

Memory Dishes



Women and African Diasporic Cooking

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The Cooking Universe of the African Diaspora

ANTHONY BOGUES

Black eyed peas; collard greens; the fish fry; rice and pigeon peas; callaloo; cachupa; these dishes populate the cooking universe of the African diaspora. Food is an essential element of human life and existence. Over time, what was once basic to our life became laden with symbolic value. Thus food, its preparation, and ways of eating became meaningful rituals and practices. Africans enslaved in the Americas, not only brought food and ways of cooking from continental Africa, they also had to rework what they knew into something else while adapting to a strange land, creating new forms and rituals. If on plantations enslaved people were directly subjugated through the toil of picking cotton, harvesting coffee, and cutting sugar cane stalks, then on provisioning grounds across the plantation Americas, enslaved Africans used small plots as gardens to grow vegetables, yams, and greens on different terms that marked a distinct space. Plantation records overflow with complaints from slave masters that the enslaved were spending too much time on these plots. The records and archives of this period abound with the demands of the enslaved for the time to work on their “garden” plot. In some instances the enslaved engaged in strategies of refusal if the agreed time allocated to them for working on their own plot was troubled in any way by the planter elite. Plot, crops, food, the rituals of cooking, and growing foodstuff all became a space, a small one, but nevertheless a space in which the enslaved made attempts to mark their being human in contrast to the brutal violence of the system of racial slavery.

Enslaved Africans carried their ideas, cultures, labor skills, and cosmologies across the Middle Passage of the Atlantic. As they landed in the Americas, these things would become *workable memories*. Today, in similar ways, as groups of the Black diaspora move about the Americas, migrating from one space to another, they carry with them cultures, skills, and various unique Black symbolic orders. Those orders constructed first under slavery and colonialism are now by necessity being reworked. This latter story in the words of Stuart Hall is about being diasporized twice. In this process, there are two memories carried, and in the new home there is a fierce attachment to what can be recalled and practiced. However, adaptation has to occur, the cod fish is not the same; the oxtail has a different flavoring no matter how many broad beans are put in the pot. Yet, there has to be rice and peas/beans on a Sunday or cachupa, and if there is no callaloo, then collard greens becomes an acceptable replacement. And even if there is no catfish, there still is a fish fry.

And who are the bearers, the carriers of these memories and practices? There is a cultural and political economy of food and gender which is at work. It is not so much a question of who does the cooking, but rather who carries memories of practices which have been created over time and which in many instances sustain Black Life. The women who carry these memories and practices have carved out a quotidian space where Black Life in the face of daily assaults might be renewed.

This exhibition, *Memory Dishes: Women and African Diasporic Cooking* foregrounds the ways in which food and the culinary arts have acted as a terrain of memory and renewal for the African diaspora in the state of Rhode Island. It is an untold story which is usually considered banal and of no significance. Yet, any ritual or practice which sustains human life cannot be banal. It is everyday, and in its everydayness it creates community and marks identity. If the enslaved African created a culinary universe as a significant material cultural contribution to the Americas (along with all their other contributions to music, art, religion, and thought), then in our contemporary America, Black migrants whether from the Southern USA, or the Caribbean, or Cape Verde continue a tradition which challenges the conventional meanings of what it means to be an American. They do this because cuisine and the culinary arts are expressions of who we are. This exhibition, curated by Johanna Obenda and the Center's curatorial team, tells us an untold story that we often take for granted.

Anthony Bogues is the Asa Messer Professor of Humanities and Critical Theory, Professor of Africana Studies, and Director of Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice at Brown University.

Curatorial Note

JOHANNA OBENDA

When we began curating *Memory Dishes*, we wanted to work collaboratively with the Providence community to share stories of African diasporic cooking. That goal led to incredible relationships forged with six generous, open, and dynamic families. Human connections are central to the exhibit in both its content and form. In this exhibition it is important that the families highlighted in *Memory Dishes* tell their cooking histories in their own voices. Thus, the exhibit centers their oral histories and is multifaceted—textual, digital, and object-based—to match the complexities of the families' stories and the world of African diasporic cooking. Thank you to the Jones, Powell, da Graça, Alcantara, Aubourg, and Malabre families for allowing us to amplify your voices in this space. And thank you to the CSSJ for allowing me the opportunity to explore a non-traditional mode of curating, straddling the lines of history, culture, and art.

Why African diasporic cooking? The culinary presence of enslaved Africans and their descendants are evident in many of the foods we enjoy today, from gumbo to barbeque. Rhode Island is a dynamic part of the African diaspora, a constant site of migration which has been shaped by the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Great Migration from the South in the twentieth century, and contemporary immigration. The people of African descent who have made Rhode Island home through these waves of migration have left a specific mark on the culinary scene. I was particularly drawn to the area's contemporary moment, where Black American food comes from the Southern United States, Africa, the



Caribbean, and Central and South America. This is why the exhibition centers contemporary Rhode Islanders of different diasporic backgrounds. In the food stories of these Rhode Islanders of African descent, past histories are carried into the present through memory.

Women are at the heart of African diasporic cooking—this is the theme that became the most evident as we collected oral histories from the families. Not only were all of the interviewees women, most cited women cooks (grandmothers, mothers, aunts, domestic workers) as the most prominent cooking influences in their lives. It became clear that it was not the specific food items that should be highlighted in the exhibition but the interpersonal relationships between the women who prepared said food. The importance of these relationships informed our decision to film the women of *Memory Dishes* cooking meals central to their personal and cultural identities, so that these essential interactions could be highlighted in the exhibit. While many interviewees highlight the ways cooking is shared intergenerationally amongst women, they also point to a shift in the traditional gendering of African diasporic cooking as mothers and grandmothers pass culinary traditions to sons and grandsons. This is one of the many reminders that African diasporic cooking is not a static practice simply passed down unaltered, but



one that is reimagined and reconfigured through each generation to fit the needs and reality of the moment.

This exhibition makes it clear that cooking, while a seemingly quotidian process, is a complex practice that can highlight social relationships, individual histories, and collective memories. *Memory Dishes* has been an exploration into the families' identities as much as it has been about food. While all members acknowledge having culinary roots connected to the continent of Africa, they possess several different identities—Latina, African American, Black, African. These identities are as vast and complex as the dishes they cook, with some overlapping with each other and others remaining distinct. Like African diasporic cooking, the beauty of the diaspora lies both in its common roots and in its unique contemporary manifestations. I hope visitors are able to see themselves in the food histories and meals of the families of *Memory Dishes*, if not explicitly, in the ways that memory and the past impact so much of our present, even down to what we put on our plates. Often we turn to exceptional figures and moments to glean knowledge about the human condition, but there is an infinite amount of knowledge, experience, and history

living within ourselves and our own communities, and—through our memories—in our ancestors. I hope the exhibit inspires people to reflect on their own memory dishes and think about the significance of the everyday.

