

African Americans and Southern Food

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African American foodways, or soul food, developed in the South and have become a distinctive cuisine.

Race History and Southern Food

Southern food encompasses the cultural identity of three races: African, Native American, and White. Throughout the years from the beginning of the Americas to present day, Southern food has taken the influences from these races and evolved around them. The collision of these three races make Southern food what we think of today. Although each race had a different role in creating southern food, the foodway would be vastly different without the contribution of each race.

Native Americans laid the foundation for Southern food. The Natives first learned the land and had basic farming techniques years before the settlers arrived. "Documentary evidence confirms that Indians were irrigating at the time of Contact, and ethnographic studies indicate that irrigation remains important for many of these people" (Doolittle). They knew what grew on the land, and what grew best where. This truly helped the settlers because they then had a basis of what could be grown. Although the Natives were often farming on a small scale, the settlers took note of what was growing and thriving. "Documentary descriptions of gardens are early, numerous, and come from most parts of the continent. These accounts indicate that small household plots were intensive, botanically diverse, and culturally and economically important" (Doolittle). The Europeans then were able to introduce their crops from the old world to America. The food that was eaten at this time was simply what Natives grew and what the Europeans brought over that would grow on southern land. Southern food was not what we conceptualize it as until the Columbian exchange occurred.

The Columbian Exchange changed American, especially southern, food ways in the greatest way. This exchange of food, animals, diseases and humans created a culture change in the Americas. The introduction of African "crops brought directly from Africa during the transatlantic slave trade include rice, okra, tania, blackeyed peas, and kidney and lima beans (Holloway)." The foods selected to bring to America were brought over for specific reasons. "They all remain palatable long after harvesting and were thus ideal for use on the slow voyage from Africa. Secondly, they are all the edible parts of plants that thrive in the American South, and therefore they flourished once they had been planted hopefully by the slave in the garden space allotted to him on his owner 's plantation" (Wilson). By allowing the slaves to have some of their native foods, it helped them to assimilate to American life. Because of these foods, they were able to blend and form new food types and dishes. Without these foods being brought over some of the staple Southern foods, such as gumbo, would not be in existence.

African food ways changed when they were brought over to the Americas and became slaves. Although, most owners gave their slaves a small plot of land for them to farm and provide their own food. This allowed them to cultivate their native foods and remain true to their old traditions. "According to Ferguson, the slaves simmered one-pot stews and sauces over central hearths in their homes. Using familiar ingredients slaves ate with their hands and drank from Colono-ware bowls or gourds" (Fountain). In addition to the land, "owners gave slaves discarded animal parts, such as hog

maw (stomach), hog jowl, pig's feet, and ham hocks. Blacks took this throwaway and added a touch of African culinary techniques to create tasty dishes" (Holloway). The continuation of their previous culinary traditions along with the mixing of the discarded food that they owners gave them, allowed for the creation of what is considered soul food. Although upper-class southerners did not accept the southern food that the slaves were eating until the antebellum period, the dishes that were created are synonymous with Southern food now.

Slave owners often had African women be their cooks. In the beginning, many owners refused to eat the native food brought from Africa. "Dietary prejudices being among our most unreasonable biases, such culinary strangers could be tolerated in the cabin of the slave, but they were not at first considered suitable for the owner's table" (Wilson). However, over time the owners began to experiment and give the cooks more leeway in preparing the food. "African cooks in the Big House introduced their native African crops and foods to the planters, thus becoming intermediary links in the melding of African and European culinary cultures" (Holloway). After the owners and their wives readily accepted the African versions and dishes of what they ate, they began to take ownership of some of the dishes. "When they were finally included among the ingredients employed in the earliest cookery books written by Southerners for use in the South, the four slave foods [they are the peanut, the okra, the cowpea (particularly the black-eyed pea), and the sesame] had successfully crossed class barriers" (Wilson). Without the slave owner's acceptance, many of the African techniques and dishes Southern food would lack any African influence.



Southern Food is a conglomeration of races that began in the beginnings of America, has transformed, and continues on today. "From their food traditions Africans contributed greatly to the culinary taste of America. Southern cooking is a cultural experience to which both blacks and whites contributed; however, today black cuisine is strongly influenced by the African style of cooking, a carryover of this antebellum period" (Holloway). Slave food later transitioned into a food type

