

**"When Her Thousand Chimneys Smoked"
Virginia's Enslaved Cooks and Their Kitchens**

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation is an interdisciplinary study of Virginia's enslaved plantation cooks that seeks to advance our understanding of their contributions to Virginia's rich cultural traditions. By examining the archaeological record, material culture, cultural landscapes, folklore, written records, and racialized and gendered spaces this study uncovers the hidden voices of the men and women who cooked for their enslavers. Enslaved cooks were highly skilled, trained, and professional, creating meals that made Virginia known for its cuisine and hospitality. They were at the core of Virginia's domesticity and culinary pride as well as the center of the plantation community. Archaeological and historical records reveal the centrality of the cook's role and the material culture exemplifies how cooks created a Black landscape within a white world, and were able to share this unique space with the larger enslaved population. This study also explores the memory of enslaved cooks and their legacy in American culture.

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ONE

Introduction

In American popular culture, enslaved cooks have been portrayed either as "Uncle Toms" or over romanticized by the popular image of "Aunt Jemima."¹ As one of the most prevalent lasting images of slavery, the "black cook" is found in everything from grocery ads to cartoons, and as a result American consumers have become accustomed to this imagery. Having *Rastus* on a box of *Cream of Wheat*, or *Aunt Jemima Pancake Mix* in your cupboard, leads to an uninformed familiarity with these icons. For something so ingrained in American domestic culture, the idea of the non-fictional "black cook" has sat alongside canned goods, on grocery shelves and at breakfast tables without question as to the reality of their position in American history. Through systematic primary research, this study uncovers the centrality of the cooks' role both in the kitchen and larger plantation community.

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary study that focuses on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century enslaved plantation cooks in Virginia and explores the influence of their legacy on twentieth-century American life and culture. To render their significance in American cultural and social history, this work draws upon archaeological collections, cookbooks, plantation records, material culture analysis, folklore and cultural landscape studies. Plantation cooks were highly skilled, trained, and professional. They created meals that made Virginia known for its cuisine and hospitality, and were at the core of Virginia's domesticity and culinary pride as well as the heart of the plantation community. Enslaved cooks lived and worked between two worlds. The archaeological and historical records demonstrate the centrality of the cook's role within the plantation, and material culture analysis shows how cooks created a black landscape within a white world, and were able to share this unique space with the larger enslaved population. To add complexity and depth, I also draw upon twentieth-century

¹ Uncle Tom is a well known derogatory term used usually as an insult to African Americans who adhere to white majority cultural values, norms and mores. Aunt Jemima is a well known grocery icon and has also been associated with being "less culturally black" and more assimilated into white culture. For more on this notion see Sara Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelly and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005.). This notion of enslaved domestic servants being disconnected from the larger African American community is a falsity and this dissertation explains why.

grocery advertisements, Black Americana and material culture.² I examine the popular icon of Aunt Jemima as well as other nameless "Black Cooks" who reinforce consumers' racialized and gendered ideas of authenticity and quality of foods, while informing Americans' memory of enslaved cooks and their legacy in our current lives.

Contemporary Notions

The term "slave cook" conjures images of Aunt Jemima and Rastus. These recognizable icons have been a staple of American culture, leading to a false familiarity with the idea of enslaved cooks. The marketing of these images has made the "slave cook" so recognizable that we have neglected a rigorous investigation into their role in history. The overuse of their imagery invites a critical look into their real lives, and begs for a better understanding of their experiences, living and working conditions, and their actual legacy in American culture.³

This dissertation brings forth the hidden voices of enslaved plantation cooks and supplements existing studies on mistresses, enslaved communities and domestic labor. The large scale plantation cooks held a unique position. They were highly skilled, trained, and professional, creating meals that made Virginia known for its cuisine and hospitality. Enslaved cooks were at the core of Virginia's domesticity and culinary pride. Their labor and expertise became an essential commodity as they were critical in the success of domestic performance and production of Virginia's noted hospitable lifestyle.⁴

Unlike the scholarship of foodways, this study concentrates more on the cooks themselves, than the food they produced. Recent scholarship has unveiled the detailed evolution of African American foodways and their significance in American culinary history.⁵ Enslaved African and African American cooks seasoned their dishes with traditional West African spices and ingredients. Foods such as okra, peppers, yams, and dishes such as gumbo and stewed fish were all part of their culinary

² *Black Americana* refers to the black-faced images and statues that depict racist images of African Americans. See Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (Westport: Praeger Press, 1994).

³ Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. (Westport: Praeger Press, 1994).

⁴ See Katharine E. Harbury, *Virginia's Cooking Dynasty* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004). Virginia's famous hospitality is outlined and referenced in detail in chapter three.

⁵ Anne L. Bower, Ed. *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

knowledge brought with them from their African homelands. These skills and tastes were handed down from generation to generation and significantly transformed American foodways.⁶ It was this cultural retention and reproduction that flourished within the quarters and came with the enslaved cooks into the main house, thus transforming elite dining preferences and Southern cuisine as a whole. While cuisine is an essential element of enslaved cooks' legacy, this study attempts to uncover their daily rituals, labor, family life, housing, and socialization and brings forth a dynamic interpretation of their struggles, pride, pain, dignity and joy.

There is still an overwhelming notion that the plantation mistresses were the ones cooking all of the food for their guests and family, when in fact it was the plantations' enslaved cooks. This dissertation is a direct response to Katherine E. Harbury's *Colonial Virginia's Cooking Dynasty*, which outlines Virginia's culinary past in incredible detail. However Harbury fails to mention that enslaved cooks were the ones actually cooking all of the food, and that they were the reason for such a "dynasty" to even exist. This gap in her narrative left an essential space for me to fill, and this dissertation places the enslaved cooks at the core of this "dynasty" and complicates the still widely accepted idea that the mistresses were the ones producing Virginia's famous cuisine.

Why Cooks?

My decision to explore the lives of Virginia's enslaved cooks comes from multiple avenues. I grew up cooking in restaurants and private homes. The labor was physically challenging and mentally trying. On one hand, I was able to express my creativity through food. On the other, I was treated poorly by many folks, and I often hated my job. The environment changed depending on where I worked, and how much effort I put into the food. My pride was always at risk, and this, in the end, is what led me to leave the professional kitchen.

During the latter years of my cooking career, between 1995 and 1998, I visited a series of Virginia plantation museums.⁷ The tours would focus on the main house, lingering in the halls, parlors, and bedrooms, providing immense details of the people

⁶ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1996) p. 243.

⁷ These included Flowerdew Hundred Plantation located in Prince George County, Berkeley Plantation located in Charles City County, Shirley Plantation located in Charles City County and Bacon's Castle located in Surry County.

who sat in the chairs, waited in the halls, and graced the plantation's landscape. Occasionally the tour would pass through the kitchen, briefly point to the room, and continue on as if nothing or nobody existed in that space. The smell of fire, iron pots and hard labor overcame me every time, leading me to stay behind and try to envision that room in use. My historical imagination ignited, fueled by vision and smell, led me to begin my quest for more knowledge. Unfortunately, the tour guides were uninformed, and often deflected any questions about the enslaved population.

As years passed, from 1998 to 2007, I continued to visit plantations, and ask questions regarding the kitchen folk. A thorough review of the literature on slavery led me to ask more questions about these cooks, whetting my appetite for more answers, which were absent in the secondary literature. As I began looking at the primary sources, these voices began to appear, hidden behind recipes in a mistress' handwritten cookbook, in archaeological field notes, through archaeological deposits, and by the sights and smells of their living quarters above the kitchen where they took time for family and rest. As a former cook myself, I would like to be remembered by more than simply my recipes. My cooking techniques are important in understanding my culinary training and influences, but I am more than a recipe. Similarly, enslaved cooks were more than their food and this dissertation unpacks the rest of their stories.

Virginia is rich with history, filled with historical homes and kitchens untouched for centuries. These walls, spaces, archaeological and architectural footprints encompass the stories of those who passed through, and this study aims to extract the voices of enslaved cooks, who distinctly contributed to Virginia's historical legacy.

Locating an Interdisciplinary Approach:
The Marriage of African American Studies and Archaeology

The interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation involves traditional historical research, archaeological analysis, and the employment of an African Diaspora lens. The marriage of these three disciplines is relatively new in academia. During the politically turbulent 1960s, scholar-activists brought significant change to the academy. As the liberation movement was taking over the country, so was the demand for more scholarly examinations into the African American past. The 1968 five-month strike at San Francisco State University demanded the establishment of a Black Studies department, and ended with the

founding of the first program in the Nation.⁸ This political moment led to the formation of more Black Studies programs throughout the United States, and the creation of sub-fields that dealt with African American scholarship.

As a result, the sub-field of African American archaeology formed as a separate discipline. Historical archaeologists use their findings to supplement the historical record, and to tell a story about the material culture of past people. African American/ Diaspora archaeology has a moral mission to tell the story of those who were unable to speak for themselves in the written historical record.⁹ The field has grown tremendously since its inception in the late 1960s.

One of the first popular examples is Charles Fairbanks 1968 excavation of Kingsley Plantation on Fort George Island in Florida. With funding from the Florida State Parks, he was to excavate the slave quarters in order to reconstruct it for tourism. Fairbanks research design included questions regarding African American lifeways, specifically looking for any African cultural survivals, "Africanisms" that remained in the material culture of the enslaved population. He believed there would be a strong retention seen in the artifact assemblage. However, his artifacts failed to support his hypothesis. Fairbanks found an abundance of Euro-American ceramics and concluded that the slaves were acculturated due to culture shock. His obsession with "Africanisms" tainted his analysis, because he looked at the origins of the material, not the uses of them. This static perception of culture led many other archaeologists to remain obsessed with the search for Africanisms, and ignore the subtleties of usage and context.¹⁰ Fairbanks pioneered the field and his misconceptions acted as a springboard for further inquiry and criticism.

Fairbanks was not the only person excavating sites associated with African American communities. During the 1960s and 1970s other historical archaeologists were digging up the African American past. In 1976 James Deetz excavated a free black site--*Parting Ways*, in Plymouth Massachusetts-- and furthered the intellectual conversation regarding the "search

⁸ Talmadge Anderson, *Introduction to African American Studies* (Dubuque:Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1993) p. 36.

⁹ See Teresa Singleton, *I Too Am America: Archaeological Studies of African American Life*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Some examples are seen in the following works; Charles Fairbanks. "The Plantation Archaeology of the Southeastern Coast." *Historical Archaeology*, Volume 18, No. 1 (1984). And Janie G. Moore. *Africanisms Among Blacks of the Sea Islands*, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, *Sea Island Culture* (June 1980) pp. 467-480.

for Africanisms." Deetz believed in using a culturally specific lens to decipher the cultural norms of a community.¹¹ This would enable the interpreter to complicate the analysis of the high volumes of European goods found in African American sites. He stated:

It would be the height of ethnocentric arrogance to assume that people recently a part of a very different culture would, upon coming to America, immediately adopt an Anglo-American set of values, of ways of doing things, and of organizing their existence . . . Again we see a strong parallel with language, in this case, one that draws on comparable data. In the West Indies Blacks speak hybrid languages known as Creole languages. Haitian Creole incorporates a French vocabulary, while Dominican Creole employs a modified English vocabulary. But the two share not a lexicon but grammar, which in both instances is West African . . . So it is while the artifacts available to the members of the Parting Ways settlement were of necessity almost entirely Anglo-American, the rules by which they were put to use in functional combinations might have been more Afro-American.¹²

Deetz's use of language as a metaphor for material culture accepts the use of Africanisms, but as a blended trait, and not a static marker.

By the 1980s, another debate took front stage as archaeologists were trying to decipher the origins of a prevalent locally made pottery known as colonoware. This type of earthenware is found on many African American sites, and has been the source of much debate as to who made it. Some archaeologists attribute colonoware to the native population.¹³

¹¹ Deetz saw the material through an African cultural lens, one that looked at African customs, and their transfer onto European materials. Deetz was ahead of his time when he employed an "African" perspective in his analysis. It is also important to note that "pan African" cultural signifiers' exist as a result of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade. While it has been proven that many planters preferred particular ethnic groups from West Africa, the generic "African body" was a direct result of the middle passage where people's ethnicity gave way to their "African" identity. The notion of "African people" is as broad as "European people" and the complexity of their individual cultures are often too hard to unpack within the muddled historical records.

¹² James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1977) pp 148-49.

¹³ See L. Daniel Mouer, Mary Ellen N. Hodges, Stephen R. Potter, Susan L. Henry Renaud, Ivor Noel Hume, Dennis J. Pogue, Martha W. McCartney,

However, the two most popular arguments against this assumption come from Leland Ferguson and James Deetz. Ferguson attributes it to both African Americans and local native populations. Deetz argues that since there was ceramic production in Africa, it should be assumed that the enslaved population carried those skills over and created this type of ceramic as a supplement to their rationed dishes.¹⁴

Once free of the constraints of Fairbanks cultural essentialism, archaeologists were able to identify African American culture as a distinct expression. The use of "cultural markers" as indicators of an African American presence became the next obsession within the field. Looking at architecture, archaeological features, and artifacts,¹⁵ archaeologists began designating certain characterizes as African American. For example, the presence of root cellars underneath a dwelling is correlated with a Black presence. White folk's cellars were usually large, rectangular, and lined, whereas cellars found under quarter dwellings are small, round, and overlapping.¹⁶ In addition, the cultural landscapes and the smaller size of the slave housing drew influences from West Africa where the houses were small and people did most of their "living" activities in the yards.¹⁷ While planters set aside land intended for their slaves, the houses were physically built by the enslaved population. This process allowed for the transmission of West African cultural landscapes into the plantation complex. This cultural pattern or "marker" provides clues for archaeologists and supports the notion that "house yards" were the center of the household, where much of the socialization went on after work hours.¹⁸

and Thomas E. Davidson, *Colonoware Pottery, Chesapeake Pipes, and "Uncritical Assumptions,"* in Singleton, 1999, pp. 83-115.

¹⁴ See Deetz, chapter 3 and Ferguson, chapter 5 in Teresa Singleton, ed. *I, Too, Am America: Archaeological Studies of African American Life* (Charlottseville: University of Virginia, 1999).

¹⁵ A discussion of colonoware and other artifacts will follow in chapter five.

¹⁶ See Michal Sobel, *The World They Made Together* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) and William Kelso, *Kingsmill Plantations, 1619-1800* (Orlando: Academic press, 1984).

¹⁷ Leland Ferguson, *Uncommon Ground: The Archaeology of Early African America, 1650-1800*. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) Chapter 3. and William M. Kelso, *Kingsmill Plantations: Archaeology of Country Life in Colonial Virginia, 1619-1800*, (New York: Academic Press, 2003.) Ch 2.

¹⁸ Whitney L. Battle-Baptiste, "In This Here Place": *Interpreting Enslaved Homeplaces*, in *The Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora*, Eds. Akinwumi Ogundrian and Toyin Falola (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007) pp. 233-248.

Artifacts, Assemblages and Analyses

The 1980s brought more changes to the interpretation of the African American past. Archaeology experienced a surge in "New Archaeology" with the scholarship of Stanley South. In the 1970s South wanted to formalize archaeology within the scientific world. He believed that archaeologists should employ strict scientific methods, which would produce hard objective and quantitative data. He relied heavily on graphs and absolute conclusions.¹⁹ By the 1980s, many archaeologists were trying to scientifically validate their sites. While South's *New Archaeology* pushed the field into a more scientific realm, it had critical flaws. First, since culture is fluid, it is difficult to gage it by using such hard analytical tools. In addition, *New Archaeology* fails to take into account the variances in African American culture due to such factors as region, status, and expression.

Archaeologist John Otto attempted to quantify his research and focused on status as an indicator of the human experience. He measured the inside of dwellings, artifacts assemblages and their disbursement amongst different social classes to gage the status of each household. Looking at Planters, overseers and enslaved African Americans he concluded that one could tell the individual status of each household by those factors. Under Otto's theory, a slave possessing a high status item would have a high status.²⁰ This is easily debatable. The most outspoken critique was Jean Howson who wrote "If such goods were indeed high-status possessions for slaves, their meanings derive at least as much from their context for acquisition as from their association with white European American culture."²¹ Furthermore, Otto ignored the possibility that the enslaved community could have had different aesthetic desires than that of their owners, and that what might be of less value to a planter, could be highly preferred by the enslaved community.

An example of these discrepancies can be seen when looking at artifact assemblages from quarter sites. Old buttons, drilled objects, blue beads could be viewed as items of low status. However, many of these artifacts have been associated with adornment and religious practices, both of which are status

¹⁹ Stanley A. South, *Method and Theory in Historical Archaeology* (New York: Academic Press, 1977).

²⁰ John S. Otto, *Cannons Point Plantation 1794-1860: Living Conditions and Status Patterns in the Old South* (Orlando: Academic Press, Inc., 1984).

²¹ Jean E. Howson, "Social Relations and Material Culture: A Critique of the Archaeology of Plantation Slavery" *Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 24, No. 4., (1990).

markers within the enslaved community. What might appear as garbage is reinterpreted as items of value when looking at it through a culturally specific lens. The most notable scholar dealing with this phenomenon is John Michael Vlach, whose work on African American folk art exposes the vast differences between the European aesthetic and that of the black community, and claims that African Americans had a "dynamic resourcefulness" like none other.²²

Another perspective is seen with the works of Mark Leone, Charles Orser, and Terrance Epperson, who brought a critical Marxist approach to material remains. Marxism, while already a developed theoretical approach, began influencing the field of African American archaeology during the 1980s. Leone has been at the forefront of Marxist archaeology, which is also referred to as the "Annapolis School" of thought.²³ Leone and the "Annapolis School" believe that class structure trumps race, and employs a Marxist lens when analyzing artifacts. This perspective leaves little room for human agency and the complexities of race, class and gender.²⁴ Another Marxist archaeologist, Charles Orser, focuses on the relationship between behavior, space, power, and material culture.²⁵ His reluctance to consider race as a factor paralyzes the thoroughness of his work. Terrence Epperson remained within the Marxist theoretical space, but included race as factor in his analysis.²⁶ This inclusion is the first step towards a critical theory approach, which employs multiple theoretical lenses in the process of investigation. Critical Theory is becoming more popular to date and has eased the academic tensions surrounding static camps of thought and competing historical narratives.²⁷

Lastly, Lorena Walsh's *From Calibar to Carter's Grove*

²² John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990).

²³ Mark Leone has been excavating in Annapolis, Maryland, for decades and this his school of thought was named after his analysis of the geographical area.

²⁴ Mark Leone P. "A Historical Archaeologies of Capitalism" *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 97, pp.251-268 (1995).

²⁵ Charles Orser. "The Archaeological Analysis of Plantation Society: Replacing Status and Caste with economics and Power." *American Antiquity*, vol. 53, no. 4. (1988).

²⁶ Terrence Epperson. "Race and the Disciplines of the Plantation." *Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 24, No. 4. (1990).

²⁷ For a discussion of the application of Critical Theory see: Laurie A. Wilkie and Kevin M. Bartoy, "A Critical Archaeology Revisited" *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 41, No. 5, (Dec. 2000).

approached the study of enslavement in a unique way.²⁸ She employed African Diaspora Studies, History and Archaeology in order to unveil a compelling story. Walsh researched a particular community of slaves belonging to one family estate, but living on different plantations. This focus on the enslaved and not slavery allowed for their individual stories to surface in her interdisciplinary study. Unlike many other scholars, Walsh created a narrative of an extended enslaved community and traced them through time and space to have a better understanding of their lifestyles. Her inclusion of architectural and archaeological data also added needed texture to the narrative. Walsh's work remains one of the only studies that incorporate such methodology and was inspirational to my work.

The Archaeology of Foodways and Plantation Kitchens

The relationship between food and kitchens is tangled both in function and analysis. It is hard to decipher the enslaved diet without archaeological evidence, and the function of the kitchen as space for cultural reproduction makes it an essential focal point for research on foodways. Examining the discarded animal bones from the kitchen quarter's trash pits helps unveil the diet and culinary techniques of enslaved cooks. Faunal remains are invaluable; showing that enslaved African Americans supplemented their diets with food from their own gardens, wild animals caught on their own time, and with food from the market place.

Archaeologist Maria Franklin argues that enslaved African Americans in Virginia ate cuts of meat that the planters did not want. In her work at Rich Neck Plantation in Williamsburg, Virginia, Franklin found that contemporary notions of "good" and "bad" cuts of meat were reversed in Colonial Virginia. Franklin states, "What we today would consider the cheapest, least desirable portions of an animal were consumed eagerly on a regular basis by even elite slave owning whites..."²⁹ This means that the archaeological evidence from slave quarters show that enslaved African Americans consumed what we would today consider higher quality cuts of meat, and supplemented them with wild

²⁸ Lorena Walsh, *From Calibar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997).

²⁹ Maria Franklin, "The Archaeological Dimensions of Soul Food: Interpreting Race, Culture, and Afro-Virginian Identity." in *Race and the Archaeology of Identity* ed. Charles Orser Jr. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001).

animals and fish. Faunal analysis enables historical archeologist to know what people were eating, and compliments the historical narrative.

The ability to decipher faunal remains is complicated when looking at the liminal space of the kitchen, as the cook produced food for the planter household, thus his/her garbage is mixed with the white folks'. It is in this moment that the cooks' unique role emerges and as seen in chapter five, the ability to draw hard lines in the data disappears. The archaeology of kitchen quarters is distinctly different from the field quarter, and chapter five examines why.

Placement in Current Trends and Discourses

There are several studies that have laid a solid intellectual foundation for my work. This dissertation focuses on the role of enslaved cooks and their negotiations with elite white women. Until the 1980s, all of the popular studies of enslaved African Americans ignored the complexities of gender. In 1985 historian Deborah Gray White published *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, which focused on the history of enslaved women in the Southern United States.³⁰ While her narrative is very broad, it provided a canvas for future historians to build on. In 1994, archaeologist Anne Yentch's book *A Chesapeake Family and Their Slaves* focuses on gender dynamics within the plantation community, looking at cultural retentions, and labor roles; and her study, like White's acted as an invitation for further inquiry.³¹

African American archaeology has recently embraced the Black feminist lens. The edited volume by Jillian Galle and Amy Young entitled *Engendering African American Archaeology*³² is a collection of essays focusing on the experiences of enslaved women throughout the plantation south. The chapters vary from site to site, and provide a glimpse into the different ways that material culture can tell a gendered story. More specifically, archaeologist Laurie Wilkie's book *The Archaeology of Mothering* focuses not only on gender but also on the historical role of motherhood in the African American community. This specificity lends itself to a reinterpretation of the material culture of enslaved African Americans. Looking at birth control and other

³⁰ Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

³¹ Anne Elizabeth Yentch, *A Chesapeake Family and Their Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge 1994).

³² Galle, Jillian and Amy Young, eds., *Engendering African American Archaeology: A Southern Perspective* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

practices employed by African American midwives, Wilkie creates a unique and essential analysis of black womanhood.³³

This dissertation also builds upon specific studies of domestic labor and white womanhood. Enslaved cooks lived in the liminal world between free and enslaved communities, and as such their story lay amid classic works in both arenas. Texts such as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation Household*, Ann Firor Scott's *The Southern Lady*, Marli F. Weiner's *Mistresses and Slaves* and recently, Thaviolia Glymph's *Out of the House of Bondage* have rigorously dissected the domestic sphere, while leaving behind the specificities of enslaved cooks' role within the plantation.³⁴ Similarly, Historian Kathleen Brown explored the specificities of Virginia and demonstrated that the hierarchical gender dynamics of early Virginia laid the framework for which the status of enslaved Africans could be placed into, and further oppressed. This sort of hierarchical categorization grouped white women and enslaved blacks together and juxtaposed them against white manhood, while racial ideology drove a highly stratified wedge between white women and enslaved folk.³⁵ This wedge is where my narrative takes place and builds on the work of these scholars to further our understanding of the complexities within the domestic sphere.

Context: A Brief History of Virginia

The colony of Virginia was established in 1607 after King James I issued a charter authorizing the Virginia Company of London to settle somewhere in North America. On May 14, 1607, 104 English colonists arrived on Jamestown Island and established Brittan's first successful colony in North America. The Virginia Company continued to bring new male settlers to the Island.

At this point food was mere a function of living and not part of any sort of cultural expression. These early settlers ate what they could; rats, vermin and grains. By the winter of 1609 they began starving to death and this lack of food resulted

³³ Laurie A. Wilkie, *The Archaeology of Mothering: an African American Midwives Tale* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

³⁴ Thaviolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) Ann Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady* ((Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1998).

³⁵ Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996).

in over 400 settlers dying.³⁶ Later in 1620 the Virginia Company of London sent 90 unmarried women to Jamestown, followed by more the next year. This diversification of the gender ratio signified the transition from a satellite settlement to a long-term colony. This creation of family life is recognized as the beginning of a Virginian domestic space.³⁷ The early settlers, now accompanied by women, wives and indentured servants, focused on building homes on plantations and farming tobacco. As the colony began taking shape, so did the labor market.

The influx of Black labor into the Old Dominion began early. Virginia's Black community is almost as old as the colony itself. The distinct Afro-Virginian experience began in 1619 when a Dutch ship dropped off "20. and odd Negroes" in Jamestown, Virginia.³⁸ Their status as free or enslaved was not recorded, but their presence in Virginia marked the beginning of an African, and later African-American presence in the new English Colony.³⁹ The seventeenth-century brought turbulent times to the English settlers and laid the foundations for a plantation society. Early Virginia plantations were constructed along the James River to enable easy access to transportation and movement of their crops. These early plantations focused on tobacco production and relied on both indentured servants and enslaved Africans to plant, grow, process and transport tobacco.⁴⁰ Settlements such as Kingsmill (est. 1619), Flowerdew Hundred (est. 1619), and Shirley Plantation (est. 1613) were some of Virginia's first tobacco plantations and were the models of success and wealth in early Virginia.⁴¹

This early period in American history has been referred to as a "society with slaves" rather than a "slave society" and reflects the youth of racial caste in America.⁴² Towards the end of the seventeenth century plantation owners began preferring enslaved Africans over indentured servants since their life-long

³⁶ Warren M. Billings, *Jamestown and the Founding of the Nation* (Gettysburg: Colonial and National Historic Parks Booklet) Chapter 3.

