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1. Introduction

1 Commonly referred to as the New South due to its abandonment of old aristocratic agriculture—best embodied in King Cotton and its

culture—and its embrace of modernity and industry (Ayers 2007: 3), the U.S. South in the early twentieth century is usually perceived as a stronghold of conservatism, not as a place where the seeds of social liberalism and advancement grew. This article, unveiling a different facet of common U.S. Southern women and of their concerns, achievements, and everyday lives, shows how homemakers’ clubs helped them transcend social conditions and patriarchal customs that kept them secluded at home, away from the sphere of public affairs and political matters (Drake 2001: 188). Despite their region’s social and political conservatism, some women of the New South found ways to evolve and thrive. Economically and politically—as well as psychologically and emotionally—these women were no puppets evolving under their fathers’ and husbands’ dominance and authority but rather participants in, and even advocates of, their gender’s dignity and their communities’ wellbeing.

2 This article will analyze Tennessee and Kentucky women’s emancipation through the lens of home demonstration clubs and of the networks of self-support and community actions that these organizations enabled women to establish, during the first half of the century and up to the 1970s.[1] Hailing from working- and middle-class environments, these Black and white mothers and daughters came from rural environments, remote from big towns and modernity. What makes those clubs particularly worthy of investigation is the fact that they were launched and led by women, for the benefit of other women, and that they took place in locations often affiliated with women’s social functions: their houses, kitchens, and gardens, or their communities’ schools. The informal workshops and meeting times that these clubs offered, away from men’s supervision and managed entirely by their female members, enabled women to develop networks of emotional and material support based on their gender and subordinate conditions. Even if a handful of those workshop demonstrators were men, homemakers’ clubs were—through their membership and staff—essentially a female institution, led by women, to serve other women. These clubs, as this article argues, awakened in their ranks a sense of belonging that transcended their social and economic conditions, catalyzing their entrance into the world of municipal management, politics, and economic production. While women benefited in different ways from these clubs, and while

geographic variations account for differences in the clubs’ achievements and functions, female members’ testimonies show that they truly profited from joining other fellow homemakers. Additionally, these women’s own families and communities also benefited from demonstration clubs.

3 The houses that hosted these clubs became public places—with a definite political dimension—where community action was contemplated and implemented. The homes where women were relegated became places where they gathered, and pooled their energy and force, to unite and turn concerns and grievances into action. As this article will demonstrate, the range and nature of homemakers’ clubs work and successes were diverse and served a variety of constituencies. Whether to serve their own needs, or their communities’ and families’, the actions and reform that these women undertook were political in the sense that they shaped public policy, reframed citizenship, and challenged social norms and hierarchies. By exercising influence and power at local, County, and State levels, they engaged in the machinery of governance, shaped political culture, and contested the power dynamics that dictated the societies they lived in. Whereas, from the 1920s onward, women could also become political agents casting votes in the ballot box—often considered the most direct way to exercise political power—, their homes and kitchens became springboards that could take them straight to the stage of civic life and city affairs—the very essence of the word “politics.” Kentucky and Tennessee women turned their homes and kitchens into places that endowed them with economic power and political legitimacy, in their close surrounding communities as well as on the national level. Whether teaching their female counterparts, performing municipal improvement, making money on their own, participating in the war effort, or launching public health and charities, these women became political participants and advocates, using their homes as springboards to become—in the eyes of their detractors—useful and worthy American citizens. They reshaped the socio-economic order and norms of the communities they lived in, took on new public responsibilities, and brought significant changes into the civic life of the localities they inhabited. Those clubs demonstrate that in the U.S. South, the walls between the privacy of one’s home and the public world of politics and affairs could be quite porous and permeable.

4 While a few academic works have dealt with home demonstration and women's clubs in the first half of the twentieth century, the majority have not given an active voice to their participants. Even though laudable research on canning club leaders and those who launched this phenomenon at the turn of the twentieth century have been published, these figures were arguably not representative of *all* regular club members. Indeed, club organizers hailed from middle- to upper-class wealthy families (Evins 2013: 78; Engelhardt 2009: 79; 2011: 91; Perry 2009: 77), which, to some extent, valued their daughters' education and did not share the harshest and less progressive conceptions of women's roles in society.[2] Other scholars have also dedicated praiseworthy works on the racial aspects of segregated homemakers' clubs and the way they fostered—or prevented—racial cooperation, inclusion, and empowerment, yet they did not significantly give an active voice to their regular club members, who represented a variety of women coming from different socio-economic backgrounds (Walker 1996: 488; Harris 2019: 477; Walker 2022: 666).

5 This article's emphasis is on archival findings dealing with club members. Collected in the University of Maryland's National Extension Homemakers Council Voices of American Homemakers records, their direct testimonies and recorded oral histories—despite the latter's imperfect nature (Kirby 2008: 23-24)—enabled ten Black and white farmers, teachers, social workers, and housewives, all mothers to several children, to tell their stories, draw the picture of the Southern societies they grew up and lived in, and consequently, show how club demonstration was synonymous with social, economic, and political emancipation and activism.[3] These oral histories were recorded by former leaders of the home demonstration movement, in 1981 and 1982, in the homes of interviewees who had been club members as early as the 1920s.[4] The apparent benevolence of these interviewers —women and former club members as well—seems especially conducive to honest testimony and reminiscence of the past.[5]

6 However, for a fair assessment of demonstration's successes, some reservations should be made regarding this archival collection; indeed, the whiteness of the interviewees—and interviewers—should be considered as only one African American club member, Julia C. White, who recounts her youth in 1920s rural Appalachian Tennessee, was interviewed;[6] additionally, the Homemakers records' ten inter-

viewees for Tennessee and Kentucky are a small number to fully portray the institution in those states; lastly, some interviews are vague about actual details and dates when community actions and programs took place.

