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Make Me A Sandwich: A Cultural History of Domestic Kitchens in 19th Century America

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Make Me A Sandwich: A Cultural History of Domestic Kitchens
in 19th Century America

An Honors Thesis Presented by Carter Goffigon
To The Department of American Studies
Advised by Professor James Downs

Connecticut College
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Introduction

Make Me a Sandwich: A Cultural History of Domestic Kitchens in 19th Century America, seeks to investigate the kitchen as a space of progress, innovation and confrontation. Many social historians, including Jeanne Boydston, Ellen M. Plante, Faye Dudden, and Kathleen M. Brown have studied the consequences of Capitalism, and specifically the effect, the wage-focused economy had on women¹. My thesis charts how the decline of the agrarian economy and specifically, the movement of men to factories, mills, and labor outside the home led to the kitchen developing as a female space. Furthermore, it strives to challenge the notion that domesticity has always been tied to womanhood, while praising the women who gracefully and skillfully executed responsibilities cast upon them as wives, mothers, designers, caretakers, healers and domestic managers.

Until the early 19th century, for middle class families' labor centered on agricultural production at home. Work kept family units together and did not reflect the same rigid gender segregation and expectations brought about by the rise of the new wage-labor system and economic standards of success seen in the mid 19th century. When men left the household and began to earn a wage at mills, factories and other places of employment outside the home, the notion of work came into a sharper focus. Work referred to the labor in which one received compensation and resided in a particular place

¹ Boydston, Jeanne. *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford University Press, 1994).
Brown, Kathleen M., *Foul bodies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)/
Dudden, Faye, *Serving Women*, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press).
Plante, Ellen M. *The American Kitchen, 1700-Present: From Hearth to Highrise* (New York: Facts on File, 1995).

– outside the home. The responsibilities of keeping the farm functioning – raising livestock, growing crops, weaving clothing – was no longer seen as work in the context of a wage-labor system. Boydston astutely introduces gender into this system, claiming, “Gender shapes our perception of what constitutes work, of who is working, and of the value of that labor.”² My thesis began by asking these questions: Where did women fit into this new structure and how did their lives change as a result? How did the rise of Capitalism give women the opportunity to inhabit their homes in a new way?

This division of labor that transformed men into workers and women into domestics did not leave men as the heroes of this story. The concept of home was vital in its ability to serve as a respite from industrial and economic stresses, and it was a woman’s responsibility to foster a supportive, warm and welcoming space to nurture their husbands and the future generations of American men and women³. However, despite its many functions, the division of labor and new standards created by Capitalism meant the kitchen was never seen as a valid or influential place of work and labor. This cultural devaluing of the space created a sense of conflict and resentment amongst housewives who knew their skills and role to be important and sought to understand their place in the changing social order.

This project seeks to investigate how the kitchen embodied the unfamiliar, and often, uncomfortable, shifting dynamics and social relations ushered in by the advent of Capitalism. The domestic responsibilities of 19th century middle class women revolved around the pivotal space and their ability to maintain homes that fought the encroaching

² Boydston, *Home and Work*, xviii.

³ Sandage, Scott A. *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

modernity. Furthermore, I wanted to understand how the historically and culturally undervalued room was not only affected by the changing economic and social values, but also existed at the intersection of race, class and gender in the 19th century. At the center of the home, the kitchen represented progress, innovation and transition during this period.

This project aims to understand the social, economic and cultural forces that shaped the construction of the kitchen. The first chapter will consider the design of the kitchen, the décor and technological innovations that made their way into the home. It will also reveal how the kitchen became the responsibility of the housewife to maintain. I will analyze how the design and decoration of the kitchen became a reflection of a family's economy status, worldliness and moral character, all of which were the job of the mistress to create and uphold. I contend that women redefined their own role within the home while reflecting the changing middle class tastes and priorities, through their work in the kitchen.

Chapter Two examines the kitchen as a place of employment, for women of different racial, ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds. The kitchen provided a setting for a completely unique labor model in which women employed other women, creating a new opportunity for women to prove themselves as leaders. Drawing on servant's manuals, cookbooks, and domestic guides, this chapter explores the new task middle class women faced of hiring, training, and managing servants while combatting their own prejudices and lack of experience as employers. The kitchen was not only the workplace of middle class women but also of women who supported themselves as domestic servants. This chapter will also analyze their experience as immigrants and

women of color in the home of white families who considered themselves more privileged and stable, but really feared their own status to be in constant jeopardy and flux. Taking my cue from Kyla Wazana Tompkins' book, *Racial Indigestion*, Chapter Two will assert that domestic labor provided a means of agency, economic independence and social influence, in a way other forms of labor could not⁴. Finally, this chapter introduces the concept of cooperative kitchens, a collaborative example of female organization and community politics.

The initial concept for the final chapter grew out of an unrelated project (through a grant awarded by the Connecticut College Social Studies, Humanities and Arts Research Program) studying the outbreak of multiple cholera epidemics in the 19th century and the resulting chaos that ensued as Americans desperately worked to understand disease transmission and effective treatment methods. The source of contaminated food and water, the kitchen could be the incubator of disease and illness. Contentiously, housewives fought against illness by creating natural and homemade remedies crafted in the kitchen. The development of public health coupled with the understanding of germ theory in the 19th century put the kitchen at opposite ends of the treatment and causal spectrum, placing women in the stressful and demanding positions of preventing disease and nourishing their families according to new standards of health and diet. Like design and domestic labor maintenance, fostering a healthy home and nourishing her family, became a defining factor in a woman's reputation and skill as a housewife and mother, as well as a measure of her morality and personal health. The mid and late 19th century saw the creation of medial training institutions aimed at educating

⁴ Tompkins, Kyla Wazana, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*, (New York: NYU Press, 2012).

and empowering women with the knowledge and skills to prevent, treat and care for the sick. Similarly, cookbook authors dedicated entire chapters to “cooking for the invalid,” stressing the importance of health management in the daily lives of women, while also putting women in direct competition with male physicians. In this way, how did the kitchen give women a laboratory to practice medicine and broaden their knowledge of food, biology and healthcare, and give them a means of rivaling men?

The majority of the primary research for this thesis utilizes 19th century cookbooks, domestic guides and advice columns. A large portion of this material was collected at the New York Academy of Medicine, which houses an extensive collection of cookery and domestic literature. Additionally, the writing of Catherine Beecher was vital in understanding 19th century priorities, values and expectations of middle class women. Her writing not only served to inform women on the many skills she felt necessary in keeping a healthy, clean and moral home, Beecher also advocated for the education, respect and equality of women as important contributors to American society. Finally, a great deal of the research will consider the vibrant print cultural written by and for women. At the forefront of this literature was, *Godey's Lady's Book*, circulated between 1830 and 1896. In 1836, Sarah Joseph Hale took over the job of editor and transformed the publication into a serious journal dedicated to women's education and awareness of gender politics. The documents reveal the standards and principles by which middle class housewives dictated their lives. In congruence with the existing writing discussing the history of American domesticity, this project will create a comprehensive and three-dimensional image of the 19th century kitchen while arguing that it was in this historical moment that domesticity became exclusively gendered.

Due to the various interdisciplinary questions that I am asking – from architecture to the history of labor and gender relations to the study of medicine – I chose to write this under the auspices of an American Studies framework. Further, the cultural history aspect of this project complements the American Studies foundation of American Identity.

Tangentially, growing up cooking and spending many years working in professional kitchens, I couldn't help but feel as though I was a walking cliché. As an all-girls school graduate and avid feminist, pursuing my love of baking, cooking and entertaining somehow seemed like historical regression. Though I had personal experience with the organization, leadership and adaptability necessary to run and work both domestic and professional kitchens, the crude jokes about women and domesticity never seemed far behind. The cultural memory of women working in kitchens is rooted in subordination and subservience, rather than the true representation of skill, resilience, organization and patience. In many ways, this project sought to reconcile these two elements of my own life, while further advocating for the validity, importance and work of being a homemaker and caretaker.

Chapter 1: Design, Decoration, and Domesticity

The demise of the agrarian economy throughout most of the northeast bankrupted the notion of women as an integral part of the family work force. With new aspirations for middle class status, men left for factories and women turned to designing and decorating their kitchens. Their work not only transformed the kitchen as a central place in the American household, but it also irrevocably redefined the meaning of womanhood. From roughly the mid to late 19th century, women and domesticity became synonymous. Magazines, manuals and even the architecture of the kitchen, especially its focus on aesthetics, contributed to the notion that domesticity characterized what it meant to be a woman. Through creation, design and maintenance of the kitchen, women redefined their role within the family and society, while reflecting middle class sensibilities and taste that ranged from organization to lighting and decoration.

For middle class men and women in 19th century America, a well kept home and efficient kitchen reflected a family's entrance in to the middle class and allowed Americans to present and uphold an image of success and progress. Ownership of a home and the ability to host dinner gatherings was fundamental in defining a couple or family's place and economic standing. As they gained more money and stability, the maintenance of the home continued to support the family's status. An 1886 column providing advice to women hosting dinner gatherings stated, "a dinner affords the best proof of the management of a household, a few hints upon the subject may be useful to the heads of families⁵." As this article states, dinner parties validated a family's, and by default, a woman's organizational, ethical and domestic values. Parties provided an

⁵ "Practical Hints for the Household: Management of a Dinner," *Godey's Lady's Book*. Philadelphia, 1886.

opportunity for families to showcase their homes as well as their aesthetic taste, which was a link to their economic status and exposure to genteel culture. Most interesting about this article is the source and intended audience, both of which were women. This implies that women are, in fact, the “heads of families,” a bold claim subtly challenging male dominance.

The link between home maintenance and social status gave women an immense amount of power and responsibility to define their husbands and families by middle class standards. Home decoration and design were not inherently female skills, however, the withdrawal from the agrarian labor force and the limited opportunities for women, left women turning to domestic work to feel useful and culturally influential. The maintenance and design of their home, gave women an opportunity to use her skills and time within their homes and secure their family’s place in the middle class and industrial economy. The rise of domestic guides and women’s magazines supported this domestic redirection, further cementing a woman’s place in the domestic sphere.

For men, marrying a woman who could decorate, cook and entertain was as much as investment in his social status as any dollar he earned. From a financial standpoint, middle class wives could contribute to her family’s earnings by saving bottles, rags and paper for resale, selling kitchen fat and various home-grown items and using her needlework skills to sew or repair clothing and linens for pay⁶. Cooking skills were also a way for women to save money, rather than outsourcing the work to hired labor, which became a drain on families’ resources. In an article titled, “Why Don’t Ladies Learn to Cook?” published in Godey’s Lady’s Book, a contributing writer adds,

⁶ Boydston, Jeanne. *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 87.

We are convinced that many of our fair friends would love nothing, either in point of respectability or happiness, while they could add at least one-third to the effective incomes of their husbands, if they were to spend a little more time in their kitchens, superintending the preparation of the family dinner, instead of contenting themselves with ordering it.⁷

This column, published in 1859, further reiterated that a woman's place was in the kitchen, not only to nourish her family, but also to play a part in their financial sustainability. It linked the notions of women's reputations and economic contributions to the kitchen, which inherently tied womanhood to domesticity. Additionally, women could advance the social status of their husbands and families through entertaining and hosting dinner parties, a social trend that became popular amongst the middle class in the mid to late 19th century. In an effort to align themselves with more elite and "foreign customs," dinner parties were viewed as "social institutions," that required organization, skill and strategy⁸. A column explaining the art of dinner parties written in 1882 outlined the tactics behind throwing a successful gathering. Every element of organizing a dinner was intentional and methodical. The number of people, the kind of food and the season were all vital to the party's and therefore, the family's, reputation. Without a beat, the column claims,

It is said, but few dinner parties are thrown without an object; persons are invited who may advance the interests of others, parties are invited who have long desired to meet each other, or some equally cogent reason. Popularity, or the extent of a circle of acquaintances may be accurately measured by the number of dinner invitations received: not to dine out is tantamount to not being in society⁹.