Johanna Obenda is a Masters student at Brown University's Center for the Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage (JNBC) and Graduate Fellow for the Study of the Public History of Slavery a joint appointment at the JNBC and Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice. Her work uses multimedia platforms including photography, video, film, and audio pieces to explore topics relating to Black identity. She has worked on projects at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Exhibition Gallery



Memory Dishes

Women and African Diasporic Cooking

Women are at the heart of African diasporic cooking—past and present.

Memory Dishes highlights the cooking practices of six Rhode Island families: Alcantara, Aubourg, Malabre, da Graça, Jones, and Powell. They follow a long tradition of women of African descent who reimagined culinary practices in the New World, blending traditional West and Central African recipes with indigenous and European staples.

Today mothers, grandmothers, and aunts continue this tradition, passing recipes mixed with family histories to daughters, granddaughters, and nieces in kitchens throughout the Americas. The smells of the cachupa simmering on the stove, the sound of the concón scraped from the bottom of the pot, the rhythm of the pilon, and the heat of the scotch bonnet pepper are central to African diasporic life. Everyday food and cooking become complex forms of culinary art and rituals of remembrance and independence. This exhibition pays homage to female cooks, both seen and unseen, and the ways their labor connects vast and diverse diasporic peoples across generations.

Tapestry designed by Daluz Rocha

JONES FAMILY

Traditional South Carolina Cooking

Miriam Jones grew up in the town of Kerhsaw in Lancaster County, South Carolina in the 1960s. Her grandmother, the family chef, prepared African American Southern traditional food, including homemade biscuits, collard greens, and fried chicken. Miriam learned to cook by observing her grandmother's meticulous practice in the kitchen. Every item had an exact place. No food was wasted. On Sundays, the family listened to gospel music and cleaned the house. On Fridays, they had a fish fry.

At these fish fries, men and women fried fresh fish in huge pots. Neighbors contributed side dishes to the celebration. While not unique to South Carolina, fish fries are tied to the state's history of enslavement. During the period of slavery, the brutal plantation schedule slowed down on Saturdays. Enslaved people used this time to fish and fry their catches as a group in the evening. After Emancipation, as some Black families moved to larger cities, the fish fry tradition shifted to Friday nights. On occasion, Miriam brings a bit of this Kershaw tradition into her Pawtucket apartment where—in the style of her mother and grandmother—she breads and fries whole trout to eat with her daughter.



At a family reunion in 1988, Miriam shares a picnic table with her great-aunt and grandmother.



Miriam Jones (right) and her two daughters, Cam and Maryam, and a cousin seated on the porch in 1987.



Miriam's grandmother, grandfather, and their 11 children gather for a family photo in the late 1950s.



Miriam preps her grandmother "Ma" for a backyard photo at dusk during a family get together in 1986.



Miriam and her daughter Maryam pose with a large bunch of collard greens in preparation of a traditional family meal.

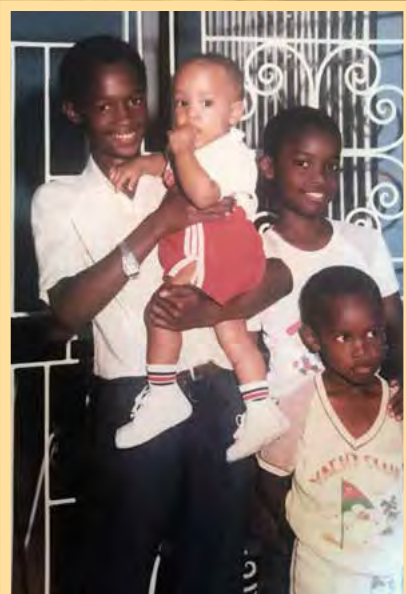
"You get to a point after you make it for years, you almost don't have to measure. You can get that consistency from the feel... It's all about the feel. It's in the hand."

—Miriam

POWELL FAMILY



Neva, her brothers, and her mother pose for a family photo in 1993.



Kirk Powell (bottom right) and relatives stand outside of their home in Kingston, Jamaica.



In 2018, Nia and Kaleb visit their father's hometown of Kingston, Jamaica for the first time.

Mixing Soul Food and the Caribbean

The Powell family's culinary palette is influenced by both African American and Jamaican cuisine. Neva traces her family's roots to Newport, Rhode Island. She remembers childhood meals as a mix of what her mom called "semi-hOMEMADE" food and soul food staples, like black eyed peas and collard greens, prepared for special occasions. Neva's husband Kirk grew up 1600 miles away in Kingston, Jamaica, where his mother cooked Jamaican classics, like rice and peas, grabbing fresh ingredients from their garden.

At the age of 15, when Kirk's family moved to Brooklyn, New York, they brought their cooking practices with them. While the family no longer had direct access to the same fresh ingredients, Kirk's mother worked hard to maintain the style of cooking that had nourished her family in Jamaica. When Neva and Kirk met as college students in Rhode Island, they began cooking rice and peas like his mom. Today they continue this tradition with their own family. Neva cooks rice and peas every Sunday, adding in ingredients from her own culinary background, passing these Jamaican and African American traditions on to her daughter and sons.

"I have the same mindset that my mom had. I want them to be able to take care of themselves. So I need for them to be able to cook for themselves."

—Neva



Kirk and Neva's youngest son Kade visits his grandmother and aunt in Brooklyn.



Neva's family has called Newport home for many generations. This 1946 marriage license between James Glover and Francis Butler (Neva's maternal grandparents) displays the family's Rhode Island roots.

◆◆◆◆◆ AUBOURG FAMILY ◆◆◆◆◆

Haitian Classics with a Rhode Island Twist

The Aubourg family emigrated from Port-au-Prince, Haiti to Providence, RI. Bichara, the oldest sister and family chef, often cooks with her “sister” (her cousin by marriage) Fabiola. Their cooking combines their regional roots, Fabiola from the North of Haiti and Bichara from the South. No meal is complete without pikliz, a spicy and acidic condiment which can provide a kick to a bowl of rice and beans or a balance to the richness of Macaroni au Gratin, Haitian mac and cheese. Fabiola and Bichara feel blessed to combine the staples of Haitian cooking with a wider variety of ingredients available to them in the U.S.

In Haitian cooking, recipes are passed down orally in Haitian Creole, typically from woman to woman. In the kitchen, Fabiola and Bichara reflect this tradition, speaking to each other in a mix of Creole and English as they cook the foods of the women who raised them. In a culture where cooking and family recipes are in the domain of women, Bichara and Fabiola use food as a way to teach their high school aged sons, who are not fluent in Creole, about the homes they left behind.



