As the biggest meal of the day, dinner was served as several courses (Lynn Olver). The first course included several meats plus meat puddings and/or meat pies containing fruits and spices, pancakes and fritters, and the ever present side dishes of sauces pickles and catsups... soups seem to have been served before or in conjunction with the first course. Other courses comprised of stews with vegetables and pork, and desserts of fruits, cakes, custards, and tarts; these assortments were plentiful in a two course dinner for the financially comfortable in the late 1700’s (3). The small meal of supper would typically consist of bland potatoes and an alcoholic beverage. For the southern planters, eggs would be consumed as “delicacies” as a special side dish with supper or dinner (9). {quote}All Virginians fell into the lowest stratification of society and "prepared basic soups and grains porridges... supplemented with whatever meats and vegetables they could obtain" (Footnotes 1). Food, in America’s formative years, was a primary indication of social status and wealth. Those that could afford to prepare elaborate, labor intensive meats to entertain guests and show off their affluence. John Egerton describes southern cuisine prior to the Revolution as “remembered in the history books and cookbooks primarily as the cuisine of the upper class” (Egerton 14). Women would direct the servant-cooked meats in the kitchen in higher society, but even in the middle class, there existed only a small portion of whites that did not have servants. There were a few different ways of preparing this water. Some people had a cast-iron bowl that was set into a stone furnace. The bowl would be filled with water first, then the farmer would build a fire in the furnace. The bowl would be placed inside, allowing ample time to heat the water as the hog was killed. Others would have an oil drum that was tipped on its side and filled halfway with water. Heated rocks would be set within the water in order to warm it up. Lastly, others would simply heat water on their stoves and pour it over the carcasses of the swine directly (Wigginton 189). The slaughtering of a hog would typically take place in late November. This time was better because the weather was becoming colder and would stay that way. Because freezers were virtually unheard of, the cold weather was important to farmers in order to keep the meat while it cured. Everything was done at the home of the farmer, and the process was a grueling one (Wigginton 189).

On the day of butchering, scalding hot water was prepared for the hog. There were a few different ways of preparing this water. Some people may have used a cast-iron pot that was approximately four feet in diameter that would be set into a stone furnace. The bowl would be filled with water first, then the farmer would build a fire in the furnace. The bowl would be placed inside, allowing ample time to heat the water as the hog was killed. Others would have an oil drum that was tipped on its side and filled halfway with water. Heated rocks would be set within the water in order to warm it up. Lastly, others would simply heat water on their stoves and pour it over the carcasses of the swine directly (Wigginton 190). The killing of the hog was a quick process. It was typically killed by a swift blow to the head with either a rock or an axe head, or the swine was shot in the back of the head or between the eyes. As soon as this was done, the jugular vein was immediately cut open in order to help drain most of the blood from the body. When the bleeding had slowed, the swine’s carcasses would be placed into the hot water then rolled over in order to loosen all of the hairs lining its body. In order to remove the hair, one would either pull it off or scrape it off with a utensil such as a knife. This process was continued until all of the hair was removed from the carcass. If the hog was left in the water for extended periods of time, the hair would set in the body and become harder to remove (Wigginton 192).

After this, the farmer would set aside to soak for later use. Also set aside and saved, in most cases, were the lungs, heart, and kidneys. The valves, veins, and arteries were trimmed off the heart, the stomach and small intestines retrieved from the entrails, and all were drained, washed, and set in water to soak while the cutting continued{quote} (Wigginton 196). As soon as the process was completed, the hog was hung up and taken down in order to cut up the meat. Depending on the size of the group helping, people may be enlisted to do a number of things. For instance, one group of people may be able to begin slaughtering a second hog, another may start to prepare the entrails and organs since these needed to be used promptly, and yet another group would cut up the carcass of the hog that had just been removed from the tree. Two pots would be prepared at this point. One was a "sausage pot" that was used to hold the trimmings of lean meat and the other was a "lard pot" that would hold the trimmings of fat (Wigginton 196).
Food and religion are very important in the South, so important that in her essay on Religion and Food, Corrie Norman claims, “church food is southern food in the South”. There are many different ways in which we can see food and religion coming together in the South. These can be seen in stories in the Bible, in the Church services, and in the activities of the congregation away from the services. Religious-based rituals to community-based rituals, “food is highly symbolic, and food rituals exist in most religions” (Norman 1). It can become a stronger sense of community in the church congregation by bringing people together to both prepare and eat the food.

The first place where we can see food and religion coming together is in several Bible stories and teachings that center around meals and food practices. An example of one of these teachings is in the practices of Lent. In the true following of Lent, one is to fast during the entire season. In some cases this fasting is meant to be too much to endure during the daytime, while others will only eat one meal each day. Many people decide to instead fast from one particular food during Lent. However, Catholic and similar denominations do not permit this. Certain foods are eaten on Fridays no matter what, even extending beyond the season of Lent ("Food culture and religion"). The most important Christian food ritual recreates Christ’s Last Supper. During this meal, Jesus broke bread and drank wine, and the Vulgate talks about the need to do “in remembrance” of him. This translates into the celebration of Communion. In the Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches, the Eucharist is eaten every week, and they also believe in the transubstantiation – the belief that the bread and wine are literally transformed into the body and blood of Jesus when they are consumed. Many southern Protestant churches observe Communion less frequently. This change is significant because it deemphasizes the importance of the religious food ritual.