This article clearly displays the link between domestic skill and social mobility. Not only attending dinner parties, but also being able to prepare and host them was essential in

⁷ "Why don't ladies learn to cook" *Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, 1859

⁸ Hints Upon the Doings of the Fashionable World" *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1882.

⁹ Hints Upon the Doings of the Fashionable World" *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1882.

exhibiting a family's wealth and values. The responsibilities of planning and organizing a party were, inevitably, left to the woman of the house, once again highlighting the important role domestic work played in advancing a couple or family's status.

Architecture and Historical Association

For the developing middle class, the historical association of these new styles gave them an opportunity to assert their identity and make themselves a part of history; all the while creating a respite from industry and grim, unsanitary factories. The mid-19th century saw an architectural shift from classic and simple revival homes to gothic revival and Italianate villa styles. As cities grew and families found themselves living amongst the bustle of new technology, home design and décor favored more “country” and suburban aesthetics and European-style floor plans based on history, ethics and functionality. The Gothic and Italianate styles stressed rationality and functionality, while easily adapting to the latest technology like new ventilation, heating and sanitation systems.¹⁰ The European styles were preferable for their “freedom from formality, and play of light and shade, which are peculiarly appropriate to country residences, surrounded by nature.”¹¹ At a moment when factories and assembly lines seemed to dominate the thoughts of the middle class population, it is not surprising that Americans preferred a residential style that was personal and customizable. They used elements of these styles simultaneously to build homes that were highly individual and reflected the family's priorities. Nineteenth century architect and design theorist, Andrew Jackson

¹⁰ Clark Jr, Clifford E. “Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1870,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 1 (1976): 33-56.

¹¹ “Italian Villa,” *Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, 1857.

Downing, led the movement that created the suburban home. Residential neighborhoods that were not directly in the city but close enough for men to commute to work daily, the creation of suburbs was intrinsically linked to the development of the middle class. In suburban home design, Downing emphasized that each house should be individualized and shunned the anonymity and redundancy of city dwellings. Architects and homeowners pulled aesthetic elements from European architectural styles and theories to design unique homes that placed a priority on nature and honesty. Typically, homes were built in the center of the lot and landscaped to appear as if engulfed by nature. The buildings themselves were irregular in footprint and silhouette to give an impression of coziness and fitting in to the surrounding landscape. Additionally, the complex rooflines were meant to symbolize the notion of shelter and coverage, while multiple chimneys were featured to signify the presence of a hearth.

These external efforts to portray the concept of “home” and “family,” were linked to British architect and theorist’s 1849 book, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, which became a social guide for Middle class Americans as they sought to define their own residential style. The most relevant of these “lamps,” is the “lamp of truth,” which states that the “suggestion of a mode of structure or support” is none “other than the true one.”¹² In other words, the structure of a building should reflect what it is and it’s purpose; and in the case of residential design, this translated to elaborate and multi-level rooflines to convey coverage and protection. These ornamented rooflines reflected where the kitchen was in the layout of the home, which further commented on the placement and priority of the kitchen within the literal and cultural image of the home.

¹² Ruskin, John. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York, 1849), 29.

The notion of finding country comforts in a suburban home and kitchen were prevalent in design guides and columns. The rural, country home was idealized for its spaciousness and distance from urban filth and grit. For those who didn't have the luxury of a country home, advice columns sought to provide hints and suggestions to help women make their suburban kitchen more pleasant. One column focusing on the "country kitchen" states,

The kitchen is the true shrine of the household gods and as such merits the highest consideration. This is especially true in the country, where the domain of the cook is everybody's province, adapted to a hundred uses, and serving for anything from laundry to a parlor. But even in commodious houses where the room is relegated to its own special and peculiar use, there is no reason why it should not be lovely and luxurious without being in the least degree splendid. The person about to build a kitchen will soon discover a world of possibilities ¹³.

Not only does this column shed light on the high esteem of the kitchen itself, it also reveals the added pressure women felt to transform their space in to something comfortable and welcoming.

Designing, organizing and decorating a kitchen more often than not meant hiding the inner workings of the space, instead portraying a veneer of airiness and ease. Additionally, this column reflects the conflict between the ideal and the practice that led to a great deal of tension for housewives. As this article states, women were equated to "household gods," a morally saturated phrase that placed them on a pedestal to be idolized and pampered. Many articles in Godey's *Lady's Book* in the mid nineteenth century encouraged women to decorate their homes to appear "luxurious" and soft. This kind of prescriptive language created an idealized image of the housewife and housework

¹³ "Household Furnishing Department: The Country Kitchen," *Godey's Lady's Book*. Philadelphia, 1884.

that was in direct contrast to the strenuous reality of running a home.

Furthermore, though this article celebrates the kitchen as a “shrine,” it neglects the fact that architecturally, in the mid-nineteenth century, kitchens were being pulled out of the central body layout of the home and only connected to central gathering spaces and bedrooms through a separate staircase and dining room. This design movement to separate, and even hide, the kitchen makes a startling comment about the value of the kitchen within the home and is further evidence of the tension housewives dealt with. Despite being praised as the “household gods,” they were still relegated to a separate part of the home and encouraged to decorate their space in a way that inaccurately portrayed and concealed the nature of their work.

The popularity of lady’s journals, like Godey’s, directly reflected the rise of home economics and domestic science, two related areas of study that developed in the mid 19th century and brought attention to the importance and validity of housework. Home economics and domestic science are essentially the codified and formalized methods of maintaining a home. Included under these umbrellas of study were cooking, cleaning, child rearing, home décor, managing the family income, economizing space, basic repairs and care of the sick and elderly. Though women were expected to know how to do all of these things, they took on an entirely new meaning when attached to the notion of science and economics. At the helm of this domestic revolution, was Catherine Beecher, who stressed the value and influence of housewives and intellectual equality between men and women.

At the core of Beecher’s system was the “apportionment of time,” a notion she strongly emphasized through all of her writing. This idea was meant to allot time and

energy for social, religious, intellectual and domestic responsibilities while being financially, spatially and morally aware and responsible. She aimed to give legitimacy to the work of housewives by studying and sharing the science and methodology of home care¹⁴.

Beecher suggests a highly organized system that assigns specific tasks to each day of the week. Her suggested weekly system was laid out as followed: Mondays were used to prepare for the work of the week, Tuesdays for washing, Wednesdays for ironing, Thursdays for folding and putting away all clothing and ironed linens, Fridays for sweeping and housecleaning and Saturdays for general inventory of the house¹⁵. In addition to these daily responsibilities, women were also cooking multiple meals per day, caring for husbands and children and managing domestic labor, if she was in a financial position to hire servants. In Beecher's eyes, the attention and emphasis on planning was important not only for productivity, but also to empower women to feel in control of their lives. She confidently writes,

Without attempting any such systematic employment of time, and carrying it out, so far as they can control circumstances, most women are rather driven along by the daily occurrences of life: so that, instead of being the intelligent regulators of their own time, they are the mere sport of circumstances.¹⁶

Despite the limited opportunities for authority for women in the 19th century, Beecher encouraged women to find strength and confidence in their roles as housewives. An organized home and the study of domestic science validated housework as just that, work rather than the romanticized and idealized image of women leisurely decorating their homes that had begun to dominate mid-19th century mentality.

¹⁴ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*.

¹⁵ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, 222.

¹⁶ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, 225.

One of the many elements of domestic training women learned was documenting inventory of the kitchen so as to have a comprehensive knowledge of the food and tools used. Housewives kept detailed journals of the meals they prepared and the quantities of produce, meat, dairy and dry goods they used and needed on a regular basis. Through these journals, women avoided buying more than they needed and prevented food from being wasted and discarded unnecessarily. Women were to have a firm grasp of her family's finances and she was expected to build a home and family structure that did not strive to live beyond its means. As domestic guides recognized, this notion was highly individual and based on every family's personal needs. One guide to women warned, "their expenses ought to be restricted within their means, as to make them easy and independent; for if they are too near run, the least accident will embarrass the whole system."¹⁷ This clearly placed an immense amount of pressure to uphold the family's image while ensuring that every meal was timely and perfect and every dish, spoon and pan in its place.

In the same way that the European architectural styles linked the middle class to a larger sense of civility and history, through design and home maintenance, a housewife could reflect her family's code of ethics and morality, while displaying the expectations of what it meant to be a woman in the nineteenth century. Appearances were essential to displaying class and status, and taste became a reflection of a woman's value system and her ability to nurture Christian ideology¹⁸. An organized, well-planned and well-kept kitchen was necessary for a woman to prove her merit as a wife, mother, caretaker and

¹⁷ Kelly, Thomas. *The Female Instructor*. (London, 1818). Archives of the New York Academy of Medicine.

¹⁸ Clark Jr, Clifford E. "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History."

woman.

Young housewives, or rather those contemplating entrance upon the duties of such, are apt to bestow much more thought upon the furnishing of their bed-chambers and drawing-rooms, than upon their kitchens and dining rooms, dismissing the former with the summary, 'some pots and pans and spoons,' and the latter with the comforting assurance that a few additions to the wedding gifts will be all-sufficient. But this will be found to be a great mistake with the young beginner is fairly launched on the troublous sea of housekeeping, and its multifarious needs are thrust upon her.¹⁹

Clark uses the word "young" twice in this passage to refer to the newly married woman who now has the responsibility of organizing her home. This, seemingly condescending label is important because it associates youth with disorganization and the inability to efficiently and responsibly maintain a house. By this definition of youth, to be an adult woman is to successfully and gracefully design a home, but more specifically a kitchen.

A woman's role in designing her kitchen had consequences beyond simply her own reputation. Though her primary concern was organizing the kitchen to best suit her needs and operate efficiently, it also affected the reputations of her husband and family. Her design choices sought to reflect the middle class beliefs of honesty, taste and domesticity, while being spatially and economically responsible. In an article published in 1859 by Harry Ward Beecher, titled, "Building a House," he writes, "a house is the shape which a man's thoughts take when he imagines how he should like to live. Its interior is the measure of his social and domestic nature; it's exterior, of his esthetic and artistic nature. It interprets, in material form, his ideas of home, of friendship and of

¹⁹ Rivers, Lena. "Chat With Our Neighbors on Home Topics," *Godey's Lady's Book*. Philadelphia, 1890.

comfort.”²⁰ If the interior of a home is designed and maintained by a woman, how much of a man’s aesthetic, and therefore his “social nature,” is actually his?

“What do you think is the chief point to consider in a kitchen!”

“I deem nothing as important as sufficient light”

“What say you, Amy?”

“I think a good range”

“Well, both answers are so essential to a well-conditioned home – for, loathe as you may be to admit it, the kitchen means home.”²¹”

The notion of visibility and technology also contributed to the middle class kitchen. They were at the core of the 19th century middle class idea of implementing a “system” to ensure the kitchen ran efficiently and productively. Introduced by a pioneer in domestic science, Catherine Beecher, sister of the above mentioned Harry Ward Beecher, stressed functionality and order when designing and organizing a kitchen.

As the middle class accrued more money and status, they turned to their homes as a display of their wealth. In the mid 19th century homes were being enlarged, adding new spaces for social gathering and individual rooms for each member of the family.