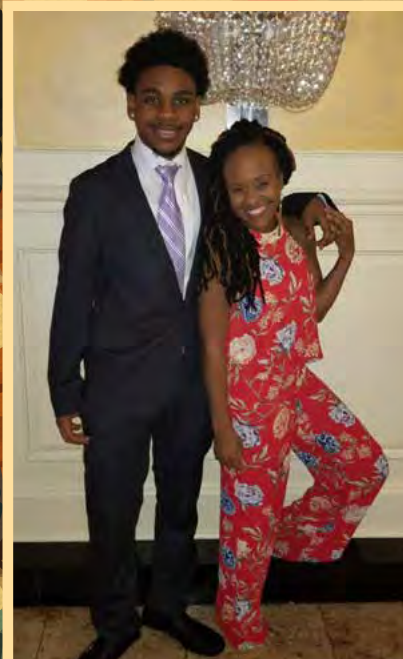
The six Aubourg sisters Murielle, Willande, Claude Michelle, Bichara, Fatima, and Nana pose for a family photo.

*“I always tell people, I’m sorry
I can’t give you the recipe.
I just don’t know it.”*

—Fabiola



Sisters (by marriage) Bichara and Fabiola together in their family kitchen.



Bichara’s son Nicholas poses with his aunt Michelle.



Michelle (left) at her first communion.



Bichara and her best friends serve food at a graduate school celebration in 2018.

ALCANTARA FAMILY

Dominican Cuisine: a Global Plate

Deliana is learning to cook food in the way that her mother Delia and her grandmother Maria cooked in the Dominican Republic. In Providence, they come together to make bistec encebollado (steak with onions) and arroz con gandules (rice and pigeon peas). These dishes are part of the Dominican Republic's vernacular cuisine, primarily comprised of recipes passed down orally. The country's cuisine is a blend of several different cooking practices including indigenous, Spanish, and African flavors and techniques.

The Alcantara family identifies as Latina and recognizes the African influences in the foods they make. The pigeon peas used in the arroz con gandules are found in many West African dishes, a region where many descendants of enslaved Dominicans can trace their ancestry. Deliana's favorite part of the dish concón, the burnt rice at the bottom of the pot, mirrors kon kon, a similar Nigerian dish. In their daily preparation of Dominican food, the Alcantara women bring varied flavors and food histories together on one plate.



Maria Alcantara in her Rhode Island kitchen over a pot of arroz con gandules in 1994.

“Having my grandmother here... she passes down certain techniques or certain tricks...She’ll tell me ‘I did this when I was younger, you should do this’. She’s passing her culture to me.”

—Deliana



Celebratory cakes are a large part of Dominican culture. Deliana sits proudly in front of a cake at her fourth birthday party.



Delia (center) and Deliana (right) at a family gathering in North Carolina in 2012 the day before Christmas Eve.



Maria holds Delia in the Dominican Republic in 1981.



Deliana's great-grandmother served as a military cook in the Dominican Republic.



Maria stands next to a buffet of Dominican dishes she prepared for her daughter Delia's wedding in 2004.

Dominican Cooking in America: A Migration Story

Below is an excerpt from an interview conducted in fall 2018 by Johanna Obenda with the Alcantara family. Delia and her mother Maria describe their experiences moving from the Dominican Republic to New York and later Rhode Island. The passage has been edited for clarity. Special thanks to Ethel Barja for her translation support.

JO (Johanna Obenda): Can you tell me about your move from the Dominican Republic to the United States?

DU (Delia Urizar): When we first got here, we used to live in New York. There are a lot of Dominican stores there, grocery stores. So basically, a lot of food from there, you don't really miss it. And for example, over there (in the DR), they have a salami. Usually, they use it in the breakfast with mashed plantains, fried eggs, and cheese. So you can find that anywhere.

The big transition is in the DR, for the main things like cilantro, onions, certain things like that, you actually get it fresh every day. You go to the little store, and you get those things fresh. Because over there, you don't have electricity all the time. In the day, you may have it for a couple hours. And then sometimes, you'll be without electricity for a few days. So you can't rely on putting things in the refrigerator because it can spoil. So (in the US) things like that, we kind of say, "oh, we don't really have to go to the store, every day. We can just go to the supermarket." In the DR, I remember my mom used to go to the supermarket once a month just to get the things that will last a month. Maybe the rice, the oil, things like that. Anything else, you had to get it like every day—cheese, eggs, and stuff like that.

So when we came here, we just went to the supermarket and put everything in the refrigerator. And nothing spoiled because there is electricity all the time. So that was one of the big things. And as I was mentioning before, we use a pilon, the big wooden thing. You put garlic, oregano, all the things in there. And you use that for cooking. We don't have time to do it all the time like we used to. So my mom just blends it in. And a lot of families—I've talked to friends—they do the same thing. They put in the blender and in a bottle to save. And we use that. It's convenient. It's faster. That's one of the little things that has changed.

From New York, we moved here. So we were only there for one year. And we've been here in Rhode Island for 22 years. First, there weren't that many Dominican stores close to us, but we got used to it. My dad got a car. And from that point, we kind of moved on. Because we didn't visit the DR that much. I've been there three times, and it's basically to see people that are sick or people that have passed away. Mami? Después que nos mudamos de República Dominicana aquí, ¿qué tu crees que ha cambiado en cuanto a la comida los sazones, cosas así? *(After we moved from Dominican Republic, what do you think changed considering the food and seasoning?)*

Maria Alcantara (MA) : No no ha cambiado nada, porque eso (laughs) eso a lo que uno ya está acostumbrado así se le enseñó a cocinar, a echarle a la comida... *(No, nothing has changed, because that (laughs) that is what one is used to, one is taught to cook that way, to add to the food...)*

DU: Pero es diferente... porque allá las cosas, la mayoría de cosas como cilantro, ajos y cebolla, una la compra diario en el comedor.

(But it's different... because there are things, the majority of things like cilantro, garlic and onions, one buys them every day in the food stand.)

MA: Bueno sí. Uno lo compra y lo prepara así, lo licúa y lo prepara para que no—

(Well yes. One buys and one prepares this way, we blend and we prepare it for not—)

DU: Y yo le dije que estuvimos en e un mercado una vez al mes para comprar las cosas que duraban más tiempo...

(I told them that we went to the market once a month to buy the things that last longer.)

MA: Sí.

(Yes.)

DU: The seasoning is the same, pretty much. It's just the way preparing it and getting it is different.

JO: Why did your family move from the DR to New York and then to this area?