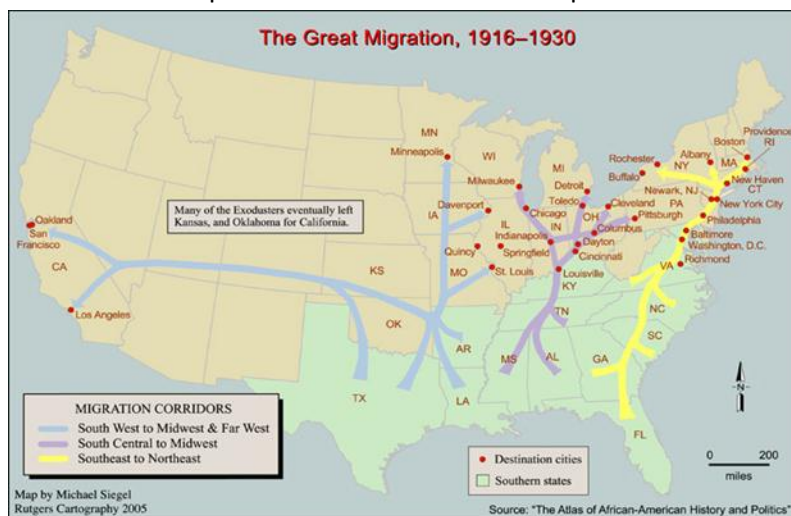
that became embraced and a source of pride. African Americans changed the name into soul food and gave it a completely new meaning. African Americans in the South carried on the traditions of slave eating and continued it in a different way that held on to their past but also integrated the future.

The Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North

The Great Migration, or the relocation of more than 6 million African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North, Midwest and West from 1916 to 1970, had a huge impact on urban life in the United States. Blacks were forced from their homes for a various amount of reasons. Because of unfair economic opportunities and harsh segregationist laws, many blacks headed north, where they took advantage of the need for industrial workers that first arose during the First World War. Migrants headed to Chicago, New York and other cities and were required to deal with poor working conditions and competition for living space, as well as widespread racism and prejudice. During this entire affair, African Americans began to form a new place for themselves in public life, actively confronting

economic, political and social challenges and creating a new black urban culture that would exert enormous influence in the decades to come.

After the post-Civil War Reconstruction period ended in 1876, white supremacy reestablished



itself across the South, and the segregationist policies known as Jim Crow laws soon became the enforcing law of the land. Southern blacks had to make their living working the land as sharecroppers, which offered little income, especially after a boll weevil epidemic in 1898. While the Ku Klux Klan had been officially disassembled in 1869, it continued underground, and terrorization, violence and even lynching of black

southerners were not uncommon practices in the Jim Crow South.

When World War I started in Europe, food prices in the southern United States increased, and business depression occurred that lasted until the summer of 1915. With war production kicking into high gear, recruiters enticed African Americans to come north, to the dismay of white Southerners. Black newspapers, particularly the widely read *Chicago Defender*, published advertisements touting the opportunities available in the cities of the North and West, along with first-person accounts of success.

The article “The Origins of Soul Food in Black Urban Identity: Chicago, 1915-1947” emphasizes the actual statistics of black migration to northern cities. By the end of 1919, some 1 million blacks had left the South, usually traveling by train, boat or bus; a smaller number had automobiles or even horse-drawn carts (Poe 19). Tracey Poe writes, “in the decade between 1910 and 1920, the black population of major Northern cities grew by large percentages, including New York (66 percent) Chicago (148 percent), Philadelphia (500 percent) and Detroit (611 percent)” (21). Many new arrivals found jobs in factories, slaughterhouses and foundries, where working conditions were arduous and sometimes dangerous. Female migrants had a harder time finding work, spurring heated competition for domestic labor positions. Aside from competition for employment, there was also competition for living space in the increasingly crowded cities. While segregation was not legalized in the North (as it was in the South), racism and prejudice were widespread. After the U.S. Supreme Court declared racially based housing ordinances unconstitutional in 1917, some residential neighborhoods enacted covenants requiring white property owners to agree not to sell to blacks; these would remain legal until the Court struck them down in 1948. Rising rents in segregated areas, plus a resurgence of KKK activity after 1915, weakened black and white relations across the country. The summer of 1919 began the greatest period of interracial strife in U.S. history, including a disturbing wave of race riots. The most serious took place in Chicago in July 1919; it lasted 13 days and left 38 people dead, 537 injured and 1,000 black families without homes.

As a result of housing tensions, many blacks ended up creating their own cities within big cities, promoting the growth of a new urban African American culture. The most obvious example was Harlem in New York City. Before the migration it was an all-white neighborhood, but by the 1920s housed some 200,000 African Americans (Great Migration). The black experience during the Great Migration became an important theme in the artistic movement known first as the New Negro Movement and later as the Harlem Renaissance, which would have a huge impact on the culture of the era (Great Migration). The Great Migration also began a new era of increasing political activism among African Americans, who after being disenfranchised in the South found a new place for themselves in public life in the cities of



The flag of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People, hanging outside the NAACP offices at 69 Fifth Avenue, New York, in 1920. Lynchings increased during the 1910s, with the lynching of Willie Brown in Omaha, Nebraska, on September 28, 1919, being perhaps the most infamous of them all. (Library of Congress)

the North and West. Black migration slowed noticeably in the 1930s, when the country sank into the Great Depression, but picked up again with the coming of World War II.

Throughout all this migration, war, relocation, and more, African Americans still carried with them their food and religious traditions. This is how soul food came to be in the northern cities, and also, how it developed and evolved into different foods. The reason for this evolution was because black families did not have access to the same ingredients they once had in the South.

Therefore, they had to make substitute

different ingredients in and make entirely new recipes.