Symmetry and utility was key in these enlargements, especially in the kitchen as more workspace and storage were added to improve the efficiency of cooking and cleaning. In a column written in 1890 by Emma J. Gray for the *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, she states,

Wherever else dim light may be considered as desirable to pretty aesthetic furnishing, the kitchen’s needs are such that the strongest sunlight is indispensable. Bright light shows up dirt, and is, therefore a great help towards cleanliness and in every way aids the general machinery of the kitchen.²²

²⁰ Beecher, H.W. “Building a House,” *Star Papers*. New York, 1859.

²¹ Gray, Emma J. “The Beautiful Home-Club,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. Philadelphia, 1890.

²² Gray, Emma J. “The Beautiful Home-Club,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. Philadelphia, 1890.

While this advice column is significant for multiple reasons, it articulates clearly that the design and decoration of the kitchen are unlike those of the other rooms in the home. The kitchen is unique in that it is the only place in the home with a specific purpose and specific requirements. Unlike social spaces and bedrooms, which could be reorganized and redecorated according to the latest fashions, the technological and organizational needs of a kitchen made it distinct. Its placement within the plan of the home was determined by direction of the sunlight and the ability to be closed off and accessed without entering the rest of the home.

One of the most significant design changes made beginning in the 1840s was the conversion of doorways in to windows to allow for more natural light. With the long days women spent in the kitchen, cleaning and preparing meals, light was vital to their ability to work and see what they were doing. In the early mornings and evenings, they supplemented the light with oil lamps, which meant the kitchen was one room in the home that rarely went dark. A kitchen should be “well provided with windows, in the summer causing a pleasant draught of air, and in the winter letting in the genial sun and light which so materially adds to the comfort of the inmates.”²³ In the first half of the 19th century, kitchens were often located in the basement of the home, and always out of sight of guests. Mistresses looked to domestic guides for suggestions to improve the comfort of the kitchen and create a space that was welcoming, warm and pleasant. That being said, even the most creative columnists could not deny the tedious and arduous work necessary to maintain a productive kitchen, even going so far as to refer to the women in the kitchens as “inmates,” connoting an obvious image of captivity. Beginning

²³ “Household Furnishing Department: The Country Kitchen,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. Philadelphia, 1884.

in the 1870s, housing plans changed and kitchens were moved to the first floor, toward the back of the home²⁴. This shift in the last quarter of the century represented a recognition and reprioritization of domestic work while also making it easier to implement more modern technology, ventilation and plumbing systems.

Light was also necessary in maintaining the “economy of the kitchen,” an idea that dominated the 19th century domestic sphere²⁵. Every utensil, gadget, plate and pan had its specific place and light enabled housewives and domestic servants to see the interior of the space in order to keep everything organized. Light was imperative for cleanliness. Mistresses were consumed with hygiene and sanitation as sickness and food-borne illness was a constantly looming threat. As the Godey’s column states, more light allowed mistresses and servants to see dirt and dust. Furthermore, kitchens were painted in lighter and more moderate colors, like white, beige, and cream to create the illusion of more space and make it easier to see dirt. Gray’s 1890 column offers two suggestions for painting kitchen walls and ceilings. The first is to use “white, or very light tinted calcimine,” but she warns that, “this should be renewed every year, which is not always convenient.” Alternatively, she proposes paint, which she says, “costs more at first, but is very durable, and is in the end less expensive than calcimine.”²⁶ Women were also advised to stay away from wallpaper as it was “in conflict with heat, smoke and steam.”²⁷ The walls were not the only design concern, for women who spent all day on their feet, the floor was an important detail to consider as well. An 1884 column advising women

²⁴ Plante, Ellen M. *The American Kitchen, 1700-Present: From Hearth to Highrise* (New York: Facts on File, 1995).

²⁵ Irving, Washington. “English Fairies,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. Philadelphia, 1850.

²⁶ Gray, Emma J. “The Beautiful Home-Club,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. Philadelphia, 1890.

²⁷ “Household Furnishing Department: The Country Kitchen,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. Philadelphia, 1884.

how to make their city kitchens more like their comfortable, “country cousins,” stated, “the ideal kitchen has a stone or tessellated floor, but hard white cement is a good substitute. All of these permit indefinite scrubbing, will wear forever, are clean and slightly, cool in summer, and may be patched with rugs or carpet in the winter time.”²⁸

After 1870, linoleum was invented and adopted as an alternative flooring material that was less expensive, more durable and easier to clean than the earlier painted cement or tile options. Cost, longevity and efficiency were evidently priorities in every middle class woman’s kitchen. Women were not only responsible for overseeing the kitchen but researching and comparing the most cost efficient and durable design options. Though Godey’s *Lady’s Book* was marketed as a domestic guide for housewives, it empowered women with knowledge of the world outside their homes and made them the engineers and architects within them.

It is not difficult to see the connection between light and morality, as well. At the height of Victorian society, wives and mothers were the upholders and nurturers of proper Christian ideals. While the home was an escape from industry and modernity, the kitchen, specifically, was a space to model and reaffirm the principles of domesticity, morality and virtue and the dining table acted as the “silent educator.”²⁹ Cooking and eating was a means of bringing the family together, passing along skills and instilling a code of ethics. None of those things would be possible without a well-lit and organized kitchen.

²⁸ “Household Furnishing Department: The Country Kitchen,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. Philadelphia, 1884.

²⁹ Miller, Elizabeth S. *In the Kitchen* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1875), Archives of the New York Academy of Medicine.

Though the home was seen as an escape from the industrial revolution and the harshness of the machine driven economy, the kitchen and the women who ran them were not unaffected by technological advances. The study and analysis of the evolution of the range is not new to the realm of domestic history. The movement away from the hearth to a range was, fundamentally, the most important development for housewives and servants in the 19th century. Not only did the introduction of cast-iron stoves increase productivity and efficiency of every kitchen, it changed the nature of cooking and the kinds of meals being prepared. As historian, Jeanne Boydston, discusses in her pivotal text, *Home and Work*, simple, single-dish meals were abandoned in favor of complex, multi-course meals that intended to nourish and impress. The new wood and coal burning stoves made it possible to cook and bake multiple dishes simultaneously, which led to hosting more elaborate parties and an increase in the number of people a woman was expected to cook for and entertain.³⁰

The hearth, or open fireplace, was really the only means of cooking and heating food until the invention of the range and cook stove. Cooking over a hearth was both limiting and tedious. It required lifting and hanging heavy iron cookware over an open fire followed by hours of close and dangerous watch as food came to temperature. This was restricting for women because they could not step away from the fire at the risk of ruining the meal and it meant their dishes could only be prepared one pot at a time. Despite initial skepticism, by the middle of the 19th century, a range or cook stove almost completely replaced the hearth and fundamentally changed the nature of cooking.

³⁰ Boydston, *Home and Work*.

Though different, the range and cook stove both served to improve the efficiency of cooking thanks to the inclusion of ovens and burners. A range was most often constructed within an existing brick hearth and contained iron structures with flues and draughts in the brickwork. While a stove was a free standing iron structure whose flues were internal and smaller than those of a range. Safety was a constant concern for housewives. Ranges were considered more dangerous than stoves because of the increased risk of clothing catching on fire. Additionally, brick is known to absorb heat, therefore it took more time and was less economical to use than a stove, which could burn all night without much maintenance.³¹ Once the range and stove phenomenon caught on, production of new models increased rapidly. Like any popular technology, improvement was occurring so quickly, models were considered out of date within a year to two years of invention.

Though cook stoves and ranges made women's lives easier in many ways, they did not eliminate all the inconveniences or dangers of cooking and entertaining. The early stoves and ranges were fed with wood or coal and required constant replenishing. Women were expected to regulate the draft, remove the ashes regularly and clean the stoves daily to avoid stinking up the kitchen and to prevent potentially dangerous oil spills. Learning to maintain a stove was essential in every housewife's education. Emma Gray, a Godey's columnist boldly wrote,

And, as for the range question, both mistress and maid, may as well leave the home, if good, healthful cooking, cannot be obtained. If your range is at all out of order, causing smoke, or not baking properly, or if the fire is tediously long in starting, examine the conditions of your drafts and ovens. Do not take the girl's word for it that they are all right, but see for yourself

³¹ Plante, *The American Kitchen*.

whether the soot has been removed. Then find out about the grate and fire bricks, possibly warped and need renewing.³²

It is evident that running a kitchen meant a great deal more than simply being a good cook. In the words of Harriet Beecher Stowe, “intelligent women, who are brought up to do the work of their own families” were the “labor-saving institutions” of the household³³. Stowe and her sister Catherine Beecher even dedicated an entire chapter of their 1869 publication, *The American Woman’s Home* to, “The Construction and Care of Stoves, Furnaces and Chimneys.” Their writing served to emphasize the belief that every woman should have an extensive understanding and knowledge of every element of running a home. The steps to maintain, clean and even, repair, stoves and ranges required specialized skills that took training, time and risk. It was near impossible to spend all day in the kitchen, prepare a multi course meal for her husband, family and acquaintances, and appear up to social dress standards, no matter how efficient technology became.

From the invention of the cook stove and range in the first quarter of the 19th century, the structures and technologies took various forms as the needs of women changed. The Wrought Iron Range Company, founded in 1864 in St. Louis, Missouri produced 13 different range varieties between its founding and 1900, each one becoming more elaborate and detailed. Not only does it say a great deal about the innovation of the company, but also about the role the kitchen played as a place for experimentation and creativity. While men were learning to use new machinery in factories, housewives were constantly being challenged and asked to adapt in their own spheres of influence. The kitchen became a petri dish for trial and observation, all the while expected to run like

³² Gray, Emma J. “The Beautiful Home-Club,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. Philadelphia, 1890.

³³ Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman’s Home*, (New York: J.B. Ford, 1869).

“well oiled machinery, with invisible wheels.³⁴” However, as they navigated the entrance of the industrial revolution in to their homes, women were also given the responsibility of providing a moral refuge from modern society. This conflict of interest and ideology was undoubtedly difficult to balance and even more exhausting to accomplish gracefully.

The introduction of kitchen gadgets and specialized utensils also drastically changed the way women cooked and maneuvered around the kitchen. Every women’s magazine and domestic guide offered advertisements for highly specialized tools aimed at making their lives simpler and more task-oriented. One of the most important additions that became a staple in every kitchen, was the clock. Seemingly simple, the clock represented an entirely new attitude towards organization and the concept of time. With Capitalism came hourly wages and timetables, which completely revolutionized meal times and the way women had to prepare food. Housewives and domestic servants had to be far more aware of prep and cooking times to ensure meals were ready when their husbands returned home. Additionally, the advent of stoves and ranges changed how food could be cooked and how long it would take. A clock in the kitchen represented both the infiltration of the industrial revolution in to the home and the importance of a schedule and regulation in the day-to-day lives of middle class women. Between flour sifters, cherry pitters, stackable steam cookers and vegetable presses, to name a few, there was a gadget for every kitchen task imaginable³⁵. However, necessity was always the priority.

We purpose giving from time to time an illustrated list of articles that are wanted for a kitchen. In furnishing a kitchen, there should be everything likely to be required, but not one article more that is wanted. Unnecessary

³⁴ Miller, *In the Kitchen*, 22.