7 Regardless of the very limited sample at hand, life expectancy took its toll on those who grew up in the 1920s and 1930s, so very few—if any—voices are still able to reveal the stakes of century-old home demonstration clubs. Historians and investigators of the past often grapple with the lack of sources and the archival silence of many ordinary Americans when trying to retrieve their voices (Hardy 2001: 243). Even if those ten Kentucky and Tennessee voices may not fully represent the experiences of all club members, they still deserve to be heard, their stories being inspiring tales of personal determination and collective action. Rather than focusing on one community member at a time, their respective interviews will be woven together into one narrative, allowing to draw general conclusions on club work, its benefits, and its limits. [7]

2. The History of Home Demonstration

8 The early twentieth century witnessed the appearance of a series of progressive reformers whose goal was to purify the corruption rampant in the United States and help those who had been left behind by decades of unregulated industrial *laissez-faire* capitalism. They campaigned for reform in politics, economy, education, culture, and science (Grantham 1983: xvi). Home demonstration and its teaching of home economics are two of the many manifestations of the progressive spirit that swept across the South at the dawn of the twentieth century. Appearing in American schools during the nineteenth century, home economics was a science whose purpose was to teach young women to become future responsible household managers, who could take care of their families in the best possible—and most efficient—way (Hoffschwelle 1998: 93). In such classes, students learned to cook balanced and healthy dishes, as well as take care of infant children and newborns. Besides the care of family members, there was also an economic side to this subject: students would learn to prepare a budget and keep track of their spendings as

well as garden and sew, for the sake of their families' finances (Stade et al 1997: 79-81). Although women were not supposed to be breadwinners per se, home economics acknowledged their contributions to the households and endowed them with a monetary role and responsibility that they would perform at home. Female students were taught to become perfect economically alert domestic managers.

9 Home demonstration began in the early twentieth century as an innovative extension of Southern agricultural clubs for children, gradually developing into homemakers' clubs for women (Harris 2019: 478-79). Originally targeting boys, it is thanks to Marie Samuella Cromer, a teacher based in South Carolina, that demonstration efforts expanded to include young girls, in 1910, and quite quickly, their older sisters and mothers as well (Lievin 2023: 40, 47). [8] At first loosely organized groups formed by volunteers and dedicated teachers who wanted to bring a wind of change into the lives of Southern women and girls, homemakers' clubs became state agencies staffed with professional teachers and bureaucrats, and governed by an institutional hierarchy. [9] A home demonstration club was set up by a leader who would visit localities and neighborhoods, and upon agreement with local housewives, would organize workshops to preach the benefits of home economics and the gospels of domesticity done right. In addition to regular home economics topics, students learned about progressive agriculture, canning, gardening and home beautification (Walker 1996: 490-91; Hoffschwelle 1998: 133, 135). Since many rural areas did not especially have public facilities that could host those demonstration workshops, many of those local female students—adults as well as younger girls—would open their doors to their neighbors and host them in their own houses, hence the name "home demonstration" (McKinney 2011: 58-59).

10 In Kentucky a few temporary home demonstration agents were teaching gardening and canning to groups of little girls as early as 1912. It was only a year later that Helen B. Wolcott, once appointed state leader, organized extension work in home economics and made home demonstration a more formal and official institution that would then welcome women of all ages. In the spring of 1914, 17 female county agents were employed in the State. [10] Tennessee's history of home demonstration for little girls is rather similar to Kentucky's, though with a bit more fame—the Volunteer State's demonstration

director and organizer, Virginia Moore, being credited as one of the very first five people in the world to enter this new educational enterprise (Evins 2013: 77). As early as February 1912, the media reported that clubs were booming in Tennessee (Lievin 2023: 47). For home demonstration agents in both of those States, and especially in the mountainous and quite rugged areas of their eastern lands, the conditions faced were particularly tough. There were no good roads, no adequate office facilities, no means of transportation, no organization nor established procedures, and no funds for supplies and equipment. On horseback or on foot, those agents who received meager salaries were wandering the countryside, visiting the homes of their students and teaching them skills and particular techniques to alleviate their everyday economic and sanitary hardships. [11] Spreading the benefits of home demonstration in remote and quite isolated communities, agents acted as vectors of change, introducing modernity and new trends from cities. Home demonstration agents quickly started welcoming mothers and housewives into their educational enterprise (Hoffschwelle 1998: 109).

3. “The Women […] Never Got to Go Anyplace”: The Social and Psychological Benefits of Home Demonstration

11 For the interviewees, belonging to a club conferred social benefits of the utmost significance. Ethel Jury, a former Kentucky club member who was particularly enthusiastic about her homemaking days in 1950s rural Appalachian Breathitt County, recalled that “the women […] in this particular area at that time never got to go anyplace. Never had any activities outside the home. In fact, many of the husbands considered the women as something that should stay in the home […] They were so thrilled to be able to come and learn many things.” [12] While the Upper South region [13] had already operated a shift from an overtly rural to an increasingly urban population at that time (Larsen 1990: 130), the region’s rural areas still consisted of numerous hamlets and villages scattered all across the countryside, to some extent isolating its communities from the modernity and social advances of

more industrial and populated areas. Social conservatism and old-fashioned gender conceptions, detrimental to women's entry into the public sphere and participation in public life, indeed permeated some Southern households, keeping women excluded from socialization (Drake 2001: 188). Workshops thus became a way to kill boredom and escape social exclusion. Ethel Jury further added that “so many people in this area […] just sit day after day and they have nothing to look forward to in their life. I feel that if they would join the homemakers’ club they would get into these things.”[14] Since staying home to fulfill their domestic duties was the fate of numerous Southern women, club demonstration and the social gatherings they promoted must have relieved a significant number of housewives from the monotony of the role that patriarchy assigned to them. Ethel Jury, particularly empowered by those years alongside club members, declared that:

> I find that you can do anything you want to do. I found I could take care of my husband and my children and still attend homemakers’ meetings and learn and go on and do each day what needed to be done […] if you really want to do something, you’ll do it […] you can make every hour count.[15]

12 Echoing the ethos of industrial efficiency preached by Frederick Taylor and scientific managers such as Lilian and Franck Gilbreth, club work taught these women how to become more organized and more efficient at a variety of domestic or personal endeavors (Elias 2008: 11). Like Jury, club members learned to become decision-makers and initiative-takers, and to channel these activities toward personal and communal benefits and purposes. Indeed, demonstration club work was not formally a top-down institution—in spite of its hierarchy, which had organizational purposes—but a rather democratic enterprise in which local populations, and notably working-class women, had agency and a say in the running of demonstration work. Depending on counties and available staff, there was generally a club leader referred to a supervisor, who then reported to the State board. Interestingly, it was emphasized almost every year in the state’s official reports that decision-making had to consider and include local populations’ suggestions and grievances, so as to make home demonstration useful and efficient:

> Every woman is given ample opportunity to give suggestions [and is] expected to participate in the community discussion [...] the club members and committeewomen really plan and make the program while the agent and supervisor are 'means to an end' in that they present facts and try to show a larger picture to local groups. [16]