By 1970, when the Great Migration ended, its demographic impact was definite. Before in 1900, nine out of every ten black Americans lived in the South, and three out of every four lived on farms, by 1970 the South was home to less than half of the country's African Americans, with only 25 percent living in the region's rural areas.

African American Women's Stereotypes

Throughout the birth of the United States of America women have been placed in the kitchen by society especially women of color. One of the higher positions a female slave could hold was to be a cook or mammy. The "Black Mammy" had the responsibility to care for the children of the family as her main duty, but she would also have responsibilities concerning household chores to help relieve the white mistress of work. The Mammy would also be in charge of the other slaves in the house (Parkhurst 3). A Mammy was a refined slave that was held to higher expectations and reflected her master more than the other slaves. She received special treatment from the other slaves on plantations due to her leadership skills and reputation at the master's home (Parkhurst 7). A Mammy became a common occurrence in southern homes, and was known as the catchall slave, meaning she could do it all. This form of slavery began to appear later in more households than just the wealthy plantations. The middle class and even the poor had the ability to seek care from a Mammy for their children, as well as

household chores and work in the fields (Parkhurst 4). This position formed a distorted relationship with the family that she worked for as a “unique type of foster motherhood” (Parkhurst 5). Mammies were the child rearing force behind the South that could fill in any duty from cleaning to cooking to raising children. Many “old gentlemen of the South” give credit to their mammies for raising them (Parkhurst 22).

However, for some African American women it seemed that being a mammy was as good as it could get for a black female slave. There are other accounts that show the life of a mammy was very difficult. An unknown Negro nurse or mammy talks about the transition of becoming a servant for white homes starting at the age of only ten years old. She began as the lowest house servant and climbed the ladder of servitude. Before her graduation to a mammy she climbed the ladder of servitude for eight years as a cook, showing the importance of comfort in southern food. The Negro nurse points out the African American race in the early twentieth century, years after slavery was abolished, African Americans were still acting as slaves in the households of whites. They were still cooking their homemade recipes in the luxury kitchens of the white race. The southern cooking was not out of a recipe book but rather by memory or guesswork with no kind of formal training.

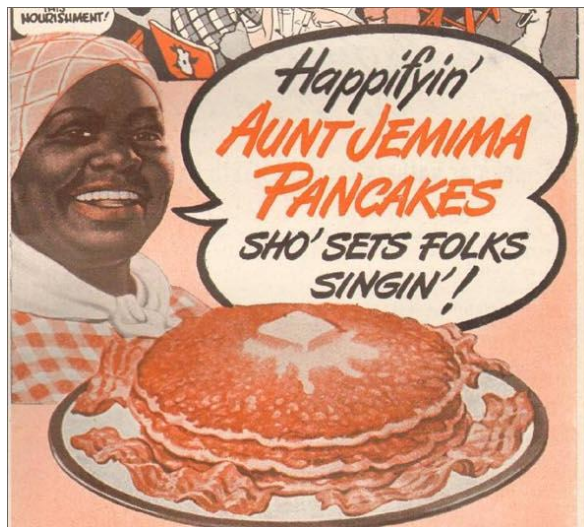
The years after abolition were years of transition for many African Americans. The women in this transition saw little change in their lives. Mammies in this transitional period became a way to maintain social class privileges and to show that even after slavery things are still the same in the Old South (Morgan 3). Mammies were portrayed in arts as the large figured black woman with an apron on and emerging from the kitchen with food in her hands. This portrayal foreshadows the future role that mammies will play in advertisement (Morgan 6). The African American woman had subjected to a stereotype in this time period that lasted throughout time to even modern times due to advertisement along with the efforts of the writers and publishers of this time period. This stereotype is referenced towards the idea of African American women belonging only in the kitchen. These women were glorified and praised in writings and advertisement (Morgan 11). Fictional characters were created to serve as the highly desired African American slave as either the best cook in the South or the mammy taking care of the white children (Morgan 12). African



American women were portrayed through art as larger women with heavier hands and strength to be able to stir and move the heavy iron cookware. This artistic portrayal of African American women shows the social expectations for them in the kitchen. African American women faced this stereotype, which made it harder for them to progress in life out of the kitchen.

Plantations from the Old South draw up a sense of pride and heritage among many southerners still. Some Plantations have been transformed into historic sites and tourist attractions. Gift shops are usually towards the end of the tours and sell Old South trinkets ranging from confederate flags to figurines depicting slaves (Adams 1). Many people have since taken advantage of these nostalgic

memories by capitalizing on the Old South and stereotypes linked with it. These plantation homes now serve as a reminder of the transition from the Old South to the new century. However plantations are not the only structures in the south that claim to hold to these memories. Restaurants are also in this capitalization of the Old South. Dooky Chase's, one of the most famous African American restaurants, serves "Planter's Punch" using the nostalgic memories of slavery and mammies in the kitchen (Adams 6).



Black memorabilia has tended to always portray the African Americans in a racist manner, and even in modern times these depictions leave many racist images of African American women. The most famous racial depiction of African American women is Aunt Jemima, which depicts a large full figured black woman with an apron and bandana on. The writers have embellished the existence of Aunt Jemima and portrayed her as the faithful loyal servant to her master and the south as well as being an amazing cook of pancakes (Adams 3). They even portrayed her as the "happy" former slave wanting to stay on her plantation and continue to serve her master even after the war was over (Adams 4).