³⁵ Kellogg, E. E., *Science in the Kitchen*, (Battle Creek: Health Publishing Company, 1892), Archives of the New York Academy of Medicine.

profusion creates a little: a deficiency too often sacrifices perfection of a dish. There should be a sufficiency, and no more.³⁶

This notion of sufficiency is a direct link to the above-mentioned value placed on efficiency and functionality. Beyond simply organization and productivity, it is likely that the desire to have a gadget for every task is synonymous with a middle class desire to have a technological solution to every problem. The middle class emerged as a response to the new machine industry and exemplified innovation and modernization. The kitchen was no different. The kitchen gave women a role in the industrial revolution as well as an opportunity to influence it. The necessities of women drove innovation and invention. Through advice columns, shared recipes and hints, cooking schools and eventually, cookbooks, women publicly expressed their cooking, cleaning and design needs and preferences. Companies used these sources to design and cater their products toward the female-driven market.

With the introduction of various gadgets and cooking tools, storage was crucial in keeping an organized kitchen. In the late nineteenth century, the Hoosier cabinet was invented and adopted by many women. A multi-purpose storage unit equipped with cupboards, drawers and extendable tabletop workspace, the Hoosier cabinet was unique because of its built in flour and sugar bins with sifters and customizable storage options³⁷. Domestic guides placed great emphasis on the need for comprehensive storage, whether in the form of drawers, cupboards and shelves, not only for organization's sake, but also for discretion. Where cabinets and cupboards were limited, women were advised to install "wall cabinets," a built structure with a few drawers for utensils, shelves for spices

³⁶ "Articles for the Kitchen," *Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, 1860.

³⁷ Green, Harvey. *The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

and dry goods and hooks to hang various tools. No matter the shape or kind of storage space, it was important that it have doors to keep out dust and germs, but more significantly to hide the inner workings of the kitchen³⁸. Women's magazines also provided detailed instructions to teach women how to build their own storage units that often doubled as decorative seating in the kitchen. Articles took women step by step through the building process, providing the appropriate measurements, materials and tools³⁹. The inclusion of these instructions is significant because it literally put the tools in the hands of women, empowering them to design and build the furniture that made their houses their own. It also combats the growing 19th century idea that housework was neither physically nor emotionally taxing on women, but instead a new form of leisure⁴⁰.

Women's involvement in designing, furnishing and decorating their kitchens enabled them to insert themselves in to the market and in to the Capitalist structure. Though their lives centered around their homes and families, middle class housewives needed to have an extensive understanding of the market economy in order to sustainably maintain their lifestyles that otherwise displaced them.

³⁸ Kellogg, *Science in the Kitchen*.

³⁹ Rivers, Lena. "Chat With Our Neighbors on Home Topics," *Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, 1890.

⁴⁰ Boydston, *Home and Work*.

Chapter Two: Women as Employers and Employees

In the same way domestic kitchens became the space that defined middle class womanhood and social value, they also set an important stage for a labor arrangement that put would women in charge of other women. The rise of hired domestic labor took on an entirely different shape in the mid nineteenth century as middle class housewives became responsible for hiring, training and managing their servants. Unlike earlier forms of domestic servitude and slavery, middle class domestic labor was particularly nuanced in its racial and gender complexities. Not only did hired domestic labor divide women by class, it further stratified the already subordinate group by race and ethnicity. As middle class women and families further relied on their servants to define their status, an undeniable tension developed between the women seeking authority within their own homes and the women simply seeking a wage.

The kitchen was essential in defining the experience of domestic servants. One column went so far as to say, “the kitchen is your maid’s home.⁴¹” Though this statement is problematic in its implications, it strongly suggests kitchen and home design were influenced and affected by cultural trends surrounding domestic servants. In an effort to combat the anxiety toward bringing strangers into the home, servants were isolated to the kitchen and separate living spaces. As live-in domestic labor became more popular in the mid 19th century, home design changed to reflect this new pattern of service. As discussed in the previous chapter, the kitchen was removed from the central body of the home and made accessible only through the dining room and concealed doorways and staircases. This creation of separate space prevented the spread of cooking odors and

⁴¹ Gray, Emma J. “The Beautiful Come club,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Philadelphia, 1890.

smoke from entering the rest of the house and disrupting social and family gatherings. Additionally, and more importantly, it drew a clear line between the realms of employer and employee that influenced social dynamics in and out of the home. Home design reflected the idea that servants should only inhabit parts of the home related to their work. By building homes with separate staircases and isolated living spaces, design prioritized the work and concealment of these women, rather than their quality of life. Though hired domestic servants were expected to care for the homes and families of the women they worked for, they were kept at a distance for fear of disrupting the “confidence and freedom that make the charm of family life.⁴²” The tendency toward “family seclusion,” was in direct response to the growing influence of industrial life. Among many responsibilities, middle class women were given the challenge of upholding republican values and cultivating a domestic environment that could protect against the habits and vices of city life. Time and time again, middle class housewives were reminded to, “never lose sight of the truth that you are held in great measure morally responsible for those of your own household.⁴³” The expanding domestic roles of middle class women in the 19th century brought a great deal of moral and social pressure. The way servants behaved not only affected the reputation of a woman as a mistress, it also affected society’s view of her as a mother and wife. Becoming the manager of her own home put a woman at risk of social and domestic criticism. In a fictional dialogue, a husband proclaimed, “She (the cook) is a fool, and I always knew it. Nobody but a simpleton

⁴² “Domestic Service,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Philadelphia, 1868.

⁴³ “How to Have Good Servants,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Philadelphia, 1855.

would ever have engaged such a girl!⁴⁴” It is evident the husband’s critique is not simply of the servant but of his wife, who hired her. His comment condemns his wife for her inadequacy as a homemaker, but more importantly, for her inferior judge of character. This is a perfect example of the many layers of criticism women were vulnerable to as they fell prey to judgment from their neighbors and their spouses⁴⁵. Moreover, it reveals this husband’s ability to make his wife feel unsatisfactory, which undoubtedly had a profound effect on her self-esteem and confidence as a domestic manager.

The patterns and division of household labor was a profound factor in the lives of both the employer and employee. In the mid 19th century, Sarah Joseph Hale, editor of Godey’s Lady’s book sought to organize a system to help service women move west and find employment during the depression. The Industrial Women’s Aid Association, founded in 1858, would collect \$5 from families to pay for the passage of young servants from the east coast. Despite her efforts, the association was unsuccessful due to the tendency of women to take the ride west and flee before reaching their employers⁴⁶. Hale viewed the IWAA as a “gratuitous intelligence office,” as opposed to the fear inducing and frustrating intelligence offices acting as the liaison between employers looking for servants and the labor pool. An attempt to organize and commodify domestic labor, intelligence offices only brought more stress and difficulty for both parties involved. There was a great deal of misrepresentation both of the young girls applying for work and the nature of the work itself. Women would find themselves accepting positions

⁴⁴ Kirk, Eleanor, “From Life; or Broad Side from Maine.” *The Revolution* 4 (2 September 1869), 130-131.

⁴⁵ Dudden, Faye, *Serving Women*, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press) 183.

⁴⁶ Dudden, *Serving Women*, 84.

advertised as “light work,” only to realize their commitment was far greater than they had anticipated. Similarly, middle class housewives quickly learned to distrust these offices, which became known for sending ill equipped servants and complicating the payment process by withholding funds or taking a portion for themselves. European peasants and poor women often fell victim to pay abuses and manipulation as well, becoming victims of cultural prejudices and their own naivete⁴⁷.

Intelligence offices exhibited the changing trends in labor recruitment and hiring, while the rise of cooking and domestic training schools reflected the expanding and rising standards of domestic servants. Elaborate and exotic cooking allowed middle class households to give the impression of worldliness and refinement. Furthermore, the image of a bountiful and full table was an commonly understood representation of wealth and prosperity. In combination, these expectations made for more work than ever for domestic servants and forced a division of labor between the cook and her employer. In order to train cooks and servants, employers would often pay for the women to go to cooking schools to learn the European styles and how to plan and prepare accordingly⁴⁸.

The notion of sending servants to training institutes was controversial amongst housewives. Some felt they greatly benefitted from it and saw it as an important part of their jobs in civilizing and mentoring less educated and cultured women. Many middle class women felt they had “grave responsibilities towards her female servants,” turning the home into a place for charity and refinement⁴⁹. As one column advised, “if you want an attached servant, be an attached mistress.” The column continues to advise mistresses

⁴⁷ Dudden, *Serving Women*, 87.

⁴⁸ Dudden, *Serving Women*, 134.

⁴⁹ “Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Philadelphia, 1852.

to, “give your maid some article of dress which is dainty and yet becoming, and thus win her confidence by assuming the righteousness of a certain amount of self respect.⁵⁰”

Middle class women believed they could influence and polish their servants, inside and out. That being said, it was all with the intention, of obtaining the best possible service and efficiency from them. The advice given to housewives inflated their sense of purpose and encouraged them to bestow their empathy and knowledge on those considered beneath them. While this may have produced a more pleasant and productive work environment, it only served to reinforce the class difference and the generalization that working class women needed to be rescued.

However, not all women believed it was their responsibility to educate and enlighten their servants. Some people accused mistresses who sent their cooks for domestic training of spoiling their servants, revealing a resentment and frustration with working class women⁵¹. Discontentment with servants and working class women was common amongst middle class housewives who sought to do all they could to separate themselves and solidify their place in the developing social ladder. Middle class women understood their status was neither permanent nor established. Criticizing and preventing working class women from gaining too much knowledge or skill was likely an effort to protect themselves and their position in the middle class. This is consistent with the constant reference to their servants as, “girls.” Though some were hardly old enough to be considered women, the patronizing and infantilizing title only reaffirmed their inferiority both in knowledge and social status.

⁵⁰ “Good Servants,” *The Christian Recorder*, Philadelphia, 1866.

⁵¹ “Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Philadelphia, 1852.

As industrial technology and innovation made its way in to the home through kitchen appliances and systems of order and production, the hiring and management of domestic servants displayed the effects 19th century Capitalism had on women's lives both in and out of the home. With the relative newness of the middle class in the 19th century, the concept of hired domestic labor was foreign to many mistresses and homemakers. Though young, local girls were brought in to help when needed, as middle class families became more established and sought to define their status more concretely, they turned to live-in domestic servants⁵². Housewives' lack of experience with service management in combination with the pressure to run an efficient home created a great deal of anxiety for middle class women as they attempted to grab hold of the limited authority and influence they were allowed. The prevalence of columns and domestic guides advising women how to treat and manage servants is a testament to the concerns and desires felt amongst housewives to prove their ability to lead and supervise effectively. As men left their families to find status, financial success and social validation, women turned to their homes for respect and approval. Housewives often combatted this power struggle by using her servants for "entertainment," in an effort to remind the young woman of her "place," within in the hierarchy of the home⁵³. While servants were often used for many social purposes, which will be further discussed later in the chapter, it is significant to acknowledge the profound anxiety women felt to prove themselves and their worth within the economic and social framework of industrial

⁵² Rollins, Judith, *Between Women: Domestic and Their Employers*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985) 7.

⁵³ Worthen, Augusta H., "Servants," *Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, 1864.

Capitalism. This fear is clearly expressed in an 1864 column published in Godey's Lady's Book, in which a female contributor writes,

Why is the lady thus irritated and mortified at a lack of respect from her subordinate? Does something whisper to her, that, if she is not respected in her superior position, she certainly could not be out of it, and therefore there is in herself a want of those qualities which under all circumstances command respect? Is not her very jealousy a humiliating acknowledgement that in her position lies her only claim to respect?⁵⁴

Augusta H. Worthen's article points at a fascinating and self-reflective issue in the lives of middle class housewives. The issue of respect and social worth became increasingly important for women in the 19th century as suffrage and women's rights movements gained momentum. For many housewives, the mid to late 19th century provided opportunities for education and agency, leaving them dissatisfied with the monotony and drudgery of housework. However, society offered limited work and leadership chances outside of the home and continued to reinforce the relationship between womanhood and domesticity. This article speaks directly to that conflict and reiterates the frustration women felt in their positions of seemingly hollow authority. Additionally, it is interesting to consider the source of this article. As has already been acknowledged in the previous chapter, Godey's Lady's Book was written by women, for women. Though the intent of the article was to encourage women to treat their servants with compassion and humanity, rather than desiring "extreme submissiveness," it seems there would be a more directed way of doing this without bringing up a woman's desire for respect⁵⁵. Buried beneath the domestic advice was, in fact, a subtle push to look beyond the home for power and independence, rather than patronizing her servants to feel a sense of authority.