DU: Well, my dad came to the United States in the '80s. He was a missionary, so he used to travel to a lot of different countries. And when he came to the United States, he liked it. He had a lot of family and friends here, and he just figured that it would be a better life for us. And my mom agreed to it. Because life in DR was hard for her. She was in DR almost all the time, working. Even though we were not considered to be poor, we were maybe middle class. We had a house, a car, and both my parents worked. She wanted to make sure that we went



Maria and Delia in the Dominican Republic

to school and got a good education. They just wanted a better life. It was way better than there. ¿Por qué nos mudamos de República Dominicana para acá? *(Why did we move from the Dominican Republic to here?)*

MA: Nos mudamos por la oportunidad que... por lo menos para mis hijos... nosotros, mi esposo y yo pensamos en el futuro de nuestros hijos.



Maria's husband Rafael with his congregation in New York.

(We moved for the opportunity that... at least for my children... we, my husband and I, thought about the future of our kids...)

DU: Better opportunity for me and my siblings.

MA: Ellos tenían más oportunidades allá, aquí, que echar pa lante, que estudiar que. Una mejor vida.

(They have more opportunities, there... here, for progressing, for studying.)

DU: A better life.

MA: y es por eso fue la causa que, aunque nosotros allá vivíamos más o menos regular, pero no nos nos faltaba nada... teníamos nuestra casa, yo trabajaba, mi esposo... *(And this was the reason, even though there we lived more*

or less all right. We didn't lack anything, we had a house, I worked, my husband...)

DU: We always had food. We had clothes.

MA: Pero sabíamos que con eso no, no era suficiente para... *(But we knew that this wasn't, wasn't enough for...)*

DU That wasn't enough—

MA: para el futuro de ellos. *(For their future.)*

DU: for our future.

JO: Are there any particular dishes that remind you of life in the Dominican Republic?

DU: Well, this particular dish [referring to arroz con gandules] when I eat it, I feel like it's a holiday. Because we normally have it for Christmas, or Thanksgiving, or birthdays. When I was growing up, my mom used to have this philosophy that if it is your birthday, you get to pick out what you want her to cook and what dress you want to wear. You were treated like a queen that day. Whatever you want to do, the cake, whatever. That was something that I always liked. And to me, when I cook it, it symbolizes happiness, childhood, and my little brother, because that's his favorite dish. ¿Qué simboliza esa comida que hicimos para ti? Cuando tú la comes ¿qué te recuerda o algo así? *(What does the food we made symbolize for you? When you eat it, what does it remind you of?)*

MA: Bueno es para días especiales o cualquier persona que uno invite

(Well that is for special days or for any person that one invites over.)

DU: Special days.

MA: A la que invite a la casa a comer porque una se esmera en hacerle algo especial y para nosotros es una de las comidas especiales que tenemos para la persona especial que uno invite. *(When we invite someone to the house to eat, because one invests a lot of effort to make it special, and for us it is one of the special foods that we have for the special person that one invites.)*

DU: And to her, it's like a special food for a special person that she invites. ¿Usted recuerda una persona específica, como alguien que le gusta comer esa comida o algo?

(Do you remember one specific person, like someone who likes to eat that food or something?)

MA: Sí... claro, por lo menos a mis hijos *(Yes, at least for my kids.)*

DL (Deliana Lora, Maria's granddaughter): I think this dish helps me remind myself of my roots. Because I was born here, so I feel like I'm very Americanized. And I have been told that I'm more American than Dominican. I feel like, yes, I do like my American breakfast and food. But eating this [referring to arroz con gandules], it kind of helps me remind myself of who I am, and where my family comes from, and what we've gone through. It helps me to not forget that. Even though I'm in America, which is a melting pot, I still have my own culture. And I still have my own identity.

DA GRAÇA FAMILY



An image from a rally for independence in São Vicente, Cape Verde 1974.



Diniz and Joana da Graça together in their aunt's garden in Portugal in 1978.



In 1989 Diniz da Graça and his friend Antonio Almeida pose for a picture while holding *Terra Nova* a pro-independence publication.



Joana sits with her mother who is preparing a meal in Cruzinha, Cape Verde, in 1992.

Cachupa, Katxupa, Manchup

When Joanna da Graça makes cachupa—a six hour slow-cooked stew of beans, greens, corn, and meat or fish—the scent wafts through the house. As a child, greeted by the familiar smell, Joanna's daughter Margarida would skip breakfast and lunch in preparation for the hearty stew. Today, Joanna makes a pot with meat for the majority of the family and a separate vegan pot for her daughter Margarida. The dish can be adapted, but its value remains unchanged in the homes of the da Graças and other Cape Verdeans.

Cachupa has nourished the family through the Cape Verdean independence movement, migration to Portugal, and their current life in Providence. While it is referred to as the national dish of Cape Verde, each island has its own variation with several pronunciations—cachupa, katxupa, or manchup. In Cape Verde, the da Graça's cachupa pot was large, holding enough stew for any passerby to partake in the meal. In Providence, where the da Graça family has lived on the same street for 30 years, their cachupa pot has gotten smaller as the city's once concentrated Cape Verdean community is dispersed by gentrification. Still, cachupa is the glue that holds this community, and Cape Verdeans around the diaspora, together.

“My grandmother, her mom, said that you always made food for more than two people, an extra two people, just in case there's somebody walking by that wants to enjoy a meal with you.”

—Margarida



The da Graça family gathers over the kitchen table in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1987 to celebrate Margarida's birthday.



Margarida works with her cousin to grind cornmeal for cachupa with the pilon (pestle and mortar) in Cruzinha, Cape Verde in 2009.

Cachupa: A Dish to be Earned

MARGARIDA DA GRAÇA

As a child, the soothing voice of Cesária Évora singing “Sodade, sodade, sodade... Dess nha terra São Nicolau” filled our home. The aroma of Cachupa would subtly drag my soul out of bed on Saturday mornings. I’d slowly make my way downstairs, guided by the savory notes of corn, beans, onions, garlic, and chourico, only to be ambushed by cleaning supplies. It always felt like Cachupa was a dish to be earned, a prize after completing chores. I would deprive myself of breakfast and lunch in preparation for the feast. Cachupa has always been a community meal, one that fills your soul to the brim, awakens stories from our elders and reminds us of the power of our people.

Cachupa/Katxupa/Munchupa is considered the national dish of Cabo Verde, the flavor composition transforms from island to island and family to family. Each rendition of this dish tells the history of the land, what the harvest had gifted you that season, and generations of culinary secrets. My mother and father both speak of childhoods that were full of adventure. They found pleasure in the simplicity of life, faced times of hardship, and always spoke to the immense love and power of community in times of need. My mother reminisces on days rising before the sun to tend to her chores, long walks to neighboring villages to pick up goods and selling her chicken eggs for school supplies. My father always smiles when he speaks of his father and how he would endearingly split the last bit of food into four sections, so that each of his children could eat from his plate. It is through my parents’ storytelling that my love of Cabo Verde grew.



Margarida’s mother Joanna celebrates with family around the table.