This image of Aunt Jemima was important to advertisement because at the time that many foreigners began to move in and the rural people began to move to the city the stereotype that African American women can cook was a common knowledge among these people (Morgan 5). In 1955 Aylene Lewis was cooking pancakes at Aunt Jemima at Disneyland showing the impact that this product had on a lasting image depicting African American women as cooks and appealing to the majority white crowd at Disneyland during this time period (Adams 4). The image of a black Aunt Jemima serving Cinderella at Disneyland should say it all, even in the 1950's the white audience clung to the nostalgic memories of the Old South and the images of African Americans serving them their food (Adams 4).

Not only were black people well known for their cooking abilities, but what they cooked was important as well. African Americans' soul food included things such as fried chicken, hoecakes, and a heaping mess of vegetables. Fried chicken was a very significant food that

followed black people into today's time. In the New York Amsterdam News, the Giant Food Store ran an ad for fried chicken in honor of black history month. This enraged African American people so much that

um-m-m!
um-m-m!
m-m-m!

**Yo' next range should be a
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**GENERAL ELECTRIC
AUTOMATIC RANGES**
Automatic, precision temperature control.
Conventional speed controls, all controls
grouped at point of greatest utility.
Inlet mixing pans, enamel roasting
surface.
3 Hi-Speed Calrod surface units.
Thrift Cooker with puddling pan.
Oven (14" x 14" x 14") with two fast heat-
ing Calrod units.
New sliding oven shelves.
Aluminum enameled broiler pan.
Large warming rack equipped with Calrod
heating unit.
Two large storage drawers on self-lifting
roller bearings.
10 Dishwasher. 31-1/2 Range. \$69.50
Model. Price not in law. **\$69.50**
P.A.S.

A GENERAL ELECTRIC RANGE simplifies the art of good cooking. Without specialized cooking skill you can serve delicious meals that will turn delicate appetites into raving, robust hunger, that will tempt the most fussy taste.

The automatically controlled, precision temperatures of a G-E Range eliminate failures. Health giving vitamins and all the delicious natural flavors of foods are served at the table—not cooked away in the kitchen.

General Electric, the world's largest manufacturer of electrical products—the leader in electrical research and development for more than half a century, has modernized electric cooking. The famous G-E Hi-Speed Calrod heating unit gives swifter and far more economical cooking heat—is more durable and lasts longer.

In easy utility, in matchless performance, in outstanding beauty, General Electric Automatic Electric Ranges are years ahead—yet you pay no premium. G-E prices are low—no more than you might pay for an ordinary electric range.

General Electric Ranges are beautifully styled in the modern mode of kitchen design. They can be placed flush against the walls and adjoining cabinets. General Electric Company, Specialty Appliances Dept., Inc., 377 N. Park, Cleveland, Ohio.

one man contacted the manager and have it removed (“Black History Month Special”). But it shows how this stereotype carried on into many generations. Much of what started this stereotype came from the story of the waiter carriers from Psyche Williams-Forsson’s book *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs*. Black women would stand alongside trains in order to sell chicken to make a little money. This was when there was no air conditioning in the trains, therefore leaving a reason for the passengers to leave their windows down. But also, in Psyche’s book she reminds us of another story that brought about the fried chicken attachment to African Americans. Whenever black people went on trips, it was customary for them to bring a boxed lunch, seeing as they would not be served very appealing food on the train, if they were offered that option at all. This classic association of African American people to chicken carried on into many generations. The picture to the side is advertising an electric appliance in order to cook chicken “without specialized training.” It shows how white-dominated manufacturers were using the people’s color and typical food they served as a way to sell a product.

Southern Fried Chicken Recipe

Yields: 4 to 6 servings

Prep time: 15 min Cook time: 30 min

Ingredients:

2 (2 1/2 to 3 pound) whole frying chicken, cut up for frying* Salt and freshly-ground black pepper 3 cups all-purpose flour 1 1/2 cups lard or solid vegetable shortening

Preparation:

Place the chicken pieces in a basin of cold water and soak for a few minutes. Remove from water and drain well; pat dry with paper towels. Season generously with salt and pepper. In a large plastic bag, add flour; close the bag and shake to dust the inside of the bag.

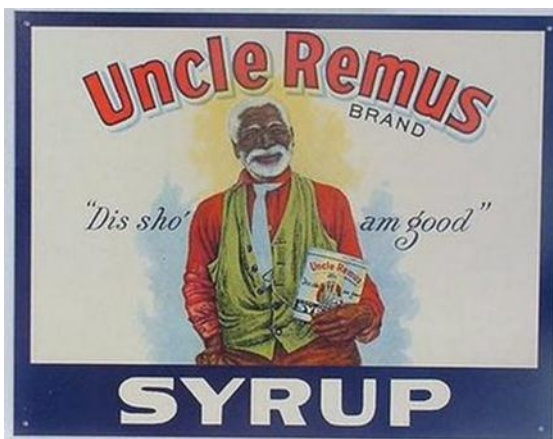
In a large, deep cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat, melt the lard or shortening and bring to 350 degrees F. (hot but not smoking). To test the temperature of the oil, drop a pinch of flour into the pan; flour should float and sizzle on hot oil. If the flour sinks to the bottom of the pan and disperses, oil is not hot enough for frying.