13 Homemakers were welcome—and even encouraged—to take part in their local clubs' decision-making. As those reports emphasized, "if the adage 'leaders are born, not made' holds for other lines of work, Extension certainly breaks the rule." [17]

14 Launched in the early 1910s, home demonstration meant leadership, agency, and empowerment. The first stage of decision-making happened between local women and their club leaders; they met at to draw a list of enhancements from which the community could truly benefit. Leaders would bring forward a report to their supervisor, who would study the project list and have it consulted by the State board members, who would then approve and make the program official. [18] Anna Evans, a teacher who followed home demonstration classes in the 1930s, emphasized the leadership skills she gained from mobilizing politicians, university representatives, and other influential people, for the sake of her fellow club members' uplift. [19] Mary Jo Depew, a social worker whose club visited and collaborated with low-income families in Kentucky's Laurel County, noted that her involvement in homemaking had strengthened her self-confidence—which she would not have developed had she not been a member, according to her. [20] Getting up and lecturing a group of 1,400 people? "It does not bother me in the least," she boldly stated. [21]

15 Giving lectures and teaching groups of fellow members were an essential part of club work. Indeed, education was one of the most essential features of homemakers' groups. While sources cannot attest to precise numbers, it is also interesting to note that alongside professional agents hired and trained by official authorities, club students could become workshop teachers themselves, passing on the knowledge and skills that they had once learned, all contributing to the emancipation of their fellows. [22] Geography, nonetheless, did influence the subjects that homemakers learned about, with no central consolidation dictating the contents and the way clubs were to operate. States, and even localities and counties, all offered classes on a

variety of topics. Kentucky and Tennessee club members attended trainings on political and economic matters. Homemaker Mary Fouts stated that in Kentucky's Laurel County in the 1950s, she and her colleagues received "lessons in property rights, and wills, and deeds," and that they even had an attorney with them. She further added that they had visits from a funeral director to "help [them] to know what to do at the time when things are hard."[23] Fouts was not the only interviewee to learn about real estate and legal affairs.[24] Additionally, to prepare women for the possibility of aggression and harm, some clubs collaborated with State and County law enforcement to offer their members training in self-defense and road safety.[25] Through these workshops, these Southern women could gain more autonomy and become decision-makers upon whom others could rely. Archives do not provide much detail over these trainings, their intents, and the way they evolved over time. Most female club members were likely to implement those teachings alongside their husbands. Offering them courses on such topics acknowledged their abilities to make wise and reasonable decisions, and thus to assume the responsibilities that family life entailed. Club work gave these women access to knowledge, and consequently power and authority.[26]

16 When training to become club leaders, students followed classes on democracy and government and had to take part in debates over the actual meaning of politics and citizenship. Even if the archives of Kentucky's Home Extension Agency do not provide much information on the actual content of those classes and debates listed in a 1940 report, the official programs are quite unequivocal on the importance of such topics. At a time of increasing female participation in politics (Corder et al 2016: 226) and racial voting restrictions (Wallenstein 2012: 548), club leaders included teachings on citizenship and democracy in their home visits and their workshops, such as "Women in Democracy" and "The Needs of the Country," to encourage their students to express themselves through the ballot box, and increase their understanding of the tense world diplomacy.[27] As the Kentucky leaders had stated in 1935, "votes speak loudly."[28]

17 Official reports of the Kentucky home demonstration office are firm on this fact: in the 1940s, club members and students had to know about formal politics and the role they had to play as citizens in the U.S. society. Panels at home demonstration conferences were given

on "The Homemaker as a Voter and a World Citizen," urging women to register and vote, as well as get acquainted with public officials, national political issues, and international affairs.[29] Even as regular students who did not especially aspire to move up in the club's hierarchy, homemakers attended classes and participated in discussions about the meanings of politics and governments. Ethel Jury thus recalled that classes on democracy and citizenship remained part of regular home demonstration programs even after World War II, during the Cold War era.[30] Away from school buildings and traditional educational institutions, homemakers' clubs offered their members ways to see themselves as parts of a community, as well as useful entities who had roles and responsibilities on the national level.

4. To Become "Indispensable to their Communities": Municipal Enhancement and Community Uplift

18 Clubs members soon realized that they could try to achieve more and undertake action well outside of the boundaries of the houses where they hosted their workshops and trainings. As heiresses to the South's custom of mutual aid (Rehder 2004: 151) and the U.S. tradition of Republican Motherhood and benevolent activism initiated by their foremothers of the Revolutionary era (Kerber 1980: 111), club members grew into the mothers of American citizens who wanted to become "indispensable to their communities."[31] Empowered by an increased self-confidence, these women became municipal arbiters and community mediators whose respective environments became their ground for action, turning whole communities into the recipients of their benevolence and expertise. Home demonstration could thus also become a springboard to civic activities, inviting women to reform and uplift their neighbors in an active and direct way.

19 Club members became allies when it came to promoting federal projects such as the electrification of the countryside in the 1930s. Visiting homes and praising the benefits of electrical home conveniences, club members served as middle-women between politicians, com-

panies, and local populations, who were not always keen on federal and state intrusion in their everyday lives—even if many must have warmly welcomed the electrification of their houses. [32] While the historiography on home conveniences and the emergence of modern technological devices offers nuanced arguments on their supposedly liberating virtues, these interviewed club members did acknowledge the benefits of modernity in their everyday lives. [33] Born in 1897 and raised in rural Tennessee, Tressa Waters, who joined demonstration work in 1922, remembered the pride and "big step up" that access to electricity and—consequently—modern appliances offered. [34] While her colleague Oma Lewis, who joined in 1932, described "wonderful" new technology such as refrigerators and freezers, homemaker Julia C. White was quite hesitant on "whether if it's to advantage or no," nonetheless adding that "[she doesn't] feel like we can live without it now." [35] In spite of the manifest flaws that modern appliances could present, club members nonetheless seemed to acknowledge their qualities. In addition to the improvement of the electrical network, club women also raised funds to refurbish municipal infrastructures, such as schools, libraries, highways, as well as sanitary facilities, whenever state appropriations could not do much in this regard. [36] They even collaborated with and supervised W.P.A. and N.Y.A. New Deal relief during the Depression years. [37]

20 As agents of municipal improvement, club women became symbolic mothers who nurtured and took care of the less well-off members of their immediate communities. Homemakers extended the functions that contemporary society assigned them. They actively came to the help of those that health and economic conditions had diminished, for instance organizing Christmas funds for children in need and helping drought victims. [38] In the late 1920s, Alton Cole, a Tennessean housewife, remembered how she and her colleagues auctioned quilts and hand-crafted items for families that had lost their homes by fire. [39] While U.S. women—and notably those hailing from higher socio-economic classes—had a long tradition of benevolent and charitable work (Ginzberg 1990: 50), demonstration community work endowed working-class and poor women with much responsibility and proactivity.