Growing up, I experienced two worlds. At home, we lived in Cabo Verde, following cultural traditions, greeting elders with kisses on the cheek, and calls from loved ones abroad who just wanted to hear a familiar voice. There is this invisible string that connects our hearts to each other and to Cabo Verde, extending from generation to generation through letters, photos, transferred hugs and kisses from travels returning home. In our culture, if you can’t send a gift you send your love and blessing through a person, “Mandã Mantenha”, although a simple phrase the spirit and love of the sender is palpable.

Cachupa is the conjuring of memories, an opportunity to pay homage to our oral traditions through the passing down of recipes. Every pot of cachupa provides an opportunity to revisit the past, create new memories that will one day become part of the narrative of our family and welcome newer generations to the love of our community.

Cachupa has always been my connection to the motherland. A reminder that home is created through tradition, language, storytelling, dancing, singing and food. The word sodade is loosely translated as a longing for although it does not convey the deep rooted emotions that are felt by those who have immigrated across the world. Sodade is a recollection of all that reminds you of home, the intersection where sadness and happiness meet in one’s soul and reminds them of their connection to home no matter where they are.

Margarida da Graça is an Academic Advisor/Success Coach at the University of Rhode Island. Excerpts from her interview with her mother Joanna da Graça are featured in the Memory Dishes exhibition.

***Cachupa is community. Cachupa is tradition. Cachupa is family.
Cachupa is love. Cachupa is nha terra.***

MALABRE FAMILY

Jamaican Countryside Cooking

Evelyn Malabre raised 13 children in the rural parish of St. Catherine, Jamaica. To ensure her children's future success, Evelyn taught them to rear animals, sow the land, and cook. When her daughter Sophia migrated to the country's capital, Kingston, she took these lessons with her. Sophia prepared large communal meals for her own family and others in the neighborhood. Food functioned as both a form of celebration and a necessity. Her daughter Chevell remembers learning to cook in their Kingston home by pulling a chair next to the stove and watching her mother work for hours.

While Rhode Island's Jamaican community is not large, the Malabres maintain their ties to Jamaica through family gatherings and cooking. Every Sunday, Sophia prepares Jamaican staples in the kitchen for aunts, sons, and granddaughters to enjoy. Her mother Evelyn's influence is present in each dish of rice and pigeon peas, curry goat, and saltfish and dumplings. Chevell cites her mother Sophia and grandmother Evelyn as two of the strongest women she knows—women who work tirelessly to financially support their families and then labor again at the end of the day to nourish those around them with tastes of home.

"She did everything...she was the provider... She'd plant the yam...she'd do the banana... she'd do everything. She'd work the field, she'd go out and sell it in the market, and she'd look after us, the 13 of us. She was a good cook."

—Sophia



Sophia poses in front of her childhood home in St. Catherine, Jamaica.



The neighborhood kids gather for Chevell's fifth birthday in Kingston, Jamaica, two years before Chevell and her mother immigrated to Rhode Island.



Chevell is christened in Kingston, Jamaica. Religion plays a large role in the Malabre's cooking. Traditional Sunday meals like rice and peas also revolve around the church service schedule.



Sophia Malabre, an avid baker, prepares a cake in her living room in St. Catherine, Jamaica.



Evelyn Malabre sits for a photo in Providence, Rhode Island in 1985. Over the years, many of her children and grandchildren joined her in Providence, creating a piece of Jamaica in their new homes where they retained such traditions as Sunday rice and peas.

The Flesh of Freedom: Black Bajans, Food, and Claims to Citizenship

HEATHER SANFORD

In 1839, British abolitionist John Scoble observed that the end of slavery in the West Indies had increased “to an astonishing degree the desire for comfortable food,” among emancipated people.¹ For those formerly enslaved across the British Caribbean, freedom tasted of the food-stuffs that plantation owners, managers, and overseers had long denied them. Black people in Barbados (the island’s residents are colloquially referred to as “Bajans”) partook in this trend, consuming butcher’s meat and imported fare as they sampled the novel but limited legal, economic, and political rights of their emancipated status. The white plantocracy historically utilized foods like salt fish, pork, and beef as key ingredients of racist exclusion and suppression. During their enslavement, black Bajans creatively adapted insubstantial rations to survive physically, culturally, and communally. In the transition to freedom, they viewed once-restricted victuals as a means to fight for a seat at society’s table.

Before enslaved Africans composed the majority of the Barbadian population, exploitative white planters distributed comparable cost-efficient rations to enslaved Africans and indentured servants.² The daily fares of white indentured servants and enslaved Africans had slight variations, but were similar in their monotony and nutritional deficiency. Accounts from the 1650s describe scant diets largely consisting of potatoes and maize.³ Meat consumption was the primary dietary difference that separated planters from slaves and servants in the first half-century of the colonization of Barbados. While fresh fish and meat spoiled quickly in the Caribbean climate, the provisioning trade enabled planters to increasingly import salt fish, pork, beef,

and other articles from the North American colonies, England, and Ireland.⁴ Enslaved and indentured men received two New England mackerels per week, while enslaved women collected just one fish.⁵ Neither slaves nor servants regularly received rations of costlier pork or beef, except on holidays like Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide. Some individuals even resorted to consuming dead livestock out of desperation.⁶ Enslaved Africans reportedly raised “some poultry” as early as 1654, but seemingly more “so as to have eggs” than for meat.⁷ Through the tight control of meat and fish rations, planters displayed their own supposed superiority along the intersecting lines of class, race, and gender.

The plantocracy of Barbados coordinated a distinct racialization of rations with the emergence of a black majority on the island in the 1660s. Many poor whites elected to leave Barbados after their indentures in search of land and more profitable employment.⁸ Planters began to entice potential militiamen to remain on the island and suppress potential slave revolts with scraps of race-based carnivorous authority. Though beef remained “very dear” due to the reservation of potential pasturage grounds for sugar cultivation, servants gained more access to meat.⁹ A visitor in 1672 observed, “the servants are allowed weekly, a small quantity of Swines-Flesh, or salted Flesh, or Fish.”¹⁰ Beginning in the 1680s, as the number of black Bajans doubled the number of whites, the Barbados legislature codified this trend with a series of laws that guaranteed minimum allowances of meat, fish, and other provisions to indentured servants.¹¹ Such comestible comforts were not extended to enslaved people.