Beginning with the dark meat (dark meat takes longer to cook than white meat), drop the chicken, a few pieces at a time, into the plastic bag; close the bag and shake until the pieces are thoroughly coated. Remove pieces from bag, shaking off excess flour, and place into the hot fat. Repeat until all chicken pieces are coated and in the pan. If you do not have a large enough pan, use two pans or cook the chicken in batches. If you fry in batches, preheat the oven to 150 degrees F. to hold the cooked chicken. Do not hold chicken for more than 30 minutes or the chicken will dry out.

Reduce heat to medium; fry the chicken slowly 12 to 15 minutes or until the bottom side of each piece is a rich golden brown. Carefully turn the chicken pieces and continue cooking an additional 12 minutes or until each piece is golden brown on all sides and a meat thermometer registers an internal temperature of 165 degrees F. (juices will run clear when cut with the tip of a knife). Remove and let drain on paper towels.

More discrimination ensued in years to come for African Americans in the media, from advertisements to jokes from popular comedians. Many white people portrayed black people as dumb and illiterate. The

pictures of the Cream of Wheat and Uncle Remus advertisements show this point in the wording



demonstrated on the images by the poor grammar, mechanics, and spelling errors. This goes back to the way white advertising agencies would use their perceptions of African American people in order to sell products and, in turn, make a mockery of the people themselves. But these were not the only advertisements that were made about African American people. In the *Index on Censorship* there was a piece released about the outrage from African American people in response to a commercial for ice cream. When it played on televisions the tune played “Eeny

Meeny Miney Moe... Catch a Nigger by the Toe.” This children’s nursery rhyme indicative of the Great Migration when white people traveled to many countries in order to pick up African Americans to keep as slaves in the United States (“Chocolate Cock-Up”). One of the last examples to be discussed is the very famous restaurant known as the Coon Chicken Inn, founded by Maxon Lester Graham and Adelaide Burt in 1925 (*Building Houses*). The restaurant, owned and operated by black people, is surprisingly very discriminatory towards the African American people. Upon entering one of the three chains, one walks

through the open, smiling mouth of a large-lipped black man. Once inside, every item of memorabilia, including menus, toothpicks, and more, are of black people seemingly happy to be serving the white customers. From the testimonies of the



employees, they seemed upset about the amount of discrimination of their own race in the restaurant, but it sure did bring a large, predominantly white, crowd. This is just one example of the persistent stereotypes following African Americans and food.

Tradition of Soul Food

From the first encounters with Native Americans, to the colonization of the New World, and to the slaves laboring for years in the kitchen comes a unique type of food and cuisine. This cuisine being that of African Americans, soul food. Soul food is a type of African American cuisine that is a celebrated and historic part of their culture dating all the way back to before the colonial era. It is a combination of West African societies and cultural influences as well as the adaptations blacks made to the conditions of slavery and freedom in the Americas. Soul food grew and developed hand in hand with African Americans in their constant changing role in the United States of America. There is a strong connection between the social and religious relationship between people of African descent and their cuisine. Many

people, of all ethnicities, believe the idea that there is “soul” personified in these particular foods, and for African Americans, soul food is an embodiment of pride. These foods are epitomes of everything blacks have been through and survived through.

Enslavement forced African American cooks to adapt new ingredients into their diet. The African American cooks frequently had to use unfamiliar ingredients to cook the foods their masters requested. The cook’s natural intuition about food and ability to improvise made it possible for the cooks to prepare these foreign dishes with, their “soul.” In the book *Hog and Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America*, the author Fredrick Douglass Opie emphasizes that “without timing and skill a cook had no soul worth talking about” and reveals how “soul food was nitty-gritty food that tasted good and helped African Americans survive during difficult times” (137). Cooking soul food is a quality only bestowed upon African Americans by virtue of their unique experiences and journeys. Ownership of soul food, a type of cuisine now enjoyed by all in America, has long been debated and fought over. Although they are products of radically different cultural environments, southern and soul food seem to go hand in hand with one another. It is difficult to imagine soul food without sweet potato pie, though the origins of the dish are rooted in the English pie making tradition. Pork, copious amounts of salt, and meat used as a garnish quickly made their way into slaves’ cuisine due to their English masters.