21 Public health, a topic particularly cherished by numbers of progressive reformers in the first part of the twentieth century, was unsur-

prisingly a keystone in demonstration clubs' agenda (Link 1992: 151). Tennessean member Alton Cole remembered that she and her colleagues visited nursing homes and were "glad to help with the old people there and take them little gifts and things [...] it is a delight for them."[40] Clubs also organized reading programs to improve the elderly's memories and neurological abilities.[41] The range and nature of sanitary club work's actions were particularly diverse, and far-reaching. Home demonstrators launched heart funds and cancer drives, and actively collaborated with their local Red Cross offices, crafting items such as ditty bags for veteran's hospitals.[42] They also promoted the use of first aid kits in schools, tested drinking water, organized fire prevention campaigns, and raised awareness on sanitation and sanitary toilet facilities.[43] As a tribute to a fellow club member who had lost her battle against ovarian cancer, Kentuckians campaigned to raise awareness on the disease.[44] A Tennessee club also launched a "bloodmobile."[45]

22 Homemakers' fundraisers, in addition to going to those that misfortune had not spared, also contributed to keeping the memory of the deceased alive. Club members contributed to the restoration and upkeep of cemeteries. Helped by men of the community who took care of much of the structural work, homemakers planned and managed these operations that gave a second youth to the final resting places of many of their communities' deceased family members and ancestors.[46] Women of the U.S. South had already had a long history with cemeteries' establishment and upkeep that dated back to the post-Civil War and the Reconstruction eras, with groups such as the Ladies' Memorial Associations (Janney 2005: 4). In a South influenced by romanticized memories of the antebellum period, as well as the ideology of the Lost Cause that emerged from the political and economic reconfiguration of the region, taking care of the fallen was highly symbolic, and charged with a definite political dimension.[47] While other associations that undertook similar actions had more political and ideological aspects, the oral histories of those club women do not permit to draw parallels with the groups that promoted Lost Cause nostalgia (Cox 2003: 2-3). Although white supremacy permeated in a significant way much of Southern white women's memorial associations, the interviewed former homemakers never

slightly alluded to racist and discriminatory theories: interviewees described their cemetery work as a regular community project. [48]

23 Tennessee and Kentucky club members, many of whom came from remote places in the countryside, collaborated with foreign homemakers, thereby becoming part of an international club movement. While the interviews do not reveal much on the nature of those exchanges—other than they were professional networks—club membership had the potential to cross national boundaries and put women from all over the world in relation with one another. In addition to giving some of its members the opportunity to travel for meetings to places such as Puerto Rico and the United Kingdom, clubs enabled these Southern women to forge friendships and professional relationships with foreign women including Pakistani, Indian, and Australian colleagues. [49] Virginia Moore, the organizer of the Tennessee chapter of demonstration work, had a written correspondence with European colleagues and attended conferences in France, Poland, and Germany (Lievin 2023: 58). Contemporary documents clearly attest to the presence of demonstration clubs and homemaking activities overseas (Redmond 1937: 604-10). Club work empowered these women to become, in a metaphorical way, female citizens of the world.

24 Racial prejudice, however, prevented many women from embracing the advantages of demonstration clubs. Indeed, the tense racial climate established by racism and segregation tended to limit the extent of home demonstration clubs' progressivism. Up to the 1960s and the advent of the Civil Rights era, African Americans faced significant denials of their rights (Wallenstein 2012: 548). Even if demonstrators welcomed foreign visitors as well as disabled people, they had limited and unequal relationships with their Black State colleagues (Hoffschwelle 2001: 63). While clubs showed *some* signs of inclusion and progressivism by admitting certain marginalized groups, such as the blind who learned to cook, perform house chores, and even sew, homemakers' clubs did not welcome all women equally in their ranks—particularly in the case of African American members. [50] White and Black club members operated separately. Although some white club leaders—such as Tennessee's Virginia Moore—did collaborate for limited periods of time with African American demonstration leaders to train agents, the clubs ultimately developed separ-

ately. Black members were most definitely marginalized. Tennessee's demonstration groups for "negroes" were established in the fall of 1915—four years after clubs for whites—, Kentucky Home Demonstration Work's archives, however, reveal that only in 1936 did the State consider offering home demonstration to its African American population. [51] Oma Lewis reminds us that, in spite of praising her Black clubmates and students for how "awful well" they performed and declaring that she truly "enjoy[ed] working with them as well as with anyone else," club work was definitely segregated, thereby circumscribing the potential impact that gendered racial cooperation could have exerted. [52] While State laws and *de jure* segregation certainly accounted for much of the limited interaction between Black and white members (Hale 1999: 8-9), with the exception of Oma Lewis, archives do not reveal much on the will of the eight other white interviewees to mingle with their Black counterparts—which could have challenged the prevailing status quo of the time. While some accounts of African American home demonstration clubs in other States present inspiring narratives of racial uplift and community advancement, the Kentucky and Tennessee interviewees seem to ignore their Black counterparts (Ambrose et al 2017: 173). Even Julia C. White, the interviewed African American homemaker, does not mention the challenges that her skin color posed during her younger days.