Map of the island of Barbadoes for the History of the West Indies by Bryan Edwards

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Generations of enslaved black Bajans creatively adapted these restrictive rations to meet their nutritional and communal needs. They created a distinct cuisine that fused Gold Coast recipes with the harsh realities of the Barbados foodscape. Enslaved people at Newton and Seawells estates in 1797 used rations of imported pork, beef, and herrings from Ireland to “relish their dry Cooks (Guinea or Indian Corn Flour boiled into a kind of bread or rather pudding).”¹² This dish, comprised of corn they had grown and garnished with limited rations of meat and fish, resembled pottages commonly prepared in their ancestral communities on the Gold Coast of Africa. These meals might not have represented revolutionary resistance, but rather constituted quotidian survival tactics in a system designed to deprive such moments of meaning and reprieve. Sharing a meal and its accompanying tastes and smells amidst the daily debasements of enslavement could potentially restore caloric and communal energies, and point to the possibilities of a time and place where such harsh realities did not exist. Many black abolitionists forged such a link between the miserable rations of their former enslavement in the West Indies and the potentialities of future freedom. Olaudah Equiano, Ottobah Cugoano, and Mary Prince communicated the routine violence of forced feedings and perpetual pangs of hunger, and expressed hope that all enslaved people might one day taste the “sweetness” of freedom.¹³

Links between freedom and food became more literal when Parliament passed the empire-wide Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. Lawmakers in Barbados elected for an apprenticeship period to precede full emancipation. In 1835, the legislature passed an amendment to the

abolition act that provided “additional food and raiment” to black apprentices.¹⁴ The law entitled plantation owners to substitute land allotments or monetary compensation for these mandated rations. However, black Bajans fought for the actual food promised them. Fish took on particular significance. On several large estates, apprentices “insisted on the additional pound of fish” stipulated in the amendment. One group of black apprentices assembled before a special magistrate and explained, “if they did not insist on having the fish, they would be liable to go back to slavery.”¹⁵ For black apprentices, newly granted morsels of legal and sociopolitical recognition were embodied in subpar salt fish.

After full emancipation in 1838, black Bajans asserted their citizenship through limited but unprecedented access to meats and fish. The new tenantry system bound most black Bajans to agricultural labor and landless poverty. This system drastically curtailed sociopolitical power in a society that tied voting rights to land ownership, and left black Bajans responsible for feeding their families.¹⁶ Most black families subsisted on provisions they grew for their own support, but whenever possible, they used modest wages and profits from sugarcane crops to purchase meat, fish, and other imported foods newly available to them. Barbados officials concurred that the “greater demand for butcher’s meat” across the island correlated to “the labouring classes now being great consumers, especially of pork.”¹⁷ Revenue records confirm that pork and beef imports quadrupled between 1833 and 1840.¹⁸ Black Bajans also sampled American foods beyond the rotten salt fish of their enslavement. A police magistrate identified the “goods most in demand” in his parish as “American provisions, such

as corn, meal, rice flour, biscuits, and salt meats.”¹⁹ For black Bajans, purchasing and eating foods once reserved for wealthy whites, even if only on an occasional or supplemental basis, served as a claim to citizenship in a British Atlantic still stained by systematic racist subjugation.

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1. “Address of Mr. Scoble before the National Anti-Slavery Convention (Albany),” *The Liberator*, 30 August 1839.

2. Hilary McD Beckles, *Black Rebellion in Barbados: The Struggle against Slavery, 1627–1838* (Bridgetown: Carib Research & Publications, Inc., 1987), 16, confirms that slaves and servants “were fed on the same basic diet and extracted from their masters similar maintenance costs” before 1660.

3. See Antoine Biet, “Father Antoine Biet’s Visit to Barbados in 1654,” ed. Jerome S. Handler, *Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 32 (1967), 66, and Richard Ligon, *A True & Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1657), 44 for more on early diets.

4. Richard Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012), 67.

5. Ligon, 37–38.

6. Biet, 66; Ligon, 37; and Richard Blome, *A description of the island of Jamaica...* (London, 1672), 86.

7. French Jesuit Antoine Biet wrote, “The slaves raise some poultry so as to have eggs which they give to their little children,” 66.

8. Dunn, 85–116.

9. Blome, 75.

10. Blome, 86–87.

11. Beckles, *White Servitude and Black Slavery in Barbados, 1627–1715* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 96.

12. Sampson Wood to Thomas Lane, Barbados, 10–18 May 1797, Newton Estate Papers, Special Collections, University of London, MS523/304/1.

13. Mary Prince, enslaved for most of her life in Bermuda, Turks and Caicos, and Antigua, proclaimed, “all slaves want to be free—to be free is very sweet.” She shared these words in her autobiography, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave. Related by Herself* (London, 1831).

14. Lionel Smith to Assembly and Council, 1 August 1835, Papers presented to Parliament, by His Majesty’s command, in explanation of the measures adopted by His Majesty’s government, for giving effect to the act for the abolition of slavery throughout the British colonies, Part III (London, 1836), 10.

15. Lionel Smith to Lord Glenelg, Barbados, 8 December 1835, Papers presented to Parliament, 15.

16. In *Great House Rules: Landless Emancipation & Workers Protest in Barbados, 1838–1938* (Kingston, Jamaica, 2004), Beckles describes black apprentices in the tenantry system as “entrapped tenant[s] rather than a free wage earner.” He explains that the plantocracy designed this system as a reimagined slavery that would maintain the political, economic, and subordination of black Bajans. See pp. 29–56.

17. “Copy of a Despatch from Governor Sir E.J.M. MacGregor to the Marquis of Normandy,” 6 April 1839, in Papers relative to the West Indies, Vol. 37 (London, 1839), 99.

18. *Tables of Revenue, Population and Commerce of United Kingdom and Dependencies, Supplement to Part IV: Colonies, 1833* (London, 1836), 23. *Tables of the revenue, population, commerce, &c. of the United Kingdom and its dependencies, Part XII*, (London, 1844), 440.

19. Henry Pilgrim, St. John, 12 August 1841, “Answers to Questions directed by Lord John Russell in a Despatch to his Excellency Sir Evan J. Murray MacGregor, 22 April 1841,” in Papers relative to the West Indies, Vol. 29 (London, 1842), 142.

Provision Grounds: Okra, Survival, and Resistance

GERI AUGUSTO

Below is an excerpt of a lecture presented by Professor Geri Augusto at the International Slavery Museum, National Museums Liverpool (United Kingdom). The full video can be found at <https://youtu.be/KIGylKHT14Q>

We usually think about enslaved people in connection with plantations and the enforced labor they did from sunup to sundown. However there is another important piece of the history of enslaved people and plants, particularly in the New World, in the Americas to which they were taken. Many had to grow their own food. Theoretically, the plantation owner was to supply what the workforce needed to eat, but in reality, the historical record shows that often this was a very paltry and scarce diet.