³⁷ Emily J. Salmon and Edward D.C. Cambell, Jr., ed., *The Hornbook of Virginia History* (Richmond: Library of Virginia, 1994) pp. 13-15.

³⁸ Salmon, p. 13.

³⁹ There are no birth records to document when the first "African American" was born, nor do we know which ethnic group these first "Africans" belonged to.

⁴⁰ Kelso, Chapter 2.

⁴¹ Chapter two discusses the transformation and change over time seen in the architectural and cultural landscapes that reflect ideas about race, servitude and enslaved cooks in particular.

⁴² Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.) Chapters 1 and 5.

status and African derived agricultural skills were superior to indentured whites with a mere seven year contract.

While the first generation of Afro-Virginians were likely indentured, the following generations were undoubtedly enslaved. In 1625 there were 23 Africans in Virginia and by the middle of the century there were as many as 300. By 1640 some Africans had been bound to a life sentence of servitude. By 1661 Virginia put statues in place, known as "Slave Codes" that began formalizing the legality and preference for enslaved labor over indenture. These laws not only applied to adults but their children would be born into a life-long sentence of enslavement.⁴³ By 1705, Virginia passed a series of slave codes that governed the actions and status of enslaved Blacks, and solidified a race-based caste system of slavery.⁴⁴ It was during this period when the early plantations were constructed, and the formation of Virginia's domestic realm took place, and the role of enslaved cooks began to form.

The Royal African Company was responsible for shipping over 1000 enslaved Africans every year to Virginia during the late seventeenth century. By 1708 there were 12,000 Afro-Virginians compared to 18,000 whites, and by 1756 the Afro-Virginian population grew to 120,156 compared to 173,316 white Virginians.⁴⁵ In 1790 there were 292,627 enslaved blacks in Virginia roughly 39.1% of the total population. Thirty years later in 1820, the population almost doubled, with 206,879 enslaved women, 218,274 enslaved men, and 4/5 of the enslaved population lived on rural plantations. By 1860, there were 241,382 enslaved women, 249,483 enslaved men. At the eve of the Civil War the vast majority of the 4,308 plantations housed 20-40 enslaved people and 1,355 plantations had 40-100 enslaved people working and living on their land. Lastly, there were 113 plantations in Virginia that housed between 100 and 300 enslaved folks each. Thus, at the very least, these 114 plantations were the most likely to have a designated enslaved cook, who performed specialized tasks.⁴⁶ These sorts of high numbers reflect a larger plantation that equates to wealth and a particular level of cultural production where enslaved cooks played an essential role.

⁴³ John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2000.) p. 65-68.

⁴⁴ Salmon, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Franklin, p.66.

⁴⁶ Historical Census Browser. Retrieved [Accessed May 15, 2007, June 28, 2008, March 23, 2010, October 26, 2010], from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.2004. (years 1790, 1820, 1830, 1840 and 1860).

By the early eighteenth century over half of Virginia's African population were Igbo from Nigeria. As the century progressed more enslaved Africans were brought from Bight of Biafra and Angola, and by 1739 they made up 85 percent of newly enslaved subjects.⁴⁷ Noting these ethnic affiliations is important in understanding the skills of Virginia's enslaved Africans, specifically their knowledge of foodways, medicine and poisoning, as seen in chapter four. While Igbo were preferred field hands, there is no doubt that with their high population percentage in the eighteenth century, many of them cooked in the main house.⁴⁸

The vast majority of enslaved folks were put to work on plantations. Tobacco was Virginia's main crop until the eighteenth century. Since growing Tobacco depletes soil's nutrients many planters chose to diversify their cash crops to replenish the soil and maintain a steady or increasing income. Planters began looking towards alternative crops such as corn and wheat, and the latter became a predominant crop by the end of the eighteenth century. However, wheat's growing cycle required short bursts of labor and unlike tobacco did not constantly occupy the enslaved labor force. During the nineteenth century many enslaved folks were sold south in the domestic slave trade as well as hired out as skilled laborers. For example, by 1850 the once booming tobacco plantations in the Piedmont region of Virginia were producing significantly more wheat than tobacco, and on plantations with more than 21 enslaved people, they were producing more than twice as much.⁴⁹

Plantation society took on many characteristics over the three centuries. Seventeenth-century plantations were smaller, the planter often worked alongside indentured servants, enslaved Africans and African Americans. White women labored in the field too, and cooked, cleaned and took first-hand care of the domestic space. By the late seventeenth-early eighteenth century changing ideas about race and class began to transform

⁴⁷ Allan Kulikoff, *The Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia, 1700 to 1790* (The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series, Vol. 35, No. 2, April 1978.)p.231. (The exact breakdown of gender and age are not available.)

⁴⁸ Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.) p.31.

⁴⁹ Gavin Wright, *Slavery and American Agricultural History, Agricultural History, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Autumn, 2003), pp. 540-543.* and for a more detailed account of Virginia's Tobacco trends see Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Williamsburg: Omohundro Institute for Early American History & Culture, 1986.)

plantation culture.⁵⁰ The increase of tobacco profits caused an influx of Englishmen to relocate to Virginia to benefit from the wealth, bringing with them an elite cultural standard.

With this influence a new patriarchal plantation culture formed with the planter being the head of household; a gentry, somewhat disconnected from the direct management of his enslaved laborers. Overseers were hired, often poor whites or son's of planters, to manage, control and punish the enslaved. The planters' wives remained in charge of the domestic sphere and coordinated formal functions such as dinner parties, balls, and dances, but stopped laboring along side enslaved bodies.⁵¹ This lavish lifestyle was only possible due to the heavy reliance on skilled enslaved laborers. Blacksmiths, brick masons, farmers, laundresses, butchers, seamstresses and cooks were some of the many positions enslaved Afro-Virginians held on these large plantations, and it was their forced labor that made Virginia's plantation culture thrive.

Enslaved laborers typically worked in the fields, and lived in the field quarters or as a domestic and resided in close proximity to the main house. Some neighboring plantations would be close enough for the enslaved populations to interact with each other and they often took advantage of proxemics in order to maintain a sense of community.⁵² By the middle of the eighteenth century race and status were melded and a caste system was firmly in place. Therefore enslaved people had to be issued a pass by the overseer in order to travel off of a plantation. This made visiting even neighbors plantations a stressful, cumbersome, and most importantly illegal.⁵³ A rich vibrant African American community developed within the confines of enslavement and influenced many aspects of American culture. Many scholars have exposed this phenomenon, although less work has been done on the culture of those enslaved people living and working within the planters' homes.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Chapter two outlines this transformation and discusses Bacon's Rebellion and its influence on racial caste.

⁵¹ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves, Introduction*.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Some examples of classic works are John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Williamsburg: Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture, 1998), and Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black*

Breadth, Scope and Limitations

This study is both a social and cultural history and shows how the cooks expression and manipulation of food reflects larger cultural transmissions throughout the Diaspora. This work focuses on the people who labored in Virginia's plantation homes, specifically ones large enough to have a designated cook. On smaller plantations (with approximately less than 20 enslaved people), the cook was also the launder, or maid. Their stories, while equally unique, are different from those who worked solely as a cook on large plantations. Enslaved cooks were sold as such, and often worked in grand homes. The scope of this study attempts to explore these experiences to represent what life was like on a big plantation, where the kitchen was separate and the cook had the highly specified role of producing food for the big house.

Locating the cooks' voice in the historical records is a challenging task, and one that was fruitful at times and empty at others. At the start of my research I caste a wide net, one that included the records I knew existed. The eighteenth-century Virginia Gazette is ripe with data on enslaved cooks as are the nineteenth century slave narratives. To exclude either source was nonsensical. As a result, I kept the scope of research to both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Virginia as it was before the Civil War, together with what now is West Virginia. As the archival search continued, the richest material came from the tidewater region of Virginia and around Richmond and some in the Piedmont area.

So much of Virginia's records burned with the Civil War, and historians are left with what survived the fires. Archaeology and landscape studies help fill in gaps in the written record, but still pose problems when trying to avoid generalizations. History is like a mosaic, where defined individual experiences make up larger sweeping narratives. Either approach in understanding the past leaves room for criticism and neglect. However, understanding that pictures are painted in many ways and with several layers, means that every addition brings us closer to the past. It is my hope that this work captures some individual voices while providing enough generalizations to see the larger picture.

The following chapters locate the cook's voice through multiple angles. *Chapter 2- Cultural Landscapes sets the stage and discusses the kitchen as it represents social trends throughout the 17th to 20th centuries. It traces the historical*

trends of plantation domestic space and kitchens as they relate to the living and working conditions of the cook and the intersections of gender, class, race and projected presentation of domesticity.

Chapter 3- Labor: Front Stage, looks at the performance, skills, and reputations of enslaved cooks, stressing the relationships between white mistresses and black cooks, as well as catering. Focusing on the formal and public aspect of the cooks' labor, and drawing from performance theory, this chapter highlights the projected image of Southern elite dining, as well as plantation fare, where the white mistress is credited for the black cook's talents.

Chapter 4-Labor: Back Stage, details the labor hours, intensity of kitchen work, and the physical and mental effects of working in the kitchen and shows the physical and practical functions of the cooks' role in the larger mechanics of the plantation. This chapter exemplifies how enslaved cooks were at the heart of food production, while standing in the shadows of the mistress.

In *Chapter 5-Archaeology*, examines the material culture from two Virginia plantation kitchens; Dixon and Flowerdew Hundred. The artifacts show the centrality of the cook's role on the plantation, as well as the textures of every day life. Gaming pieces and high-status objects reflect a vibrant and complex space within the plantation community. The notion of enslaved domestic servants being disconnected to the larger African American community is a falsity and this chapter shows the covert aspects of their life and the ways in which they retained both a connection to their African roots and the quarter community as well.

Lastly, Chapter 6- Material Culture, Myth and Memory, concludes the study by looking at folklore, public history, Black Americana, and grocery advertising to discuss the legacy of enslaved cooks and their kitchens in our contemporary world. Building on the previous sections, this chapter analyzes plantation museums, twentieth-century "black cook" iconography to provide a reinterpretation of enslaved cooks throughout history and into the present.

TWO

Setting the Stage *The Cultural Landscape of Virginia's Plantation Kitchens*

By the end of the seventeenth century Virginia was experiencing a critical ideological shift. The influx of indentured servants juxtaposed with a developing reliance on enslaved African labor directly influenced Virginia's vernacular architecture. Plantations transformed reflecting the emerging and changing views on race. This shift is clearly visible when looking at the evolution of kitchens within the larger cultural landscape. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, Virginia's plantation kitchens mirrored the greater social environment and positioning of enslaved cooks within the larger plantation community. By the turn of the twentieth century the legacy of this "racialized space" transferred directly into modern kitchen spaces, and continues to inform our collective memory of cooks and their roles in society.

Studying cultural landscapes provides a critical perspective to the more common historical narrative. The material culture of space and architecture represents the larger ideological trends. Architectural historian Dell Upton considers "landscape as extension of ideological process."⁵⁵ This perspective enables critical evaluation of space as a marker of social customs, mores and materializations of cognitive patterns. Therefore, looking at kitchens within the larger context of plantation landscapes uncovers the centrality of this designated space within Virginia's plantation culture.

Virginia, like many of England's colonies, was a microcosm of Brittan. However, its individuality was seasoned by local environments resulting in a distinct "Virginian" tradition. In the early seventeenth century Virginia planters held relatively small dwellings, compared to their later typical eighteenth-century mansion style homes. "These were one-and-a-half-story frame structures with one or more rooms on each floor."⁵⁶ The

⁵⁵ Dell Upton, *Black and White Landscapes in Eighteenth Century Virginia*, in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, by Robert Blair St. George, ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), p.357. It is important to note that this chapter relies heavily on Upton's work. He has published groundbreaking work on Virginian cultural landscapes, race and plantation complexes and has remained one of the ultimate authorities on Virginia landscapes.

⁵⁶ Cary Carson, "The 'Virginia House' in Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 69, no. 2 (Summer 1974):186 Dell Upton, "Early

"kitchen" consisted of a hearth in the common room, and was part of the shared social space of the household. Virginia vernacular house forms began as varieties of English house plans, and by the end of the seventeenth century became distinctly Virginian, and housed common folk as well as elites.⁵⁷ This distinct Virginian house formed as a combination of colonists' need to culturally reproduce English architecture with the local "frontier" needs of the Virginia landscape.

With the increased reliance on enslaved Africans and indentured servants, Virginian planters began to evaluate the social strata. "Increasingly in the period 1660-80, planters moved servants and slaves to separate buildings, creating a definite spatial division where no clear social one existed, and built smaller houses for themselves."⁵⁸ A major ideological turning point came in 1676 when Bacon's Rebellion influenced elite planters to reevaluate the class-based social strata.⁵⁹ Poor whites and enslaved Africans conspired to overthrow the local government. As a result, Virginia's elite began a strategic ideological promotion of white supremacy. This "divide and conquer" technique succeeded in breaking apart the burgeoning rebellious spirit, and in turn transformed a class based society into a racially conscious Virginia, where Blacks were inherently enslaved. By the late seventeenth century the planters' choice of a small house and outbuildings for the servants/slaves reflected growing social separation of master and servant.⁶⁰

This increasing racial consciousness was transferred onto the cultural landscape, as planters began separating spaces into distinct categories. The idea of "otherness" began to inform the architectural plans and space of Virginia's plantations. "Elite whites, carefully orchestrated exercise in the definitions of space, delineating two spaces: white and black/poor white."⁶¹ The most significant example is seen in the birth of the external kitchen. "They also built a separate kitchen, a separate house for the Christian slaves, one for the negro slaves."⁶² "The addition of new rooms reflected an

Vernacular Architecture in Southeastern Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1979), pp. 221,232.

⁵⁷ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 96.

⁵⁸ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 96.

⁵⁹ Sobel, Michel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) p. 44.

⁶⁰ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 96.

⁶¹ Upton, *Black and White Landscapes*, p. 357.

⁶² Durand de Dauphine, *A Huguenot Exile in Virginia; or, Voyages of a Frenchman Exiled for His Religion, with a Description of Virginia and*

analytical desire for order and separation that grew out of and amplified the seventeenth-century division of servant and served spaces."⁶³ This division of space is noted in 1705 by Robert Beverly who stated: "All their drudgeries of Cookery, washing, daries, etc., are perform'd in Offices detached from their Dwelling-Houses, which by this means are kept more cool and sweet."⁶⁴ Kitchens, which began inside the common space of a typical two room house, were moved to an external location, physically separating the servants from the served and creating a mental template that defined otherness.⁶⁵

The External Kitchen and Georgian Influences

"Separating the kitchen from the main plantation house was one of several related architectural gestures that signaled the onset of a more rigid form of chattel slavery that would persist until the middle of the nineteenth century."⁶⁶ Seventeenth-century Virginian planters continued to live in considerably small dwellings, while their servants moved into separate domiciles. "In the early eighteenth century, small houses of this general character served even the wealthiest segments of the population."⁶⁷ Hall and parlor houses became increasingly popular, and within 25 years most of Virginia elite's houses increasingly became the detached house form known commonly as "Georgian" style house. This architectural transformation paralleled Virginia's evolving social traditions. Builders adapted to the planters wants for compartmentalized spaces and particular flow throughout their homes.⁶⁸ With the turn of the eighteenth century, and the racial caste system in place, Virginians began upgrading their material style. At this point, British domestic buildings had undeniable influences from

Maryland, trans. and ed. Gilbert Chinard (New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1934) pp. 119-20. The term Christian slaves is unclear; no mention of whether these slaves were indeed indentured or possibly Native American.

⁶³ Cary Carson, "Doing History with Material Culture," in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978) pp. 52-54, in Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 102.

⁶⁴ Robert Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, ed. Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947) pp. 289-90.

⁶⁵ John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993) p. 43.

⁶⁶ Vlach, p. 43.

⁶⁷ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 96.

⁶⁸ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 98.

Vingboons, Palladio, and Serlio. However, while such influences are undeniable, Virginian's had their own hand in the creation of a culturally specific architectural formation, a combination of local and extra local influences of the "Georgian House" form.⁶⁹

By the early eighteenth century Virginian elite whites organized their society around values of patriarchy, localism and hierarchy.⁷⁰ The popular style of Georgian architecture fit into this ideological perspective and stemmed from England during the reigns of Kings George I through George IV, between 1714 and 1830. Named after England's Kings, this style was popular in Virginia between 1700 and 1780, characterized by rectangular symmetry, and stylistically inspired by Classical, Renaissance and Baroque forms. Another characteristic is their formal central hall which acted as a public space, separating the adjacent semi-private and private rooms from company.⁷¹ This sort of physical layout established distinct spaces for the organization and symbolism of rigid social roles, and allowed for the physical compartmentalization of race, class and gender within the architectural form.

This Georgian house form developed alongside and in response to changing views of race and servitude as a manifested ideology. This compartmentalization of space reflects the ideological shift towards the "Georgian mindset"⁷² which permeated the construction of eighteenth-century plantation landscapes. Georgian house plans were ideal for separating social spaces, and creating a controlled flow throughout the rooms.

During the early eighteenth century, America and England maintained a certain level of political and social consensus.⁷³ Virginia planters looked towards England for cultural motherhood, and tried to the best of their ability to recreate the Georgian way of life. The Georgian mindset manifested particularly in the performance of rituals of hospitality.⁷⁴ Planters began presenting their homes as venues for

⁶⁹ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 96.

⁷⁰ Allan Kulikoff, "The Colonial Chesapeake: Seedbed of Antebellum Culture" *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Nov. 1979) p. 534.

⁷¹ Cyril M. Harris, ed. *Dictionary of Architecture and Construction*, 3rd edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000) p. 424-425.

⁷² For more on the Georgian mindset see Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten* (New York: Anchor, 1996).

⁷³ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 95.

⁷⁴ Upton, *Black and White Landscapes*, p. 357.

entertaining, and as such, adapted their homes to produce a particular level of hospitality. Dell Upton argues that,

“Local builders took new ideas into consideration but were not overwhelmed by them. In eighteenth-century eastern Virginia, builders systematically dismembered the new architectural concepts and fit them into traditional Virginia ones in ways that illustrate the close interdependence of local and extra local impulses in vernacular building.”⁷⁵

This local impulse included the centrality of kitchens and dining rooms as mediums for proper entertaining. Virginia’s plantation homes began taking unique shape that differed from homes in England and even in New England, where the kitchens remained inside the main house. With these transitions, elite women and enslaved Africans began playing a critical role within the functions of the plantation home.

A Culture of Hospitality

The birth of the formal or external kitchen preceded the development of dining rooms and halls. This order signifies the transformation into a *culture of hospitality*, where entertaining became part of the planters’ projected image and drove mistresses’ sense of domestic pride. “Eighteenth-century-planning was a painstaking operation that involved the careful correlation of space and social function.”⁷⁶ The changing social habits of Virginia’s elite planters led them to want more space than the traditional two-room-house.⁷⁷ The effect of the “Georgian Mindset” directly influenced the emergence of the formalized kitchen. Planters called for the physical and ideological division of public versus private space and construction of specialized rooms. The building of formal kitchens and ball rooms/banquet halls reflect the centrality of the *culture of hospitality*.

In contrast to the seventeenth century where men were the vast majority of Virginians, the eighteenth century brought more women to the colony and efforts to settle in the colony cemented. With this shift came entertainment, and by the eighteenth century it became a critical part of plantation culture. The rise in large-scale plantations created an isolated atmosphere that depended on local socialization. “The

⁷⁵ Dell Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. Winterthur Portfolio, Vol. 17, No. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn, 1982), p. 95.

⁷⁶ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 98

⁷⁷ *Ibid*

large planter set himself at the center of a private community that replicated in form and appearance the civic order of public service."⁷⁸ Neighboring plantations became a community as each took turns hosting dinners and balls. The kitchen became a distinct space in which the performance of such ideological customs manifested in the production of food, catering, and social entertaining.

The rise in hospitality within these micro communities called for increased attention on culinary fare. Virginia was now an established colony and needed to perform as such. English elites afforded fine cuisine, and as a cultural child, Virginia needed to mirror accordingly. Whereas in the seventeenth century, food was seen more as a necessity for survival; the formalization of these spaces coincided with an increased desire to produce noteworthy meals as part of the entertaining platform. This in turn, made kitchens, ballrooms, and enslaved cooks a higher commodity, as they were the center of food production. The cooks' role in the kitchen helped excel the performance of a particular kind of presentation of wealth and custom that made Virginia known throughout the colonies for its hospitable nature.

Locating the Kitchen in Virginia's Plantation Landscape : Changing Domestic Priorities.

Virginia plantations varied in size, function, order and location. The larger the plantation, the more specialized roles and buildings it housed. For example, Shirley Plantation in Charles City County has a large external kitchen and separate external formal laundry. Shirley was one of Virginia's most prominent plantations, and as a result, the cook had his or her own dwelling, separate from the laundress. On smaller plantations the kitchens tended to be combined with the laundry and the enslaved domestics shared the living space. The more grand the property, the more formal the planters wanted their "service buildings." With large plantations erecting throughout the Virginia countryside, planters needed to make sure their homes functioned according to their cultural ideologies, including notions of status, race and gender. "Virginians also looked for neatness and order in their social lives. Their houses were part of a complex landscape defining and vitalizing that order, and changes in interior spaces can only be understood in the context of that whole landscape."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 102

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

Planters organized their land to display their wealth and control their space which was "designed to indicate the centrality of the planters and to keep them aloof from any visitors behind a series of physical barriers that simultaneously functioned as social buffers."⁸⁰ Plantations were set up to present an air of wealth. The main house usually sat on the highest point on the land, and the kitchen close by, usually adjacent to the dining or hall area of the main house.⁸¹ This sort of spatial arrangement reiterated and reflected the social hierarchies of the planter and the enslaved folks who lived on the plantation.⁸²

The main house had its own set of formalities; public, semi public and private space. "The semipublic nature of the planter's house is evident, as is the extent to which he viewed it as an emblem of himself and his order."⁸³ The heart of the planter's order was his hall, and in turn acted as the nucleus of his world. It was the center of entertaining, and public displays of wealth. The hall was the meeting point between the inside and outside worlds. It was in this space that planters performed and mimicked an Anglo inspired elitism, putting on balls, dinners and social gatherings. The construction of halls increased significantly by the second quarter of the eighteenth century and allowed a formal stage for plantation entertainment and socialization. Therefore the cook, housed and laboring in the private space of the kitchen, was kept from the front stage, thus promoting a sense of mistress accomplishment while hiding the black body within the confines of the highly compartmentalized Georgian house form.

The transformation from a two-room house to a multi-room mansion allowed for the creation of formal public space as well as private space. These designated rooms were divided among gender lines, giving the man of the house the formal stage of the parlor, dining room and library. These divided spaces allowed for a certain level of heterosocial interaction; however, the man has full reign of every room unconditionally.⁸⁴ By the middle of the eighteenth century formal "dining rooms" were standard.⁸⁵ Georgian house plans suggested ways to incorporate new spaces into traditional homes and how to control interior circulation, leading to an architectural response to specific social requirements.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Vlach, p. 8.

⁸¹ Vlach, chapter 1.

⁸² Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 102.

⁸³ *Ibid*

⁸⁴ Kross, p. 385.

⁸⁵ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 103.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 98.

In addition, room naming patterns changed significantly by the eighteenth century. Seventeenth and eighteenth century Virginians created a system of social categories--habitual ways of grouping and classifying particular daily activities, and personal relations that underlay the physical forms of their houses. These burgeoning classifications became room names that crystallized the intersection between physical spaces and social categories in a single term.⁸⁷ An example of this is seen in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century probate inventories. The architectural terms "passage" and "dining room" arose and were commonly used by the end of the first quarter of the eighteenth century and continued to grow.⁸⁸ By the mid eighteenth-century plantation homes had a formal hall; a public room without access to other parts of the house. They also had a dining room, which was a semipublic space and often had an exterior door facing the kitchen outbuilding.⁸⁹ These rooms were highly masculine in their use, yet the dining room as a semi-public room acted as liminal space between the misses, cook, as well as the planter and public.

In contrast, the kitchen was the heart of the mistress's order, and in some instances purpose. The naming system allowed the materialization of social custom into house plan.⁹⁰ The kitchen and the cook became the mistress' responsibility, and she was driven by the productivity of domestic ideals. During the nineteenth century, plantation mistresses were occupied by domestic performance and gaining entrance into the elite's world. This drove the mistresses to both desire, and present, a particular level of cultural production in the medium of food and entertainment. Thus, the kitchen arose as an essential part of the cultural landscape. The vast majority of eighteenth-century sale ads list the kitchen directly after the main house, which can be interpreted as the second most important building on a plantation.⁹¹ Dimensions of the main house and kitchen are listed, while the other dependencies are simply stated, without details. Gabriel Penn listed his 274 acre plantation for sale, stating the property had "two kitchens, one of which is very

⁸⁷ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 98.

⁸⁸ Cary Carson, "Doing History with Material Culture," in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), pp. 52-54, in Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 102.

⁸⁹ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 104.

⁹⁰ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, figure 11, p. 107.

⁹¹ *Virginia Gazette, 1736-1780*, Rockefeller Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA.

valuable."⁹² This advertising tactic speaks to the centrality and importance of a properly working kitchen, as a selling point to Virginia's potential plantation owners.