25 World Wars significantly extended the geographical scope of clubs' actions and benevolence. Women's political role became crucial in times of economic scarcity and world political instability. When the First World War hit the international scene, homemakers shone through their contribution to the war effort finances. In addition to canning food, homemakers started selling war bonds in their respective communities. [53] The U.S. supported the war effort through a mix of taxes and fundraising. In 1917, the country introduced the Liberty Loan Plan to sell bonds and finance the war but also to educate the public on the causes of the conflict and appeal to their patriotism. Bonds, thrift stamps, and Liberty Loan drives raised $17 billion, to which were added $8.8 billion coming from taxes (Hilt et al 2016: 90-91). Selling bonds and promoting their benefits to their respective communities, homemakers did contribute—more symbolically than significantly, admittedly—to the military and economic might of the U.S., as well as its international prestige. [54]

26 World War II in particular became a stage on which U.S. club women stood out for their patriotic devotion. Alton Cole and her club, for instance, were particularly proud of their victory gardening.[55] American women and female farmers became the incredible food providers that turned the U.S. into the metaphorical pantry of the troubled world of the early 1940s. The pressing need for food led the Federal Government to create the War Food Administration within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a strategic initiative aimed at enlightening citizens on the critical importance of food as a vital force in securing victory (Gowdy-Wygant 2013: 133). Even thousands of miles away from the battlefields, American housewives and young girls significantly contributed to the war effort (Wright-Peterson 2020: 109-11). Growing fruits and vegetables, as well as killing and processing beef and pork, homemakers produced cans of healthy food that would directly contribute to the wellbeing of their fellows, thus enhancing the physical force of those working in the defense industry as well as the soldiers' enduring tenuous hardships on the battlefields. While processing and canning food had originally served as a means to save money and ensure access to nutritious food—especially important during periods of economic scarcity and food shortage—it became, in times of global armed conflicts, an act of patriotism infused with an agro-industrial dimension: for their country and world peace, homemakers were expected to produce as much as possible.[56] Some of this canning was even shipped to war-torn countries that had been devastated by Nazi Germany and their Fascist allies (Weeks 2010: 122-23). "Make America Strong by Making Americans Stronger"[57]: more than ever, for the farming women whose slogan this was, growing and canning food became a selfless act of devotion to their country, and a tribute to their motherhood.

27 In addition to providing food, club members also played a crucial role in promoting and funding the World War II effort. Besides handing out flyers and posters, they delivered talks in their communities. Reports greatly emphasized the importance of home visits and public demonstrations, whose numbers skyrocketed in the early 1940s.[58] Having weekly radio broadcasts at the University of Kentucky, they likely used the airwaves to convert their listeners to the war effort, as well.[59]

28 The political dimension of homemaker’s clubs was also manifest with the organization’s hierarchies and administrative structures. Joining a homemakers’ club could serve as a springboard for the most dedicated and motivated members to reach political levels, through democratic elections and personal nominations and appointments. Thanks to her experience and successes in home demonstration, club member Anna Evans served in a few county positions to end up State board member of the Wilderness Trail Area committee, as well as its State International chairwoman.[60] Club membership offered a few political opportunities, unprecedented to most of those working- and middle-class housewives. Tressa Waters, who had the privilege to serve as county President, managed a whole network of clubs and collaborated with official State institutions—such as penitentiaries—to undertake bigger infrastructure projects.[61] National and international projects could take these Southern women abroad, as far as Sri Lanka, to attend the Associated Country Women of the World’s Congress.[62] Along the same line, prior to becoming an authority in her state 4-H clubs, Margie Brookshire served as Southern Regional Director of the National Extension Homemakers Council. After years of important responsibilities, she organized the Southern region’s Extension Advisory Council, and later represented Kentucky on the National Extension Advisory Leader’s Council.[63] Anna Evans, a farmer for years, was even invited by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt at the White House, and had the opportunity to further their collaboration when the former gave a talk at the Women’s Action Committee in Louisville in April 1946.[64]

5. “A Girl Don’t Have to Marry if She Can Make Money Herself”: The Economic Benefits of Homemakers’ Clubs

29 The economic benefits it offered to its club members were undoubtedly another important feature that contributed to demonstration’s success. Agents who solicited new members were ordered by the Head of the Kentucky Extension branch to emphasize first and foremost the money that—for the most part—poorer women could

make.[65] While the bigger cities had their shares of factory workers and poor working-class families, the rural South was no land of prosperity (Wright 1982: 175-76). As of 1930, about 70% of Kentuckians still lived in the countryside, and less than 18% of the state's adult population was employed in the industrial sector (Blakey 1986: 6). While the region’s Appalachian Mountains became bastions of industrial coal mining, coal mines did not officially welcome women prior to the 1970s (Kahle 2016: 41; Tallichet 2006: 5-6). Given these limited economic opportunities, homemakers’ clubs and their teachings proved to be interesting economic alternatives for women. Furthermore, the economic uncertainties that preyed upon these club members’ families—such as the Great Depression in 1929 and the financial recession it sparked—could give a whole other dimension and meaning to their membership in homemaking associations (Blakey 1986: 11, 29; Biles 1986: 18).

30 In addition to learning to eat and cook better—thus saving considerable amounts of money on food and medical bills—women could reap significant profits out of their involvement in demonstration clubs, be it with poultry, dairy, canning, or sewing and making clothes (Jones 2002: 51-52, 63-64). The example of canning clubs is especially revealing: young girls and their mothers, through demonstration workshops, learned to grow and can vegetables in their gardens and kitchens, for consumption and sale. Canning club members learned to negotiate trade contracts with merchants and industrialists in order to reap monetary benefits from these interactions. Their club members’ economic citizenship was canning club leaders’ ultimate goal.[66] Little girls and their mothers were taught to improve their well-being and survive in the United States’ capitalist regime. Club leaders taught students how to handwrite letters to order tomato seeds and to write telegrams to purchase fertilizers. Students learned to get directly in touch with merchants for the sake of their crops, without going through middlemen they would have to pay. When teaching arithmetic, leaders related everything to the monetary maximization of the ten-acre plots they were working with. Demonstration clubs inculcated profit-seeking values in their club members, teaching them book-keeping and to become business-oriented.[67] Tennessee homemaker Tressa Waters remembered that she and her colleagues were encouraged to take over club business responsibilities.[68] Long

on the margins of the countryside's economy, homemakers entered the public sphere of economy and capitalism through their kitchens and their domestic production in the early 1910s. Tennessee club member Hauntie Nelson, who stated that canning workshops came right after the foundational teachings on food, sewing, and health, remembered that she and her fellow club students were sold and "all bought canners very shortly," following their introduction to this device. [69]

31 Providing all the materials the club members needed, companies were the precious allies of demonstration agents in their quest for the economic uplift of the South. [70] By first using Vaseline and ink bottles to conserve their fruits and vegetables, club leaders encouraged their students to reinvest the money they had won in contests and earned from their sales into buying actual jars, whose look would be more appealing to the customer (Moore 2001: 111). Marketing was a whole part of home demonstration. In addition to learning from club leaders, members learned about sales and marketing from experienced professionals. Businessmen, who were accompanying club members during agricultural contests and fairs where the latter could win significant sums of money as prizes, probably helped the girls promote their products and taught them how to secure the best deals. [71] Railroad owners even offered scholarships as contest prizes. [72] Through their home food production, young girls could become economically independent and have ambitions, such as college education. [73]

32 As a solution to unfair and capitalistic farming, some Kentucky farming women even created a cooperative movement to eliminate industrial competition and raise the economic value of their agricultural productions. [74] According to Virginia Moore—an unwed woman who spent her whole life travelling and teaching—thanks to home demonstration and canning, "a girl don't have to marry if she can make money herself." [75] This minimizes the economic conservatism and social realities of the time, but the life story of Moore demonstrates that club work could be a blessing. While most homemakers likely sold their home production merely to supplement their husbands' or fathers' incomes, a small number managed to amass significant earnings. One of them, whose parents were on the brink of homelessness, paid the mortgage they could no longer afford. [76] In the middle of the

recession that followed the Great Depression, in 1933, sale revenue from Kentucky home products amounted to $525,000.[77] Their kitchens allowed these poorer women to enter the world of economics and capitalism, and claim the economic citizenship that they had been too long denied.