To survive, enslaved people took the initiative to create small plots and provision grounds. These gardens have different names in various parts of the Americas. In North America, they were called plots and patches. In the Caribbean, they were called provision grounds. These spaces, plots, and provision grounds would be on a piece of land the plantation owner didn't need for cotton, coffee, sugar, or tobacco. Often they were located either beside the slave hut or cabin or on marginal lands, so swamp lands, on a hillside, at the edge of the forest. On these small plots, they would raise vegetables,

medicinal plants, and even flowers. So in a way, you could think of these plots as part of resistance. Survival is always resistance if you can make it. Growing food to supplement their diet, or flowers to create spaces of constrained beauty in the midst of a social system of slavery the enslaved could construct a space for them to be human.

Okra is 1 of about 20, some scholars say 25, plants that are originally indigenous to Africa that made it over the Atlantic during the slave trade. Very few plants were actually deliberately brought as seeds clandestinely by the enslaved. Many of the crops carried across the Atlantic were known by plantation owners. They were aware that these crops were cultivated and eaten on the coasts of Africa. And so they brought them over as provisions in the ship for the voyage of the Middle Passage. Other times the slave merchants would actually send for cuttings and pods so that these could be replanted on the plantation. One of those plants was okra. Okra was often planted in the provision grounds or plots or huck patches, whether in the Southern United States, in the Caribbean or in South America. It was ubiquitous. It had plenty of uses. Teas were made from the flowers and the leaves, but it was mainly the pod itself that was used. All up and down the west coast of Africa, from Nigeria on down to what is today Angola, the okra pod was part

of very popular dishes that people would have had at home. When eaten it was combined with a sauce made from peanut butter. What we call peanut butter was then crushed peanuts or a sauce made from palm oil.

When the enslaved arrived in the Americas, it was important for them to recreate at least some dishes that were familiar and nourishing. A lot of these dishes were based around the okra pod. The most famous dish is called callaloo. You'll find callaloo from New Orleans, callaloo from Jamaica, callaloo from Angola, and callaloo from Brazil. Sometimes called caruru, the R gets changed to an L. The basis of callaloo is always okra plus some other dark green with various sauces. Often there was hot pepper. There could be fish and a bit of bean. In Brazil, a bit of dried meat. And so you'll find callaloo everywhere. The other name for okra is kingombo which is from a Kikongo word for that plant, kingombo, from which you get the derivative gumbo. In New Orleans, there is a dish called gumbo. It is a one pot dish with a savoury stew that features okra and some kind of dark leafy green. Nutritious and tasty, it kept us alive. The different ways of cooking okra is an example of adaptation and resistance that the enslaved African practiced in the New World.

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COURTESY OF GERI AUGUSTO

Aural Traditions

JOHANNA OBENDA

What does good food sound like? The taste of good food, while not objective, is easy to recognize—rich, flavorful, fresh, spicy, sweet. There’s also the scent of good food, of course: the aromas produced from heating ingredients over the stove, the smells that linger on your clothes, the way a great dish can greet your nose before it ever comes into sight. Sight—there’s that too, consuming food with our eyes in advance of our stomachs. We admire the vividness of bell peppers waiting to be chopped. Our gaze follows the smoke winding up from the BBQ pit. Children around the dinner table, heavy with anticipation, peek out at their plates while heads are bowed for grace. Then there’s the physical sensation—the chef’s hands breading the trout, the way each bite of cornbread feels between your teeth, the cold drip of the ice cream from the cone onto your forearm. When we think about good food, emphasis is often placed on these four senses: taste, smell, sight, and touch. But what does good food sound like? Good food is multi-sensorial. It is flavorful and visual, yes—and also aural.

Each kitchen has its own soundtrack, the specific buzz of the microwave, the flickering of a gas burner, the drip of the faucet—and then, sometimes, there’s the music. When we arrive at Miriam Jones’s Pawtucket home for filming, she recalls the sounds of her childhood house in 1960s Kershaw County, South Carolina. Her grandmother, who raised Miriam, her brother, and their 11 aunts and uncles, kept an orderly house and kitchen. On Sunday mornings, the sounds of the local gospel station—which played the songs of Luther Reddit Bloodborne, Albertina Walker, Mahalia Jackson—were a sign

that it was time for the kids to get up and help clean. On Fridays however, the mood was more festive as the Jones family and their neighbors greeted the weekend with outdoor fish fries. At one of these events, one might hear the latest tracks from James Brown or The Temptations. Around the kitchen table on the weeknights, there was a different type of music in the air—a melody of laughter and joy. Miriam recalls the way her grandmother created an air of fun and geniality when the family got together to eat:

The dinner table was very jovial. And we used to have a lot of fun. We sort of were known as a family that really, really loved each other because we used to laugh with each other so much and tease and play. But overall, we got along. We didn’t have a lot.... We shared a lot of love. I have great memories of childhood, and it was a lot of fun in the segregated South.

At the filmed cooking sessions, many of the families highlighted in *Memory Dishes* cite a song or a certain type of music that remind them of good food. In the Powell household, Neva and her daughter Nia gather the ingredients and objects to make oxtail and rice and peas. Neva asks the videographer if she can play some music while she cooks. For her, it almost feels wrong to cook without her kitchen playlist—a mix of neo-soul tunes. As she plugs in her phone to the speaker and Erykah Badu softly enters the space, I am reminded of my own family’s kitchen. Growing up, my mom would play a unique rotation of songs as she cooked. There was soothing jazz in the morning, Afro-Latin music in the evenings, and Soukous classics when my dad

prepped Congolese food on the weekends. Certain types of music were so associated with certain meals that they felt essential to the cooking process. I understand what Neva means about needing her playlist. The music is much more than an accompanying melody—it’s a key ingredient.

There are layers to the kitchen soundtrack. Some pieces play clearly in the air like music, while others can be harder to isolate. These tracks are, what I consider to be, sounds of making. These are the noises that are created in the process of cooking. In the kitchens of *Memory Dishes* there are sounds found in homes around the world: the thwack of a large knife on the cutting board, the flow of water running from cold to hot, and the rustling of produce bags and other packaged items. But then there are details more specific to people of the African diaspora. For example, each family uses a large iron pot, ubiquitous with African, Caribbean, and African American cooking. Cast iron pots and skillets are at the epicenter of Black cooking in this country. Enslaved African Americans not only worked tirelessly over open fire hearths to cook for their owners, they also used these pots to sustain themselves and their own communities. Forced to make new lives for themselves in the Americas, African descendants blended traditional West and Central African one-pot stews with Indigenous and European staples. In the *Memory Dishes*’ kitchens, these pots not only speak to this history, but they also voice contemporary realities. The sizzle of the curry goat (a traditional Jamaican meal) mixes with sazón (a popular Latin American seasoning) reflecting a blending of diasporic cultures in the area.



Photo of Mahalia Jackson during a performance.