Kitchen Quarters as Home and Work Place

Most enslaved cooks lived in the external kitchens and living conditions differed from field hands. All quarters varied in size and quality. However, a common eighteenth-century Virginian field cabin was one story tall, had two main rooms separated by a central chimney, and had an external entrance. This pattern evolved into the nineteenth century to have a doorway connecting the two internal rooms. One of the two rooms would have a loft to maximize occupancy; housing approximately 6-24 people. The average single dwelling was 12'x8' and larger ones, in the style of dormitories were as big as 16'X 20' split up into individual domiciles.⁹³

The slave quarters were part of two intersecting landscapes; Black landscape existed within and around the field quarters while the white landscape fell around the main house. From the masters perspective the quarters were part of the "working landscape" dictated by some degree to their location.⁹⁴

Field slave quarters were of similar construction as poor white housing. However, the landscapes were used in drastically different ways. Poor white Virginians tended to live more within the walls of the home and with far less people. This "living" refers to using a designated area for social space, eating, cooking, etc.⁹⁵ In contrast, slave dwellings were only a segment of the living space and were occupied by significantly more people. The quarter as a domestic space, expanded beyond the walls of the cabins and into the house-yard. This house-yard acted as a functioning work space, but mostly as a social space for enslaved folks to conjure, eat, and maintain a sense of community. Quarters were constructed to facilitate this social space, where enslaved people could socialize --to allow for ample development of surroundings.⁹⁶ Depending on the location of the overseer, this space also served as a way for the overseer to view the quarter community in one convenient space, providing a sense of panoptic fear among slaves. Enslaved Blacks often built fences and or buildings in the line of the overseer's

⁹² Virginia Gazette, March 21, 1771, Page 3, col.2.

⁹³ Upton, *Black and White Landscapes*, p. 359.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 361.

⁹⁵ Upton, *Black and White Landscapes*, p. 361.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*.

house to combat this sense of surveillance.⁹⁷ While these small garden fences wouldn't completely obstruct the overseers' view, it allowed for a slight visual block.

Domestic's Quarters: Placement in Larger Scope

In contrast to the field slave quarters, kitchen quarters reflected a smaller microcosm of the big house. "Private" space was considered by constructing the upstairs sleeping quarters found in most plantation kitchens. This was a clear division of work and home space that was unique to the enslaved cooks and his or her family. On larger plantations the kitchens were exclusively for food production. Kitchens were the most common outbuilding listed in the eighteenth-century Gazette, with a total of 334 mentions, and were the most clearly described.⁹⁸ Even though kitchens varied in size, they were more standardized than other dwellings, most being two room structures, ranging between 192 and 384 square feet.⁹⁹

The domestic slaves lived and worked within the white landscape. Many of the house servants slept in a room inside the mansion. However, the cook's living space depended on the location of the kitchen. While most large scale Virginia plantations constructed external kitchens by the eighteenth century, some kept their internal kitchens and continued to house the cook(s) within the main house in a room adjacent to the kitchen.¹⁰⁰ This is a departure from the detached kitchen arrangement known to have prevailed on the landscape of eighteenth century Tidewater Virginia."¹⁰¹ This internal kitchen type is one of four general styles of kitchen/homes that enslaved cooks lived and worked in through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁹⁷ *Ibid* and Whitney L. Battle-Baptiste, *In This Here Place: Interpreting Enslaved Homeplaces*, in *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora*, eds. Akinwumi Ogundiran and Toyin Falola, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2007, Chapter 10. and Sobel, p. 100.

⁹⁸ The Virginia Gazette ran from 1736-1780.

⁹⁹ Camille Wells, "The Planter's Prospect: Houses, Outbuildings, and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia." *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Spring 1993.

¹⁰⁰ Examples are seen at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and Bacon's Castle in Surry County, Virginia.

¹⁰¹ Department of Historic Preservation, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Richmond, VA. Edward Tolson, DHR file 46-86 on *William Scott Farmstead*, 1990.

There was not an abundance of mansions in eighteenth-century Virginia, approximately two dozen total by 1776.¹⁰² Most eighteenth-century main houses had a hall, parlor, chamber, and or dining room on the first floor. By 1750 the dining room, hall, chamber and passage were the most essential public rooms, while the kitchen was the most important private space for the function of domestic production. The rise of the dining room as a distinct social space filled with etiquette, props and elite social functions became standard by 1750.¹⁰³ Naming was a way to acknowledge a rooms social significance, however, the lack of a name, speaks to the importance of "negative space" within the walls of Virginia's homes. Dell Upton discusses the Moore House in York County, and recalls the lack of naming of a back "fourth room." In a sense, the fourth first story room was an "unwanted" space. Probates show a variety of content, including "domestic items and "Negro clothes."¹⁰⁴ There was no set name for this room, and in turn it had no social meaning to the planters.¹⁰⁵ The mere absence of a proper name is significant. The presence and proximity to the internal kitchen or in absence, the dining room could easily be associated with the enslaved cook or domestic. This unlabeled space speaks to the projected invisibility of enslaved domestics. They existed to create a sense of sophistication and performance of elite domestic ideals, but in the foreshadows of the proud mistress, and from the hidden passageways of the plantation.

The more common, external kitchen, usually sat adjacent to the main house, sometimes in rows or streets, all visible from the main house. Their exteriors resembled the main house in style but differed in construction.¹⁰⁶ These external kitchens generally came in three forms. The first is a small one room cabin, with a varying size chimney (figures 2.1,-2.4).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Michal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) p. 127.

¹⁰³ Mark R. Wenger. *The Dining Room in Early Virginia*. Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, Vol. 3 (1989), pp. 149-159.

¹⁰⁴ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 108

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁶ Upton, *Black and White Landscapes*, p. 361

¹⁰⁷ Buckhorn Manor, Kitchen, State Route 603, Bacova vicinity, Bath County, VA1742 1st floor kitchen, 2nd floor weaving room.



Figure 2.1.



Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Green Hill Plantation, Kitchen, State Route 728, Long Island vicinity, Campbell County, VAHABS VA,16-LONI.V,1B-3

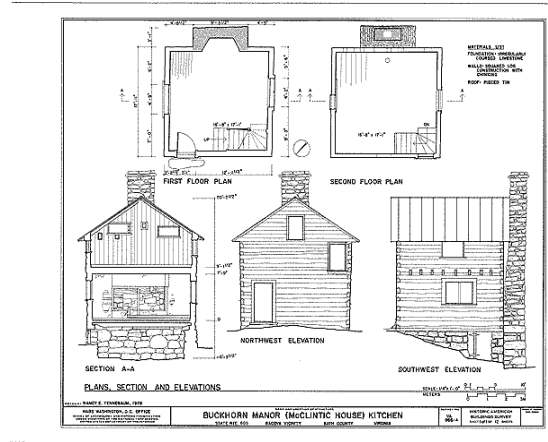


Figure 2.4

The chimney in figures 2.1-2.3 encompasses the entire wall of the quarter. This structure was most likely used as a kitchen and laundry, given the width of the hearth and adjacent fireplaces. The sleeping quarter would then be in a loft opposite the fireplace. Figure 2.4 was used as a kitchen weaving room, where the kitchen was on the first floor and the weaving room sat upstairs presumably within the space of the cooks/weaver's sleeping area.

The second common external kitchen quarter was a two room dwelling, with a central chimney.¹⁰⁹ This fireplace was either along the back of the dwelling (figure 2.5)¹¹⁰ or in the middle of the kitchen space, dividing the internal space in two. If the chimney was along the back side of the kitchen the enslaved cook would commonly have a ladder or stairs along the internal side wall leading to a loft above. If the fireplace sat as a divider between both halves the space was split in multiple ways. Similarly, the third variation of an external kitchen has fireplaces on the gable ends of the kitchen (figure 2.5).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ See Vlach for the descriptions of two of the four major typologies, p. 44.

¹¹⁰ Westover KITCHEN BUILDING, FROM NORTHEAST HABS VA,19-WEST,1B-1, Westover, Kitchen Building, State Route 633, Charles City vicinity, Charles City County, VA.

¹¹¹ SOUTH AND EAST SIDES, LOOKING NORTHWEST HABS VA,90-FAL.V,2C-3Chatham, Kitchen, .2 mile Northeast of intersection State Routes 218, Falmouth vicinity, Stafford County, VA

Variations on this type are as follows:

Local of FP	1st room	2nd room	second floor
central chimney 1	kitchen	living	
central chimney 2	kitchen	laundry	lofts
central chimney 3	kitchen	scullery	lofts
gable end chimneys 1	kitchen	laundry	lofts or second floor
gable end chimneys 2	kitchen	scullery	lofts or second floor
gable end chimneys 3	kitchen	kitchen	lofts or second floor



Figure 2.5



Figure 2.6

The kitchens, while separate from the main house, were placed to where the windows faced the main house. It can be assumed, that this allowed for the mistress to “watch over” the cook, or at least present the notion of her eyes onto the kitchen at all times. The main door was usually placed towards the dining area, in order to promote a direct flow of service from kitchen to table. The placement of the windows and doors encouraged a constant association between the main house and kitchen, and mistress and cook. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, architectural trends began transforming this virtual connection into constructed spaces. Enclosed colonnades, hidden walkways, “all weather” passageways, and “whistling walks” were built as a response to many factors. These walkways and their contemporary functions are discussed further in chapter six.

“The Passageway”

Architectural trends continued shifting during the turn of the nineteenth century. While the seventeenth century defined the separation of enslaved spaces, the eighteenth century formalized this partitioning into highly structured working landscapes. The vast majority of kitchens were external, and plantation homes were highly functional producers of domestic entertainment. Balls and banquets became synonymous with

Virginian culture, and its hospitality was renowned.¹¹²

By the early nineteenth century, many Virginia plantations had constructed what is often called an "all weather passageway" from the kitchen to the main house (figures 2.7-9). During the 1800s the colonnade between the dining room and the kitchen was enclosed, forming the "little house."¹¹³ Eighteenth-century planters incorporated passageways in the main house to cure the "Problem of circulation."¹¹⁴ This external version of a "flow-fixer" is more complicated than suggested by contemporary plantation narratives. According to Berkeley, Monticello, and Mount Vernon plantations, these covert walkways were built to keep the enslaved cooks from having to walk through rain, and snow.¹¹⁵ While this pragmatic explanation is true, the construction of these passageways coincides with a changing ideological perspective towards enslavement and public displays of wealth and servitude. Attaching a service wing to main house became popular in the early nineteenth century and some rural plantations created covered walkways and passageways from the dining room to the external kitchen.¹¹⁶

At Berry Hill Plantation in Halifax, Virginia, the mistress Mrs. Eliza Bruce, installed a series of bells in the house servants rooms, all with a different tone for the related person.¹¹⁷ Discretion and efficiency ruled the architectural developments of Virginia's plantations. Berry Hill was designed in the nineteenth century and reflects the ideological want to conceal and control the flow of enslaved bodies within the private space of the mansion. This desire stemmed from a growing reflexivity in wanting to conceal the private and complicated interracial relationships within the plantation household during a period where slavery was under incredible international scrutiny.¹¹⁸

These passageways also allowed the planter to directly and individually control circulation to every room in the house.¹¹⁹ This trend of an "all weather passageway" began materializing throughout Virginia, just as slavery became a more significant part of the international dialog. With the close of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1808, planters were forced to

¹¹² See Phillip V. Fithian, *Diary and the plethora of citations in chapter three for further evidence.*

¹¹³ Catherine R. Harrison, DHR file 001-0062, *Willowdale*, Section 7, Page 3, 2007.

¹¹⁴ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 104.

¹¹⁵ Official plantation tours, summer 2007, Fall 2009.

¹¹⁶ Ellis, p. 26.

¹¹⁷ Ellis, p, 32.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, p. 103.

evaluate their position on enslaved servitude and labor.¹²⁰



Figure 2.7¹²¹

Figure 2.8¹²²



¹²⁰ I use the term servitude along with labor to stress the performance aspect of enslaved cooks and domestic slaves.

¹²¹ Kendall Grove, Connecting Passageway & Kitchen, State Route 674, Eastville vicinity, Northampton County, VA NORTH FACADE OF CONNECTING PASSAGEWAY AND EAST FACADE OF KITCHEN

HABS VA, 66-EAST.V, 6A-1

¹²² Kendall grove, DETAIL, SOUTH FACADE OF KITCHEN, ENTRANCE FROM CONNECTING PASSAGEWAY

HABS VA, 66-EAST.V, 6A-4



Figure 2.9

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While it is clear that enslaved cooks and domestics' work differed from other laborers, they had an additional burden, in that they were in the public's eye.¹²⁴ They were part of a display of wealth, sophistication, and order of the domestic space. This is especially true at the larger more prestigious plantations where enslaved cooks created sophisticated suppers; enslaved waiters served them, and white planters and their guests enjoyed every aspect.

At Thomas Jefferson's *Monticello*, sophisticated dumb-waiters were installed so that the food would magically appear out of the wall in the formal dining room. His house was equipped with the most modern and bizarre gadgets to promote the presentation of food without Blackness. His all-weather passageway, dumb-waiters, and hidden doors all shielded the Black presence from the room as he and his guests ate.¹²⁵ While Jefferson's *Monticello* is the most extreme example of this attempt to hide Black domestic labor, it nonetheless is a marker of the nineteenth-century ideological shift towards a more racialized, self reflective planter society. This transformation

¹²³ Kendall Grove, INTERIOR, CONNECTING PASSAGEWAY, DETAIL OF DOOR HABS VA, 66-EAST.V, 6A-6. View from cooks' quarters.

¹²⁴ For more on this subject see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

¹²⁵ Official Plantation Tour, Monticello, July 8, 2007.

could easily be associated with the rise in nineteenth-century Abolitionist literature, or simply be reflecting the larger social unease that came with the closing of the Transatlantic Slave Trade to the Americas or the rise in Slave Revolts.

Along with the covered passageways came "whistling walks." Berkeley Plantation in Charles City County, Virginia, displays signage to remember this renowned walkway. The underground passage was dug between the external kitchen and mansion cellar, which eventually leads to the formal dining room via a narrow flight of stairs built between the walls. The "whistling" was imposed by the mistress to keep the enslaved cook or waitperson from eating the food as it was brought into the main house.¹²⁶ This bizarre and paranoid ritual makes no sense in the terms set by the plantation tour. This interpretation assumes the cook hadn't touched the food while preparing it, or avoided tasting it in the process. It also removes the idea and fact that Black labor was intimately involved in the creation, production, and quality of Virginia's meals.

In addition, the implementation of whistling, in lieu of speaking speaks to a particular level of forced performance. Having the Black voice whistle or sing as the food is brought inside, could easily be interpreted as a form of entertainment for the planters' family and guests. It also could have helped alarm whites of the coming of an enslaved person, allowing for the hindrance of conversation or certain improper behaviors. Either way, these whistling walkways acted as a venue for performance and an architectural manifestation of furthered social control of enslaved spaces.

Even in plantation museums the enslaved cook remains present by the standing kitchens that sit adjacent to the main house. However, the mention of cooks is kept to a minimum, as the focus of such tours rely on interpreting the front stage. Only when there is a whistling walk, or a hidden passageway does the mention of the "slave cook" appear, and in that you find a twisted version of reality, wrapped in twentieth century folklore. At Berkeley Plantation in Charles City County, the "Whistling Walkway" is marked with a sign (figure 2.10). The story is told as follows, "The cook was made to whistle while they carried the food in, to prevent them from tasting the food." Such an absurd memory functions to ease the white tourist's idea's about slavery and personal intimacy during slavery as well as perpetuating stereotypes of the bad character and dishonesty of African Americans. Just as the nineteenth century passageways grew to hide the black body from the guests, this tale exists to redefine history, and remove the black body

¹²⁶ Personal Communication, Plantation tour July 2007.

from the intimate sharing and production of food that occurred during enslavement.



Figure 2.10

Inside the kitchen: furnishings, textures, and use

While eighteenth and nineteenth century field slave quarters lacked built in furniture and storage, kitchens had comparatively more furnishings. Enslaved field hands often installed furnishings privately and found areas under the floor to hide and store their belongings.¹²⁷ Kitchens were unique in that they had all the amenities available at the time, but the cook's enslaved status often made their accessibility limited (Figure 2.11).

¹²⁷ See chapter 3 The Archaeology of Dixon and Flowerdew kitchens.



Figure 2.11 ¹²⁸

Aesthetics

Most external kitchens resembled the main house, both in style and material. The majority of tiles were made of brick and the floors were usually plain compressed clay, brick, or oyster shell in lieu of wooden planks. White wash was often applied to the interior of the kitchen to promote a “finished” or “visually clean”¹²⁹ look. Kitchens were usually proportionate to the main house, and larger than most other outbuildings. They usually sat adjacent to the main house, and near the kitchen garden.¹³⁰

The interior varied as much, if not more, than the exterior. The furnishings changed drastically between the late seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Whereas the seventeenth century cooking technology consisted of an iron pot over open flame, the eighteenth century brought the common use of the Dutch Ovens, Salamanders, and more sophisticated tools. With the invention of the stove in the mid 1800s, the material culture of kitchens became increasingly technical. What had been reserved for the Governor’s Palace kitchen during the eighteenth century had made its way into the plantation kitchens. These elite kitchens were being stocked with fat skimmers, fish forks, trivets, mortars, and countless other elaborate tools.¹³¹

Work Space

The kitchen furnishings varied, yet most had the basic

¹²⁸ Kenmore, Kitchen, 1201 Washington Avenue, Fredericksburg, VA HABS VA,89-FRED,1C-2

¹²⁹ I use the term “visual clean” because this ideology predates germ theory and thus ideas of cleanliness coincide with visual aesthetics rather than bacterial control.

¹³⁰ Helen Claire Duprey Bullock, *Kitchens in Colonial Virginia* (Colonial Williamsburg Research Series, 1931) p.15.

¹³¹ Desiree B. Caldwell, *The Palace Kitchen Report* (Colonial Williamsburg Research Series, 1979).

necessities. Along with the obvious hearth cooking area, some had formal dressers for rolling bread and baked goods. These dressers acted as storage for plates, pots, pans and utensils. In Esther Copley's 1836 *Cooks Complete Guide* she argues the importance of these furnishings, "Kitchens should be furnished with a dresser, over which a clean cloth should be kept spread."¹³² This marks the importance of presentation of the kitchen as a "visually clean space" and suggests the mistress had responsibility over the presentation of this particular ideal. While the kitchen space was kept "visually clean" some had the formality of a scullery in the second room. Many sculleries (room adjacent to kitchen if used as such) had "slop drains" for the washing of food items, dishes, pots etc. These sculleries helped the flow of the kitchens, extracting the business of cleaning from the production of food.

The storage of food, especially butter, sugar, liquor, and other valuable ingredients were often kept locked in the main house.¹³³ This lock and key relationship intensified during the mid eighteenth century, as mistresses became paranoid of enslaved folks with the rise of revolts and overall cognitive dissidence. It was worried that cooks and field hands would "steal" these items for their personal consumption, thus taking away the mistresses sense of control.¹³⁴ The temptation to take food items must have been overwhelming for the cook as he or she had to smell, taste and work with these products on a regular basis.

Home Space and Memory

As mentioned earlier, the cooks usually slept on the second floor of the kitchen, either in a loft or a second story. Their beds varied in size, and quality, ranging between a basic straw matt and a wool blanket to framed flax mattresses. Regardless of the quality of the bedding, the cook's kin typically was allowed to live in this area as a nuclear family, without having to share with others. This is drastically different from the field quarters and even the domestic dorms, where the sleeping arrangements sometimes ignored familial bonds.

While this could be viewed as somewhat beneficial towards the cook, the reality is far from convenient. The field hands had to dorm along side sometimes over 25 other people, but they did not have to sleep next to a burning hot oven. The field

¹³² Esther Copley, *Cooks Complete Guide*, London, 1836. P.4.

¹³³ Donna C. Hole., *Architectural Fittings in Colonial Virginia*, Vol.1, Colonial Williamsburg Research Series, 1980. (housed at the Rockefeller Library, Williamsburg, VA.)

¹³⁴ Bullock, p. 16.

hands often cooked in the house-yard area especially during hot days and nights. In contrast, the cook had to use their hearth regardless of the weather. This consistent use of the kitchen as workplace interfered with the cooks comfort in his or her bed. Tutor Phillip V. Fithian recalls the cook sleeping outdoors often to keep cool.¹³⁵

Just as field hands found innovative ways to make their cabins "home" enslaved cooks did the same. They carved pictures into the walls of the second floor, and persevered for the sake of their families and selves. Shirley Plantation restored their kitchen as part of the plantation tour. Since the plantation has been in the same family since its inception, much of the original fixtures remain as well as utensils, pots, pans etc. The most significant artifact remaining in the kitchen is a set of candle holders. These iron accessories are in the shape of Sankofa, an Akan symbol signifying the importance of looking back to move forward, retrieving from the past to look ahead, or literally "go back and fetch." Their placement in the kitchen workplace is a just reminder that the cooks were just as connected to their roots as the field hands were. Even though they were housed away from the rich cultural space of the house-yards and cabins, they nonetheless remembered their roots and displayed such icons within the white landscape of the plantation.¹³⁶

Legacy

The legacies of plantation kitchens are substantial. The cultural landscapes of Virginia gave birth to a formalized culture of hospitality seen throughout the American South. This regional reputation still prevails throughout the United States, and it all stemmed from these kitchen spaces. Enslaved cooks were at the core of this evolution, and their kitchens were the manifestation of such ideological trends. The birth of "otherness" and racial landscapes also grew alongside, and in response to these notions, and is seen throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The separation of kitchen spaces to incorporate Black labor was followed later by the separation of Irish, Italian, Mexican and other ethnic cooks into defined kitchen spaces in homes and restaurants. Planters and later many Americans equated "otherness" with "dirtiness." One of the more telling

¹³⁵ Phillip Vickers Fithian, *Diary, 1747-1776* (Williamsburg, Va., Colonial Williamsburg, 1957).

¹³⁶ See David Kutz, Director. *The African Burial Ground: An American Discovery*, film, 115 minutes, Tribeca Films, 1994.

connections is seen in the development of the Railroad dining car. Not only were most dining cooks Black after the Civil War, but the language used to define the dirtiness of this racially segregated kitchen space is consistent with Robert Beverly's 1705 depiction of plantation kitchens: "All their drudgeries of Cookery, washing, daries, etc., are perform'd in Offices detached from their Dwelling-Houses, which by this means are kept more cool and Sweet."¹³⁷ Similarly, an Ivory Soap ad from 1892 states,

To keep dining private and hotel cars free from disagreeable odors has been a study since they were both introduced. One odor that gave much annoyance was that arising from common soap used with hot water, but this can be prevented by adopting the ivory Soap for all purposes. It is the only laundry soap that is entirely free from this objection.¹³⁸

The kitchen, whether in a home or railway car remained a "Black" racialized service space well into the twentieth century. The initial invention of the external kitchen transcended the plantation landscape and has become part of American culture.

Every year thousands of tourist flock to Virginia to "step back into time" via Colonial Williamsburg, James River Plantation Tours or similar venues. Many of the plantation kitchens remain a permanent fixture in the tourist landscape, while most slave cabins and quarters were demolished long ago. Colonial Williamsburg rents out their "kitchens" at a higher price than their hotel rooms, offering an "authentic experience." They do not, however, rent slave quarters, as that is too controversial. This decision to only sell the kitchen as a "safe space" for tourists, speaks to the kitchen's position not only in history but in our chosen memories.¹³⁹ Somehow, kitchens have become one of the only acceptable facets in museum's interpretations and commoditization of enslavement.

This also speaks to the importance of the kitchen and the cook in the legacy of public historical memory. Current plantation owners must feel the lasting importance of these buildings in the presentation of wealth and pride in "Virginia hospitality." While the tours tend to ignore the presentation of

¹³⁷ Robert Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, ed. Louis B. Wright (Chappell Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947) pp. 289-90.

¹³⁸ Proctor and Gamble advertisement, 1892. See Figure 2.11.

¹³⁹ The use of chosen memories refers to the ways in which Americans are selective with their memories of enslavement, "choosing" a memory that allows a particular level of comfort by ignoring the harshness of reality.

the enslaved cook in a realistic and respectful manner, the shadows of the cooks stand strong in the buildings they once called home.

PROPRIETARY ARTICLES



To keep dining, private, and hotel cars free from disagreeable odors has been a study since they were first introduced. One odor that gave much annoyance was that arising from common soap used with hot water, but this can be prevented by adopting the Ivory Soap for all purposes. It is the only laundry soap that is entirely free from this objection.

Copyright, 1910, by The Procter & Gamble Co.

Figure 2.12

THREE
Front Stage at the Plantation House:
Virginia's Domestic Queendom

On November 26, 1827 Virginian housewife Mary Randolph wrote to her sister describing the recent accomplishments of her mother's household, stating: "mother had a banquet and everything went off to perfection. . . I am very anxious for mother to give a ball, which she has promised me to do as soon as the servants and Mrs. Randolph, who is quiet sick, recover. She has promised to invite 250 people."¹⁴⁰ Mary was delighted by the success of her mother's hosting, and was anxious to put on a more elaborate and grandiose event. This sort of entertainment was typical in eighteenth and nineteenth century Virginian plantation culture, as the physical isolation of homes provided a social network of at-home mistresses whom planned some of Virginia's most famous parties. These occasions revolved around the production, presentation and consumption of meals, and the mistress took pride in her self-proclaimed central role. By the mid-eighteenth century, Virginia's hospitality became a well-known regional cultural standard. "Virginia...has always been famed for the style of her living. . .she became noted among the colonies for the princely hospitality of her people and for the beauty and richness of their living."¹⁴¹

Behind every meal and in the shadow of the mistress was an enslaved cook, whose responsibility was to create these lavish meals. These cooks existed within a complex social space, created by racialized and gendered ideologies, and fueled by the mistress' domestic wants. This environment, similar to a stage, relied on props, actors and performance of domesticity and stringent social class mores. The relationship was built on status roles, negotiations, and a constant threat of violence. The front stage behavior was seen by the guests and depended on the mistress' performance of "hostess supreme." The backstage behavior was what happened before guests arrived, behind the kitchen door, and often between mistress and cook. This chapter looks at the front stage, filled with abundant gourmet food, ball gowns, liquor, and music and examines the cook's performed role in the essence of plantation social culture.