6. Conclusion

33 The interviewed club members did not seem to have outraged public opinion by transgressing the social expectation that women and politics were two different, separate worlds. While other more militant groups have sparked controversy for their radicalism—as was the case in the quest for women’s suffrage and access to birth control—the interviewed homemakers embraced a form of political activism that was decidedly maternalist. Whether promoting public health programs, municipal reform and infrastructure upkeep and beautification, supporting the war effort, improving literacy and advancing education, supervising New Deal programs, aiding victims of environmental disasters, and chairing groups and committees within women’s reform organizations, club members undertook projects and assumed functions typically associated with a welfare-oriented governing body, as was FDR’s administration in the 1930s. Clubs and the houses that hosted them empowered women to better the world and the communities they lived in, broadened their economic and social horizons, and encouraged them to fully exercise their citizenship rights and their political agency.

34 For all the liberating value of clubs, socially and economically, home demonstration did exhibit some flaws, arousing doubts about the extent of the advancements it promoted. While one white member did openly express sympathy for her African American colleagues, the others remained silent, leaving their thoughts on racial matters open to interpretation. In the same regard, the Tennessee homemaker who conducted Julia C. White’s interview did not especially ask her about her race and her experience as a Black homemaker: was the interviewer colorblind, or inconsiderate of the plight of her Black colleagues? The matter of gender equality also arouses doubts on homemakers’ clubs liberating virtues. Indeed, just like other contemporary conservative women from the Upper South (Baker 2015: 477), Tressa

Waters, for instance, particularly frowned upon the Equal Rights Amendment of 1972, claiming that "I've been opposed to ERA and all it stands for—not against women having equal opportunity, but that isn't really what ERA has been working toward. I just think we have allowed so many indecencies and criminal things into our society."[78] Another club member, Mary Jo Depew, claimed that no matter how she appreciated her husband's progressivism on domestic matters—such as sharing chores and cooking—, *he* should be the one to have the last word in the family's businesses and running.[79] Despite their apparent openness on women's social, economic, and political involvement, some of these homemakers may have been more conservative than others, which raises questions about the success of club work on social issues.

35 Albeit it would have been particularly illuminating to determine whether the content of workshops reflected the broader evolution of U.S. society—such as women's enfranchisement, the New Deal, the War on Poverty—and whether they attempted to tackle some of the challenges the country faced, the available archival evidence does not allow for definitive conclusions in this regard. While some local chapters may have emphasized certain contemporary socio-economic and/or political issues in their teachings, official reports and oral histories do not reveal much on the matter. Only in the 1930s and 1940s—times of economic turmoil and world political instability and wars—did the clubs and their State administration officially encourage their members to exert their voting rights and learn about the concepts of citizenship and democracy. Archives do not mention any relationship between demonstration clubs and women's vote prior to the 1930s.

36 Properly assessing the extent of home demonstration's success in liberating women from patriarchy is an arduous task. Most of the interviewed club members, according to the records, remained housewives and homemakers all their lives—a role they embraced without apparent ambivalence, often expressing a sense of fulfillment in their domestic responsibilities and showing no inclination toward employment outside the home.[80] Nevertheless, their occupational histories should not downplay the benefits of club membership for professional and economic success. As this article argues, the emotional and psychological dimensions of home demonstration significantly

contributed to its undeniable success among interviewees. Whether it was through contributing to their households' finances, improving their families' and communities' health and wellbeing, supporting the homeland during times of international upheaval, or—most importantly—acknowledging their rights and abilities as full individuals and not second-class Americans living in their husbands and fathers' shadows, club membership empowered its members to grow stronger and more self-confident. In that respect, all interviewees' reflections on their time in home demonstration converge on one point: they would whole-heartedly encourage the younger generation to join homemakers' clubs. [81] Southern kitchens were thus more than just kitchens: they were spaces for personal development and community action.

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1 Note on terminology: in the archives, "homemakers' clubs" and "home demonstration clubs" are used interchangeably. To avoid repetition and for stylistic purposes, this article will also use both.

2 Other works have also studied more elitist and higher-class women’s social clubs in the region, such as Joan Marie Johnson and her study of South Carolina clubs, which were unrelated to home demonstration and its pedagogical benefits, but more political and anchored in the tense racial climate of the region she focuses on (Johnson 2004). It is also worth noting that while home economics was most definitely taught during the demonstration workshops that the interviewees mention, they do not discuss the content of the home economics knowledge they gathered, but rather reminisce about their overall respective experiences throughout their years as homemakers’ club members.

3 Some of the interviewees reminiscing on their lives fifty years later, their personal stories and interpretations—which could potentially be tainted with nostalgia and the desire to emphasize some aspects of their life successes—should obviously be considered through a critical perspective. These sources are thus partial, and other archives will be used to explain or corroborate them. Some administrative files of the Kentucky Home Demonstration and Extension Service offices, hosted at the University of Kentucky, as well as the personal records of Tennessee’s canning club organizer, archived at the University of Tennessee, will sporadically be used to expand club members’ testimonies. Yet, a greater emphasis will be put on club members’ perspectives on their experiences in homemakers’ clubs.

4 Except for the fact that interviewers were visiting the interviewees at home to record their responses on a tape recorder, there is a significant lack of information about the interview process. One may wonder why these particular women were selected—and why such a small number was interviewed out of all the current and former members. Judging from the interviews, there was no set list of pre-established questions and interviewers seemed free to go with the flow and question homemakers on topics that aroused their curiosity. There is thus no chronological thread in the stories told, and some uncertainty about the dates and periods when those experiences and life events took place.