Something that was consistent throughout all ordeals though for African Americans was religion. Africans already had a well-developed religious life even before forced migration that included iconic food served in a particular way, so basically “soul” was already flowing through the veins of African Americans even before the development of soul food. Religion has been an immense part of African American lives since the beginning of their existence. Although plantation owners in America influenced African-American religion, it was still something unique to them and the African Americans that adopted it, much like soul food. “There’s Nothing like Church Food” is an article from 1995 about the spiritual connection between African Americans and their foods. It describes the “connection between food and spirituality, as spirituality and food are greatly intertwined” in African societies and have clear association with “African American communities throughout the new world” (Dodson and Gilkes 520). Ritual moments occur at homes and in churches and usually revolve around a meal or foods. A large amount of African American churches emerged after the emancipation proclamation; religion was only practiced quietly on the plantations but soon grew to become the centerpiece of the African American culture. Religion allowed the African American a sense of freedom and services and became a site for friendly cooking competitions and community building. Foods such as chitterlings, sweet potato pie, macaroni and cheese, hogs head, and pork-infused collard greens became the symbol of a rich tradition that remained long after the shackles of slavery were abolished. These rich traditions were the basis of soul food as people know it today.

Unlike the ever-changing political and social definitions of African Americans, the idea of African soul remains firmly intact and steady throughout. This is an idea that propelled African Americans across the nation to support a movement nationwide for freedom and equality. Through history, African Americans have had the ability to survive almost all the hardships thrown their way, the periods of slavery, racism, and oppression, just to name a few. In America, this story is reflected in the development of soul food. Today the contemporary African-American cuisine takes inspiration from many slave recipes and Southern cuisine.

The recipes and techniques are passed down from generation to generation. Many of these recipes are kept secret within the family, because they want it to stay unique with their family only. Not only are they kept secret, but most of the recipes are oral, not even written. Some cooks may share the obvious ingredients, but not the ones that make the recipe different than any other. An example may be adding an extra clove of garlic or a dash of cinnamon. Food was a way to be different. Henderson says, "soul food was used as means by which blacks defined themselves apart from the white middle class," (Henderson 81-97).

Black Americans were given the lower paying jobs throughout the early and mid-nineteen hundreds, so cheap food and foods that could be grown were ideal. Some examples of this would be chitterlings and collard greens. Also, corn bread was eaten with most meals because it was cheap to make, filling, and requires minimal ingredients. Most white people would not eat it. As African American maids prepared these foods, though, it became popular among the white population. Whites saw that these types of food were not so bad after all, if prepared the right way

Corn Bread

Ingredients:

1 3/4 cups white cornmeal
 1 teaspoon baking powder
 1 teaspoon baking soda
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 2 cups buttermilk
 1 large egg
 3 tablespoons shortening or bacon grease



Instructions:

Start by preheating your oven to 450 degrees. Put a 9" cast iron skillet on the stove over medium heat and put the shortening in the skillet. Mix all the dry ingredients together in one bowl. Mix the egg and buttermilk together in another bowl. Mix the dry and wet ingredients together. When you start to see little wisps of smoke coming from the hot shortening, pour most, not all of the shortening into the cornbread batter and mix well. Then pour the batter into the hot skillet and enjoy the sizzling sound that guarantees a nice crisp crust. Place in the middle of the preheated oven and bake about 30 minutes, until nice and brown on top.

Serve with butter, pinto beans or collards with pot liquor, and consider yourself blessed. And if you want something sweet, put some molasses on there with the butter.

Soul food has evolved into somewhat of a prestigious food, because now we eat it at upscale restaurants famous for their soul food. Many restaurants are world renown for their soul food. In reality "soul food" was prepared and eaten by the poorest of people as a means of survival. Now it can be found anywhere from Husk, an upscale restaurant in Charleston, South Carolina to St. Cottons, a small family owned restaurant in Macon, Georgia. This food obviously did not start out in restaurants though.

Much of what we know today as soul food evolved from basic garden vegetables. African Americans grew a lot of what they ate in their gardens, because they had to rely on themselves to provide food. Because money was minimal, they bought seeds that would constantly produce instead of just buying one batch of something. Take collard green for example, they grow all year long and are nutritious. Greens along with many other vegetables were the staple food for African Americans. They seasoned their vegetable usually with left over pork meat and fat that could be bought with little money.

Basic Soul Food Collard Greens

Ingredients:

4-6 bunches of collard cleaned and steamed
 5 slices of bacon
 1 smoked ham hock
 1 large chopped onion
 seasoning salt to taste
 1 bunch of green onions (optional)
 black pepper to taste
 7 cups of water



Instructions:

Lay collard greens on top of each other, (no more than 4 at a time) roll and then cut in half with a knife. Cut even smaller if you have large leaves. Line the bottom of a large stock pot with the bacon. Cook on medium heat until done, obtaining as much bacon grease as possible. Add the water to the stock pot and the grease and bring to a boil. Now add the 1/2 of the chopped onion, ham hock, pepper and salt to taste. Let mixture boil for 10 minutes. Add the collard greens, other half of the onions and more salt and pepper to taste if desired to the stock pot. Rapidly boil for 45 minutes. Reduce heat and let simmer for 4-6 hours. Serve with green onions.