This kind of entertainment entangled with a paternalistic society and chattel slavery created a particular kind of labor structure, where both the misses and enslaved cooks held unique positions in the plantation household. Elite white women

¹⁴⁰ Mary H. Randolph, letter, November 26, 1827. Randolph de Potestad Family Papers, folder 1, p. 2. Rockefeller Library Manuscript Collection, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

¹⁴¹ Tyree, p. vii.

functioned within patriarchy, but carved out gendered space in a highly organized and segmented household. Within this space they found power to control enslaved domestics and relied on their labor for their social elevation.

The construction and separation of private and public space within plantation homes reflected eighteenth-century ideas about multiple publics and gendered spaces.¹⁴² The creation of engendered publics in mansion construction, acted as both mirrors and metaphors for colonial society.¹⁴³ Elite Virginians desired gentility and attempted to perform as such at every occasion.¹⁴⁴

Ornate rooms signaled wealth and taste, and therefore social superiority, as the wealthy invested their objects and their homes with meanings, expressed through an encoded polite behavior, which, it has been argued, sharpened class distinctions.¹⁴⁵

Many Virginians "counted chairs" to gauge the wealth of a planter and his family. The more chairs a home had, the more people it could entertain; thus being high on the social ladder.¹⁴⁶

The idea of public space is seen in many aspects of society. The plantation home acted as a controlled public, in contrast to a tavern or a coffee house, where anyone could be present. In rural Virginia, plantations were the epicenter of socialization, as they were isolated miles from urban life. Some scholars argue that women lost some of their control over the home, and were moved to the periphery of the houses functional purpose.¹⁴⁷ Just as described in chapter two, the compartmentalization of rooms led to a separation of gendered spaces. However, with close examination of the function of food, as a social measure, it can be argued that the role of the mistress and the cook lay at the heart of social success, thus far closer to the center of plantation management. When women left the home under the care of their husbands, they did so with written directions and by such flexed their authority, clearly

¹⁴² Jessica Kross, "Mansions, Men, Women, and the creation of Multiple Publics in Eighteenth-Century British North America" *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 33, (Winter 1999), pp. 385-408.

¹⁴³ Kross, p. 385.

¹⁴⁴ See Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1984).

¹⁴⁵ Kross, 385.

¹⁴⁶ Sobel, 151.

¹⁴⁷ Kross, 386-387.

marking their control over the domestic sphere.¹⁴⁸

Enslaved cooks encompassed incredible skill and technique that separated them from the larger labor pool. Cooks were accountable for the full production of daily meals, catering of banquets, and presenting a caliber of dining that made Virginia known for her hospitable nature.¹⁴⁹ This specialized role came with distinctive training, responsibilities, hardships and perks. Enslaved cooks and mistresses had a unique relationship, which revolved around the labor and production of food, all tangled in the web of power, oppression, violence and negotiations.¹⁵⁰

Performing the Virginia Tradition

As the woman of the house, the planter's wife was in charge of the house servants, and constantly negotiated her power and control over the meals and labor within her household. However, the success of a meal, especially when guests were entertained, depended heavily on the cooks ability and in some sense willingness to perform such a professional task as to put on a formal "proper" dinner. With all the constraints of enslavement in place, some cooks were able to put off special dinners and banquets until they felt ready to perform such a task.¹⁵¹ These moments of agency were wrapped up in their skill set, one that fueled the mistress's respectability in her elite social world. Nonetheless, their role was to produce sophisticated plantation fare, influenced by British and French cuisines and managed by the plantation's mistress. "The matrons of the Old Dominion [had] enviable reputation for their superb cooking and their delightful housekeeping."¹⁵²

Their reputation was connected to their success as housewife and was instrumental in performing the epitome of white womanhood. Even in nineteenth century housekeeping books this archetype was praised: "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. . . . She looketh well to the

¹⁴⁸ Clifton Ellis "The Mansion House at Berry hill Plantation: Architecture and the Changing Nature of Slavery in Antebellum Virginia." Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2006), pp. 22-48.

¹⁴⁹ Philip Fithian, Diary.

¹⁵⁰ Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁵¹ Randolph-de Potestad family letters, 1826-1913, folder 1, Rockefeller library, Colonial Williamsburg foundation.

¹⁵² Marion Cabell Tyree, ed., *Housekeeping in Old Virginia*, (Louisville: John P. Morton and Company, 1879) Front cover.

ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness."¹⁵³ Proper white domesticity was valued above jewels and as such, was the ultimate goal of many of Virginia's mistresses.

Virginia's plantations were self contained social spaces, and sometimes painfully isolated. Many white women were often confined to their homes and complained about chronic loneliness. The physical distance of a plantation from the center of town sometimes spanned over 60 miles, which created a seclusion based on both proxemics and the patriarchal desire to protect white womanhood. The planning of social events became for some, the only time they were afforded public interaction. While occasional trips to the market or daily letters plugged the mistresses into the happenings of the colony, their world existed primarily in the household, of which acted as a public and highly social venue for Virginia's elites.¹⁵⁴

This sort of partial seclusion was a common aspect of southern plantation culture.¹⁵⁵ Some women remained inside their domiciles, only socializing with their domestic servants. This sort of position afforded a particular white lens of companionship with the domestics. Jane Edmunds complained of her isolation and the sickly nature of her household. Speaking of her cook Lucy, she wrote, "she is very ill, as are most people in her area, our cook Lucy has been sick all week too, and Harry has everything to do: cook, milk, and wash the clothes." Edmunds goes on to talk about how she "helps her maids Letia and Betty clean the house."¹⁵⁶ Mrs. Edmunds continued to complain about being lonely and was far from an idyllic, stoic and happy mistress.

The nature of Virginia hospitality was larger than individuals. Elite families would attend church on Sundays, and following the service would retire to someone's home for dinners, barbeques, and fish feasts, and mistresses' took turns hosting these Sunday get-togethers. As early as 1705 noted Englishman, Robert Beverly stated that "the kitchen garden don't come any finer than the ones we have in Virginia."¹⁵⁷ Virginia's domestic reputation and style was noted as:

. . . a combination the thrifty frugality of New England with the less rigid style of Carolina, has been justly pronounced, by the throngs of admirers who have gathered from all quarters of the Union around the generous boards

¹⁵³ Tyree, Front cover, Proverb xxxi, 10, 27.

¹⁵⁴ Glymph, chapter 2.

¹⁵⁵ Fox-Genovese, 61.

¹⁵⁶ Jane Watkins Edmunds, Berkeley-letter to nanny, Edmunds Family Papers, VHS, Mss1 Ed 596a31 section 3.

¹⁵⁷ Robert Beverly, *The History and Present State of Virginia*, London 1705 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1947) p. 292.

of her illustrious sons, as the very perfection of domestic art.¹⁵⁸

As seen in chapter two, plantation landscapes were set up

to fulfill this ideal. Plantations hosted guests regularly and loved any excuse for a celebration. Even passing strangers were treated as welcome guests. It was also common for a neighbor's servant to bring venison or some other delicacy for the master's table.¹⁵⁹

Mistresses were under tremendous pressure to perform "Virginian Domesticity" the most ultimate precursor to "Southern hospitality." Their worth as a wife, mistress, and woman was fixed to their domestic success, and directly related to the enslaved cook's skills and production of desirable food. Mrs. T.J.B.T Worthington remembered this relationship on her family's plantation:

Ingleside Plantation outside of Norfolk, was a socially active plantation where the misses was truly "given to hospitality" and constantly entertained family and friends. Family at Ingleside consisted of fifteen people. Neighborhood was very social, had fish fries and picnics. Fourth of July picnics-would follow a reading of the constitution and a feast. "I well remember how glad we young people were when the "celebration was over, we were free to amuse ourselves while the ladies gathered their servant-maids and men and hampers were unpacked and the great feast laid on the rustic table put up for the occasion beneath the trees. And such a feast! There were home cured hams and great platters of fried chicken, roasts and joints and vegetables innumerable; such big pones of "lightened" cornbread and "beaten biscuit", the like of which only the old time southern cooks could make. Nobody could beat our Old Aunt Maria in making biscuit. Wherever a smaller dish could be set were pickles, jams, tarts and cakes. The pride of the housewives who complimented each other's daintiness, doubtless with any mental reservation. I always noticed that Miss Jane Brown's pickles and preserves were in great demand and quickly disappeared, for my good auntie was known for the quality of her good things."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Tyree, p. viii.

¹⁵⁹ Tyree, p. xli.

¹⁶⁰ Mrs. T.J.B.T Worthington's recollection of what happened in Princesses Anne, Norfolk when she was a girl in 1861-65.

Mrs. Worthington remembered not just the menu, but the pride that she and her family took in their "Aunt Maria's" food. Her romanticized recollection of "the old time country cooks" and her "Aunt Maria" speaks to the centrality of food within Virginia's social elite culture, and the presumed familial relationships between the misses and the enslaved cook. Domestic pride was so closely linked to the talents of the cook, that the mistress often took pride in them selves for the doings of their slaves.

The management of Virginia's mistresses reflected their household's efficiency. The inner mechanics of a plantation home relied on a full domestic staff, working around the clock. Enslaved house maids, waiters, butlers, chamber maids, and cooks all functioned as a larger domestic service network. Enslaved cooks worked closely with the waiters and butlers, as the timing and presentation of food was critical to a meals' success. The mistress often supervised the house cleaning and preparation for dinner guests. At Pine Grove plantation the misses not only supervised the cleaning, but helped out. She spent the whole day cleaning chamber and dining room; preparing the chambers for formal dinning, rearranged sideboards, rugs etc, to emulate plantation space. Dinner guests came and ate "roasted chicken, boiled potatoes, and then----of soda bread, (which the cook succeeds in making very well), milk and preserves."¹⁶¹ Her journal was filled with her daily duties and exposed her obsession with presenting a clean and orderly chamber.¹⁶² And again, her pride in the cook's food was central to her narrative.

In addition to having a clean house, there was a particular way to put on a formal plantation meal. The butlers and waiters had to set up the dinning room chamber with lavish silver, European imported ceramics, candles, and multiple tablecloths all in preparation for the cook's culinary spread. This cultural standard projected the appropriate self image needed to be part of Virginia's plantation elite. The plantation dinning room as such, was front stage in the performance of Virginia's domesticity and culinary pride.

There was tremendous pressure for young mistresses to perform this caliber of entertainment, and as a result, the cook inherited the brunt of stress. Plantation women were trying to gain acceptance into the elite social circles, and had to set the stage with the appropriate props and manners. The aspiring

Mss1B8408e109, Bryan Family Papers, Section 5, *Virginia Historical Society* manuscripts. P. 1-5.

¹⁶¹ Unknown author, Pine Grove Diary, January 4.

¹⁶² Pine Grove Diary, January 4.

misses at Pine Grove plantation devoted her entire diary to social planning, mostly concerning the food and its role in presenting "proper" plantation culture. The author describes how "Molly" hadn't entertained guests before, and presented a nice spread of "soda biscuits, two types of preserves, a nice plate of cake, coffee and milk." Stating that, "Mr. Chin and his wife arrived, ate the food and in turn invited them to dine at their house."¹⁶³ She stresses the importance of this gesture and was elated by the invitation.¹⁶⁴ This momentary exchange illustrates how successful dinning acted as an entry into Virginia's elite culture, and how the food needed to be up to par.

The abundance of food praise compared to the lack of complaints speaks to the fact that food was undoubtedly central to success, yet the absence of critique begs for questioning. Perhaps the gentry were so wrapped up in performing prestige that their judgment was not refined enough to critique a dish. Complementing the food could have acted as a marker of social knowledge, a measure of pedigree. Perhaps the newness of this caliber of dinning lent to a false sense of approval. Perhaps these early generations of folks *liked* to know *what* Boeuf Bourguignon was, but had no idea of its actual state. Being that these planters and their social equals were not far removed from eating out of a troth, what kind of culinary comprehension did they really have?¹⁶⁵ There was easily more at risk in vocally disliking something than performing the social praise of a crême-brule. If one voiced dislike for a "sophisticated dish" it could have easily been social suicide. Not liking or not knowing about a dish easily put guests at risk of being labeled as unsophisticated, uncultured, and not worthy of entertainment. While the letters and diaries of plantation mistresses stress the importance of good food, the reality was that folks most likely didn't know how to properly critique cuisine, yet the function of the supposed measurement acted as a cultural commodity.

The interrelationship between food and domestic success is seen in a popular nineteenth-century kitchen companion stating, "When the bread rises in the oven, the heart of a housewife

¹⁶³ Pine Grove Diary, January 7.

¹⁶⁴ Pine Grove Diary, January 8.

¹⁶⁵ Seventeenth-century dinning customs are reflected in the material culture of dinner ware and architecture. It was typical for families to gather around and eat out of a central vessel, just as the architecture and the lack of a formal dining room reveal a simple perspective of food. The transition from food as sustenance to food as performance and its increasing function as a social commodity paralleled the transition from seventeenth to eighteenth century culture.

rises with it. . .[and] sinks in sympathy with the sinking bread."¹⁶⁶ On preparing for "emergencies" the book suggests the following,

I recommend the housekeeper acquire the practice as well as the theory of bread making. In this way, she will be able to give more exact directions to her cook and to more readily detect and rectify any blemish in the bread. Besides, if circumstances should throw her out of a cook for a short time, she is then prepared for the emergency.¹⁶⁷

This direct link between emotion and food speaks to the personal nature of catering as well as the reference to "an emergency." This recommendation unfolds the importance of the cooks' role within the household, and the urgency in the mistress having control over her labor and the front stage.

"Carrying the Keys"

Many wealthy southern women were raised with servants; therefore, enslaved cooks complemented their ideological and physical upbringing. Stepping into the role of mistress was a familiar character as most Virginian elites married within their social class, making most second, third and fourth generation mistresses. Their domestic happiness and success was partially tied to their ability to manage servants.¹⁶⁸ Most mistresses were in charge of menu planning, and checked outbuilding labor daily. They were often described as "carrying the keys" as they kept many of the ingredients under lock and key.¹⁶⁹ Locked containers were essential in keeping expensive items, such as sugar and spices, from being over used or given away by the cook. Not all mistresses locked their valuables in these spice chests, but many relied on their security for economical stability. Items such as knives and medicinal ingredients were also locked up for safety measures.

This notion of carrying the keys also referred to the self-assigned role of the mistress. Plantation mistresses were in charge of their family and the house servants, while field hands were managed by the planter and overseer. Society demanded both submissiveness and stern leadership from plantation women, as they managed house servants, relying on master as a last resort. This liminal role provided the mistress with full authority over the domestic sphere, especially the kitchen which was often separated from the main house and out of the master's normal circulation. Paris notes,

¹⁶⁶ Tyree, 19.

¹⁶⁷ Tyree, 19.

¹⁶⁸ Scott, 8.

¹⁶⁹ Langhorn, 30-31.

The tranquility of family, white and black, depended on her ability to settle petty disagreements, cajole, motivate or threaten her servants into working, and all the while maintain an appearance of fragility and ease [to her white socialites]. The failure to be a good mistress, a job involving the duties of both mother and a wife, was a serious breach of gender responsibilities.¹⁷⁰

Eighteenth-century mistress Elizabeth Foote Washington struggled over her role as "domestic queen" as she wrote:

it shall be my endeavor not to hurt the feelings of my servants when I am oblig'd to find fault, I will take care not to find fault of one servant before another - but wait with patience [till I have an] opportunity of doing it alone, - if it should be even a day or two before I have one, - - by that means I shall teach myself patience & forbearance - & avoid hurting their feelings, - & at the same time raise some ambition in their breast, - for certainly it must be a pleasing reflection to a servant if they have committed a fault to think no one know it but their mistress.¹⁷¹

Mrs. Washington was without children and her repeated miscarriages drove her to have a maternalistic relationship with her domestic slaves. This was not uncommon within Virginia's plantation culture, as many women were isolated with their maids and cooks and developed close relationships with those who performed and fulfilled their household needs. The dependence on enslaved cooks was central to their tangled relationships. The seasoning of food, baking of breads, making of preserves, and overall presentation of Virginia's cuisine was the cooks' responsibility, and created a connection based on reliance and confidence of the cook's skills. Yet mistresses were not purely motherly to their cooks. They regulated their domestics with strict rules, while trying to remain a proper woman.¹⁷²

Southern women strove to be religious, and their schedules demonstrate their considerable devotion to reading the bible. Enslaved cooks helped mistresses attain this pious lifestyle by making sure the food was on schedule and removing the worries of the kitchen from the mistresses major concerns.¹⁷³ "Southern women exerted power within male dominated restrictions."¹⁷⁴ "A planter's wife was, as a Virginia lady noted, a good housekeeper

¹⁷⁰ Paris, 32.

¹⁷¹ Paris, 66.

¹⁷² Scott, 6.

¹⁷³ Scott, 10.

¹⁷⁴ Scott, 19.

whether she wanted to be or not."¹⁷⁵

The Myth of the Leisurely Mistress and "Ringing the Bell"

The image of the "leisurely southern woman" has reigned in America's collective memory for generations. "Southern women (before 1860) had been the subjects-perhaps the victims-of an image of woman which was at odds with the reality of their lives."¹⁷⁶ The plantation household determined daily lives of southern white women.¹⁷⁷ The mistress usually arose at 5 or 6 am to overlook kitchen.¹⁷⁸ This means that the cook was presumably already awake and working on the day's menu. Once the mistress checked in with the cook, opened and rationed the day's spices, she would then retire to other duties; managing maids, her children's tutors, writing letters, reading the bible etc.

Mistresses' dairies and notebooks expose their diverse responsibilities within the household. Often plantation women wore many hats depending on their households needs. Ms. Nelson of Westover Plantation kept a school book which contained recipes for; huckleberry cake, spiced grapes, dressings, chocolate filling, orange cake, brownies delight cake, wafers, delicious orange dessert, caramel filling, custard filling, cream puffs, pies, cakes, doughnuts, fillings, waffles, all in between lessons on history, philosophy and arithmetic.¹⁷⁹ The presence and ratio of sweet recipes kept in her school book suggests the possibility that she oversaw the cooks' dessert making, since the misses usually locked up the sugar.

While the mistress was occupied managing her household, the cook was busy preparing an average of four meals a day; breakfast, dinner, tea and supper.¹⁸⁰ Many plantations had dinner bells, which were rung when dinner was served, a duty that was shared with the cook, and sometimes wait staff. The Carter family tutor remembered this tradition, "Ms. Carter has a large good bell of upwards of 60 lbs which may be heard some miles, & this is always rung at meal times."¹⁸¹ Breakfast was prepared and

¹⁷⁵ Scott, 29.

¹⁷⁶ Anne Frior Scott, *The Southern Lady, From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*. (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. x.

¹⁷⁷ Fox-Genovese, 84.

¹⁷⁸ Scott, 31.

¹⁷⁹ Maria Octavia Selden Nelson's Schoolbook, 1845, VHS Mss5:4 n3352:1

¹⁸⁰ These terms changed depending on the plantation. Break-fast was always the morning meal, supper and dinner were used interchangeable for the afternoon/evening meal. Tea, a snack and hot drink, was usually in the afternoon, sometimes taking place of the middle meal. For the sake of clarity, supper will be used for evening meal, and dinner for the afternoon meal, and tea is treated as its own thing.

¹⁸¹ Fithian, 41.

often set out to order, as many of the folks living at the plantation had different morning schedules. The cook prepared biscuits, breads, meats and porridge, along with preserves, coffee and tea. Some of the James River Plantations served oysters at every meal, as they were fresh and accessible. Breakfast was ready at daybreak, and was available until mid-morning. Eighteenth-century tutor Phillip Fithian noted the dining schedule at Virginia's Nomini Hall Plantation, "[We] dined at three. ... Half after eight the bell rings for breakfast. . . breakfast till 9:30, dinner bell at commonly 2:30, often 3 but never before 2! After dinner is over, which in common if we have no company, is about half after three...supper is 8:30 or at 9."¹⁸² This schedule outlines the cook's routine, beginning at daybreak and ending well after nightfall.

Occasionally the mistress got her hands in the flour, and actually cooked either along side the cook, but more likely in their absence. In June of 1823, an unnamed mistress wrote "Last Monday dear Caroline was married . . . yesterday we gave them a large dinner party. I had fatigued myself so much making a dessert over the fire that when the hour came that was to call my guests to dinner I was obliged to take Seidlitz powers and bind my head with poplar leaves."¹⁸³ This momentary stint in the kitchen fatigued her so much that she entered a medical state. Cooking one dish was more than she could handle, and shows the intensity of kitchen work for the enslaved cooks whose daily schedule consisted of such labor.

The Table: Props, Consumption and Reputation

The food served at dinner and suppers were similar; a variety of meats, game, vegetables, salads, stews etc. However, typically the earlier meals were of a smaller scale, as fewer guests were present at lunchtime. Suppers (also referred to as dinner) were the ultimate venue for showing off the mistresses' hospitality and domestic ability as well as her cook's talent. These infamous spreads consisted of multiple kinds of roasted, boiled, smoked, broiled, salted, and stewed meats, European inspired sauces, jellies, head cheese, vegetables, and breads. "Meats usually smoked or salted for preservation. Never know how many people would show up for dinner. . . Ham was perfect for this occasion."¹⁸⁴

These plantation dinners were the pulse of Virginia's domestic pride and reputation. Fithian fondly remembered these grand suppers, "we were rung into supper. The room looked

¹⁸² Fithian, 41.

¹⁸³ Carole McCabe, *Woodlawn Hospitality*. Early American life. Harrisburg, PA. vol.19, no.1 (Feb. 1988), p. 58.

¹⁸⁴ Beverly, 101.

luminous and splendid; four very large candles burning on the table where we supp'd, three others in different parts of the room: a gay, sociable assembly & four well instructed waiters!"¹⁸⁵ Fellow Virginian Ms. Helen Coles also described these meals: "we sat down to dinner drest in our best, and looking as though we had never thought of anything more pleasant than to simply taste the various delicacies placed before us—such a dinner was customarily served by placing a variety of dishes on the table, which was latter cleared for the dessert course."¹⁸⁶ Coles also commented:

We were entertained in a most sumptuous fashion. . .the table was spread with double table cloths and the first course consisted of beef, mutton, oysters, soup, etc. The first cloth was removed with these viands, and the clean one below covered with pies, puddings, tarts, jellies, whips, floating island, sweetmeats, etc. and after these we came to the plain mahogany table. Clean glasses were brought on and a lighter kind of wine with fruit, raisins and almonds . . .a typical first course would include a large standing cold ham wrapped in a linen napkin at the top of the table balance by a hot saddle of mutton, leg of lamb, roast beef, turkey or goose at the bottom of the table . . . the centerpiece might be a mock turtle, a huge meat pie, a haunch of venison, or a 'made dish, a complicated composition of meat, sauced and garnished with such ingredients as eels, chicken livers, mushrooms, oysters and coxcombs.¹⁸⁷

These culinary spreads were influenced by both British and French culture. Elite Virginians, mostly of English descent, had their own traditions, while the idea of French food was the ultimate cultural prose. Eating in the French fashion meant the consumption of sauces and condiments that made each dish superbly delicious. In addition, "sugar from the West Indies gave rise to desserts. Upper-class Anglo-Americans thought French cuisine was superior to their own."¹⁸⁸ This French influence began in the eighteenth century and grew into Virginian cuisine by the 1800s. Eating in the "French fashion" also meant having a large variety of food, but only eating some. This tradition marks a transition from eating for sustenance to eating as a performance of elite "cultured" ways. It also shows

¹⁸⁵ Fithian, 45.

¹⁸⁶ Elizabeth Langhorn, K. Edward Lay and William D. Reilly, eds., *A Virginia Family and its Plantation Houses: papers of Helen Coles 1704-1907* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1987) p. 102.

¹⁸⁷ McCabe, 58-70.

¹⁸⁸ Hooker, 19.

a connection between wealth and waste. The food, as such, became essential "props" within Virginia's plantation society and an overt style of conspicuous consumption.

Special Occasions: Balls, Banquets and Weddings

Not only was Virginia known for its regular meals, but also so for the lavish balls, banquets and weddings that filled their parlor walls. The classic image of plantation social scenes; jewel-adorned white women wearing vibrant silk dresses, lace, bonnets, petty coats, waiting for handsome bachelors in horse and buggy coming to find their future wives, ballroom dancing and small symphonies, and tables filled with silver, crystal and an abundance of food and spirits. This memory of plantation culture came from the numerous balls and banquets put on by Virginia's mistresses during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Plantation Balls were planned well in advance and advertised accordingly. It was common for the misses to post the event as they were responsible for the planning and execution of such occasions. This is seen in the Virginia Gazette, and they become more detailed the closer they are to the event. For example, the first advertisement for a Williamsburg Ball reads: "Mrs. Degraffendriedt gives notice that she intends to have a Ball at her house on Tuesday November 1st, and an assembly the next day."¹⁸⁹ Three weeks later, the ad is as follows:

This is to inform Gentlemen and Ladies that Mrs. Degraffendriedt designs to have a Ball at her House, on Tuesday the first of November next, and a Collation, for the Entertainment of those who are pleased to favor her with their company, for which tickets will be delivered at her House at Five Shillings each...And the next day she designs to have an assembly for which Tickets will be delivered at her House, at Half a Pistole each.¹⁹⁰

The fact that financial resources was key in affording an invitation kept the guest list plump with well-off Virginians, and maintained the plantations projected aire of sophistication. The updated version also speaks to the fact that it was a designated space for men and women, a courting zone, where elites can mingle amongst each other while performing the pretensions of plantation sophistication. This also complicates the idea of white womanhood, and shows the public nature of their role in elite culture.

These occasions were important social outlets and the

¹⁸⁹ Virginia Gazette, 10/7/1737, p. 4, column 2.

¹⁹⁰ Virginia Gazette, 10/21/1737, p. 4, column 1.

perfect stage for the performance of domestic crafts. Banquet tables were often decorated with ribbons and multiple table cloths. "The centerpiece was an elaborate "temple of love," made of spun sugar. In the 19th century, such "temples" were very popular as wedding table decorations."¹⁹¹ Punch bowls were filled with home made fruit brandy; tables were set with delightful sugary tarts, candies, and sweets.¹⁹² Plantation mistresses took turns hosting these parties, showcasing their homes, organizational skills and ability to create European inspired cuisine.