5 Not much is known about the interviewers: according to the National Extension Homemakers Council Voices of American Homemakers records, Marion B. Mariner was a family life specialist with the University of Tennessee’s Agricultural Extension Service, and Mable Bertram was the former Kentucky State President of homemakers’ clubs, as well as a member of the Associated Country Women of the World. According to an obituary, Alpha R. Worrell, who conducted one Tennessee interview, was an Extension and

Family and Consumer Sciences leader. Alpha Ruth Worell 1933-2018. Available via: https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/jacksonsun/name/alpha-worrell-obituary?id=37349804. Consulted 17 October, 2024.

6 Historian John W. Blassingame warns about the limits of oral history and taking at face value the stories of Freedmen and ethnic minorities who lived under white supremacy and slavery. He argues that, for instance, having to recount their past experiences to unknown white persons may compel the interviewees to downplay some tragic events, and only tell parts of their lives, out of intimidation and feelings of insecurity (Blassingame 1975: 481).

7 To be as authentic as possible and show these women respect—some of whom did not get formal education—this article will not correct the grammatical mistakes that they made.

8 At the end of the nineteenth century, various reformers had also already introduced some of the mountains and most remote areas to progressive teachings that often took the form of demonstration workshops (Stoddart et al 1997: 63, 71-72).

9 Tennessee’s canning club demonstration work started under the USDA Farmers’ Cooperative Demonstration Work in 1911, and was later catalyzed by the 1914 Smith-Lever Act that provided federal funding to hire agents and professional workers; prior to this Act, in Kentucky, the university had established in 1913 an extension center that had already professionalized—to some extent—demonstration work (Lievin 2023: 40, 42).

10 History of the Kentucky Home Economics Association, 1922-1965, The University of Kentucky, Kentucky Home Demonstration and Extension Service records, box 3, Agricultural Extension 1920-1949 series (hereafter Agriculture records).

11 Moore’s personal papers are particularly revealing about the challenges that the Appalachian and rural topography represented: to visit her students, the reformer got off the train and walked miles of narrow dirt roads on the hillsides and in the valley hollows; Moore, untitled notepad, undated, The University of Tennessee, Virginia Moore’s papers, p. 2-4, box 1, series 1, folder 2 (hereafter Moore’s papers).

12 Ethel Jury, The University of Maryland, National Extension Homemakers Council Voices of American Homemakers records, p. 1 (hereafter HR). At the time of the interview, in 1981, Mrs. Jury was a housewife, mother of two, who had been a club member for over 28 years; she lived in Noctor, Breathitt County, in eastern Kentucky’s Appalachian Mountains.

13 The Upper South consists of Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, and the Virginias.

14 Ethel Jury, HR, p. 9.

15 Ethel Jury, HR, p. 8.

16 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1940-November 1941, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 15.

17 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1940-November 1941, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 19.

18 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1934-November 1935, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 5.

19 Anna Evans, HR, p. 3. Mrs. Evans was a widowed homemaker who had been a farmer, in addition to being a teacher, in Barren County, Kentucky.

20 Mary Jo Depew, HR, p. 10. Mrs. Depew was a mother of four and a social worker for the Laurel County Child Development Center. She joined a homemakers' club in 1960, at the age of twenty.

21 Mary Jo Depew, HR, p. 10.

22 Anna Evans, HR, p. 17.

23 Mary Fouts, HR, p. 2. Mrs. Fouts—who happens to be Mary Jo Depew's mother—, was a mother of nine who joined clubs in the early 1950s; her records do not list any other occupation than housewife and mother.

24 Anna Evans, HR, p. 7, 14.

25 Ethel Jury, HR, p. 11; Mary Fouts, HR, p. 2.

26 These new roles and powers granted to women truly echo the concept of Republican Motherhood, which Linda Kerber describes as the process of women's political socialization and participation in the civic culture in the late 18th century, from which they could—to limited yet meaningful extent—influence the political system. (Kerber 1980: 11-12, 284-85).

27 Mrs. P. W. Adkins, 1940 Report of State Citizenship Chairman, Agriculture records, box 3, Agricultural Extension 1920-1949 series, p. 1-2. It should be noted that even though Kentucky and Tennessee ratified the Nineteenth Amendment that enfranchised women in January and August 1920 respectively (Wheeler 1993: 172, 176), discriminatory policies—such as poll taxes and registration requirements—severely restricted many of their African American counterparts' rights, including voting, until the Civil Rights Act of 1965

(Corder et al 2016: 17). While archival documents relating to homemaking and clubs do emphasize the roles and significance of citizenship and voting, they nonetheless do not address the issue of segregation and appear to turn a blind eye to color-based voting restrictions.

28 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1935-November 1936, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 9.

29 Mrs. P. W. Adkins, 1940 Report of State Citizenship Chairman, Agriculture records, box 3, Agricultural Extension 1920-1949 series, p. 2.

30 Ethel Jury, HR, p. 6.

31 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1940-November 1941, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 22.

32 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1936-November 1937, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 8.

33 Ruth Schwartz Cowan, for instance, shows that no matter how time-saving new home devices have been supposed to be, women are still spending the same amount of time doing chores and domestic duties. New technologies have established news standards in cleanliness and domestic etiquette that still—to some degree—enslave women and have not relieved them of long and tedious housework routines (Cowan 1989: 211-13).

34 Tressa Waters, HR, p. 7; Mrs. Waters was a homemaker, mother of four, from Lebanon, Wilson County, Tennessee, who joined her first club in 1922.

35 Oma Lewis, HR, p. 8; Julia C. White, HR, p. 7. Mrs. Lewis was a mother of thirteen whose only occupation is listed as homemaker. Mrs. White, the only African American interviewee, was a college-educated housewife mother of four; born in 1922, her interview only mentions that she graduated high school and then went two years to college.

36 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1938-Novermber 1939, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 41.

37 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1938-Novermber 1939, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 43; and Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1935-Novermber 1936, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 38-39.

38 Oma Lewis, HR, p. 12.

39 Alton Cole, HR, p. 1. Alton Cole was a housewife, mother of nine, from Winchester County, Tennessee, who joined her first club in 1928.

40 Alton Cole, HR, p. 12.

41 Hauntie Nelson, HR, p. 4; Mrs. Nelson was a housewife, high-school graduate, and mother of four, from Fruitvale, Tennessee.