⁵⁴ Worthen, "Servants."

⁵⁵ Worthen, "Servants."

In addition to domestic guides, middle class women looked to their husbands and the managerial trends in the mid 19th century industry to learn how to supervise domestic servants and foster a productive work environment. As Faye Dudden discusses in her book, *Serving Women*, the emphasis on professionalism and order in the home blurred the line between the domestic sphere and the industrial one⁵⁶. Like modern stoves and ranges, domestic servants became yet another commodity that brought middle class women in to the market economy and Capitalism in to the home. An 1877 column advised housewives to, “aim to be as systematic as possible in arranging your regular work; make rules most convenient for your family, and have the servants understand they are to be obeyed.⁵⁷” Similarly, Catherine Beecher writes, “It is well understood that your relations with them are of a mere business character.⁵⁸” Both of these examples shed light on the structured and machinelike nature of domestic labor in the 19th century, consistent with technological innovations that aimed to turn the home in to a factory, of sorts.

If middle class housewives were the employers, housework was the product. However, the challenge of this product was its abstract and relative standards. Every home functioned differently and every mistress expected different skills from her employees. With the high turn over rate of domestic servants, young women were constantly moving from home to home, rarely giving them enough time to adjust to each home and mistress’s tastes. Many housewives were extremely difficult to please and carried unrealistic expectations leading to constant disappointment and perpetuating a sense of superiority. Godey’s published a series of fictional dialogues between various

⁵⁶ Dudden, *Serving Women*.

⁵⁷ “System and Management of Servants,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Philadelphia, 1877.

⁵⁸ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman’s Home*, 240.

middle class housewives, chronicling “the servant question,” and the trials of finding and training good help. In one column, published in 1857, a Mrs. Philips complains, “There’s your cook. I heard you say she had been with you five years, and Mrs. Lawrence has had hers oh, ages! Three years, to speak with bounds. Well, that’s a great while. I have had five in the same length of time; and not one of them suited me.⁵⁹” Not only does this short excerpt display the role domestic servants played in the gossip of middle class women, it attests to the stress many women felt to maintain a healthy, happy and clean home and how servants contributed to that picture of home.

The ability to hire and dismiss servants reaffirmed a mistress’s sense of authority and control, displaying a clear desire amongst women for roles with greater influence. The notion of a servant “suiting” her is significant because it evidently prioritizes Mrs. Philips’ needs and expectations, yet says nothing about the nature of those expectations. As mid 19th century housewives gained more power and experience in positions of authority, they came to demand more from their servants and were quicker to dismiss them if they failed to meet those standards. Furthermore, mistresses then used these shortcomings to judge the personalities and morals of their servants and generalize about all women of lower economic status and different racial and ethnic backgrounds⁶⁰.

The kitchen was a place of social change as well as technological advancement. In many ways it functioned as the point of intersection of race, class and gender in 19th century America as it brought together women of different cultural, racial, and economic backgrounds under the umbrella of domestic service. As young Irish and German girls and freed black women flocked to cities to fill the roles of domestic servants and cooks,

⁵⁹ Neal, Alice B., “The Servant Question,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Philadelphia, 1857.

⁶⁰ Dudden, *Serving Women*, 59.

housewives met the changing cultural landscape head on. White, middle class women were not the only people uncomfortable with the changing dynamics. Multiple columns published in progressive, African American newspapers pertaining to the role of women of color in white homes speaks to the awareness and agency within black communities. One article emphasized the importance of young, black “women’s employment” over “women’s suffrage,” stating,

The advice we give to poor young colored girls, who by the way, are already imitating their own hurt the false sentiment of white sisters that hate them with such hatred as only a woman can command – the advice we give is, cast away your prejudice against become domestics. Cease to speak contemptuously of white people’s kitchen. Indeed the only independent people we know, are household servants who have proved themselves invaluable to their employers⁶¹.

This column is profound in so many ways in that it sheds a clear light on the conflicted and nuanced experience of black women in the second half of the 19th century. The freedom to vote was an unnecessary luxury when so many freed black women could hardly find work and gain economic stability. Though the article acknowledges the frustration and oppression many women of color felt, the writer represents the voice of pragmatism and reality by encouraging black women to take the work opportunities they’re offered. However, after centuries of slavery and forced domestic labor, black women felt immense opposition to returning to the kitchen, both physically and symbolically. The labor patterns of live-in, domestic labor often took women away from their families and isolated them in the homes of the middle class. For women who lived through or were the product of families torn apart by slavery and the Civil War, leaving their own families was painful and nearly impossible to justify. Though some attempted to continue working as domestics while living with their own families, it took a great toll

⁶¹ “Employment of Women,” *The Christian Recorder*, Philadelphia, 1875.

on their quality of life and jeopardized their positions. Middle class housewives were quick to dismiss servants who could not be available at all times and rarely gave them time off to care for their own families. Some servants resorted to bringing laundry home, in order to spend more time with their own families, however this was not an ideal solution either. Carrying soiled linens from her employer's home to her own and back again was extremely physically taxing and led to health problems, pain and exhaustion. Furthermore, even black women who did marry and have children of their own were expected to maintain their own homes like any other housewife. Their work was far from over when they left their employers home.

Black women working as domestics experienced physical and psychological exhaustion unlike women of any race or social class. The history of slavery in America cast a long-lasting shadow to the present day, none more damaging than the belief that black bodies were "built" for physical labor, dramatically limiting the employment opportunities for freed black men and women. Interestingly, though, black women often had an easier time finding work. White women were sometimes more comfortable hiring black women than Irish or German immigrants in fear they would bring foreign customs and religious beliefs, while black men were seen as threats to immigrant men seeking employment in the industrial field. The relative priority black women were given created palpable tension between white and black women and fostered the "hatred" addressed in the earlier column. This is yet another layer of race and gender relations experienced in kitchens. The "white sisters" to which, the article refers are likely immigrants who felt similarly marginalized for their cultural "otherness." The use of the word sister implies an emotional kinship and suggests young black women could obviously relate to young

white immigrant girls working in domestic labor. However, according to this column, that economic and social likeness was abandoned in favor of racial prejudice. Though both of these groups of women were equally economically subordinate, simply their whiteness gave Irish and German immigrants a sense of superiority.

The final element of this article is the idea that domestic labor was in fact the most secure job for working class women, providing independence and consistency unlike many other employment opportunities, which were subject to economic flux. While the work was undoubtedly demanding, time consuming and psychologically arduous, if servants proved helpful and efficient, they could count on loyalty from their employers. To say, “the only independent people we know are household servants,” is a bold statement. Not only does it empower and provide a sense of agency and control for women in service positions, it also attests to the social weight and power of black women. Though their lives were far from easy, or even pleasant, freed black women were encouraged to be proud of the work they did and understand the value they brought to the home.

Social historian, Kyla Wazana Tompkin’s book, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*, examines another way black women found power in the kitchens of white families. She boldly asserts that the kitchen was the, “space from which the cook, that servant-figure so broadly stereotyped over the past two centuries, threatens to speak.⁶²” Through the food she cooks, Tompkins suggests black servants permeate the racial barrier and gain access to the bodies of their white employers. Cooks were, quite literally, responsible for feeding and nourishing their white employers, making them a

⁶² Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 17.

vital factor in their health and quality of life. Domestic servants were privy to the likes and dislikes and personal tastes of their employers and furthermore, had the power to appeal to those tastes in order to advance their own position.

This was especially important to women like, Malinda Russell, who is the first known black woman to publish a cookbook in 1866. A widow and the mother of a disabled son, Mrs. Russell worked tirelessly as a cook in the south. Forced to leave the south with her son as a result of her Union alliances, Mrs. Russell moved to Michigan and published her cookbook in hopes of raising enough money to return to her home in Tennessee and reclaim the property taken from her⁶³. In her introduction to the book, Mrs. Russell confidently writes,

I have made cooking my employment for the last twenty years, in the first families of Tennessee, (my native place), Virginia, North Carolina and Kentucky. I know my receipts to be good, as they have always given satisfaction. I have been advised to have my receipts published, as they are valuable, and every family has a use for them⁶⁴.

Though impoverished and hardened by her life's misfortunes, Mrs. Russell understood the power of her food and cooking for others. Her skills as a cook garnered her a reputation among wealthy families in the south, giving her access and influence to the mouths and social circles of high-ranking and well-connected people in the 19th century.

One of the many challenges that arose for employers as domestic servants gained more independence and a greater sense of self worth, was their own sense of agency. Two columns published in *The Christian Recorder* in the 1860's spoke to the changing trends in servant loyalty. One, voicing the frustrations of housewives, wrote, "the servant girl, who has already changed her place three or four times in the course of the year,

⁶³ Russell, Malinda, *A Domestic Cook Book*, (Paw Paw, Michigan: Published by the Author, 1866).

⁶⁴ Russell, *A Domestic Cook Book*, 5.

conceives a new desire for society or change of scene, and at once departs, leaving the household in confusion.⁶⁵” A second column addresses a similar concern by nostalgically referencing a time, “when female domestics became attached to families, and would remain with them, for that attachment, even under worldly reverses. That has greatly changed. Self-interest alone actuates the servant now.⁶⁶” While both of these excerpts portray the employer’s perspective and discontent, it speaks to a broader trend of female servants taking more control of their lives and incomes. Young immigrant and black women working as domestics recognized they could capitalize on the need for quality and specialized labor, taking better and higher paying opportunities where they could find them. Though this often left housewives without help, the influence of capitalism is evident even amongst the lowest economic class. Housewives were not the only women looking to broaden their influence and climb the social and economic ladder.

Furthermore, the domestic guides sentimentalized the relationship between servant and employer, creating a false and unrealistic image of “love” and “friendship” between these women. Though many advice columns encouraged women to treat their servants with compassion, they seemed to flatter themselves by assuming their domestics had an investment beyond economic independence and stability. One woman wrote, “I believe kindness is thought of more than wages,” and then went on to remind her friend experiencing frustrations with her servants that “they are fellow creatures with the same hopes and desires, failings and weaknesses, and infirmities of temper we must not expect

⁶⁵ “House Servants. Discussions of the Great Domestic Trouble” *The Christian Recorder*, Philadelphia, 1866.

⁶⁶ “Servants,” *The Christian Recorder*, Philadelphia, 1864.

perfection; and if we show them sympathy, it is astonishing the influence.⁶⁷ For a majority of women, domestic service was their only option to support themselves and their families. Many young immigrant women came to America with nothing and continued to support their families in their home countries by sending monthly wages. Similarly, black women were excluded from all other work, therefore domestic service provided the only chance to participate in the labor force and accrue savings, something they had never been allowed to do before the 19th century. Though it is, in theory, admirable, and in some ways progressive, for middle class women to attempt to develop relationships with women of different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds, it is a clear display of their lack of real understanding of their own social position. Even by referring to their servants as “creatures,” is distancing and dehumanizing despite her effort to show their commonalities.