These parties, while grand and "fancy" were not always as romantic as one might think. While the ball gowns and silver were definitely present, the roughness of Virginia's rural nature often shinned through. A European visitor to America wrote in 1780, "Another peculiarity of this country is the absence of napkins, even in the homes of the wealthy. Napkins as a whole are never used and one has to wipe one's mouth on the table cloth, which in consequence suffers in appearance."¹⁹³ This image of a silk-dressed maiden, in all proper attire, leaning down to wipe her food ridden mouth on the table cloth contrasts the popular notion of elite manners. However, it is this peculiarity that existed within Virginia's isolated plantation community.

These special occasions were not only important social outlets but vital to familial success. These events were the pinnacle of plantation entertainment and provided a much needed and appreciated venue for social interactions among whites. It was at these balls where men and women found their future spouses, and families secured elite heirs for their wealth. In January 1832 Mr. George Blown writes a letter to Mr. John Y. Mason, bragging about his daughter getting invited to a splendid ball at Belfield Plantation.¹⁹⁴ The successful ball produced a long guest list, which in turn provided a broad, but elite, source of eligible bachelors and bachelorettes.

Domestic pride and performance was also directly connected with marital success and moral worth. This relationship is outlined in Virginia's Housekeeping book:

...if she shall thus make her tasks lighter and home-life sweeter; if she shall succeed in contributing something to the health of American children by instructing their mothers in the art of preparing light and wholesome and palatable food; *if she above all, shall succeed in making*

¹⁹¹ McCabe, 58-70.

¹⁹² John Young Mason, Account Book, 1839, VHS, Mss1n3816c558.

¹⁹³ McCabe, 58.

¹⁹⁴ George Blow letter, Mason Family Papers, Section 6, Folder 3/37, Virginia Historical Society Manuscript Collections, Mss1M3816c93.

*American Homes more attractive to American husbands, and spare them a resort to hotels and saloons for those simple luxuries which their wives know how not to provide; if she shall thus add to the comfort, to the health and happy contentment of these, she will have proved in some measure a public benefactor, and will feel amply repaid for all the labor her work has cost.*¹⁹⁵

This ideology reigned in nineteenth-century Virginia, and fueled the need for "good house help," for without it, one's marriage was doomed, and their moral worth was at risk. It is essential to remember that food was a critical factor in the popularity of a plantation's event. As a result, enslaved cooks found themselves not just as kitchen laborers, but as vital contributors to the mistresses' domestic pride. This domestic pride included the presentation of ideal domesticity, cultural production and respectability. In addition, the role of formal balls designated as "courting spaces" connects the cooks' labor to the success of future marriages, familial heirs, and maintaining Virginia's elite plantation pedigree.

The critical role of food and meals also expanded into men's social needs. Plantation dinners, while produced by the cook, planned by the mistress, were essential to planters' professional success. Virginia's plantation dining rooms provided addition space for men to meet, eat, and discuss formal business matters with other masters, doctors, lawyers, and government officials. Nineteenth-century planter Dr. Richard Eppes noted that he "held formal meetings during dinner" and used the time to network with other influential men.¹⁹⁶ Dinners and food remained imperative to the overall accomplishments of Virginia's plantation households.

Buying Plantation Success: The Cook as Commodity

Since food was such a critical part of plantation mechanics and success, enslaved cooks were highly valued and sought after. In order for a mistress to have a proper home, she needed to inherit or purchase a skilled cook. Virginia's newspapers were filled with for sale ads, containing everything from land to enslaved Blacks. Cooks were some of the highest valued and promoted slaves within this realm. Among thousands of eighteenth-century ads, cooks were clearly a hot commodity. For example, in the March 3, 1770 issue of the Virginia Gazette, a sale at the Amelia courthouse is advertized as having, "ABOUT

¹⁹⁵ Tyree, ix-x.

¹⁹⁶ Eppes, 1858 Diary.

20 very likely *Virginia* born S L A V E S, chiefly men and women, . . .and one of them a very good cook."¹⁹⁷ Other ads read, "I have for sale a negro woman that is generally thought of by those that know her an exceeding good COOK, ..." ¹⁹⁸ and "TEN likely *Virginia* born NEGROES, all under 20 years of age but one, which is about 38, a good cook, and as handy a wench as any in the colony." This sort of promoted value was rampant within these sale ads, and spoke to a particular audience, one that wanted the status of a skilled cook within their household reputation. Age also carried a particular level of worth in that skill was accumulated and grew, while field hands might get weaker with time, a cook only gained talent.

Planters maintained a self sufficient goal of plantation production. The catering fit into this mode perfectly, and was central to *Virginia's* hospitable nature. Eighteenth-century bourgeoisie domestic rhetoric of domesticity became ingrained into nineteenth century cultural norms.¹⁹⁹ Plantation mistresses desired, managed and promoted their domestic success and relied on their cooks to perform this caliber of domestic production. While the plantation acted as a stage for the performance of domesticity, the main players were the actors. The cook, domestic servants, and the misses traveled between two worlds, acting differently depending on what stage they were on. The main house, its ballroom, hall and parlor, and dining room provided the formal space for social functions; spaces where guests were entertained, and which demanded proper etiquette. The actors, in the classic Southern manner, were polite, polished players within this space. When the butler or cook announces that "mistis dinner is served"²⁰⁰ they are performing that front stage persona. However, their performance changed drastically when the dinners were over, guests went home, and the front stage was closed.

¹⁹⁷ *Virginia Gazette*, Publisher: Purdie & Dixon , Page: 3, Column: 3, 1770-03-08.

¹⁹⁸ *Virginia Gazette*, Publisher: Purdie & Dixon, Page: 2, Column: 1, 1777-04-11.

¹⁹⁹ Fox-Genovese, 64.

²⁰⁰ Deans Family papers, VHS, section 1.



Image 3.1

²⁰¹ Harper's New Monthly Magazine, vol. 12 (Jan. 1856), p. 177. (Copy in Special Collections, University of Virginia Library) Courtesy of Jerome S. Handler, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, *Slavery Images* database. Handler documents this picture as follows: Harper's writer, David Hunter Strother, "Stopping for a meal at a house in Amherst County, Central Virginia, Strother writes that the cook belongs to "the type of a class whose skill is not of books or training, but a gift both rich and rare . . . who has grown sleek and fat on the steam of her own genius, whose children have the first dip in all gravies, the exclusive right to all livers and gizzards, not to mention breasts of fried chickens" Image reference HARP01 found at <http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/index.php>.

FOUR
"Standing the Heat:"
Back Stage in the Plantation Kitchen:

Before sunrise on a hot summer day in 1767, Sukey Hamilton, the Governor's cook began melting butter for the day's meals. This task, while seemingly simple, required constant attention and a delicate hand. Hamilton had likely been taught the following technique:

Nothing is more simple than this process, and nothing so generally done badly. Keep a quart tin sauce-pan, with a cover to it, exclusively for this purpose; weigh on quarter of a pound of good butter; rub into it two tea-spoonfuls of flour; when well mixed put it in the sauce-pan with one table-spoonful of water, and a little salt; cover it, and set the sauce-pan in a larger one of boiling water; shake it constantly till completely melted, and beginning to boil. If the pan containing the butter be set on coals, it will oil the butter and spoil it. This quantity is sufficient for one sauce-boat. A great variety of delicious sauces can be made, by adding different herbs to melted butter, all of which are excellent to eat with fish, poultry or boiled butchers' meat. To begin with parsley- wash a large bunch very clean, pick the leaves from the stems carefully, boil them ten minutes in salt and water, drain them perfectly dry, mince them exceedingly fine, and stir then in the butter when it begins to melt. When herbs are added to butter, you must put two spoonfuls of water instead of one. Chervil, young fennel, burnet, tarragon, and cress, or peppergrass, may all be used, and must be prepared in the same manner as the parsley.²⁰²

Hamilton not only had to "constantly shake" the pan, but keep the temperatures and consistency of the roux at the perfect levels; melting butter, a simple sounding task, required skill, strength and perseverance. The elaborate dinners put on in plantation dining rooms were produced in the kitchen, a space unique to enslaved cooks, and separated from the public/front stage of the main house. If the small gravy boat filled with

²⁰² Mary Randolph, *The Virginia Housewife or, Methodical Cook: A Facsimile of an Authentic Early American Cookbook 1824* (New York: Dover, 1993) p.93.

butter took this much attention, what kind of labor went into the rest of the meal? There was a network of domestics that contributed to food being put on the table. This larger "catering network" was essential for the output of a meal and the cook was at the center of production. The kitchen as a backstage, provided a space for the cook and mistress to negotiate their relationship behind closed doors, as well as a center for production. Plantation cooks were kept on tight schedules, performed precisely timed duties, and had strict deadlines, compared to other laboring positions. Their skills were multifold, and their role was central to both plantation dining and the larger enslaved community.

The plantation food production was massive. Tutor Phillip V. Fithian recalled that "Mrs. Carter informed me last evening that this family one year with another consumes 27000 Lbs of pork; and 20 beeves. 550 bushels of wheat. Besides corn-4 hogsheads of rum, and 150 gallons of brandy." He continued to speak of the large scale catering, "I walked, to the mill together with Mr. and Mrs. Carter; Miss Prissy and Nancy, to see them make biscuits and pack flour. . . here too I had a forfeit for kneading biscuits..the ovens bake 100 lbs of flour at a heating, they are in the bake-house two ovens."²⁰³

The Kitchen as Home and Work

The plantation kitchen was both a center for production and residency for enslaved cooks and their families. Typically, "work and home were two distinct spheres. . ."²⁰⁴ As discussed in chapter two, the kitchen was either external, sitting separate, yet adjacent to the main house, or in the basement, with a sleeping space within or next to the room. Regardless of the kitchens placement, the cook both lived and worked within its limits. This sort of cultural landscape provided a different living environment for the cook and his or her family. Compared to field quarters, where approximately 20 or more people slept in a one or two room cabin, the cook's home was both larger in size, made from better materials, and shared with his or her family. While this sort of distinction could make this living space appealing to some, it also came with added responsibilities and stress, as living within the white landscape required 24-hour monitoring from the mistress.

²⁰³ Fithian, 99-100.

²⁰⁴ Jones, introduction.

While the increased space might have been more physically comfortable, the temperatures in the kitchen often exceeded normal physical tolerances. There is no doubt that during the winters, the kitchen was warm and bearable, as the large hearth would keep the entire building warm. However, Virginia's summer heat often rises over 80 degrees and the 90% humidity pushes the real temperature well over 90 degrees. Thus the kitchen with a hearth fire burning at over 1000 degrees would be unbearable in the summer months.²⁰⁵ As a direct result, enslaved cooks often spent the summers sleeping outside, away from the mandatory heat in their homes. Needless to say, the days being hotter than the nights made for an exceedingly hot kitchen and sleeping outside while slightly cooler was ridden with mosquitoes, horse flies spiders and snakes.

Not only was the temperature elevated, but the smells were ripe. The romantic plantation dinner table, filled with French inspired delicacies was a far stretch from the kitchen scene. For example, the preparation of head cheese required that an animal head sit in a vat of lye based liquid for over a week. The cook had to stir the pot daily, remove excess mold and growth off the head and skim the top of the pot. The smell of rotting meat is offensive to anyone, and the kitchen often smelled of decaying remains.

Kitchens were set up to produce large scale catering and were furnished accordingly. This furnishing was noted in 1879,

must have a good stove or range. . . a kitchen safe, a bread block in the corner, furnished with a heavy iron beater; trays, sifters (with iron rims) steamers colanders, a porcelain preserving kettle, perforated skimmers and spoons, ladles, long-handed iron forks and spoons, sharp knives and skewers, graters, egg beaters, extra bread pans, dippers and tins of every kind, iron molds for egg bread and muffins, wash pans, tea towels, hand towels, plates, knives and spoons for use of the servants, a pepper box, salt box and dredge box (filled), a match safe, and last, but not least, a clock.²⁰⁶

Probate inventories and plantation recipes reveal the diversity of equipment and uses for these items. The "Essential objects found in eighteenth century kitchens, skimmers, Dutch ovens, salamanders, bellows, fish forks, ladles, toasting forks, grid irons, trivets, chairs, table, mortars, tea and coffee service.

²⁰⁵ Average temperature of a burning fire.

²⁰⁶ Tyree, 24.

²⁰⁷ Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the introduction of iron stoves transformed plantation kitchens, shifting from fireplace to stove cooking.²⁰⁸ This change took the base of labor from the floor of the hearth to the top of an oven, which was a slight improvement from fireplace cooking.

Some of Virginia's kitchens were joint laundries, or had a scullery set up for cleaning the kitchens hardware. It was noted to:

always keep your cook well supplied with soap, washing mops and coarse linen rags, I have noticed that if you give them the latter, servants are not so apt to throw them away. Insist on having each utensil cleaned immediately after being used. Once a week have the kitchen and every article in it thoroughly cleaned.²⁰⁹

They cleaned the pots and pans with sand, and used well water to rinse.²¹⁰ This additional work was often done by the cook and their family members. Sophisticated drainage systems were carved into the exterior grounds to flush the waste away from the kitchen; however, the lingering smell of dishwater, rotting food remains and ash lingered within the kitchen complex.

Training

In 1784 James Hemings traveled to Paris to learn the art of French cooking. He was the head cook at Monticello while Jefferson was governor of Virginia. This extraordinary opportunity was unique considering he was Jefferson's slave. Hemings spent three years in Paris training under some of France's most notable chefs. While experiencing a temporary "free status;" he managed to negotiate his own freedom upon his return to Virginia. James passed his knowledge of French cooking on to his enslaved brother Peter, and as a result he was manumitted on September 15, 1793. While Monticello might have been the epitome of the planter class, many other well to do Virginians invested in their cooks as well. Chefs were appraised at significantly higher rates than the rest of the domestic laborers. William Marshall of Fredericksburg described his cook as "an excellent cook about 35 years of age, and

²⁰⁷ Caldwell.

²⁰⁸ Richard J. Hooker, ed. *Harriot Pinckney Horry receipt book, 1770* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1984) P.9.

²⁰⁹ Tyree, 24.

²¹⁰ Desiree B. Caldwell, *Palace Kitchen Report* (Colonial Williamsburg Research Report Series, 1994)

inferior to none.”²¹¹ While James Hemings was able to travel to France, gain formal culinary training, and ultimately free himself, his story was not typical. Formal French training, while presumably highly desired by planters, was risky. The “free status” gained by traveling to France in the nineteenth century welcomed escape. Yet the potential for escape didn’t outweigh Jefferson’s desire for a French trained chef, and played to both Hemings’ and Jefferson’s needs.

Many of Virginia’s enslaved cooks were formally trained on the plantation, either by the mistress or the head cook. Plantation papers reveal the system in which cooks were trained and promoted within the kitchens hierarchy. In 1858 Dr. Richard Eppes’ cooks, 45 year old Susan and 72 year old Harriet ran the kitchen.²¹² Records reveal that by 1859, previous field hand, Ursula Sanders was recruited as assistant cook and was tipped \$.50 for good coffee on top of her \$1.00 Christmas present. Susan and Harriet who were the head cooks, received a \$5.00 Christmas gifts, which was only second in value to the butler, Madison Ruffin, who was given \$10.00. By 1860, Ursula was still apprenticing under Susan and Harriet, and receiving \$1.00 for Christmas.²¹³ This record shows not only the hierarchy within the kitchen roles, but the fact that slaves were chosen from the entire plantation community, and did not simply inherit the position. Therefore, while family members lived within the kitchen walls, they were not necessarily next in line for “Head Cook.”

Secondary Literacies

Some enslaved cooks were taught how to read by mistresses.²¹⁴ This was a pragmatic solution to dealing with recipes and food production. While mistresses found themselves in the kitchen teaching cooks the particularities of certain European dishes, they relied on a level of understanding and

²¹¹ *Virginia Gazette*, Dixon and Nicolson, March 26, 1779, page 3.

²¹² Richard Eppes Diary, 1858, p. 20, Mss1 Ep734 d293.

²¹³ Richard Eppes Diaries, 1857-1864. VHS.

²¹⁴ This assumption comes from repeated references of cooks “understanding” their trade. While there is no firm evidence of enslaved cooks being fully literate, they nonetheless were able to be functionally literate in order to do their job. For example, they might not have been able to pick up a newspaper and understand the content or phonetics yet they had to know some basic culinary words such as butter, flour, simmer etc. This sort of partial literacy was essential for the cooks to be able to handle the business within the kitchen and in going to the market for goods.

performance from them. It is unlikely the mistress stayed within the kitchen and walked the cook through every movement. Instead, the cook would be taught recipes and either memorized them or possibly read them as reminders. There is no record of this; cooks undoubtedly learned something along the way. The currency of proper food was so vast that the teaching of very basic reading could have been an essential aspect to guarantee culinary delight.

In addition to sometimes learning basic phonetics, enslaved cooks also had to know basic math. Counting, fractions, and arithmetic proportions are all essential aspects to cooking and are in the recipes as such. Knowing how to count, double, triple a recipe was essential for large scale plantation cooking. Especially when baking, precise measurement was imperative for bread to rise, biscuits to bake and cakes to form.

In addition to basic reading and math, enslaved cooks learned general anatomy from the butchering and cooking of animals. If a recipe called for a calf's heart, the cook was forced to become familiar with not just the location but the anatomy of such organs. Much of Virginia's plantation fare included organs, heads, and relied on the proper butchering and preparation of these parts. These secondary literacies were gained via their training and built upon their skill set.

Backstage: Food Preparation and Techniques

With multiple meals being prepared on both short and long-term schedules, the kitchen was an active space. Plantation recipes reveal the breadth of items being prepared at a single time. For example, if the day's menu consisted of morning biscuits, eggs, smoked meats, jams, mid-day breads, roasted meats, soups and evening game, stews, vegetables and desserts, the cook would prepare some items that day as well as prepping long-term items such as breads, jams, wines, dairy, head cheeses, and sausages. Thus cooks strategically scheduled their days, and what they prepared on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly schedule, including the smoking of the meat, milking of cows, and butchering of meat.

It is essential to note that the majority of enslaved Afro-Virginians were Igbo and brought with them knowledge of both poisoning and foodways.²¹⁵ Igbo were known for their knowledge of

²¹⁵ See Lorena S. Walsh, *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia

herbs and poisons, as well as their use and knowledge of supernatural powers. Historian Douglas B. Chambers argues that enslaved Africans and even their descendants acted as "Atlantic Africans" rather than what Ira Berlin calls "Atlantic Creoles." This pertinent distinction reflects a particular level of cultural fluency and attachment among enslaved African and African Americans to their deep roots in West Africa. This is seen in the cultural transmission of culinary styles, tastes and production on plantations throughout the western world. In addition "the use of poison especially evokes a different matrix of meaning rooted in African conceptions of efficacy."²¹⁶ While many different factors helped flavor the plantation cuisine, the Igbo's use of okra is one of the most prevalent legacies in Southern foodways.²¹⁷ Used as a thickening agent, enslaved cooks relied on this ingredient and one can assume it became a good substitute for a roux. Presumably enslaved cooks had knowledge, either first-hand or passed down, of making certain foods from their homeland. For example, palm wine was a common staple in many parts of West Africa, as was one pot meals and stews. Their organic culinary knowledge was easily transferable to the needs of elite plantation culture.²¹⁸

Virginia's cuisine was also heavily influenced by both British and French cuisine. Depending on the plantation, mistresses favored one over the other, and made sure their cook was up to par. Every plantation served bread, which like the melted butter, is simple, yet easy to ruin. A common recipe for Family Bread called for the following:

2 quarts of flour.
2 tablespoonfuls of lard or butter.
2 tablespoonfuls of salt.
Enough sponge for a two quart loaf of bread.
Mix with one pint of sweet milk.
Make into rolls and bake with very little fire under the oven.²¹⁹

Precise measuring and counting was required for the proper chemical balance of this typical diet staple. Not only did the cook have to be precise in his/her measurement but be able to

Press, 2001), and Douglas B. Chambers, *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo African in Virginia* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2005).

²¹⁶ Chambers, 14.

²¹⁷ Chambers, 40.

²¹⁸ Chambers, 166.

²¹⁹ *Housekeeping in Old Virginia*, p. 29, Mrs. A.C.

control the temperature of the Dutch oven and fire. In addition, most recipes called to "knead the bread for half an hour without intermission."²²⁰ For a daily prepared item, this labor intensive food relied on both craft and the physical strength needed to constantly knead a ball of dough for thirty minutes.

While the bread was being prepared the cook had other short-term items in progress. Fish was consumed on a daily basis and was prepared in multiple ways. For example "Fish-a-la-Crème" and stewed halibut were Virginian favorites. The following recipes were some of Virginian classics prepared by enslaved cooks:

Fish A La Crème

Boil a firm fish, remove the bones, pick it to pieces. Mix one pint cream or mild with two tablespoonfuls flour, one onion, one-half pound butter (or less), and salt. Set it on the fire and stir until it is as thick as custard. Fill a baking-dish alternately with fish, cracker, and cream. Bake for thirty minutes, use four crackers.²²¹

Halibut

Boil one pound halibut, then chop it very fine and add eight eggs well beaten; pepper and salt to taste, then one cup butter. Put it in a stewpan and cook until the eggs are done sufficiently. Serve very hot on toast.²²²

While the Halibut recipe is fairly straight forward, the fish-a-la-crème involves some skillful techniques. Depending on the type of fish, the bones are anywhere from large and easy to pick to small and cumbersome. Picking the bones out of a catfish or small local Shad, Perch or Bass would require excellent eye sight and command of the fish's anatomy. Making the fish meat into custard over the hot fire is yet another challenging task, being that it required dairy provided a wildcard in hearth cooking. The consistency, temperatures and timing must be precise; otherwise the dish would burn, curdle or not set correctly.

In addition to fish enslaved cooks used oysters in many Virginian dishes. Eighteenth-century tutor Phillip V. Fithian mentioned eating oysters in some fashion, almost everyday while living at the Carter family plantation. Oysters were readily

²²⁰ Tyree, 20.

²²¹ Tyree, 98.

²²² Tyree, 98.

available in the adjacent rivers and were caught by both enslaved men and plantation gentry. Similar to enslaved cooks, enslaved fisherman were often sold separately and at higher rates than field hands.²²³ These fishermen would spend the days in Virginia's waterways catching fish and oysters for the main house. Fishermen and cooks worked together to put seafood on the plantation table. While catching seafood is at times a challenging task, so was preparing it for the guests. Oysters, more than other seafood required immediate cooking and intense labor. For example a basic "Oyster Sauce for Fish" called for the following procedure:

Scald a pint of oysters, and strain them through a sieve; then wash some more in cold water, and take off their beards; put them in a stew-pan, and pour the liquor over them; then add a large spoonful of anchovy liquor, half a lemon, two blades of mace, and thicken it with butter rolled in flour. Put in half a pound of butter, and boil it till it is melted- take out the mace and lemon, and squeeze the lemon juice into the sauce; boil it, and stir it all the time, and put it in a boat.²²⁴

This sauce was one of many served at a plantation dinner. Approximately 40-60 oysters compile a pint. This means the cook had to first shuck them, which requires a hard sharp tool, a firm and steady hand, and finesse to shuck without getting shells in the meat. After forcefully prying open dozens of oysters, the cook would then have to sear them over a hot fire, push them through a metal sieve (making a oyster mush), remove their individual beards and add items such as floured butter (which as seen previously, took its share of labor), and anchovy liquor (another complex recipe). This entire process could have taken over an hour if not more. In addition, oyster soup was a common meal consisting of the following techniques:

100 Oysters
1 teaspoonful salt.
1 tablespoonful black pepper.
¼ pound butter.
Yolks of three eggs.
1 pint rich milk, perfectly fresh.
3 tablespoonfuls flour.

²²³ *Virginia Gazette*, Dixon and Nicolson, December 25, 1779, page 2, column 2.

²²⁴ Tyree, 92.

Separate the oysters from the liquor: put the liquor to boil, when boiled add salt, pepper and butter, then the flour, having previously made it into a batter. Stir all the time. When it comes to a boil add the eggs well beaten, then the milk, and when the mixture reaches a boil, put in the oysters; let them also just boil, and the soup is done. Stir all the time to prevent curdling²²⁵

Similar to fish preparation, the cook's attention was constantly focused on the pot, as a slight distraction or mistake would result in a broken soup, a waste of time, ingredients and an upset mistress.

Another labor intensive dish, Brunswick Stew, was a Virginia staple. As a common dish, enslaved cooks were familiar with its production and the timing of this day-long process. A common recipe is as follows:

A shank of beef.
A loaf of bread-square loaf
1 quart potatoes cooked and mashed
1 quart cooked butter-beans
1 quart raw corn
1 ½ quart raw tomatoes peeled and chopped

If served at two o'clock, put on the shank as for soup, at the earliest possible hour; then about twelve o'clock take the shank out of the soup and shred and cut all of the meat as fine as you can. Carefully taking out bone and gristle, and then return it to the soup-pot and add all of the vegetables; the bread and two slices of middling are an improvement to it.

Season with salt and pepper to the taste; and when ready to serve, drop into the tureen two or three tablespoonfuls butter.²²⁶

This classic recipe is the perfect example of how labor was broken down in plantation kitchens. Everything from the corn, potatoes, beans and tomatoes being grown and picked by the field hands, to the meat being slaughtered by the enslaved butcher, and the bread and final stew being prepared by the cook shows the labor network that put the dish on the table. It also shows the length of time it took to complete. Cooks had multiple projects running at once and worked from before sunup to well after sundown.

²²⁵ Tyree, 69.

²²⁶ Tyree, 211.