42 Oma Lewis, HR, p. 12.

43 Mrs. P. W. Adkins, 1940 Report of State Citizenship Chairman, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 2.

44 Anna Evans, HR, p. 10.

45 Alton Cole, HR, p. 7.

46 *Ibid*, p. 2.

47 The Lost Cause narrative, essentially racist and against African Americans' integration into the U.S. society, emerged after the Civil War as many white Southerners sought to portray the Confederacy in a positive light. They romanticized the "Old South" and the Confederate war effort, distorting history and downplaying slavery (Gallagher et al 2010: 12-14).

48 Oma Lewis, HR, p. 11.

49 Anna Evans, HR, p. 2, 5; Margie Brookshire, HR, p. 3. Mrs. Brookshire, who first ventured into demonstration club work during the 1940s in Kentucky's Breckinridge County, was the daughter of a Homemakers' club member.

50 Anna Evans, HR, p. 5.

51 Moore, "Tennessee's Early Tomato Club and Home Demonstration Work from 1911-1919," undated, Moore's papers, box 2, p. 15; Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1935-November 1936, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 3.

52 Oma Lewis, HR, p. 11.

53 Anna Evans, HR, p. 10.

54 Eric Hilt and Wendy M. Rahn argue that compared to Boy Scouts, women's clubs did not *significantly* contribute to the marketing and sales of war bonds (Hilt et al 2016: 99).

55 Alton Cole, HR, p. 3.

56 Moore, "Good Home Management, Yesterday and Today," undated (estimated 1930s), Moore's papers, box 2, p. 6.

57 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1940-November 1941, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 7.

58 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1941-November 1942, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 1-2.

59 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1938-Novermber 1939, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 32.

60 Anna Evans, HR, p. 3.

61 Tressa Waters, HR, p.3.

62 Anna Evans, HR, p. 6. The Associated Country Women of the World promoted causes such as literacy, health education, nutrition, home economics, agricultural training, economic citizenship, as well as community involvement (Ambrose 2015).

63 Margie Brookshire, HR, p. 17.

64 Anna Evans, HR, p. 7.

65 Annual Report of Home Demonstration Work, State of Kentucky, December 1932-November 1933, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 2.

66 Historian Alice Kessler-Harris argues that economic citizenship refers to the independent and largely self-sufficient status that enables full participation in the power dynamics and decision-making processes of a democratic society. Gaining economic citizenship implies the ability to support oneself —typically through the freedom to work in a chosen profession—, rights to fair treatment, opportunities for training, equitable access to resources, and participation in the marketplace (Kessler-Harris 2001: 12-13).

67 Moore, Canning Club Work, no. 1 (State Dpt. Of Education, undated), Moore's papers, box 2, p. 18-9.

68 Tressa Waters, HR, p. 8.

69 Hauntie Nelson, HR, p. 3.

70 Moore's personal notepad, undated, box 1, series 1, folder 1, Moore's papers.

71 Moore, "Tennessee's Early Tomato Club and Home Demonstration Work from 1911 to 1919," undated, pp.10, box 1, series 3, folder 17, Moore's papers.

72 Moore, "Tennessee's Early Tomato Club and Home Demonstration Work from 1911 to 1919," undated, pp.12, box 1, series 3, folder 17, Moore's papers.

73 Home Demonstration Work, estimated 1936, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 4.

74 Annual Report of the Section of Markets for the Calendar Year 1922, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 1-4.

75 Moore, "Tennessee's Early Tomato Club and Home Demonstration Work from 1911-1919," undated, Moore's papers, box 1, p. 10-11.

76 Maggie H. Landsen, untitled letter, undated, Moore's papers, box 2.

77 Home Demonstration Work, 1933, Agriculture records, box 3, p. 8. The figure equates to 12 million dollars today.

78 Tressa Waters, HR, p. 9.

79 Marie Jo Depew, HR, p. 8.

80 While marginalized women—such as African Americans and immigrants—often worked outside of their homes in addition to managing domestic responsibilities, it was less common for white women to engage in paid labor while raising young children. The interviewees seemed particularly content with their roles as homemakers during the years their children lived at home. They did not necessarily regard this arrangement as a privilege—though to some extent it was—but rather as a natural and proper way to fulfill the duties of motherhood.

81 Some interviewees note that the younger generations have turned to activities such as 4-H, an agricultural demonstration enterprise reminiscent of homemaking clubs. While women and teenagers growing up and living in the latter half of the twentieth century must not have relied on club membership as much as the older generation for social and economic empowerment, the interviewees nonetheless attest to the continued success of demonstration clubs, even into the early 1980s.

English

This article explores the political, economic and social dimensions of home demonstration workshops and homemakers' clubs in two U.S. Southern states, Tennessee and Kentucky, at the beginning of the 20th century. Held in the privacy of housewives' homes, these workshops offered training in cooking, sewing and canning, allowing these women to acquire economic skills as well as social and political awareness. By relying on a supportive community and under the guidance of club directors and demonstration agents, these club members transcended their socio-economic status, not-

ably entering economic markets. These workshops also enabled some of them to take on local and national political responsibilities and even to access influential positions. Based on oral interviews conducted in the early 1980s, this article offers a new vision of working- and middle-class Southern women: educated and active in the local communities, they were able to mix private and public spheres to impose themselves in a landscape often unfavorable to them.

Français

Cet article explore la dimension politique, économique et sociale des ateliers de démonstration domestique dans deux États du Sud états-unien, le Tennessee et le Kentucky, au début du XX^{e} siècle. Organisés dans l'intimité des domiciles de femmes au foyer, ces ateliers offraient des cours de cuisine, de couture et de mise en conserve, permettant à ces femmes d'acquérir des compétences économiques et une conscience sociale et politique. En s'appuyant sur une communauté d'entraide et sous la supervision de directrices de clubs, elles transcendèrent leur statut socio-économique, notamment en s'insérant dans des marchés économiques. Ces ateliers permirent aussi à certaines d'entre elles de prendre des responsabilités politiques locales et nationales et d'accéder même à des postes influents. Basé sur des entretiens oraux du début des années 1980, cet article offre une vision nouvelle des femmes des classes moyenne et ouvrière du Sud : instruites et actives dans l'économie locale, elles ont su mêler sphère privée et publique pour s'imposer dans un contexte souvent défavorable.

Mots-clés

démonstration domestique, économie domestique, mouvement progressiste, réforme municipale, histoire orale, Sud des États-Unis

Keywords

home demonstration, domestic economics, Progressive movement, municipal reform, oral history, U.S. South

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