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In addition to recording history, these sounds of making also reflect personal and cultural transformations. In their respective cooking sessions, the women of the Aubourg, Alcantara, and da Graça families each bring out a pilon or mortar and pestle. In their home countries—Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Cape Verde—the pilon is used to blend spices. Each family acknowledges that they don’t use it much in the U.S., opting for the quicker option of the blender, but they still bring it out to demonstrate. The pestle hits into mortar with a loud thud, crushed herbs the only barrier between their union. Margarida da Graça recounts learning how to use the pilon in Cape Verde to grind cornmeal, “it’s like a rhythm, so you have a back and forth.” The rhythm of the pilon has, for the most part, been replaced by the grind of the blender in their kitchens.

This is not the only noise that echos change for the families. There’s the hum of the refrigerator, the flurry of the food processor, and the soft jingle the rice cooker makes



when its done. These sounds reflect an adaptation from earlier methods of preparation. However, some sounds in the kitchen speak to an aural retention. There are the conversations between the women as they prepare the food, which occur in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Cape Verdean Creole. Bichara Aubourg and her sister Fabiola, move around each other in the kitchen as if they've choreographed a dance. Their speech, a back and forth between Creole and English, a near reflection of their movement. Language is an essential part of the food. As Bichara notes, "It is in the language... and the recipes are very oral." There are English translations for many of the foods and utensils, yes—but it is not the same. How does one pass down a dish to a next generation that does not know the dish's tongue? Bichara and Fabiola think about their teenage sons. There are many barriers that might prevent them from cooking Haitian food. First, they are boys, and women traditionally do the majority of cooking in Haiti. Secondly, they are not fluent in Creole—the language of Haitian cooking. However, Bichara and Fabiola are hopeful for the future, hopeful that their sons will learn to make Haitian dishes from watching and hearing their mothers in their Rhode Island kitchens.

Finally, there are the sounds we don't hear in the kitchen. There are the dishes we no longer cook because

they evoke the laughter of a loved one who has passed on. There is the grandmother's voice in the back of our mind, reminding us to stir the rice before it sticks. There are the sounds related to meals past—roosters crowing, leaves rustling, children playing—that are absent in our current kitchens. We bring all of these silences with us as we cook too, through memories. When I set out to work on *Memory Dishes*, I imagined the exhibit to explore the ways recipes and cooking practices of the African diaspora are shared intergenerationally as a part of an oral tradition between women. What I also found during the process is that there are aural traditions shared between families as well—from the music played in the kitchen, to the sound of the concón scraped from the bottom of the pot, to a mother's recipe held in the ear. These aural traditions shift through time and are reimagined—as the sound of the pressure cooker replaces the crackle of outdoor fire—but they remain in the way they inform the foods we make. Witnessing the families of *Memory Dishes* cook and eat together, I am reminded that good food is not just what we taste or see, but what we hear. The long, evolving aural tradition of African diasporic cooking connects us with both our ancestors and generations yet to come.



Coda: A Final Definition

DR. JESSICA B. HARRIS,
excerpt from *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America*

African Americans have a long love affair with food, one perhaps unequaled in the history of the country. For centuries we've brought the piquant tastes of Africa to the New World. With particular relish we eat (*nyam*) "grease" and "grit," whether it's a bologna sandwich and a peanut pattie tucked into the bib of overalls for a workman's late-night supper of chitlins and champagne eaten off fine bone china. Some of us delight in a sip of white lightning from a mason jar in a juke joint, while others delicately lift little fingers and savor minted ice tea or a cool drink while fanning and watching the neighbors on the front porch. Good times or bad, food provides a time for communion and relaxation.

It's so much a part of our lives that it seems at times as though a Supreme Being created us from a favorite recipe. There was a heaping cupful of cornmeal to signal our links with the Native Americans, a rounded tablespoon of biscuit dough for Southern gentility, a mess of greens and a dozen okra pods for our African roots, and a good measure of molasses to recall the tribulations of slavery. A seasoning piece of fatback signals our lasting love for the almighty pig, and smoked turkey wing foretells our healthier future. A handful of hot chilies gives the mixture attitude and sass, while a hearty dose of bourbon mellows it out and a splash of corn liquor gives it kick. There are regional additions such as a bit of benne from South Carolina, a hint of praline from New Orleans, and a drop of at least twelve types of barbecue sauce. A fried porgy, a splash of homemade

scuppernong wine, and a heaping portion of the secret ingredient called love fill the bowl to overflowing. When well mixed, it can either be baked, broiled, roasted, fried, sautéed, or barbecued. The result has yielded us in all hues of the rainbow from lightly toasted to deep well done.

We are now a new people. All the world comes together in us and on our plates: Africa, the Americas, Asia, and beyond. We eat hog maws or pickled meat, potatoes or plantain, sweet potatoes or yams or both. Our greens are collards or callaloo or bok choy, and we serve them with everything from a ham hock to a smoked turkey wing to tofu. We savor fine aged *rhum agricole* and still know how to throw back a good Mason jar of corn liquor or a glass of cachaça.

With a start like that, it's not surprising then, that we have our own way with food. We've called it our way for centuries and incorporated our wondrous way with food and eating into our daily lives. We have rocked generations of babies to sleep while crooning "Shortenin' Bread," laughed to the comedy of "Pigmeat" Markham and "Butterbeans and Susie," danced the cakewalk, tapped our feet to the music of "Jelly Roll" Morton, shimmied with wild abandon to gutbucket music in juke joints, gotten all hot and sweaty over salsa or sat down with friends and "chewed the fat." We've had the blues over the "Kitchen Man," searched for our "Sugar Pie Honey Bunch," called our "Sugar Honey," and longed to be loved like "Lilac Wine." When we found the one,

we celebrated with a “Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer” or just kicked back and hollered, “Pass the Courvoisier.”

In short, we’ve created our own culinary universe: one where an ample grandmother presides over a kitchen where the pungent aroma of greens mixes with the molasses perfume of pralines, and the bubbling from a big iron gumbo pot punctuates her soft humming. This is a universe where Aunt Jemima takes off her kerchief and sits down at the table, where Uncle Ben bows his head and blesses the food, the Luzianne coffee woman passes the plates, and Rastus, the Cream of Wheat man, tells tall tales over a taste of whiskey to the Banania Man. It’s the warmth of the kitchen tempered by the formality of the dining room and the love of family that extends over generations and across bloodlines. With the improvisational genius that gave the world jazz and salsa, as well as rumba, rap, and reggae, we have cooked our way into the hearts, minds, and stomachs of a country.

Jessica B. Harris is a scholar on food and foodways of the African Diaspora, author of twelve critically acclaimed cookbooks documenting the foods and foodways of the African Diaspora, and award winning journalist. Dr. Harris has been honored with many awards including a lifetime achievement award from the Southern Foodways Alliance (of which she is a founding member) and the Lafcadio Hearn award as a Louisiana culinary icon from The John Folse Culinary Academy at Louisiana’s Nicholls State University.

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