The responsibilities of domestic servant also gave women access and insight into the complexities of middle class society and status maintenance. As many were responsible for answering the door, they acted as “social nonparticipants,” who said little but observed all⁶⁸. One of the elements of domestic training was rooted in understanding the social dynamics of 19th century middle class women. As Dudden discusses, the women who answered the door played a profound role in who entered the home and engaged with the mistress and family of the house. While mistresses used domestic servants to prove their wealth and status, they relied on their servants to act as buffers as

⁶⁷ “Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Philadelphia, 1852.

⁶⁸ Dudden, *Serving Women*, 115.

well⁶⁹. In order to do this successfully, servants needed to have an intimate understanding of women's social circles and reputations.

Additionally, they provided a resource to housewives seeking new or different servants. Though the social lives of domestic servants were relatively limited, they maintained circles of friendships with other servants and women with similar backgrounds. In one case, a housewife, Mrs. Brown, goes to her friend, Mrs. Smith, to ask if she knows of any servants looking for work. Interestingly, she asks, "Does your cook know of any friend she can recommend?"⁷⁰ This moment displays another level of dependency between employer and employee and demonstrates trust in a servant's judgment and recommendation. Conversely, this interaction also gives women working as domestic servants an opportunity to help each other while potentially improving or influencing the household efficiency of another woman. Depending on the reputation of the housewife as a homemaker, teacher and employer, domestic servants could insert themselves in to the hiring process and help or hinder along the way. This is not to say servants had malicious or manipulative intentions, however, they were well aware of the role they played in the lives of middle class women, both as an employee and social servant. Their employers made little attempt to hide their exploitation of these women, introducing "her servant girl for their entertainment," when there was "not a ready and easy flow of conversation."⁷¹ Though many of these employers believed their servants to be aloof and ignorant of the "double life she leads," a letter written to the editor of *The Christian Recorder* chastised employers for seeing their servants as nothing more than "a

⁶⁹ Dudden, *Serving Women*, 115.

⁷⁰ "Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Brown, a Domestic Dialogue, time," *Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, 1852.

⁷¹ Worthen, "Servants."

thing (not a person, or course,) that must be obedient to the will of his or her mistress.⁷²”

He then goes on to scornfully reveal the hypocrisies of the employer and servant relationship.

Bridget and John must take their meals in the kitchen, and this after Madam and Mr. have been served. And, as an almost universal thing, where colored and Irish servants are kept in one house, there must be two tables set in the kitchen. Madam and Mr. are too good to eat with Pat and Bridget, and Pat and Bridget are too good to eat with Pompey and Dinah. And those things are tolerated – not only tolerated, but indulged in by people who profess to be followers of the meek and lowly Jesus⁷³.

As this impassioned and resentful passage clearly displays, the kitchen table was often where issues of race, class and ethnicity came to a head. And beyond that, those considered to be of inferior intellect were very much aware of the prejudices and the arbitrary nature of the oppression they faced. This passage in conversation with the earlier reference to the use of servants for entertainment presents a much more nuanced view of the relationship between employer and servant.

In hopes of easing servant frustrations and becoming less dependent on personal servants and cooks, some communities of women sought alternative organizational solutions that were more cost and time efficient.

Co-operative kitchens are suggested as a remedy for the chronic evils of housekeeping. If a number of families living near each other would club together and furnish a joint kitchen, and put it in the charge of an efficient cook and steward, then each family would be relieved from the worry of servants, the trouble of marketing and the expense of separate establishments⁷⁴.

First introduced in America by Melusina Fay Pierce in the late 1860s, the idea of co-operative housekeeping was both a means of lightening the domestic load for

⁷² “Servants and Masters,” *The Christian Recorder*, Philadelphia, Dec. 3 1864.

⁷³ “Servants and Masters,” *The Christian Recorder*.

⁷⁴ “Co-operative Kitchens,” *The Christian Recorder*, Philadelphia, 1867.

housewives, freeing them to educate and occupy themselves outside of the home, and an opportunity for female leadership and organization. It offered a more systematic and profitable way to supervise domestics, as it required the employment of fewer women and eliminated the need for a cook in every family's home. Women who possessed strong leadership and training skills were appointed to managerial roles, also giving them the opportunity to earn their own salaries and supplement their husband's incomes. The co-operative kitchen did not gain the traction Pierce had hoped it would, and the way it had in Europe, however, through the early 20th century women in dozens of American cities established community kitchens and housekeeping associations. Much of the reason for the kitchen's failure was the need for initial start up capital, which inherently meant a reliance on men for investment⁷⁵. Men believed domestic matters were the sole responsibility of the women therefore they declined to be involved, failing to see how it influenced their lives. Though the co-operative kitchen did not gain nationwide momentum, it was a reflection of the early female organization and the power middle class women had to shape domestic trends.

⁷⁵ Dudden, *Serving Women*, 184.

Chapter 3: Kitchen for Cause and Cure

But this important duty of a Christian woman is one that demands more science, care and attention than almost any other, and yet, to prepare her for this duty has never been any part of female education.

*Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe
The American Woman's Home*

Plagued by outbreaks of global epidemics and food-borne illness, the 19th century saw the rise of medical organization and the legitimization of medical authority. The rapid creation and expansion of medical schools, citywide boards of health and academies of medicine demonstrated the anxiety many felt regarding their lack of knowledge of the body, disease and treatment methods. Male physicians, politicians and public health activists drove this growth, not only creating the mold for medical expertise but also overshadowing the important role women played for so long as homemade medics, midwives and caretakers⁷⁶. This chapter seeks to demonstrate the ways many women worked as healers within their own homes, using household ingredients found in their kitchens, to treat and cure their families. Furthermore, as the medical profession posited theories about disease transmission, during the late 19th and early 20th century, women were charged with learning this new gospel of sanitation, the dangers of food contamination, and health benefits of keeping a clean home, adding yet another demanding element to domesticity.

Like many of the domestic responsibilities of middle class housewives, the notion of maintaining a healthy home brought women face to face with the realities of industrialization and urbanization. As the spread of disease became associated with the

⁷⁶ Ulrich, Laurel, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on her Diary, 1785-1812*, (New York: Knopf, 1990).

rise of cities and urban density, a woman's ability to keep her family healthy was as much a sign of her skills in protecting them from the threat of modernity as anything else. However, while the vices and sanitation problems of cities put middle class families in danger of disease and sickness, the growing interest in medicine also gave women an opportunity to educate themselves about human anatomy and modern treatment methods. Though, in many ways, health fears presented another motive for middle class women to combat industrialization, it also acted as a driving force, pushing women to chase modernity and the educational and influential opportunities it had to offer⁷⁷.

Domestic pioneer, Catherine Beecher, was yet again at the forefront of the campaign to encourage women to learn all they could of the body and the relationship of food, drink and domestic care to a person's health. She argues, "there is no really efficacious mode of preparing a woman to take a rational care of the health of a family, except by communicating that knowledge in regard to the construction of the body and the laws of health which the bases of medical profession."⁷⁸ Beecher believed in equipping women with basic medical and anatomical knowledge, not only to ensure the health of every family member, but also to empower them with the skills to feel valuable and comparable to male physicians. Throughout her book, *The American Woman's Home*, she provides graphic diagrams of internal organs accompanied by detailed descriptions of their purpose, functions and the effects of specific food and drink on the bodily systems. Beecher explains the way household sanitation, air quality and ventilation systems and cooking habits could influence a person's health and standard of

⁷⁷ Verbugge, Martha H., *Able-bodied Womanhood*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷⁸ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, 85.

living. By linking these fundamentally domestic and female concerns with health, she gave housewives a personal stake and sense of responsibility in protecting her family's health, and ultimately, her nation's health.

Domestic guides, print culture and cookbooks, all featuring sections dedicated to instructing women on caring and cooking for the sick. One column spoke to the power of housewives and healthful cooking, stating, "the multiplication of cooking-schools and of culinary departments in so many of our newspapers and magazines have so enlightened housewives generally, that the national health has improved."⁷⁹ It was the belief amongst social health activists and women alike that quality food and cooking could prevent illness and nourish the 19th century bodies that were so important to industry and productivity. In this way, the kitchen, as a production space in itself, was instrumental in middle class economy and organization. It became the women's workshop, emphasizing cleanliness, efficiency, and output. A late 19th century review of physiology and hygiene book addressed the treatment of indigestion, comparing the stomach to the kitchen and the gastric juice, which processes the food, the cook⁸⁰. This stresses the point that the kitchen was seen as the source of medical treatment.

Furthermore, food culture and eating trends changed in the 19th century as produce became more accessible year-round and an interest in international cooking styles and recipes developed amongst middle class Americans. This interest was encouraged by a cultural criticism of American cooking technique, considered to be inferior and uncivilized. As one column attacked, "The people of new England are far behind the rest of the civilized world in the practical accomplishments of the culinary

⁷⁹ "About Cooking," *The Christian Advocate*, 1890.

⁸⁰ "The Man Wonderful in the House Beautiful," *Arthurs Home Magazine*, 1884.

art.”⁸¹ In the same way housewives sought to maintain their social status through the design of kitchens and hired domestic labor, their knowledge of European cooking styles and health habits provided another means to assert their class status.

The international influence also shaped how health reformers and activists promoted the goals of sanitation and the nutritional benefits of cooking healthy meals. The same column that criticized New England cooking technique titled, simply, “Health,” stated,

In the bustle and hurry of our busy population, but little attention has been given to the sanitary conditions of cooking, and there is much of truth in the assertion that a French cook will make a nutritious dinner from remnants of food that we consign to the waste barrel⁸².

This excerpt highlights the nutritional benefits of French cooking through their prioritization of cleanly prepared meals as well as the economic resourcefulness and skill American women were encouraged to understand and employ. Additionally, the columnist shows how even the French, often touted as the epitome of elegant cuisine, devised healthy solutions to make leftovers from “remnants of food consigned to the waste barrel.” This attempted to reveal to American Readers that eating healthy and even keeping a sanitary condition was not something only the rich could do, but all Americans could embrace.

Reformers drew on earlier American aphorisms about the connection between cleanliness and godliness and applied it to the kitchen. A column published in 1875 titled, “Religion and Cooking,” stated, “If cleanliness is allied to godliness, much more is good digestion.”⁸³ As referenced in the first chapter, the 19th century gave birth to the phrase,

⁸¹ “Health” *Friends Review: A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, 1884.

⁸² “Health” *Friends Review: A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, 1884.

⁸³ “Religion and Cooking” *NY Observer and Chronicle*, 1875.

“cleanliness is next to godliness,” bestowing upon women the praise and pressure of maintaining a clean home. By using the same phrase in this article, it specifically directs the column toward women, while also elevating the role of food, cooking and the kitchen to a place of glory, influence and esteem. Furthermore, it displays the strong moral and social ties between women and the home they kept and food they prepared.

Cleanliness, Disease and Sanitation Reform

The many competing theories about disease transmission made for chaos as epidemics swept through the east coast of America, especially as food itself was thought to be a means of spreading bacteria and disease. In all three of the briefly described theories about disease dissemination, the common thread is the necessity of women to understand and plan their homes and routines to best carry out their preventative methods. As historian Kathleen A. Brown notes, cleanliness became synonymous with disease prevention in the 19th century and effectively, worked to ease the transitional role of women from healers to nurturers⁸⁴. Water sanitation and plumbing developments revolutionized the lives of middle class Americans but also exposed them to the threats of food and water borne illness. Often designers and architects of their homes and kitchens, it became a requirement that women also understand the inner workings and infrastructure of their homes. Like the construction and care of stoves and kitchen appliances, understanding the function and design of plumbing and sanitary appliances was a vital part of home care and the fight against disease. The belief that disease could spread through soil into the water supply meant authors and women dedicated extensive

⁸⁴ Brown, Kathleen M., *Foul bodies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 232.

time and energy to plumbing and the way pipes were laid and sealed. In 1879 health reformer and physician, Professor Nichol addressed the competing opinions and techniques for sanitary and healthful plumbing⁸⁵. Referencing the rising national health standards and anxiety, the columnist writes,

Surely the president of a board of health ought to know enough of the practice of the larger cities to have heard that the Boston building law requires just such a concrete coating, air-space, and flue connection in the greater part of the houses erected in that city⁸⁶.