A particularly challenging item was sausage. Modern technology has allowed sausage making to become somewhat easier, but in early Virginia this task was demanding. Cooks either acquired pig intestines from the butcher, or cut them out themselves and had to clean the feces out by hand. Of the vast items made in the kitchen, sausages by far contradict the idea of the "front stage plantation table," as they are the dirtiest and most unsanitary item processed on the plantation. Cooks, having to clean the entrails, would then boil them to rid the remainder of the waste. After processing the intestines, enslaved cooks would then have to prepare the minced filling, another labor intensive assignment, hand chopping the meat and mixing the seasonings. The cook then had to stuff, by hand, the intestines with the meat filling, a chore that without modern sausage stuffers was exceedingly cumbersome.

In addition to these dishes, cooks were also trained pastry cooks, baking desserts, pies, cakes and custards for the plantation household. Mistresses kept alcohol and sugar locked up, but the cook nonetheless had partial access to these items. For example the following recipes were common Virginian desserts:

A Rich Cake

Take four pounds of Flower 3 pound of Sugar 3 pound of Butter 3 dozen Eggs Cream your butter then Strain your Eggs to beat, mix it together with the Flower and Sugar. Finely beat nutmegs and the same quantity of mace & a Race of Ginger and near half a pint of Brandy or wine 2 pound and a half of Currants and what quantity of Citron you please, let your oven be hot and bake it near three hours

Scorched Custard

Take two quarts new milk & the yolk of 8 eggs set them on a slow fire & stir them constantly. And when thick enough (which it will not be in less than half an hour) season it with essence of lemon nutmeg & sugar put it in a dish to cool. then beat the whites of 6 eggs & 8 Spoonfuls Sugar till they become good icing flavor it with rose water or what you chose lay it over your custard hold the top Dutch oven hot over your icing till brown

These delicacies have similar preparation needs as the previous dishes; timing, attention, etc., but with baking, perfect measurement is essential as it is a chemical equation. These recipes unveil the cooks' ability to count, and perform "educated" tasks.

Lastly, enslaved cooks were talented wine makers, brewers, and distillers, many of which brought their knowledge from parts of West Africa. Their kitchens were full of casks, pot liquors and brewing beer. Alcohol was a popular beverage in that it was sterile, thus better than most water, and provided a high to those who consumed it. The following recipes lay out the techniques enslaved cooks employed to make this popular drink:

Be sure to get perfectly ripe fruit for making wine, but do not gather it immediately after rain, as it is watery then and less sweet than usual. Be very careful to stop the wine securely as soon as fermentation ceases, as other wise it will lose its strength and flavor. Watch carefully to see when fermentation ceases.

The clearest wine is made without straining, by the following process: take a tub or barrel (a flour- barrel for instance), and make a little pen of sticks of wood at the bottom. On top of this pen lay an armful of clean straw. Bore a hole in the side of the tub or barrel as near the bottom as possible, and set it on a stool or box so as to admit of setting a vessel underneath it. After mashing the berries intended for wine, put them on top of the straw, and let the juice drain through it and run through the hole at the side of the tub or barrel into the vessel set beneath to catch it. Be careful to have this vessel large enough to avoid its being overrun. Any open stone vessel not used before for pickle will answer, or a bucket of other wooden vessel may be sued. Let the berries remain on the straw and drain form evening till the next morning. Some persons make a slight variation on the process above described by pouring hot water over the berries after putting them on the straw. After the draining is over, and inferior sort of wine may be make by squeezing the berries.

The following process will make wine perfectly clear: to a half-gallon of wine put two wine-glasses of sweet mil, stir it into the wine and pour t all into a transparent half-gallon bottle. Stop it and set it by for twenty-four hours, at the end of which time the wine will be beautifully clear, the sediment settling with the milk at the bottom. Pour off the wine carefully into another bottle, not allowing any of the sediment or milk to get into the fresh bottle. The same directions apply to vinegar.²²⁷

²²⁷ Tyree, 461.

Prosecco was also a common European inspired beverage and called for similar space and skill. This time and space consuming process was essential for the success of plantation balls and dinners, thus was a constant activity in the kitchen. Wine was also used for medicine "Strawberry wine makes a delicious flavoring for syllabub, cake, jelly, etc. And so does gooseberry wine. Dewberries make a prettier and better wine than blackberries, and have all the medicinal virtues of the latter."²²⁸

Cooks were also responsible for making all of the household cleaning items as well as medicines. This sort of practice consisted of making salves, remedies, ammonias and dyes. Salve was made by taking "mutton suet turpentine, barren soil, melobonet, parsley, elder bark, Night Shade, and bees wax and adding a little honey and brown sugar do it over a slow fire." Similarly, "mouth water" was made by "tak[ing] Pine Buds, Spanish Oak bark, Alder bark, Persimmon bark, and Sage, boil it in a Bell Metal in weak vinegar, after it boils well take out the ingredients and add Allum Salt Petre and Honey simmer it over a slow fire until its a Syrup." Ointments were made too, by taking "lavender Sassafras Bark Chamomile Feather free Mullen Buds & Sage, a pound of Lard to a half pint of Brandy Simmer it over a slow fire, when the strength is sufficient pour off the Herbs, ring them dry this ointment will keep a year or two - get the ingredients in August." Cooks also made cures for the common cold. Not only did enslaved cooks learn and practice the art of medicinal creations, but they were allowed access to poisons, such as Deadly Nightshade, and belladonna.²²⁹ This presumed trust combined with their role in feeding and nourishing the plantation household made for a very tangled power relationship.²³⁰

Negotiations

Enslaved cooks were at the center of domestic success and had access to unique assortments of edibles, poisons, and alternative living arrangements due to their status. At the same time, their workload was constant and stressful. At Middleway Plantation, in Glouster County, Virginia, "The servants were never dismissed-- their training never ended and

²²⁸ Tyree, 461.

²²⁹ Holly Phaneuf, *Herbs Demystified* (New York: Marlow and Co., 2005).

²³⁰ For more on dyes, and remedies see J.F. Walker, *Commonplace Book*. And Charles Dabney *Commonplace Book, 1811-1825*, Dabney Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society Manuscript Collections, Mss5:5D1124:1.

they were part of a complex social system."²³¹ Enslaved cooks found themselves in an exclusive position. Having the responsibility of producing food made them the most important slave in the household. This role allowed for labor negotiations and individual agency. Cooks and other domestics found themselves "acting out" on occasion, which infuriated mistresses:

Uncle Bob Iveson was a splendid butler and Mammy's son Daniel Cosby was his assistant and a very young man. I suppose Uncle Bob thought he owned the place because his drunkenness became unbearable. It appears that the butlers were expected to get drunk after the entertainments and this lapse from discipline was overlooked in a measure. When their condition next day was too obvious, the master stormed! But Uncle Bob got drunk at the entertainments and thereby caused mortification. Uncle Bob was demoted to watch over the garden, and Mammy's son Daniel was promoted to pantry.²³²

Uncle Bob clearly acted against the expectations of domestic performance and front stage behavior. His demotion, directly resulting from his dismissal of cultural norms, shows a juncture between community expectation and individual choice.

"Household shared imaginative universe, could shimmer with mutual affection or shatter in mutual antagonism."²³³ Mistresses not only appropriated the pride from proper servant etiquette, but this appropriation was a two way exchange. Cooks "owned the kitchen" misses owned the food, as well as drunkenness and embarrassment, which resulted in poor representation of self.

In a frustrating letter to Rueben Dean, overseer at Strawberry Hill Plantation, Ms. Holladay complains of her domestic help, "last week little was done, and altho three days the woman was doing nothing, yet yesterday when she could have been milling she was kept to wash in the house, which she might as well of done the days she was idle. If I am to feed, cloth, pay hire for servants, I expect their services..."²³⁴ This enslaved woman obviously was hired out from another plantation, and decided she was not going to work. "There was no way to beat

²³¹ Deans Family Papers, Section 1, MssD3464a13. The Virginia Historical Society Manuscript Collections.

²³² Deans Family Papers, section 1.

²³³ Fox-Genovese, 27.

²³⁴ Holladay Papers, VHS, Mss1h7185b12126-12133, section 234.

good cooking out of her"²³⁵ Another account of blatant disregard for their duties is seen in this post emancipation recollection,

Post Civil War conditions worsened by the hiring of a cook Lishy. She was stupid, roughish, sullen and often neglectful of work that she knew how to do well—but she was never discharged. She had been born and raised in the servants' quarters and when the Negroes drifted away to a near Yankee camp, Lishy was deserted. She was taken into the house and shared the protection afforded my young aunts, remaining on the place..." "Mistress supervised well sifted flour, and proper proportions of salt and lard. ..Lishy would sift great mounds of flour; so much for light bread, so much for waffles, so much for biscuit." "Remember Lishy you have two quarts of flour. That will make thirty-six good sized biscuit." ..."Grandmother didn't count the biscuit as they come up hot and hot to her pleasant supper table but Lishy thought she did. From my seat behind her at the side table, I could hear her occasional message: -"Tell Lishy her biscuits are getting too small!" "Grandmother was safe-guarding Lishy's morals and family interests with a prevision that was second nature. Oh! The elegant thrift of those Southern housewives, more productive of comfort than the most lavish expenditure!²³⁶

Lishy might have been an excellent enslaved cook, but decided to change after the war, or she might have acted as many other enslaved cooks did- by taking as much time as they liked. While there was a constant threat of punishment, the mistress relied on the cook so much that their relationship was also controlled by the willingness and talents of the enslaved cook.

Enslaved cooks often knew more about their jobs than their misses.²³⁷ While the mistress was proud of her cook, she rarely lingered in the kitchen or visited smokehouse or outbuildings.²³⁸ Since the mistress did not cook the food, she was sometimes met with controlling demands from her cook. There are records of cooks telling their mistress to get out of kitchen, a practice only functional in a negotiated relationship.²³⁹

²³⁵ Fox-Genovese, 160.

²³⁶ Deans Family Papers, Section 1.

²³⁷ Fox-Genovese, 137.

²³⁸ Fox-Genovese, pp. 98, 137.

²³⁹ For more information see Fox-Genovese, p.142. Where she quotes Mrs. Merrick remembering her dealings with the family cook. This instance

The only real control the misses had was through her provisions. Mistresses handed out sugar, spices, butter, and were in charge of smokehouse provisions.²⁴⁰ The Smokehouse and dairy were part of white landscape; as such the mistress was in charge. This contrasts the management of field hands who were looked over by an overseer. The role of sugar in the kitchen must have demanded extra attention. Contemporary knowledge of physical and emotional effects of sugar must have led to a cycle of craving food, desire, and control between the supplier of sugar (misses) and the producer of sweets (cook).²⁴¹ Cooks had the ability to "steal" items, such as raw materials or prepared food for themselves and their family. The misses did not watch every movement of the cook, and as a result, there was room for inconspicuous consumption.

In addition to being able to sneak food from the white folk's groceries, cooks sometimes let things happen while turning a blind eye. On Monday December 14, 1857, Richard Eppes awoke to find a disturbing scene in his new kitchen well: "Much shocked this morning on opening the new well back of the cook's garden to find that some scoundrel had stolen a hog and pitched the entrails and ribs down the well. Could not find who did it."²⁴² Eppes cook clearly would have heard a killing of a hog, or the noises associated with a quick butcher and her silence represents a loyalty to other slaves. This account also speaks to the slave pallet; this person clearly took the preferred meat, and left the intestines and ribs to rot. Or rather didn't want to partake in the lengthy process of cleaning them for consumption. Either way, the cook, living adjacent to the well, must have turned a blind eye, or done it herself.

Not all household resistance was passive. As previously mentioned, the majority of enslaved Afro-Virginians were Igbo and brought with them knowledge of both poisoning and foodways.²⁴³ Igbo were known for their knowledge of herbs and

was outside of Virginia, therefore I am omitting the direct quote for sake of my scope.

²⁴⁰ Jane Francis Walker, *Commonplace Book, Castle Hill Plantation, Albemarle County, Virginia, 1802-1845*, Virginia Historical Society, Manuscript Collections, Mss5:5 P1432:1.

²⁴¹ It is common knowledge that sugar is addictive and consumption causes psycho-physical reactions in most people. See <http://www.princeton.edu/pr/news/02/q2/0620-hoebel.htm>

²⁴² Richard Eppes Diary, 1857, p. 322, Mss1 Ep734 d 292.

²⁴³ See Lorena S. Walsh. *From Calabar to Carter's Grove: The History of a Virginia Slave Community*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), and Douglas B. Chambers. *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo African in Virginia*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2005).

poisons, as well as their use and knowledge of supernatural powers. Tutor Phillip Fithian recalled an attempted murder by poison on a local plantation:

Ben returned about seven from Westmorland court house -he informed us that Mr. Sorrels Negroes had their trial there today, concurring their accusation of entering their masters house in the night and with an intention to murder him. It was proved (so far as negro evidence will go.) that the brother of this Sorrels early last spring bribed some negroes to poison his brother and when that diabolical attempt could not succeed he has since tried to persuade them to murder him!²⁴⁴

The idea of poisoning goes hand-in-hand with food production and consumption. While the "servants" were not cited as the cook, they nonetheless had to have access to the victim's food. Similarly, in April of 1849 an enslaved man named Billy was charged with poisoning his owner Thomas Wilcox, at North Bend plantation in Charles City County. Ten years later another house servant was charged with poisoning Wilcox's son.²⁴⁵ Although rare, this was one of the many modes of resistance practiced by enslaved Afro-Virginians. The role of feeding one's enslavers begs for more understanding as to why more cooks didn't poison their masters. Clearly, they had access to poison, food and trust; the ideal situation for murder. Perhaps their role as cook provided them with enough collateral power to negotiate their living conditions and treatment. So much of the mistress's reputation was based on the cook's labor, and this twisted relationship had a particular level of negotiation and invited covert power struggles.

Many enslaved cooks were not willing to stay within their unique position and ran away from their plantations. Enslaved cook Rachael, belonging to Mr. John Aylett ran away after three months of cooking for him. A runaway ad was placed in the Virginia Gazette reading:

THREE months ago I purchased, from the executors of *Littlebury Hardiman*, a negro woman named RACHAEL, formerly Mr. *Hardiman's* cook, since which I have not seen her. I am

²⁴⁴ Fithian, 252.

²⁴⁵ Robert L. Crewdson et al. *Charles City County Virginia, An Official History, Four Centuries of the Southern Experience: Charles City County, Virginia, from the Age of Discovery to the Modern Civil Rights Struggle*, ed. James P. Whittenburg and John M. Coski, (Salem, W. Va.: Don Mills, 1989) 65.

informed she has a husband at one of Col. *Carter's* quarters on *James River*, through whose benevolence I imagine she is now harboured. Whoever brings her to me, at *Drummond's Neck*, near *Cowels ferry*, shall receive 30s, or 20s if conveyed to *Charles City* prison. I am determined not to dispose of her, and will sue any who entertain her.²⁴⁶

Rachael obviously was sold away from her family and was not able to negotiate her placement as some others were able to. It is clear by the ad that Mr. Aylett valued her skills and would go to great ends to capture her again.

In April of 1751 a Virginia-born enslaved man named Hercules ran away from his Prince George County plantation. Hercules was known for pretending to be a cook, and a repeat runaway.²⁴⁷ This notion of acting as a "cook" speaks to the flexibility granted to some of Virginia's enslaved chefs. If being a cook would somehow excuse the presence of a slave at a market, or on a road, cooks must have had more fluid boundaries between their plantation's border and city centers. A clear example of this is seen in a pewter pass given to "Aunt Jemima Johnson" of Nicholas plantation in Warrenton, Virginia (see image below). This permanent pass suggests that some cooks had a more fluid geography that was attached to their position.



Figure 4.1

²⁴⁶Virginia Gazette, Publisher: Purdie Page: 4, Column: 2, 1775-03-24.

²⁴⁷ Virginia Gazette Page: 4, Column: 1, 1751-04-25.

(Aunt Jemima's pass, Virginia Historical Society Special Collections.)

While many enslaved cooks had the power to negotiate their labor, many still fell victim to violent abuse. Elizabeth Sparks of Mathews, Virginia remembered her mistress' violence, "she'd give the cook jes' so much meal to make bread fum an' effen she burnt it, she'd be scared to death 'cause they's whup her."²⁴⁸ Ex-slave Susan Jackson of Fredericksburg recalled the violence on her old plantation. In contrast to Ms. Sparks story, the perpetrator was the master, not the misses. "Her ole Marsa, named Allen, treated her jus' like a dog. She was de cook, an' he would beat her if he didn't like what she cooked."²⁴⁹ Mrs. Liza Brown's mother was a plantation cook and was abused even while pregnant. "When mother was in a pregnant stage, if she happen to burn de bread or biscuits, Missus would order her to the granary, make her take off all her clothes... sometimes 'twon' but one piece. After she stripped her stark naked she would beat mother wid a strap."²⁵⁰ These moments are a stark reminder that no matter how much agency enslaved cooks had they were constantly living as slaves, in fear of violent abuse.

Gender

In Booker T. Washington's 1915 classic *Up From Slavery* he recalls: "When a Negro girl learns to cook, to wash dishes, to sew, to write a book, or a Negro boy learns to groom horses, or to grow sweet potatoes, or to produce butter, or to build a house, or to be able to practice medicine—they will be rewarded regardless of race or colour."²⁵¹ By the early twentieth century gender constructions were directly connected with labor roles, specifically with women as cooks. This relationship was popularized by fictional character of Aunt Jemima and was based very little in reality. In the early eighteenth century men were believed to be better cooks, and were highly sought after.

This trend is seen in the November 1778 Virginia Gazette advertising a want ad, "WANTED: John Parke Custis/Williamsburg I will give a generous ready money price for a good COOK. A man

²⁴⁸ Charles Purdue, *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia's Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1977) p. 275.

²⁴⁹ Purdue, 154.

²⁵⁰ Purdue, 63.

²⁵¹ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (Albon L. Hosley, 1915) p. 281.

would be preferred.²⁵² Popular eighteenth-century thought connected masculinity with the ability to withstand the heat, burns and physical labor of kitchen work. In addition, two other ads showcased men's kitchen skills "An exceeding likely and capable young NEGRO FELLOW who understands House Work... and is a tolerable good Cook."²⁵³ as well as "an exceeding likely young negro man, who is a very good house servant, and is a tolerable good cook. If purchaser is not perfectly satisfied with him after month's trial, he may return him if in health."²⁵⁴ In addition, Mr. William Plume of Williamsburg wrote, "I would exchange a negro man, who is a good house servant and cook, and by profession a biscuit baker."²⁵⁵ This instance demonstrates the professionalism of some enslaved cooks, and the respect that their skills brought them. Securing a cook who could produce all of the table's foods was also sought after as seen in this 1776 ad, "A GOOD negro COOK, who is a healthy fellow under 40 years of age, can roast and broil very well, and understands made dishes, with baking of bread and pickling."²⁵⁶ This enslaved man was obviously trained to reproduce European dining, and was a high commodity.

These descriptions showcase that enslaved men were used in the domestic sphere, in ways that became exclusively "feminized" by the nineteenth century. Masculinity and blackness carried a varied identity and transformed as the years progressed. While it was common to have an enslaved man as a plantation cook in the eighteenth century, by the nineteenth century women became more popular in the kitchen. The "feminization" of kitchens was a gradual transition as more women were being sold into slavery and making their way into plantation kitchens. One could also assume that with the increase and formalization of elite white women as mistresses, the power dynamic between race and gender shifted. As more white women became part of the household, and assumed domestic responsibilities and control, the less male cooks appear in the kitchens. This could be a casualty of white fear of the black male slave and the "protection" of white womanhood. Or it could be contributed to both the expansion of specialized plantation labor to include blacksmithing and other

²⁵² Virginia Gazette, Dixon Page: 3, Column: 1, 1778-11-27.

²⁵³ Virginia Gazette, Purdie & Dixon Series: supplement Page: 2, Column: 2, 1774-10-20.

²⁵⁴ Virginia Gazette, Purdie Page: 3, Column: 1, 1775-04-14.

²⁵⁵ Virginia Gazette, Page: 3, Column: 3, 1780-02-12.

²⁵⁶ Virginia Gazette, Page: 3, Column: 3, 1776-02-16.

male dominated trades which would take the men out of the kitchen, as well as the overall increase of enslaved women in the plantation south.

Enslaved women became more valuable due to their child bearing abilities. Black women were viewed as both reproductive and productive, as they labored along side men and reproduced the labor pool.²⁵⁷ Racial discrimination was compounded by sexual prejudice, and enslaved women were victims of sexual, emotional and physical abuse.²⁵⁸ There was a dual caste system based on race and sex and the plantations were a microcosm of this order.²⁵⁹ Two forms of domination overlapped, traditional notions of womanhood and profit/plantation economy. What is known as the "Colonial household industry"²⁶⁰ relied on enslaved folks to carry out the performance of domesticity through labor, skills and presence. The labor of enslaved women was used to keep crops up, enlarge workforce, and sustain the plantation household.²⁶¹

The skills of enslaved cooks allowed them a particular level of living, drastically different from the field hands, and even other domestics. Their food-centered job relied on their senses, smell, taste, sight, touch and sound, all of which varied from person to person. One's pallet might not be the same as another's, and the ability not to just simply follow a recipe, but to create food, relied on individual tastes and creativity. This complex role must have inspired a sense of pride in cooking, and a level of personal fulfillment.²⁶² Within the horrors of enslavement, enslaved cooks took moments of pride in their food, and received complements on their skills. This complex exchange within the confines of slavery is another unique position and situation enslaved cooks dealt with on a daily basis. This mixture of pain and joy in labor, work and family was something that enslaved women held onto and struggled with throughout their lives.²⁶³

Motherhood played out in the kitchen differently than in the quarter. Enslaved cooks were allowed to share their

²⁵⁷ Jones, 14.

²⁵⁸ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*, New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

²⁵⁹ Jones, 11.

²⁶⁰ Jones, 30.

²⁶¹ Jones, 28.

²⁶² Jones, 29.

²⁶³ Jones, 61.

distinct living space with their immediate family and partner. Their children either helped them in the kitchen, and/or worked in the main house as servants. Having their children working and living next to them provided a more intimate setting which carried into the profit of slavery. This is seen in sale ads for cooks, which include their children, "SUKEY HAMILTON, cook to the late Govenour, with her youngest daughter, 7 years old,"²⁶⁴ at the Brunswick courthouse "Sundry NEGROES, among which are two very fine house wenches, and their children, the wenches can wash and iron, cook,"²⁶⁵ and in Williamsburg "A LIKELY young Negro WENCH, about 25 years of age, she has a child of two months old, understands cooking, making paste, pickling."²⁶⁶ and "a young cook wench with two children."²⁶⁷ These ads expose the currency that cooks had and how their children were seen as part of their labor machine. As many of their children helped in the kitchen, they would be contributing to the production of meals, and as such were valued *with* the cook. When planters sold off their slaves, they often kept house servants to preserve domestic stability.

This sort of familial inclusion is also seen in an incident involving kidnapping. On October 31, 1828 Mr. Thomas Spragins received a letter from an angry neighbor, Mr. James Wills accusing him of breaking into their kitchen and kidnapping their cook Lucy and her children. He follows by stating "the peculiarities I need not mention by note."²⁶⁸ Mr. Willis just wanted his cook and her children back, as without them, his house was unable to function as a domestic machine. Why Mr. Spragins kidnapped Lucy and her children is unknown, perhaps it was Lucy's skills he was hoping to appropriate or possibly stealing her was the most hurtful thing he could have done to his neighbors' household. Either way, it is clear that Lucy was exceptionally valuable and that her children were part of her function.

"Lords of the Backstairs"²⁶⁹

In addition to having biologically related folks living in the domestic space, some kinship affinities existed among

²⁶⁴ Virginia Gazette, Page: 3, Column: 1, 1768-11-24.

²⁶⁵ Virginia gazette, Page: 3, Column: 3, 1769-07-27.

²⁶⁶ Virginia gazette, Page: 4, Column: 1, 1771-09-26.

²⁶⁷ Virginia gazette, Page: 4, Column: 3, 1773-11-25.

²⁶⁸ Spragins Family Papers, 1753-81, Section 67. MssISP716a2264, Virginia Historical Society manuscript Collections.

²⁶⁹ Deans Family Papers, section 1. Referring to back stage service staff.

domestic slaves. This larger catering network, made up of cooks, maids, butlers, waiters, etc., were known as "the lords of the back-stairs."²⁷⁰ An early twentieth-century Virginia memoir states:

My grandparents brought wise young heads to the management of their plantation. They wished to encourage intermarriage among their servants, so with that in view for the moral edification of all a premium was offered. Grandfather furnished a cabin for the groom, and grandmother gave a wedding frock and supper to the bride when there was a religious ceremony.²⁷¹

Recollections of these enslaved workers are also mentioned as such:

I can hardly understand myself and it's hard to explain, the great influence of these old family servants. The position was that of old cabinet ministers, only the incoming administration could not get rid of them as they were on the estate for life. Also, they had great weight with all the plantation for the house- servants represented the plantations aristocracy and were revered accordingly.²⁷²

This network of servants had their own views on hierarchies and self-pride. The cook, while central to the white folks presentation of self, was not always seen with the same respect from the enslaved communities. In a plantation memoir, an elderly Virginian woman recollects this dynamic on her families plantation:

In every home there were certain dignitaries among the servants, whose authority and personal influence was second only to that of the master and mistress. The mammy was the most important person upstairs, the butler lorded the pantry, the cook queened it in the kitchen and the coachmen was law-giver in the stables. Their children swarmed unobtrusively around and were the future lady's maids, seamstresses, pastry cooks, butlers and coachmen. These for dignitaries were part of the administration and jealously guarded their prestige.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Deans Family Papers, section 1. Referring to back stage service staff.

²⁷¹ Deans Family Papers, section 1.

²⁷² Deans Family Papers, section 1.

²⁷³ Deans Family Papers, section 1.

This dated memory speaks to the cook's "queen role" but only in conjunction with the other domestics. This memory of enslaved folk appropriating the pride of the plantation resembles the ways in which mistresses falsely took credit for the cooks' food, thus showing the incredible commodity of domestic pride and success.