Food has a way of bringing people together, especially soul food. Slocum exemplifies the role food has in the creation of relationships and solidity, “Embracing soul food is a statement of racial pride precisely because it reclaims food previously despised—those animal parts that slaves had to eat and those that their owners would not” (Rachel Slocum). Through food, African Americans gained pride and kept their culture unique from that of the white man. They did this by continuing to eat the “trash” meats that the white man would not. One example would be chitterlings, fried pig intestines. Continuing to eat things like this showed their pride for past ways of life. The shame of having to eat the cheap food is now gone and has been replaced with joy. These foods have evolved into more than necessity. They are wanted by many because they taste good and the tradition and meaning behind it is so important to the African American culture.

Chitterlings

Ingredients:

10-pound bucket fresh or frozen chitterlings (before they could be bought frozen women would take them out of the pig and clean them to cook fresh)

Cold water to cover

1 cup cider vinegar

5 bay leaves

2 large onions, coarsely chopped

2 large potatoes, peeled and coarsely chopped

1 green or red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and coarsely chopped

3 cloves garlic, minced

Salt and freshly-ground black pepper to taste

Hot pepper sauce



Preparation:

If chitterlings are frozen, thaw. Using a small soft brush, clean chitterlings thoroughly; rinse in several changes of cold water. Cut into 1 1/2 to 2-inch pieces. Place the cleaned chitterlings into a large pot; cover with water and vinegar. Add bay leaves, onions, potatoes, green or red pepper, garlic, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil; turn heat to low and simmer for 2 1/2 to 3 hours or until chitterlings are tender. Remove from heat; drain well. Serve with your favorite hot pepper sauce. Makes 6 servings.

Soul food is not just a type of food; it's a tradition and relationship creator. I asked Mrs. Cotton of St. Cotton's restaurant, "What makes soul food different?" She responded, "Well, I would say the difference in our food, the reason we call it soul food is because we do a lot of praying." Soul brings people together, especially religiously. At any banquet in most southern churches you can find soul food. Traditionally one prays before they eat to thank God for what they have and the nourishment they are about to receive.

Soul food restaurants are becoming more common now because the demand for soul food is so large. These types of restaurant can be found all over the United States from California to New York to, of course, Georgia. California is home to R&R Soul Food, which serves traditional soul food: mac-n-cheese, collard greens, and meatloaf. One from the South may not treat this as "real" soul food, but



nonetheless it shows people from all over love it. They love it not just because it tastes good, but also the meanings it holds like faith, home, and warmth.

Many people incorporate southern food with soul food, because they are very similar. Soul food is different because of the techniques that are used in preparing it and the customs that it encompasses. Though all southern food is not soul food, soul food is southern. The great thing about

soul food is the cook. No matter where you go it is the cook who makes the meal. The same dish can be made so many different ways but still all is soul food. For example the Cottons at St. Cotton's found that Christians are not supposed to eat pork so they use smoked turkey neck instead to season their vegetables. Whether the skills used or the prayer before, soul food has its own unique feel, taste and overall setting in which one may eat it.

Green Beans With Smoked Turkey Neck

2 lbs green beans (trimmed and cut into 1/2 inch pieces)

2 quarts low sodium chicken broth

5 crushed garlic cloves

1 onion, quartered

2 lbs smoked turkey necks (about 4-5 necks)

1 teaspoon Mrs. Dash seasoning mix

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon pepper

Directions:

Put turkey necks, broth, garlic, onion, and seasonings in a pot and bring to a boil. Turn heat down and let simmer for 45 minutes to an hour. Add green beans; bring back to a boil. Turn down heat and simmer til fork tender or to taste (about 45 - 60 minutes). Adjust seasonings to taste

"Smoked Turkey neck tastes just as good and some customers love it better," (Geraldine Cotton). God and religion have a lot to do with soul food. Of course its name explains it all "soul." Soul food is made with a lot of heart and love. Prayer almost always accompanies a meal of soul food whether it is in a church, house, or restaurant.

Contemporary African Food

Soul Food gives African Americans an identity, set them apart. This was the food African Americans ate during slavery and after slavery ended. Contemporary African American foods are influenced by African foods through the cultural exchange dating back to the Columbus exchange and the Middle Passage (travel from Africa to the Americas) in the late 1400s and early 1500s. There are two basic ways to approach the issue of African influences on African American foods. One approach is to look at the original crops that were brought to the Americas from Africa. Another approach is to closely examine how ingredients, regardless of their initial locus of domestication, were prepared and seasoned.

In his book, *Hog and Hominy*, Fredrick Opie explains that in the fifteen through the seventeenth century, there was a great amount of creolization and mixing of different ethnic groups in the Atlantic World. According to Douglas Brent Chambers, Africans in the New World did not entirely face a different environment when they arrived in the Americas: they were introduced to American plants before they reached the New World and were operating within familiar agriculture in colonial America. Africans in Virginia grew kale, cabbages, mustard leaves, black-eyed peas, gourds, okra, spinach, squash,

watercress, watermelon, yams, corn, pumpkins, and peanuts. These foods were indigenous to the Americas but they were incorporated by people of Igboland, an ethnic group in West Africa, most likely by the early or mid-seventeenth century. Yams, eggplants, bananas, plantains, rice, millet, cassava/manioc, and Malegueta peppers are other examples of African food crops in the era of the slave trade” (Opie 2). These crops are used in the daily cooking of African Americans. Therefore by utilizing these crops, African Americans gained a sense of identity due to their ancestors coming from this continent.