Though this excerpt doesn't reveal the specific logistical requirements of 19th century plumbing systems, it does exhibit that national construction codes and standards were established. Furthermore, boards of health were created to implement and monitor these building rules displaying a sense of panic and paranoia as Americans realized they really had no idea how disease spread. Air and ventilation was believed to be another method of disease dissemination. "Pure air," was essential to creating a healthy home, according to Catherine Beecher, who argued,

There are two modes of nourishing the body, one is by food and the other by air. In the stomach the food is dissolved, and the nutritious portion is absorbed by the blood, and then is carried by blood-vessels to the lungs, where it receives oxygen from the air we breathe⁸⁷.

Beecher goes on to explain the way oxygen is processed by the lungs and then affects one's body and overall health. The primary challenge to the maintaining a well ventilated home was the impure air and smoke that came from cooking stoves and ranges, which often emitted foul odors and thoughts. She charges women, as the caretakers and molders of America's future generation, with the task of ensuring pure and clean ventilation throughout the home, a responsibility she openly recognized, "few, if any, of them are

⁸⁵ "Hygiene and Public Health" *The American Architect and Building News*, 1879.

⁸⁶ "Hygiene and Public Health" *The American Architect and Building News*, 1879.

⁸⁷ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, 42-43.

taught to solve the problem of a house constructed to secure pure and moist air by and night for all its inmates.⁸⁸ Knowledge of potential foodborne illness and cooking techniques to prevent the ingestion of illness was an additional part of a woman's education and skillset needed to care for her family. An article published by a physician in Godey's, warned of the dangers of children consuming unripe or badly prepared fruit,

No wonder that choleras, colics, convulsions dire, worms, wind, and watery gripes, and all the long train of infant maladies have been charged upon the products of the orchard⁸⁹.

Though the article does not suggest eliminating fruit from one's diet entirely, it advocates for "baking or stewing," the fruit to ensure any disease is eliminated by heat⁹⁰.

In all of these theories, the kitchen became the space where they were tried, either successfully or not. In this way the kitchen could either prevent or aid in the spread of disease, sometimes unknowingly. It is where women, and all their home's inhabitants came in contact with potentially unclean water, unclean air and unclean food, adding an even greater weight to their already pressure-filled lives.

By the middle of the century, the kitchen had become socially devalued, and by default devaluing those who inhabited the kitchen as employment or simply by the cultural association and expectation that placed them in the space. The prevalence of articles dedicated to kitchen design, cleanliness and health were all an attempt to combat a growing negative image of the kitchen, all the while recognizing that kitchens and the women in those kitchens had a power and knowledge that no other American citizens possessed. This sense of competing representation and cultural understanding of the kitchen caused conflict, no doubt. Print culture sought to elevate the reputation of the

⁸⁸ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, 52.

⁸⁹ "Health Department," *Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, 1861.

⁹⁰ "Health Department," *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1861.

kitchen, in hopes of encouraging women to willingly re-enter it and improve the health and cooking conditions of their homes. The author writes,

Even the kitchen is a place of dignity and honor in their presence, and love sanctifies the baking and the boiling. Will they not give us their active co-operation in promoting a more healthful system of cookery? And will they not, also, aid us by their pens in adding value and interest to this department⁹¹.

This directly reflects the profound link between kitchens, domesticity, and the women who were entrusted, and in some ways burdened, with the responsibility of adding value to the culturally charged space. As home reformers and physicians recognized the importance of a woman's cooperation and role in home sanitation, they had the added challenge of undoing the negative perception of the kitchen and compelling women to aid in the fight against disease. The struggles led to confusion, frustration and hypocrisy women must have felt and been subjected to. Though they were criticized as inferior, for occupying a space considered to undignified, they had to step in to that space in order to uphold domestic expectations to cook, entertain and most importantly, keep their families healthy. Moreover, for women who then chose not to make their lives in the kitchen, they were met with condemnation and disapproval for voluntarily denying the health of her family. While men preached morality, advocating, "be well by being good," women understood the science of health and nutrition and were expected to implement those rules and standards, despite the inherent negativity they would face⁹². As Beecher fearlessly argues, kitchen design and health maintenance was "one of the cases where a 'wise woman that buildeth her house' is greatly needed."⁹³ The domestic trailblazer was undoubtedly angered by the negative representation of the home, the kitchen and the

⁹¹ "Rural Hygiene," *Southern Cultivator*, 1861.

⁹² Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Women*.

⁹³ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, 55.

housewife, created by men. Even more, she publicly answers that damaging image by arguing that women, thanks to their long history of domestic work, are in fact, more equipped to design even the infrastructure of the home.

Not only were they feeding their husbands, middle class housewives were also building the future generations of American workers through an awareness of health and an understanding of the effects of food on growth and development. The role cooking, and by default women, played in health became a constant topic of writing and discussion in the mid to late 19th century as housewives demanded more national attention and respect. In the wake of the growing medical culture, journalists did attempt to remind readers to value nutrition and therefore, the women who oversaw the kitchens. An 1876 column, titled “Cooking For Health,” claimed,

There is no more important branch of “preventative medicine” than cooking. Bad cooking may cause a dwindling of the race, ruination of the temper, and deterioration of the morals. Good cooking, on the other hand, is accompanied by national prosperity and domestic bliss⁹⁴.

Though cooking gave housewives an added sense of purpose and value in 19th century society, it also became yet another way for women to be held accountable or blamed for their husband’s financial and social anxieties. The rise of capitalism brought a great deal of anxiety for both men and women as new definitions of success meant dramatic lifestyle changes and a persistently looming fear of failure. One of the many ways this anxiety manifested itself was through physical standards and expectations of men. “Able-bodied American men,” became a common phrase in the second half of the 19th

⁹⁴ “Cooking for Health,” *Prairie Farmer*, 1876.

century to describe the ideal physical build.⁹⁵ This expression placed a man's body on display for evaluation and criticism, giving society a quantifiable way to judge a man's worth. Continuously striving to live up to this body ideal was not only a man's issue. It was the women in their lives who were responsible for feeding, nurturing and protecting those bodies. At a moment when middle class men relied heavily on their physical wellness and capacity to support their families and affirm their sense of self, their bodies became commodities and it was a woman's job to fortify them. Women became responsible for feeding, nurturing, and protecting those bodies and thus contributed to the goals of capitalistic production by ensuring that the men within their households were healthy laborers.

Mental health also became an important concern for both men and women in the mid and late 19th century. In additions to preparing healthy meals in a sanitized home, women also had to create a peaceful home, as this was often seen as the most formidable opponent for the "pressure of competition," men experienced daily⁹⁶. Women had the added duty of creating a calm, warm and quiet home environment where their husbands could retreat to and escape the nervousness of the city⁹⁷.

As has been discussed in the previous chapters, women's responsibilities within the home were already numerous and exhausting, yet it was their husband's mental health they needed to be concerned with, not their own. Given the multiple responsibilities that women encountered, it is no wonder 19th century women were frequently criticized for

⁹⁵ "A Plea for Pedestrians," *Ohio Farmer*, Cleveland, 1873.

"Something We Have to Think of, and to do," *The Continental Monthly: Devoted to Literature and National Policy*, New York, 1862

Street, Thomas, "A Plea For Boys," *Friends Intelligencer*, Philadelphia, 1876.

⁹⁶ "The Causes of Ill Health," *Circular*, 1860.

⁹⁷ "The Causes of Ill Health," *Circular*.

their frailty and seemingly diminishing strength, when they had little time to consider their own mental and physical health amidst all their other jobs and worries. Women were inundated with columns advising them on how to care for their homes, children and husbands, all the while being condemned for their growing disinterest in domestic responsibilities and seeming waning health. As Martha H. Verbrugge discusses in her book, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston*, though a woman's life expectancy in the mid 19th century was, in fact, higher than that of a man, health reformers and doctors perpetuated the idea of female disorder and weakness to maintain the social order⁹⁸.

In order to sustain this idea of women as the weaker sex, writers, reformers and doctors began to publicly associate poor health with a lack of morality and psychological soundness. One case, published in "The Phrenological Journal and Science of Health," in 1883, discussed the rise in crime committed by, "women belonging to the educated class."⁹⁹ The column considers the case of a woman in New York who killed her children and then committed suicide. Though the writer quickly considers the possibility of mental illness, she boldly claims,

But if her case were fully described, I doubt not that one important cause of the mental disturbance would be found to be insufficient nutrition. The elements of an active nervous system were not met in the food she ate, and there was a consequent decline in tone and capacity, until intellect and moral sentiment broke down completely, and the animal impulses took uncontrolled possession¹⁰⁰.

Not only does this article speak to the belief that women were of a weaker constituency and could fall prey to the grips of "animal impulses," it also imbues food and nutrition

⁹⁸ Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Women*, 17.

⁹⁹ "Kitchen Leaflets No. 17," *Phrenological Journal and Science of Health*, 1883.

¹⁰⁰ "Kitchen Leaflets No. 17," *Phrenological Journal and Science of Health*, 1883.

with the power to control behavior and personality. Understanding the social power of food further reiterates the importance of the kitchen as a space that could foster and uphold personal health and social reputation.

The issue of temperance was an additional concern for women that brought, “the very intimate relationship between sound health and sound piety,” to the forefront. Personal health was considered foundational in leading a pious life and maintaining social order. Alcohol use was believed to be a powerful threat to both health and morality. Inversely, it was also seen as a result of an unhealthy home environment and unhealthy diet, both of which were the responsibilities of housewives to maintain.

To avoid the disease and the fruits of it, it is necessary to regulate the diet, and the publication of a judicious treatise on cookery, with suitable receipts, may be of great advantage in a morally sanitary point of view¹⁰¹.

This phrase “morally sanitary,” is an interesting one in that it adds a level of nuance to the 19th century sanitation worries and fears. Not only were women responsible for keeping their homes tidy and untouched by the literal grime of industry, she was also expected to keep her family member’s bodies and characters clean as well. In the words of Catherine Beecher, “there is no direction in which a woman more needs both scientific knowledge and moral force than in using her influences to control her family in regard to stimulating beverages.¹⁰²” Beecher warned of the possibilities of addiction, brain and nerve interference, and nutritional detriments of alcohol consumption in hopes of educating middle class women about the dangers of excessive drinking. Though middle class men were more often those afflicted by unhealthy drinking habits, it was women

¹⁰¹ “Religion and Cooking” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 1875.

¹⁰² Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman’s Home*, 108.

who were expected to understand the science behind alcohol consumption and its relationship to health and productivity. The scientific knowledge was being limited to educated male physicians and middle class housewives, a testament to the national and social influence these women could exert from inside the walls of their kitchens.