In the same memoir the author recollects a proud division between the domestics:

I remember when I was a girl that Daniel Cosby was engaged to preside in the dining room on the occasion of the marriage of one of my aunts. The house was full of guests and Grandfather was famous for his lambs. There were many negro assistants in the kitchen, and when the giving out had to be done, Daniel was consulted as to the proper provision for them. "Don' give 'em none of dat lam' dey won't touch it!" When his own dinner was given out, he said:- "I would like a little lam' please marm, I was raised in the house an' on sheep meat. Dem folks in dat kitchen aint had no raisin' at all and dey don' know nothin'!" There is no scorn in the world equal to the scorn of the house servant for plantation raising.²⁷⁴

The presented familiarity of lamb as a class separator shows the minute social stratifications between the front stage domestics and those working in the kitchen. One never knows why the cook or kitchen laborers didn't eat the lamb, and with the power they had in preparing it, one might be better off following suit with the cooks rather than the enslavers, in that only the cook knows what really went in the food and the composite of the animal. Regardless, butlers lived within the house, and as a result, many must have felt culturally different than others, or at least tried to flex a certain prestige in front of white folks.

Liminal Space

It is clear that the kitchen was both home and work for enslaved cooks. The conditions were complex, being larger than a field quarter, yet without the privacy and separation from work. Kitchens were at a crossroads between black and white worlds, and held a unique function on the plantation. The intersecting space of the kitchen was the social center of the plantation community.

²⁷⁴ Deans Family Papers, section 1.

Eighteenth-century tutor Mr. Fithian often recalled this unique space within his journal. The Carter family kitchen was used as space for a drunk man who stumbled upon the Carters property one late evening. Fithian recalls:

There came about 8 o'clock, a man very drunk, and grew exceedingly noisy and troublesome, and as the evening was cold and stormy Mr. Carter thought it improper to send him away; he was therefore ordered into the kitchen to stay the night; Bob soon after persuaded to the schoolhouse.²⁷⁵

This moment shows the value of the kitchen as a safe harbor for a stranger, yet also proving security for the Carter family. Leaving the disorderly man at the responsibility of the cook speaks to the liminal nature of the kitchen quarter. Fithian recalled young Harry Carter continually being drawn into the plantation kitchen. Harry also played in the other domestic buildings at night: "This evening the Negroes collected themselves into the school room and began to play the fiddle and dance...Harry was among them dancing with his coat off...I dispersed them immediately."²⁷⁶ In an 1864 letter, Virginian mistress Eleanor Platt wrote "The children soon ran off to dance in the kitchen as they do every night."²⁷⁷ This sort of interracial socialization was a constant in the kitchen, especially with the children. Ex-slave Ms. Johnson recalled, "My mother was de cook; her name was Hannah too. Dey was crazy 'bout her. I come up as one of de white chillum-didn' know no difference. We et together at de same table. I slept in de same bed wid de white folks..."²⁷⁸ There was a certain level of fluidity between white and Black children, and the kitchen acted as a vehicle for these interactions. Sometimes the enslaved children would go into the main house, but usually only for particular reasons. Ms. Cunningham remembered this, "All the work hands ate in the cabins and all the children took their cymblin [squash] soup bowl to the big kitchen and got it full of cabbage soup. Then we were allowed to go [to] the table where the white folks ate and get the crumbs from the table."²⁷⁹ This sort of psycho-emotional

²⁷⁵ Fithian, 93.

²⁷⁶ Fithian, 82.

²⁷⁷ Eleanor Beverly Platt, letter, December 31, 1864, Virginia Historical Society Manuscript Collections, Mss2P6977a.

²⁷⁸ Mrs. Hannah Johnson, in Purdue, 158.

²⁷⁹ Baily Cunningham, in Purdue, p. 83.

action remaps violence onto enslaved children by reinforcing ideas about status, worth and disrespect of the black body. It is clear that a black child within the white house was cautionary and reserved; however, the reverse, the white body in the kitchen, was free of the social constraints of elite culture.

It is clear that kitchens were socially active and open spaces. Kitchens also acted as a formal venue for weddings. The traditional "jumping the broom" ceremony occurred in the quarter, yet the kitchen acted as a formal stage for these occasions as well. On New Years Eve, 1856, Richard Eppes' cooks Emma and Harriet threw a wedding party for John Bird and Patience Anderson in the kitchen. Richard Eppes discusses this festivity:

The close of the year 1856. Since Christmas we have has nothing to break the monotony of these festival times but a marriage and marriage party between two of the Bermuda negroes John Bird and Patience Anderson married by me in this dining room Sunday December 28th according to the doctrine of the P.E. Church in presence of Mrs. E and Emma nurse White and the house servants. The party came off the following night Monday in the kitchen given by Harriet and Emma. ²⁸⁰

Two years later, Eppes is involved in another kitchen wedding reception. On Tuesday December 28th, Eppes ordered 20 loaves of bread, \$3 worth of cakes and \$3 worth of candy for slaves. "George our dining room servant was married tonight to a girl belonging to Mrs. Wood by name of Anna. Mrs. Eppes gives them an entertainment in our kitchen." ²⁸¹ These glimpses into the kitchen's multiple functions relay the centrality of the kitchen within both the white and black communities. It is in the next chapter where the social functions of kitchens as a mode of resistance shine through in the archaeological record.

Pain, Pride and Performance

Enslaved cooks were not exempt from torture, nor was their high status a deterrent from mental abuse. They were proud of their food, and they were forced to perform domestic chores that often resulted in physical and emotional trauma. This pride, cycled within performance and pain was unique to enslaved cooks,

²⁸⁰ Eppes, 1856 Diary, Mss1 Ep734 d292.

²⁸¹ Eppes, 1858 Diary, p. 45

and proved to be a challenging and tangled existence. The backstage scene presents uncomfortable working conditions, long laboring hours and a responsibility that lended itself to negotiations, abuse, and small moments of empowerment.

[The following photographs are of a few Virginian ex-slave cooks. Note that their dress was typical of both men and women (See chapter 5 Emmanuel Jones photograph) and they often wet their skirts to avoid catching on fire while working at the hearth. The weight of a wet skirt added extra pounds onto an already hard job, and is yet another example of their physical prowess and strength.]



unk, unk, patty George + Liddie Jones (Cook
@ Appomattox)
marble
Crtty point VA

1999.160.269 Acc: 12/21/73

Figure 4.2

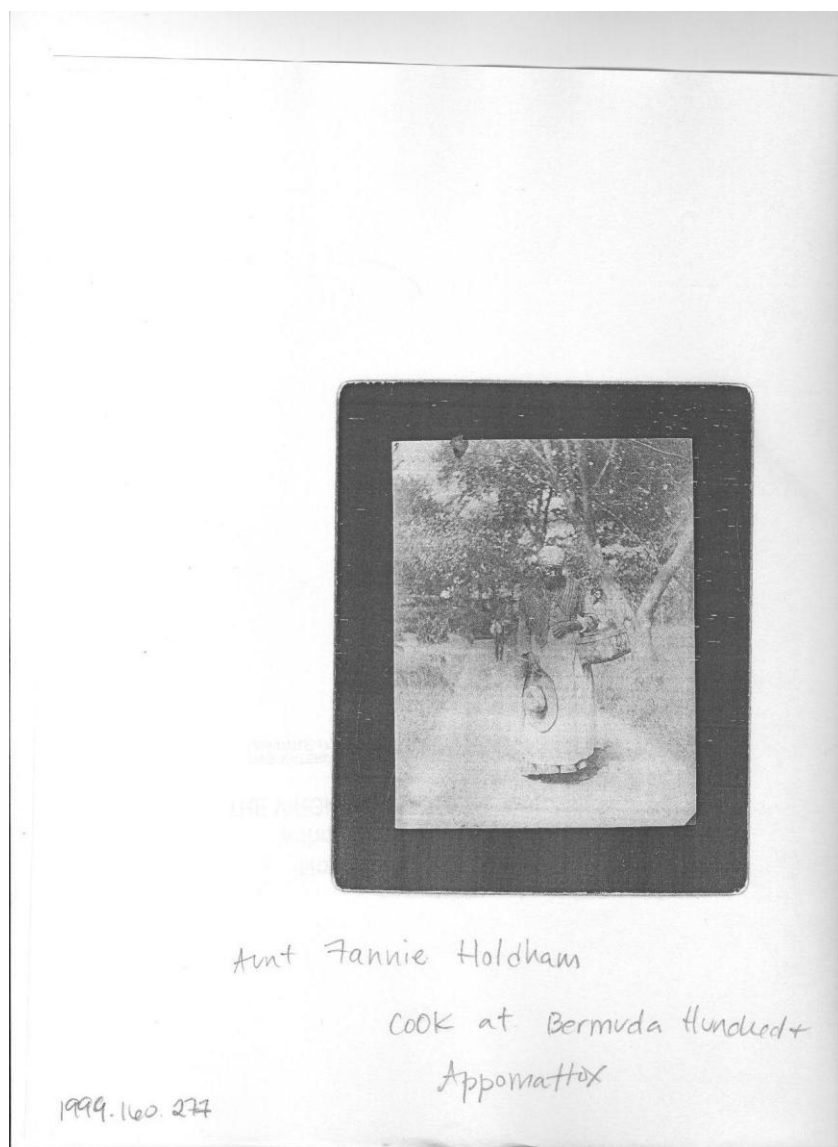


Figure 4.3



Figure 4.4

(Figure 4.2) Richard Eppes' cooks-Liddy Jones (Appomattox)VHS

(Figure 4.3) Aunt Fannie Holdham, Appomattox and Bermuda hundred, cook for 20 years, pensioned off about 1870-80.VHS

(Figure 4.4) Anonymous cook with a bell.VHS

FIVE

Diggin' the Kitchen: The Archaeology of Liminal Space

Emmanuel Jones rose early to the sound of roosters' crowing to cook breakfast for his master. He lived in the kitchen at Flowerdew Hundred plantation, a liminal space adjacent to the big house and within walking distance to the field quarters. The smell of the nearby James River and trash deposit often carried into the kitchen and mixed with the scents of his culinary creations. He was proud of his cooking skills and was known on the plantation as "the little Black magician," because "his biscuits were so good, it was like magic." His mother Keziah was the plantation milk maid and his father Emmanuel Jones, Sr., lived on the property as well. Born in the 1840s he spent the first twenty plus years of his life as a slave for the Wilcox Family of Flowerdew Hundred plantation in Prince George County, Virginia.²⁸²

On any given day Emmanuel Jones and his family threw their garbage into the outdoor trash pit, which was dug on the quarter side of the kitchen, keeping it out of the view of the main house.²⁸³ Cooking for the Wilcoxes and his own family created significant amount of garbage; faunal remains, broken dishes, bottles etc., all of which tell a particular story hidden from the written records. In addition, the Joneses dug root cellars inside the kitchen, under the floors to keep roots dry and cool, as well as to hide their valuables. These features and little pieces of material culture shed light onto the private lives of Virginia's plantation cooks and illustrate the centrality of their role in the plantation community.

²⁸² Flowered Hundred Collection Papers, housed at Morven, University of Virginia Special Collections, c/o Karen Shriver supervision of Karen Shriver, a longtime Flowerdew Hundred employee and whose generosity and organization has helped me complete this project. This collection includes written oral histories, diaries, archaeological collections and photographs from Flowerdew Hundred Plantation.

²⁸³ James Deetz, *Flowerdew Hundred: The Archaeology of a Virginia Plantation 1619-1864* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993) pp. 135-7.



5.1 Photograph of Emmanuel Jones, circa 1880s²⁸⁴

Historical archaeology is an essential tool to decipher aspects of the African American past and is critical in re-informing contemporary mythical ideas about enslaved cooks and their kitchens, and helps reshape their legacy in America's cultural history. The following material evidence creates an archaeological narrative, left behind by enslaved cooks who lived and worked in two Virginia plantation kitchens. This chapter begins with the kitchen at Dixon plantation in King and Queen County, VA, which was erected during the third quarter of the eighteenth century and burned down before 1800. Dixon's archaeological remains represent a typical mid-late eighteenth-century external plantation kitchen and reflect the uniqueness of the cooks' space in the larger mechanics of plantation culture. The second kitchen is from Flowerdew Hundred Plantation, and was built in the early 1800s by John Wilcox's slaves. This nineteenth-century kitchen was used and occupied up through the 1930s. However, the archaeological record is representative of nineteenth century culture since the last tenants used alternative trash disposal and removed all of their belongings before relocating, leaving behind the subfloor features and artifacts long forgotten by their generation. By looking at the archaeological footprint of these two kitchens the hidden world of Emmanuel Jones and the unknown cook at Dixon surface.

²⁸⁴ Flowerdew Hundred Collection Papers.

The Archaeological Approach

Since the 1960s archaeologists have excavated kitchens along with the greater plantation landscape. Larger plantations had field quarters that were a good distance from the house. The kitchen quarter is unique in that it was always adjacent to the main house and the cooks had a higher status than the field hands. This poses questions as to how the cooks' material culture in this liminal space, compares to that of other enslaved groups and the white planters. Liminality as it functions in the architectural design of a plantation kitchen results in the creation of a physical and cultural crossroads, one that contains a unique and diverse assortment of material culture. Trash pits for the main house and kitchen are often indistinguishable; therefore, what remains is the question of access. Enslaved cooks had access to the serving vessels, serving ware and glassware of the big house; however, they also had their own assemblages to eat with in the kitchen. The liminality of their role, status and locale made for a complex life, mixed with cultural fluidity and material expressions of power and resistance.

In addition to the space, the faunal remains are also shared with the planter's trash. This challenging task of differentiating the cooks' remains from those of the planters is exactly what defines the cooks' role on the plantation. They lived and worked within the white landscape, but as enslaved Blacks. Their world was not clear cut, nor was their diet, material culture or status. Instead of attempting to draw concrete lines or difference in the archaeological data, this chapter shows the complexity of the cooks' world as they constantly walked the line of both landscapes, while simultaneously performing white domesticity and preserving their African roots.

*Case Studies: Centralizing the Kitchen:
Dixon and Flowerdew Hundred Plantations*

Dixon Plantation Kitchen (44KQ127)

Dixon plantation was established sometime in the middle of the eighteenth century by William Dixon and his family. The external kitchen was built in suit with Virginia's architectural traditions, and it sat adjacent to the house. In 2002, *James River Institute for Archaeology* was contracted by the current

owner to excavate the remains of the eighteenth century kitchen that had burned sometime during the 1760s. When the kitchen burned, the occupants swept the remains into the cellar and adjacent trash pit. This short-term solution provided a long term value in that it captured the kitchen in a sort of a time-capsule. Rarely are archaeologists able to uncover the entire material world of a past space. The Dixon kitchen is an informative snapshot into mid eighteenth century kitchen life and provides a rich archaeological narrative.

The site was excavated by removing the topsoil with a backhoe and hand shoveling the soil until prominent features appeared. A hearth and two features were mapped and excavated in quadrants (See below). The James River Institute (JRI) uncovered the remains of a hearth, a large root cellar and an external trash pit. The kitchen remains consisted of a stone/bog iron/brick chimney base that measured 11'6'' X 6'0'' with an 8'9'' wide firebox. The subfloor pit measured 5'X8' filled with refuse dating it to no later than the 1760s. The root cellar contained everything from swords to ceramics and its richness exemplifies the cooks' prestige within the plantation community.

As discussed in previous chapters, by the eighteenth century the kitchen was the heart of the plantation. The cooks' roles in hosting slave wedding receptions, catering balls, and countless other occasions, are seen in the written record. The archaeology not only supports this, but adds the textures of daily life that long escaped the written documents. Since the fire caused a rapid fill of the cellar and trash pit, the specific context of the artifacts are less critical to the interpretation. This time-capsule tells a story of elite Virginians sharing space with enslaved Afro-Virginians, all within the confines of the kitchen space.

Findings

The ceramic assemblage is typical of early to middle eighteenth-century plantation homes.²⁸⁵ A variety of Jackfield, Stonewares, and imported porcelains and the absence of Creamware and Pearlware tighten the deposit date to pre 1760 (Figure 5.1).

²⁸⁵ Ivor Noel Hume, *A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1969).

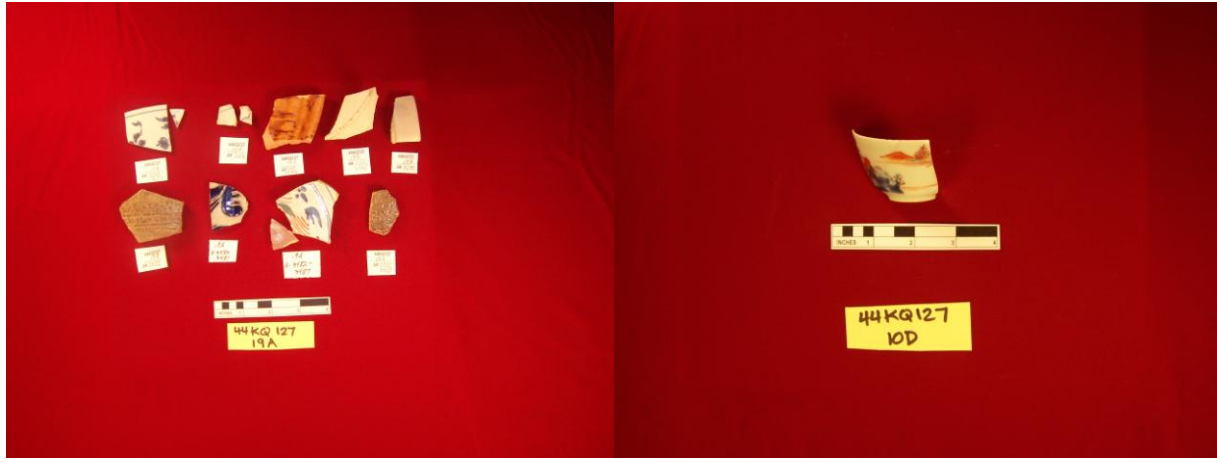


Figure 5.2

In addition, there are significant counts of carved and engraved glassware and crystal, as well as medicine bottles (Figure 5.2). Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cookbooks contained a mixture of recipes and remedies. As seen in chapters 3 and 4, the cook was responsible for not only feeding the planter's family, but for creating serums for sickness. This complex role was common in the Chesapeake and the concentration of crucibles and medicine bottles support this practice.



Figure 5.3

The milk pan in figure 5.3 suggests the plantation had cattle, and more importantly, that the cook worked with or was also a milkmaid. Milkmaids were occasionally sold separately from cooks, as in a March 14, 1744 sale ad, stating that William Byrd was selling "one hundred Virginia born slaves, among them. . .an exceedingly good cook. . .and dairymaids."²⁸⁶ An ad in March of 1777 states the sale of a cook and dairy maid as one person.²⁸⁷ The records for Dixon do not reveal the size or scale of the plantation, and the milk pan simply shows the presence of cows and suggests the inclusion of dairy work in the kitchen schedule.



Figure 5.4

In addition to an abundance of classic eighteenth century imported ceramics, there was a large Colonoware pot sherd (Figure 5.4), which was excavated from the external kitchen trash pit. The presence of this type of ceramic within the kitchen, where pots and pans were readily furnished from the white misses, can be used to infer the representation of Black culture within a white space. Whether this pot was made on the plantation, or given to the cook as a gift from the quarter folk, is debatable. However, its context, as an African derived cooking vessel, locally made by enslaved Africans, shows that the cook, while living in a white landscape, flavored his or her space with material that represented their heritage. The use

²⁸⁶ *Virginia Gazette*, Purdie, March 14, 1777, page 3.

²⁸⁷ *Virginia Gazette*, Purdie, March 14, 1777, page 3.

and or purpose of this pot is unknown, but its presence is significant.



Figure 5.5

A heavy concentration of tobacco pipes were also in the cellar and trash pit (Figure 5.5). While the most are typical eighteenth-century English pipes, a few are molded with a special design. The pipe below has an elaborate design on its stem, and multiple others had WM makers mark on their bowl. These pipes were expensive and their presence in the kitchen speaks to the status of the enslaved cook, and his or her ability to gain valuable items usually not allotted or accessible for the greater enslaved population.



Figure 5.6

Many kitchens were also used as laundries. This allowed for one building to have two hearths on opposite sides of the dwelling (as seen in chapter 2). The Dixon kitchen was disturbed, and the second half of it was not recorded. However, the presence of thimbles and pins suggest the kitchen was a laundry as well. This doesn't necessarily mean the cook was also a launderer, but that the activity was prevalent within the walls of the kitchen.



Figure 5.7

As mentioned before, the kitchen was often used for celebrations, where both the enslaved and white population mingled. The kitchen as a black landscape within a larger white landscape was a relatively "safe social space" for the greater plantation community to gather together. This middle ground witnessed slave wedding receptions, catering, and black and white worlds congregating at particular moments. The archaeological record supports this notion with an abundance of unique artifacts within an even more exceptional context.

With food at the center of the kitchen, and white and Black worlds incubating within this space, little bits of evidence fell through the cracks. Below is a picture of an emerald ring, a pile of fish scales, and a modified African cowry shell. These artifacts represent the elite Virginians socially mixing with enslaved Africans, all within the world of a plantation kitchen (Figure 5.6).

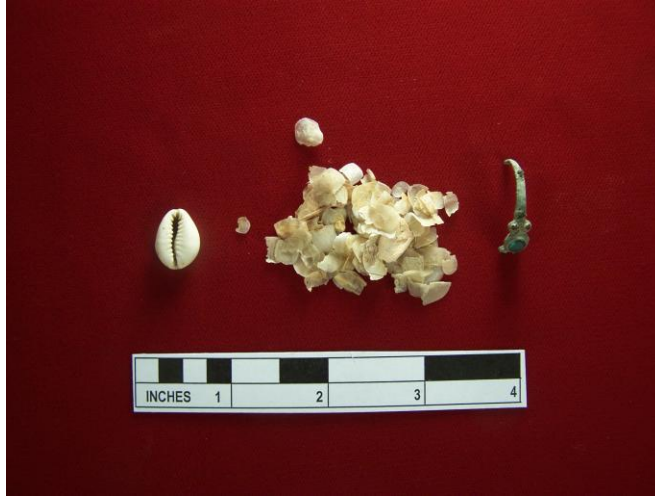


Figure 5.8

The following artifacts are representative of both West African/African Diaspora religious traditions and adornment (Figure 5.7). Blue beads and cowrie shells are likely of Igbo origin, and are found throughout Virginia's archaeological sites.²⁸⁸ Cowry shells were commonly used as currency throughout West Africa and their modification was necessary for use as beads or pendants (See below). In addition, the glass beads were also worn in multiple ways. Similarly, they were worn as necklaces, bracelets and most likely reminded enslaved Africans of home.



Figure 5.9

²⁸⁸ Chambers, 172.



Figure 5.10

Figure 5.8 is an assortment of modified cowrie shells, African glass beads and a pierced English coin. The array of materials is representative of the ways in which enslaved Africans were able to keep some of their material goods thru the horrors of the slave ship. In addition, the coin, while not African, was modified in an African way. The piercing allows for the coin to become a pendant. These pendants were used for protection from evil sprits as well as in religious practices.²⁸⁹ The resourcefulness of enslaved Africans speaks to their perseverance throughout enslavement, and illustrates their drive to keep their culture intact in a new and changing world.²⁹⁰

The kitchen environment is complex. From the items seen in Figure 5.9 we can infer intersections of the cook and mistress, black and white, and personal aesthetics. The top row consists of an emerald ring, a blue painted jewel, a fragment of a green glass ring, a mother of pearl button, and two pace jewels. The bottom row represents African aesthetic adornments; cowry

²⁸⁹ Mark P. Leone and Gladys Marie Fry. "Conjuring in the Big House Kitchen" (American Folklore Society, *The Journal of American Folklore*: University of Illinois press, Vol. 112. No. 445. 1999) pp. 372-403. Also see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the American South* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1980.)

²⁹⁰ While these few artifacts do not solely prove Africans' resourcefulness or perseverance they do provide tangible evidence that supports scholarly work seen in Raboteau's *Slave Religion*, and in John Blassingame, *The Slave Community* (Oxford, : Oxford, 1972.), and Ira Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), as well as Chambers, Sobel and Kutz.

shells, blue, white and red beads, and an English coin turned African by the puncture of a hole.



Figure 5.11

The kitchen was more than a venue for food production and laundry. As seen in chapters one and two, this unique space hosted lively receptions, large gatherings and nightly socials. Games were a significant part of eighteenth century culture. With the knowledge of these social activities, it is easy to assess the variety of gaming materials found at Dixon. Assortments of marbles (Figure 5.11), unidentified glass objects and obviously manipulated marble pieces evidence the variety of games that were played within the kitchen walls.