Even though crops that were domesticated in Africa were incorporated in the diets of African Americans, it was not the only thing that influenced the foods of these individuals. According to Jessica Harris, Africans brought techniques such as frying in deep oil, toasting in the ashes, steaming in leaves, one-pot stewing, slow-cooking, okra-based gumbos, composed rice dishes and more. Enslaved Africans passed down their techniques, such as preparing and seasoning foods, to their children who in return passed it down to their children. Therefore, the cooking of African Americans has traces of African cooking dating back in the slavery period. Robert Hall writes, “while acknowledging that African American cooking is certainly a derivative of African cuisine, it is largely developed as a result of the exigencies of life as a slave” (Hall). During slavery, slaves ate soul food, traditional black cookery originating in the South. It was also the food that slaves incorporated in their diets after emancipation. Stephan Palmie writes, “African cooks who served in the kitchens here in America were “trained” by French cooks who received their training from African cooks in the kitchens of the colonies.”

Soul food has traces of African influences due to the crops and techniques utilized. In her book, *High on the Hog*, Jessica Harris describes various recipes that were of African origin that have been incorporated to the food ways of African Americans. She talks about a popular dish known as Sauce Gumbo. She says this is a simple vegetarian version of a classic West African sauce that came from Benin, a nation that sent many to the United States in the hold of slave ships. In Benin, it might be eaten over pounded yam or another traditional starch, but in the United States it can be served over rice. The ingredients usually include water, fresh okra, ripe tomatoes, habanero chili, salt and freshly ground black pepper. The okra, tomatoes, and chili and water are added in a heavy saucepan and bring to a boil for about ten minutes or until the okra is fork-tender.

Yassa au poulet is another dish that Jessica Harris describes in her book. This is originally a French recipe that was brought to a country in West Africa, Senegal. They adopted the dish and it travelled here to the states. It includes freshly squeezed lemon juice, sliced onions, salt, freshly ground black pepper, peanut oil, habanero chili. This dish is prepared and marinated the night before by mixing the lemon juice, onions, salt and pepper, peanut oil and the chili in a deep bowl. The chicken is cut to pieces and is later placed in the marinade and when everything is seasoned the bowl is covered with plastic wrap and refrigerated overnight. This sauce is usually served hot over white rice.

Rice Gruel is another dish from Africa. It is simply rice that is boiled until it breaks down into porridge, a lot like the rice porridges that were served aboard slave ships. But this rice has been adjusted to be tastier by the addition of sugar and cinnamon. Jessica Harris goes on to state that various types of succotash were eaten by tribes on the eastern seaboard. They were later adopted by African Americans to include such ingredients as okra, tomatoes, and even black-eyed peas. Another popular sauce is called Gumbo. This is made by peeling two quarts of ripe tomatoes, mix them with two quarts of young pods of ochre, and chop them small; put them in a stew pan, without any water; add four ounces of

butter, and salt and pepper to taste, and boil them gently and steadily for one hour; then past it through a sieve into a tureen, and send to table with it, crackers, toasts, or light bread. These foods originated in West and Central Africa. To find traces of them in America shows how Africans kept some of their culture and passed it down to their children. By analyzing these dishes, one can see the importance that the food practices of Africans help create the dishes of African Americans.

Fritters sold on the street of New Orleans by African American Women

Calas are rice fritters that trace back to the grain of West Africa. The Vai people of the rice growing regions of Sierra Leone and Liberia were represented in the southern slave census. To them, the word for uncooked rice is kala. The word means "a stalk of cereal" to the Bambara people of West Africa and as for the Gullah people of the South Carolina and Georgia low country, kala means rice. The fritters were one of the items sold on the streets of New Orleans by women of color. The ingredients include:

2^{1/4} cups cold water

¾ cup raw long grain rice

1^{1/2} packages dry yeast

½ cup lukewarm water

4 eggs, well beaten

¾ cup granulated sugar

¾ teaspoon salt

3 cups flour

Vegetable oil for frying

Confectioners' sugar for dusting

Place the cold water and rice in a saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Lower the heat and cook the rice for 25 to 30 minutes or until it is soft and tender. Drain the rice, place it in a bowl, mash it with the back of a spoon, and set it aside to cool. In a separate bowl, dissolve the yeast in the lukewarm water, and then add it to the cooled rice. Beat the mixture for two minutes to aerate it, then cover the bowl with a slightly moistened towel and set it aside in a warm place to rise for three to four hours. When ready to prepare the fritters, add the eggs, granulated sugar, salt, and flour to the rice mixture. Beat it thoroughly, cover it, add set it aside for 30 minutes. Heat four inches of oil in a heavy pan to 375 degrees. Drop the batter by the tablespoonful into the hot oil, frying a few at a time until golden brown. Drain on paper towels, then dust with confectioners' sugar and serve hot (219-222).

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