Keeping homes free from disease and social vice was not the only way middle class housewives made themselves part of the 19th century health reform movement. The rise of receipt books outlining how to care and cook for the sick displayed the long history and accumulation of homemade remedies. Entire chapters dedicated to “Cooking for the Invalid,” exhibited the vital role women played as healers and the wisdom they possessed and were expected to pass along. However, the rise of medical associations and authority, a result of the multiple epidemic diseases that sent Americans into chaos, obscured women’s roles and changed their function from that of healer to disease preventer. However, doctors still relied heavily on commonly used home remedies, often claiming credit for their discovery. For example, in a column published in 1877, Dr. G.F. Waters was praised for the discovery,

That the application of bicarbonate soda, which is to be found in all households, or other alkali in a neutral term, would afford instantaneous cessation of pain from the severest burns or scald, and that in all cases of mere superficial burning the treatment would effect a cure in the course of a few hours¹⁰³.

While Dr. Water’s suggestion may be effective, it was neither a new treatment method nor a discovery he can take credit for. In an article published four years earlier, by Godey’s Lady’s Book, female readers were advised to,

Mix common kitchen whiting with sweet oil, or, if sweet oil is not at hand, with water. Plaster the whole of the burn and some inches behind it all around with the above, after mixing it to the consistency of common paste,

¹⁰³ “Health and Disease,” *The Christian Advocate*, 1877.

and lay it on an eighth, or rather more, of an inch in thickness. It acts like a charm; the most agonizing pain is in a few minutes stilled¹⁰⁴. Kitchen whitening, more commonly known as chalk, is a similarly neutralizing alkali to the bicarbonate soda, which Dr. Water's recommends to treat burns. Though this unoriginal advice may not discredit the physician's skills or knowledge, it sheds light on a history of female resourcefulness and an overshadowing of household wisdom on the part of medical professionals. These kind of homemade remedies and natural antidotes were thought to be an essential part of a woman's education, especially once she became a mother and a wife. Catherine Beecher made no attempt to hide her skepticism over the use of drugs, warning of the potential dangers of unnatural medicinal treatment and avers reactions. Instead, Beecher advocated for, "simple remedies," that could be prepared in the kitchen and utilized pure and chemical-free ingredients¹⁰⁵. Though Beecher saw the benefit in medical, chemical and nutritional training, her insistence that women should be "taught the following modes of saving life, health, and limbs, in cases of sudden emergency, before a medical adviser can be summoned," exhibits a lingering distrust in medical authority and a profound belief that in cases of emergency and sickness, middle class women should be able to respond appropriately¹⁰⁶. Furthermore, Beecher's beliefs transformed the kitchen into a pharmacy of sorts, empowering women to become physicians within their own homes. The emphasis on homemade remedies once again made the kitchen a platform for female influence and gave social power to the home that further blurred the margins of the domestic sphere.

¹⁰⁴ "Miscellaneous" *Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, 1873.

¹⁰⁵ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, 249.

¹⁰⁶ Beecher and Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, 256.

While Beecher does not outright dismiss medical opinion, her work and the prevalence of writing focused on women's knowledge of health and body, displays a sense of resentment toward physicians for undermining their role as healers. For women, whose sense of femininity and social value came in part from their health and wellness knowledge and contributions, it is not difficult to imagine they felt displaced and discredited. Instead, as the 19th century continued and the field of medicine gained popularity and legitimacy, womanhood became defined by the ability to keep a healthy home and attend to and protect her family. In the mid to late 19th century, to be a good woman was to be morally and physically healthy and caring. This cultural shift speaks to the power health had in creating a model for social and gender norms, and the deeply intertwined relationship between domesticity and public health¹⁰⁷.

Though some women may have felt displaced, others took the growing interest in medicine to further their education and find opportunities outside the home to effect change. As studied by Verbrugge, women made up a quarter of the American Physiological Society and regularly requested and attended public courses for women dedicated to furthering their medical knowledge. The 1850s saw the founding of multiple medical institutions dedicated to training women as nurses and educating them about the various health reform trends made popular in the 19th century¹⁰⁸. Furthermore, by the second half of the century women were practicing and publishing as professional physicians. One of the leaders in the movement to provide access to medical education to women was Dr. Mary Gove Nichols. With the help of her husband, a fellow physician, Dr. Nichols founded the Hydropathic Institute in 1851 in New York. The institute was

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *Foul Bodies*.

¹⁰⁸ Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Women*.

praised for its training, becoming one of the leading medical institutions where women could earn the full degree of doctor for members of their own sex and children¹⁰⁹. The expansion of female medical associations and institutions was met with an immense amount of financial and social support, especially by reverends, professors and other women who saw the value of female doctors in the areas of women and children's health. One Reverend wrote,

On the main point, as to the propriety of accomplishing intelligent and qualified females to act as physicians amongst their own sex and children, I have never been able to discover how there could be two opinions; and there are very few of the late movements, in this age of restless progress, which I have regarded with greater satisfaction than the establishment of institutions where ladies can receive scientific preparation for the professional practice of the healing art¹¹⁰.

While, a Mrs. L.H. Sigourney, said, "The excellence of the design of the Ladies' Medical Missionary Society, of Philadelphia, approves itself to wise and thoughtful judges, as not only congenial to the capacity and sphere of woman, but as a measure of patriotism and philanthropy," and enclosed five dollars in support of the medical association¹¹¹. There is no doubt the progress and accessibility of medical education was a major development that brought middle class women in to the public sphere, however, it is impossible to overlook that their training and roles were limited solely to illnesses considered to be female, serving as midwives and caring for children. Without undermining the accomplishments of the women who paved the way for female physicians, the limitations of their spheres of practice and influence reiterates the profound link between

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Foul Bodies*, 231.

¹¹⁰ "Doings of the Ladies Medical Missionary Society," *From Rev. John H. Hopkins, Bishop of Vermont, Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, June 1853.

¹¹¹ "Doings of the Ladies Medical Missionary Society", *From L.H. Sigourney, Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, June 1853.

womanhood, domesticity and healthcare. Despite the fears of modernity and progress, the image of a woman as a caretaker was so deeply engrained in the 19th century middle class imagination, that her entrance in to the professional world in this capacity was mostly welcomed and applauded. And to those who did criticize or oppose women working as degreed physicians, editor of Godey's Lady's Magazine, Sarah Joseph Hale, asked,

Now, we ask those who are strenuous advocates of "woman's sphere," to examine and see if man is not "out of his sphere" when acting as *midwife!* Do not Nature and the Word of God both give this profession to woman? Is the faithful husband satisfied that his beloved and delicate wife should be subjected to the power, influence, and *confidence* of any other man besides himself? Is a young man made any purer or holier from having received the degree of "Doctor of Medicine?" Would American husbands and fathers permit men of any other profession or pursuit to have the familiar intercourse with their wives and daughters which "the Faculty" are now privileged to hold? We entreat honorable men, Christian men, to consider these things. It is time that this very objectionable practice of *man-midwifery and its results* should be closely investigated. Christian physicians will, we trust, lend their aid to this reform. Some people are fearful that life would be sacrificed if women were employed. Careful researches show the danger is on the other side¹¹².

Published in 1853, Hale valiantly makes the case for female physicians, using the history of domesticity and Christian values to argue for the earned presence of women in the professional medical sphere. As a leading voice in the 19th century women's movement, Hale articulately points out the way health dramatically blurred the line between the domestic and public spheres. By calling out the hypocrisy of having "professional" male doctors performing historically and culturally female work, like midwifery, she addresses a long history of women acting as physicians within their homes and even goes so far as to suggest men do not have the tact or divine gift to hold such a job.

¹¹² Hale, Sarah Joseph, "Doings of the Ladies Medical Missionary Society", *Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia, June 1853.

The job of housewife in the 19th century equipped women with a great deal of knowledge and skills that could and would be translated into the professional world. Perhaps, none more directly than their responsibilities as caretakers. The behavioral expectations of women to be warm, comforting and unselfish not only became an indicator of their femininity but also of their own health and ability to care for other's health. However, maintaining their own physical, emotional and mental health proved to be a challenge when the long list of responsibilities and expectations always placed her family's well being above her own. Furthermore, their organizational training and reliance on routine in their day-to-day lives, gave them the management skills and efficient work ethic to become proficient physicians. These skills were born in the home, although more specifically in the kitchen. For centuries, the kitchen has been tied to healthcare, but beginning in the mid-19th century with the increasing interest and cultural paranoia about health, middle class housewives' responsibilities as caretakers, healers and moral guides, were more acknowledged and in some ways, challenged, than ever before.

Conclusion

What began as a study of the position of the domestic kitchen, a space remembered and thought to be historically and inherently female, became an active and feminist project that ultimately sought to portray a nuanced and holistic image of what it meant to be a housewife in the latter half of the 19th century. Though the study and history of domesticity is not new, this project explores how domesticity evolved as women's work.

Make Me A Sandwich argues that the kitchen not only came to define womanhood and domesticity, but that it was also both profoundly shaped by and instrumental in informing middle class culture, economy and industry. The kitchen was the stage for the performances of 19th century innovation, race relations, public health fears, financial anxiety and evolving gender roles and expectations.

By considering the kitchen from multiple, seemingly unrelated avenues, this project argues the many functions the kitchen served and the many ways it blurred the line between the public and private spheres. It serves to heighten the power of the kitchen and challenge the collective memory of a room that is so often remembered and considered a place of inferiority, filth and subjugation. This thesis reveals how the kitchen introduced new technology into the home, through cooking innovations and appliances. The kitchen brought middle class families in direct contact with immigrant women and women of color, in a capacity unlike any other before it. And it was the space where mistresses became medics and transformed public health from a distant, public fear to a personal mission. In all of these cases, it was the women who designed, oversaw and inhabited these kitchens that became the stars of this project and the stars of their

homes. To be a housewife was all encompassing and required a thorough understanding of the inner workings of the house as well as the cultural power of the home in defining social status and prosperity. While these cultural expectations may have been prescriptive and limiting for many women, it gave many a strong sense of purpose and an opportunity to effect change outside the walls of their homes.

Drawing on a range of sources from cookbooks, domestic guides and advice columns written for women's journals, this project revealed the struggles that confronted middle class women as they attempted to meet the demands of new technology, a shifting economic structure, the changing roles of domesticity and caring for their families. These sources provide examples of women's literary interest and organization, as well as their desire to share their knowledge and influence the public sphere. Domestic guides and lady's journals served as their paper trails, giving women a means of making their voices heard without challenging the fragile boundaries of the private sphere.

One of the most interesting and important results of this research is the self-awareness and organization that existed amongst 19th century middle class wives and mothers. Though women understood the limitations of their direct influence, they were well aware of their ability to indirectly impact the present economic and cultural understanding and the representation of the kitchen and housewives. Women took to writing to publish their recipes, domestic advice and even, at times, their personal experiences in the kitchen as an opportunity to shape middle class ideology and lifestyle. The kitchen was the platform for their campaign. To men, though the kitchen may have appeared as a socially unthreatening and physically hidden space, it gave many women

power, authority and cultural sway while fulfilling the social and gender expectations believed to keep women in positions of subordination.

As the work developed and my personal investment in the lives of these women grew, it was impossible not to put myself in their positions and empathize with the anxiety, frustration and stress they undoubtedly felt. Over the course of this project I was challenged to consider my personal anxieties and internal conflict, as a young woman attempting to reconcile my professional aspirations with the limitations of the existing economic and social structure and my love of the kitchen and all that it represents. By inserting myself into these women's lives and fully appreciating all that was expected and demanded of them, I began to see my position, not as one of conflict, but as one of strength. Through this research, I have gained immense admiration for the kitchen, as a space that has enabled and empowered so many women for centuries. Furthermore, I have seen the kitchen as a space that has created a lineage of women who tactfully and gracefully challenged gender roles and expectations, to influence the course of women's history in America.