Figure 5.12

Figure 5.12a is a picture of a broken clay marble. Its fracture is rough and natural with the consistency of the clay and its porous nature allows for an uneven split. In contrast, the marbles in figure 5.12b are perfectly split, creating two different sized pieces. The wear on the broken pieces show clear cut marks, and post break wear. It is clear that

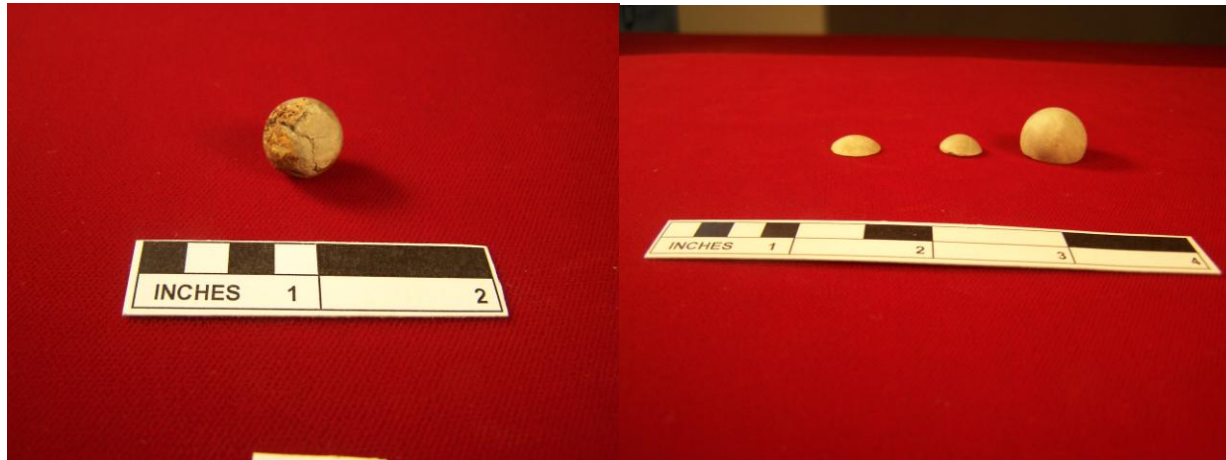


Figure 5.12a

5.12b

marbles were being played in the kitchen, but it also appears that the marbles were used for other games as well. The traditional West African game of mancala or wari is prevalent throughout the Diaspora, and calls for small rounded, partially flat gaming pieces and the board is simply fourteen holes, carved in the earth or on a board. Figure 5.13 are unidentified glass pieces that highly resemble contemporary mancala pieces, but were most likely from button inlets, due to their fake four-

Established in 1619, Flowerdew Hundred is one of Virginia's oldest plantations. This 1000 acre plantation located on the James River in Prince George County, was home to many early Virginian settlers, as well as to some of the first Africans brought through Jamestown in 1619. It is also believed that the first African American was born on this land shortly after its founding. This plantation witnessed many significant historical moments and has an unmatched archaeological record. In 1804 John V. Wilcox purchased the land, for himself and his new wife, Susanna Peachy Poythress. In addition, Wilcoxes, following local tradition, erected an external kitchen for his cook just south of the main house and north of the slave quarters. By 1830, the Wilcox created a fully developed plantation community.²⁹¹

Excavation and Methods

The University of California at Berkeley, under the direction of Professor James Deetz, excavated the Wilcox kitchen (44PG114), during the 1984-1986 seasons. Then graduate student Lawrence McKee led the excavation of the kitchen, assembling an archaeological data collection, field notes and maps for future research.²⁹² Three summers of field work unearthed a substantial kitchen/laundry foundation, containing two brick hearths and a stone wall, subfloor deposits and an external trash pit (See Figure 5.15).



²⁹¹ James Deetz, *Flowerdew Hundred*, pp. 135-7.

²⁹² The Flowerdew Hundred Collections.

5.15 Overhead photo of Kitchen 44JC114

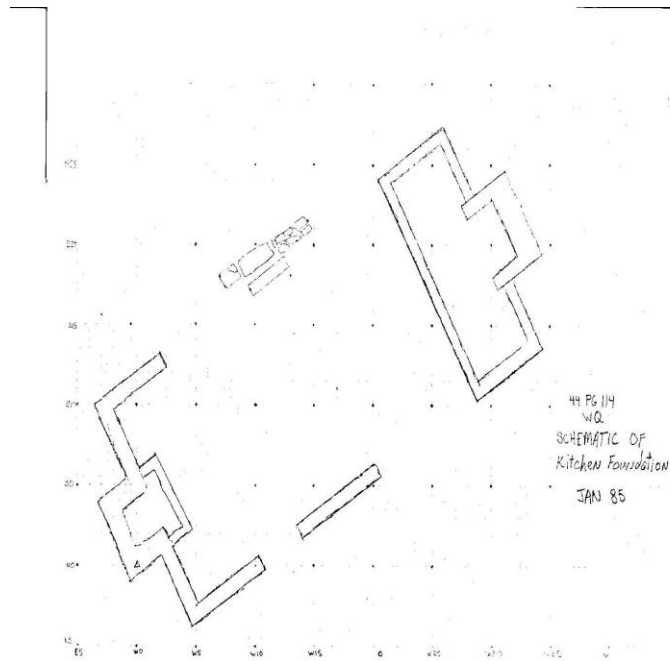


Figure 5.16 Drawing from 1985 excavation

The kitchen was constructed on a brick pier foundation, had a raised plank floor, glass windows, and two fireplace/hearths, one on each side of the dwelling. The site was uncovered through wide area exposure, consisting of five by five foot grid squares, with 2 ½ foot quadrant subdivisions.²⁹³ This specific site, like many sites dug in the 1980s and earlier, were excavated and recorded without extensive knowledge of Diaspora traditions. Bringing a twenty-first century analysis to 44PG114 helps to decipher what was unknown to the original archaeologists. The kitchen had significant artifact deposits in and around the hearth. While the archaeological notes do not mention root cellars or subfloor pits they nonetheless resemble such features.

The kitchen dump was excavated in the 1982 season, revealing an abundance of ceramic, metal and glass deposits. A minimum vessel count shows that the Jones' used a variety of ceramic types, all presumably passed down from the main house

²⁹³ Flowerdew Hundred Plantation Collection, Field Notes, Larry McKee, January 3, 1985.

collection. The kitchen dump contained at least four blue transfer print porcelain plates (-1 blue willow 3 -unknown), in addition to eight undecorated porcelain objects, (4 plates, 3 cups, 2 lids, and 1 bowl). In addition, the dump contained a variety of earthenware, two hand painted yellow vessels as well as a large platter and bowl. McKee also uncovered a variety of Spongeware, blue, brown, black and purple transfer print plates (blue willow), red transfer print cups, bowls and plates, and one Creamware platter. Whiteware made up the largest assemblage of kitchen dump ceramics, containing a large heavily fractured Whiteware chamber pot, 2 cream tint cups, 6 plates, 1 saucer, 4 platters, 1 additional chamber pot, 1 crucible, 2 pearl tint cups, and 1 bowl. Also included were Whiteware molded patterns, totaling 2 cups, 1 floral pitcher, and a fluted bowl.²⁹⁴

This typical collection also included at least 11 Banded Annualware bowls. The total minimum vessel bowl count is 19 compared to 13 plates. Field quarters traditionally have a significantly high number of bowls due to their one-pot-meal traditions. The Jones kitchen reflects a more even distribution of serving vessels, which suggests their intersecting world. They cooked European dishes with an African flare. The archaeology of slave quarters depicts a much more African derived culinary fare, whereas, the kitchen diet and material culture speak to the heavily creolized space in which the performance of European ways was carried out through the material culture assemblages.

The mistress furnished the kitchen as a smaller reflection of the main house. These artifacts acted as props in both front and backstage. The cook performed his or her duties as directed by the misses. Kitchens were furnished with the "proper" cooking utensils, and serving ware. Just as a doll house is a spectacle, the kitchen was shown to guests and needed to project a level of sophistication to be deemed respectable. This is also not to say that the cook was in any way the mistress' doll, but rather that the front and backstage were constantly in interplay within this space, and the cook needed to perform at any given moment.

An example of this proper furnishing is the Rockingham glazed cookie jar found in the trash pit. The idea of a cookie jar in the kitchen speaks to the cook's unique access to culinary treats. While many plantations kept sugar and treats locked up from the cook and from the enslaved community, some, like Flowerdew, yielded access to baked goods. The formality of a cookie jar also represents a level of sophistication in the

²⁹⁴ Paul Debarthe's crossmend notes, FDH Collection, (No date).

kitchen. Cooks, while playing this public role, had access to edibles that were usually kept from the other slaves. This microcosm of status, access and material culture is again reflective of the cooks' unique role in the larger plantation community.

While the European vessels fall into the front stage of kitchen life, some artifacts are clearly backstage, hidden and inherently African. A small amethyst crystal was located in the north east hearth subfloor pit (Figure 5.17). Evidence has shown that the use of crystals as a form of religious "root work" began in many parts of West Africa and survives in the Americas.²⁹⁵ The location, in the north east corner of the kitchen is congruent with Mark Leone's argument that these caches are intentional and usually found within the north east section of a dwelling space and represent intentional proxemic value. In addition to this gem, oyster shells were found in the same location, symbolizing the color white and the world of the sea. Both are traditional symbols of West African religious thought. Many ethnic groups believed that upon death their souls would travel back through the ocean into the ancestral land, which was all white. Shells, while typical faunal remains can also shed light on the cognitive spiritual world of enslaved African peoples.

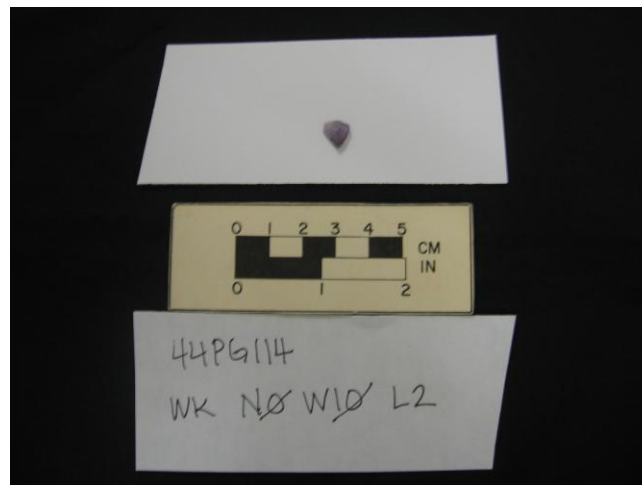


Figure 5.17

²⁹⁵ Mark P. Leone and Gladys Marie Fry. "Conjuring in the Big House Kitchen, American Folklore society" (The Journal of American Folklore: University of Illinois Press, Vol. 112, No. 445, 1999) pp. 372-403.

The amethyst crystal and oyster shells were excavated before scholars had common knowledge of this practice; therefore its contextual relationship to religion was left out. In addition, there were two "worm shells" found in the same location as a thimble, and in close proximity to the amethyst crystal and oyster shells. In revisiting some of the archaeological materials from this site, one can generate new perspectives that highlight what had been the hidden dimensions of the Jones' space and religious world.

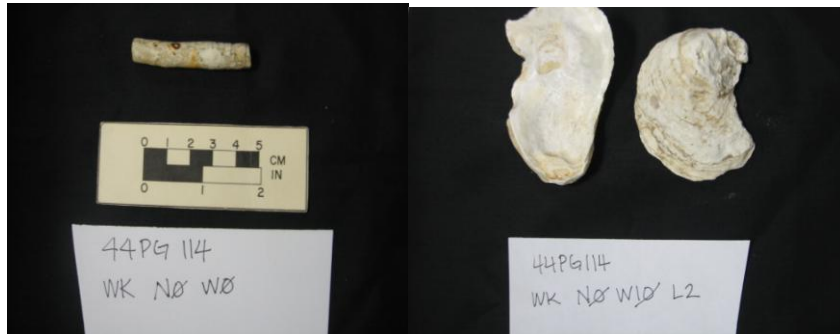


Figure 5.18: Shells

The Jones/Wilcox kitchen also contained significant laundering artifacts; pins, thimbles, buttons and buckles. These items were likely a product of Keziah Jones' labor and presumably fell off the clothes that she was washing (Figure 5.19). The presence of such buttons, buckles and pins confirms the architectural record, as having two hearths usually indicates a kitchen/laundry site. However, these small remnants had multiple uses during enslavement. For example buttons were often reused as pendants, similarly buckles and thimbles also made their way onto enslaved bodies as jewelry. Reusing discarded or "lost" objects allowed enslaved folks to reinterpret these forgotten items and create adornment for themselves as well as for friends and relatives in the field quarter.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ For more on clothing see Steve O. Buckridge, *Language of Dress: Resistance and Accommodation in Jamaica 1760-1890* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2004).

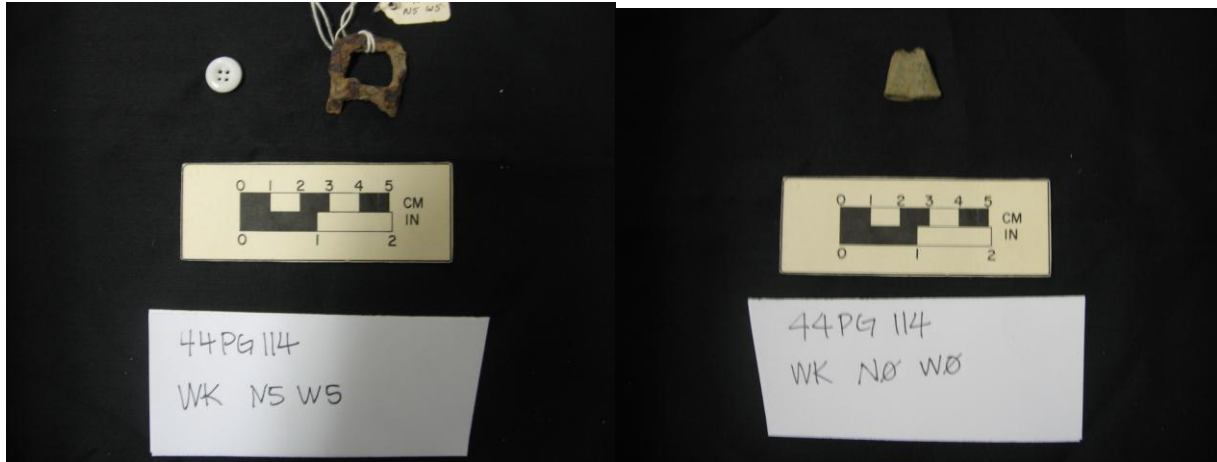


Figure 5.19

The metal artifacts also tell a story, having been used for everything from cast iron pots to delicate copper rings. Below is a heavy duty cast iron pot handle (Figure 5.20). Its size and weight remind us of the strength it took to move such vats filled with food. The cook was strong and withstood incredible pain and labor while working in the kitchen. Cast iron was the best material for hearth side cooking. This typical vessel cooked everything from stews to mulled wine, and was the main appliance in the kitchen. Dutch ovens, and skillets shared the pots space, however, the cast iron pot was queen of the hearth. A *Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce* top (Figure 5.21) was also found in the trash pit. While not a necessity in nineteenth century cooking, this item was essential for the creation of classic French dishes. This top further illustrates the cooks' and mistress' sophisticated palates and attests to the level of food being cooked in the hearth.



Figure 5.20

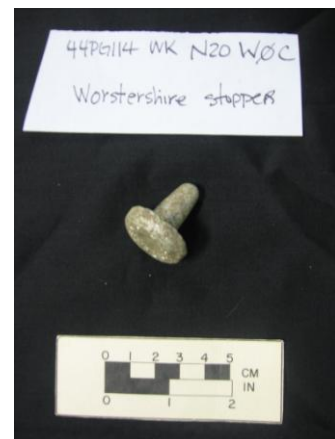


Figure 5.21

In addition to large pieces of cast iron and pewter found in the dump was a small copper ring (Figure 5.22), with a leaf design on its outer edge. This ring could have belonged to anyone. Whether or not the cook had access to such jewelry is unknown, but the possibilities behind the disposal are numerous. This ring could have belonged to a slave or maybe the mistress. Just as we lose small things today, it could have fallen out of a pocket, off a finger, or intentionally thrown in the trash in spite of someone/something. Keziah and Emmanuel were married, and perhaps it was their ring?



Figure 5.22

Numerous pipes were found in the trash pit as well as inside the kitchen walls. Most of them were traditional white clay. English or Dutch pipes are also in the Dixon assemblage (Figure 5.24). However, there was one locally made, colonoware pipe that was adjacent to the shell and thimble inside the North West hearth area. There are no decorations or makers marks on this pipe, as it was crudely made on or near the plantation. The presence of home made pipes within this kitchen space also shows the crossroads of material culture the cooks lived with. While they had access to English pipes, perhaps they traded their bonus materials for locally made objects.



Figure 5.23

The last significant artifact from the Jones' kitchen was a tiny saucer from a children's tea set (Figure 5.25). This tiny porcelain plate could have been Emmanuel's when he was a child. The contemporary gendered ideas that cooking and tea sets are inherently female did not dominate this particular place and time. Many of Virginia's plantation cooks were men, and the cooks' role was not feminized in this respect, it was functional. This small plate might have belonged to any number of children, but it nonetheless exemplifies the formality of performed domesticity, and its application to small children.



Figure 5.24

Keziah and her family remained on the plantation during the Civil War. Emmanuel Jones Jr. continued to live and cook for the Wilcox's long after his freedom. He was proud of his occupation and used it to eventually leave Flowerdew Hundred in the late nineteenth century. He moved to Petersburg, Virginia, where he bought a plot of land, raised his family and worked as a cook until the day he passes on August 21, 1917. The Flowerdew kitchen was occupied by Joneses until they moved at which point it turned into a workshop/garage, as seen in a 1930s photograph (Figure 5.26).



Figure 5.26 Wilcox Kitchen

Significance

So what does this all mean and how does archaeology expand our knowledge of enslaved cooks? In this chapter I have elucidated how the archaeological investigation of the Dixon and Flowerdew kitchens can inform on the complex social space in which enslaved cooks lived and worked, and exposes their liminality, in the sense that they were living between two worlds. Field quarters and mansion homes have been thoroughly examined, but the kitchens have been assigned to one or the other, and not treated as a separate and distinctive space. Eighteenth-century plantation culture was diverse and the archaeology of kitchens exemplifies this historical moment, and suggests that African and European material coexisted in the kitchen. While the voices of eighteenth-century enslaved Africans were missing from the larger historical record, their material culture speaks loudly on their behalf. As the nineteenth century approached, and American slavery matured, the written record captured more enslaved voices, while the material culture became more covert and creolized.

Scholarship on foodways has successfully laid out the ways in which enslaved cooks manipulated food and created a creolized cuisine. The written record shows glimpses of the whole stage, front, back, and in-between, and illustrates this picture of a vibrant social space, within the dregs of slavery and excruciating labor demands. The archaeology uncovers the tangible ways in which these cooks actively remembered their past, helped themselves and others survive the horrors of chattel slavery, and continued to own their identity as African people living throughout the Diaspora.

SIX
Conclusion:
The Memory and Legacy Enslaved Cooks

While slavery ended over 150 years ago, its legacy permeates our social, cognitive and material worlds. The depth and breadth of its legacy covers almost every aspect of our society and the lingering ideological memory of enslaved cooks sits tightly in American grocery and culinary trends. Boxes of Aunt Jemima Pancake mix and Uncle Ben's Rice stock our grocers' shelves, while using the image of enslaved cooks to authenticate their products. This mythical cook is so engrained in America's culture and consciousness that we have neglected to interrogate this widely accepted idea. This work redefines the mythical "slave cook" and uncovers their rich and complex history and role in plantation culture. Historical and archaeological data is critical in re-informing contemporary mythical ideas about enslaved cooks and their kitchens, and helps reshape their legacy in America's cultural history.

The lasting images of enslaved cooks flood flea markets, antique stores and on-line auctions. These objects, often in the form of kitchen ware, remind us of the Old South, racist ideologies manifested in tangible form. Having spent decades seeing these antiques, I have found a great variety of responses and feelings about such items. This chapter traces the evolution of "slave cook" objects, while paying attention to the parallel social, emotional and economical trends that define such imagery. While Black Americana continues to reinforce ideas about Black servitude and white privilege, it also acts as a medium for redefinition and has an immense ability to evoke reactions from everyone.²⁹⁷

In order to understand the context of this study, it is important to define the myth of the "slave cook." During the nineteenth century, Abolitionist literature began presenting the horrors of Southern slavery, depicting a brutal and inhumane society. Southern planters, responding to this trend, argued that their slaves, especially those working in the house, were treated like family, and in this romanticized moment, the iconic "slave cook" was born. As the twentieth century rolled in, advertisements using the "black cook" image proved successful as they helped sell premixed baking products, syrups, cereals and rice. Aunt Jemima became a household name along with Rastus and Uncle Ben. American consumers, eager for a quickly prepared

²⁹⁷ See Haley.

meal, reached for these "slave-in-a-box" products at alarming rates.²⁹⁸

Alongside this grocery trend, the development and popularity of *Black Americana* material culture formed. Black-faced cooks were produced as statues, kitchenware and countless random forms that reinforced the racist and sexist memory of enslaved cooks. These material manifestations laid such a solid foundation in American memory, that until recently, even scholars hadn't delved into this vat of institutionalized racism and misrepresentation. These images functioned in many ways. They were specifically marketed towards white American's fear of integration. Black Americana led white folks to believe that the old days were still within reach, and that the black body, while free was still controlled by white power. Having a black cook in your kitchen meant the "ease" of black servitude carried over without the black body inside your home. This conflicting mentality directly reflects plantation settings, in which the black body was kept to labor, but at a concealed distance.

Americans are so use to the idea of a black cook that their history has been marginalized as if complete. Even in the early stages of my dissertation, there was doubt from scholars in other fields, that there was anything new to bring to the table. The *slave cook*, as a white-washed Uncle Tom or Mammy is far from reality. Scholarship on foodways has successfully laid out the ways in which enslaved cooks manipulated food and created a creolized cuisine. This study, in conjunction with historical research on foodways, enslavement and plantation history, pulls the individual's voice from the records. The written record shows the whole stage, front, back and in between, and illustrates this picture of a vibrant social space, within the dreads of slavery and excruciating labor demands. The archaeology uncovers the tangible ways in which these cooks actively remembered their past, helped themselves and others survive the horrors of chattel slavery, and continued to own their identity as African people. They, unlike the field hands, were part of the white landscape, and had to partake in a particular performance of white domesticity. In all of this, they were and are more complex than the myth suggests. If, in fact, a small percentage of Aunt Jemima pancake mix was served with a side of contempt, or Rastus' *Cream of Wheat* came with a Sankofa shaped spoon, or even better, if Uncle Ben's rice had trace amounts of poison in it, we would be closer to reality.

For antique collectors Black Americana is a money maker. Drawing fascination, obsession, and pure distain for these

²⁹⁸ M.M. Manning, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (University of Virginia: Charlottesville, 1998).

objects, consumers buy them as fast as they are offered. On EBay, an online auction site, it is rare for a Black Americana item to go without a bid, and the most popular ones are of Black cooks, either Aunt Jemima or a "generic black cook" (Figure 6.1). Ebay's Stoneycreek Candle Company has gotten in the market of Black Americana, but specifically making soy candles in old tin cans with newly painted slave cook imagery. The fact that Black Americana is such a hot item allows for Stoneycreek Candles to mass produce these twenty-first century renditions of the "slave cook" and unveils the existing market. In addition, these images reinforce ideas about African American labor and its place in American homes.



Figure 6.1

A 1993 visit to the main house at Flowerdew Hundred Plantation, a working farm, revealed the strong legacy of the enslaved cook. While sitting at the table of a wealthy late twentieth-century planter, I witnessed an extensive all Black kitchen staff, waiters, and maids and the cook, who was thanked at the end of the meal. The bizarreness of this occasion was expanded when I was told that the "help" lived on the plantation too, and ever more disturbing was that they lived right where the slave quarters once stood. The spaces of the elite's domestic kitchens are still highly racialized, especially given the influx of Mexican immigrants and the maintained population of working class African Americans. Having personally cooked in private homes, dined at present day plantations, it is very clear that the complex legacy of plantation cooking remains active.

Conclusion

Approaching the study of enslaved cooks from multiple angles allowed for an examination of many facets of their lives. While the moments and materials captured in time only reveal so much, the culmination of them help to shed light onto their struggles, their agency and daily activities. It is essential to redefine the enslaved cook as skilled, possibly functionally literate, and somewhat powerful within his or her position. They were skilled people who used their talents to try and gain power and control of their social and physical environments for themselves and their families. Enslaved cooks were central to the plantation and mistress' social success and were vital to white womanhood and plantation social functions. They were also central to quarter folk's ability to persevere enslavement by providing access to alternative space. The myth of white-washed cook is only front-stage, backstage shows that enslaved cooks retained their African religious roots, culture and heritage despite being placed in the white landscape.

I hope this work reminds us to remember not just the pain of slavery, or the strange legacy of Aunt Jemima, or Uncle Rastus, but rather the dignity, the pride enslaved cooks took in their food, and the agency and ability to negotiate their labor and living conditions for themselves and their loved ones within the kitchen walls. It was through interdisciplinary work and the scope of Diaspora studies that I was able to see these complexities within the cooks' lives.



Figure 6.2 (1960s Charcoal bag).

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of Virginia Special Collections, c/o Karen Shriver supervision
of Karen Shriver, a longtime Flowerdew Hundred employee and
whose generosity and organization has helped me complete this
project. This collection includes written oral histories,
diaries, archaeological collections and photographs from
Flowerdew Hundred Plantation.

James River Institute for Archaeology, Dixon Archaeological
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Buckhorn Manor, Kitchen, State Route 603, Bacova vicinity, Bath
County, VA1742 1st floor kitchen, 2nd floor weaving room.

Green Hill Plantation, Kitchen, State Route 728, Long Island
vicinity, Campbell County, VAHABS VA,16-LONI.V,1B-3

SOUTH AND EAST SIDES, LOOKING NORTHWEST

HABS VA,90-FAL.V,2C-3Chatham, Kitchen, .2 mile Northeast of
intersection State Routes 218, Falmouth vicinity, Stafford
County, VA

Kendall Grove, Connecting Passageway & Kitchen, State Route 674,
Eastville vicinity, Northampton County, VA NORTH FACADE OF
CONNECTING PASSAGEWAY AND EAST FACADE OF KITCHEN
HABS VA,66-EAST.V,6A-1

Kendall grove, DETAIL, SOUTH FACADE OF KITCHEN, ENTRANCE FROM
CONNECTING PASSAGEWAY
HABS VA,66-EAST.V,6A-4

Kendall Grove, INTERIOR, CONNECTING PASSAGEWAY, DETAIL OF DOOR
HABS VA,66-EAST.V,6A-6. View from cooks' quarters.

Kenmore, Kitchen, 1201 Washington Avenue, Fredericksburg, VA
HABS VA,89-FRED,1C-2

Westover KITCHEN BUILDING, FROM NORTHEAST HABS VA,19-WEST,1B-1,
Westover, Kitchen Building, State Route 633, Charles City
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