The emphasis in Baptist and Methodist churches seem to be somewhat reminiscent of the Last Supper. Norman explains that “the covered dish supper took over for ways to get food to themselves taken from the same pots and eaten at communal tables symbolically related to the supper at which Christ and his disciples shared common dishes” (3). In this way, we can again see how emphasis has been shifted from the religious ritual, Eucharist, to the community ritual centering around food in the protestant churches.

There are a few different ways in which the stereotypical church dinner originated. One of these origins is the evangelical camp meetings of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These meetings lasted from all day to all night. Many people would eat picnics of food that they had prepared at their homes, and brought with them. Usually the meal would be prepared from ingredients that were grown or raised by the family or in the community. This would add to the sense of community in two ways. First, if they were from a certain area, such as a certain farm or garden, then they would bring their unique product to the table for everyone to enjoy. If they used ingredients from various members of the community, then the dish or meal would literally be a blend of different elements of the community. This blending also allowed people together and strengthen the feeling of community. As time moved on, people continued to have picnics on the church grounds, however, it became encouraged to bring enough to share, and then to make good use of the kitchen. The meals provided by this smaller community "allowed worshipers to enjoy not only the fellowship of the spirit but also the fellowship of the members whom they would see only during these occasions" (136).

Food plays many and a wide variety of roles in church life. It is important in following and staying connected to one’s own religious faith by following teachings concerning food, such as Lent and Communion. However, it is also significant in personal lives. Church food allows people to develop a strong sense of community as a whole, and to find their place in that community.

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Farmers’ Markets
by Carrie Coburn

Americans’ attitudes toward food have changed radically in the past fifty years. In Georgia, for example, we have transformed from a largely agrarian society to one where many children grow up unaware of how food is produced. In recent years, we have seen a push back towards localism and organically grown produce. With the development of the local food movement in America, farmers markets have become increasingly popular because they provide many benefits to both the local community and small farmers. There are many different types of farmers markets in the U.S.; all with different regulations about the products being sold and not all farmers markets require that food be locally produced or organically grown. Markets similar to those found in the United States can be seen in countries all over the world. Shopping at a local farmers market can be a beneficial solution for those who are not blessed with a green thumb or acres of farm land.

Agriculture remains Georgia’s largest industry, contributing 15 percent of the state’s employment and 12 percent of the value added in Georgia’s economy. There are currently about 50,000 active farms in the state, 65% of which are small farms that produce less than $10,000 per year in sales (Flatt). Yet, many small farmers still struggle to make a living. Restaurants and grocery stores no longer turn to farms for fresh produce. The American consumer has no concept of “out of season” produce. Regardless of the time of year, nearly any fruit or vegetable is available in the local grocery store. Our globalizing world allows us to easily ship produce across the country and even across the world. For example, we have mangos from the Philippines, oranges from Peru, carrots from New Zealand. As these fruits and vegetables rack up frequent flyer miles, they also have a tremendous impact on the environment. According to Steven L. Hopp in Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, “Each food item in a typical U.S. meal has traveled an average of 1,500 miles...If every U.S. citizen ate just one meat a week (any meat) composed of locally and organically raised meats and produce, we would reduce our country’s oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels of oil every week” (Kingsolver 5).

Farmers markets are not a new creation, but they have been booming in popularity all over the country. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the total number of farmers markets in the United States in 2008 was 4,685, double the number in 1998. The state of Georgia alone has well over 40. Farmers markets provide an outlet for farmers to sell their farm fresh products to the public. They can be state, city, or community operated, and each market has its own rules regarding who can sell and what can be sold. These markets benefit both the farmers and the local community by giving customers access to excellent fresh produce at an affordable price. At most farmers markets, the produce is locally grown, often organically, and picked when it is at the peak of the season, when they taste and look the best. An added bonus to buying directly from the farmer is that the prices are often significantly cheaper than grocery stores or supermarkets. Without the costs associated with packaging, customers receive better quality food at a whole lot cheaper. It is also extremely easy to locate a farmers market anywhere in the U.S through the U.S.D.A’s website or in Georgia through the Georgia Department of Agriculture.

In many countries around the world, open air markets are the norm. A weekly market day is a normal occurrence in cities and towns across the globe. France and other European countries are well known for their street markets. Paris has about 80, each selling its own assortment of unique wares, attracting all different types of customers. Some markets are known for their fish, cheese and bakeries, others for their organically grown food and ecologically correct products (Fayard). Prices vary from market to market based on the quality of the products being sold.

The number of increasing farmers markets in the U.S. indicates a change in the American mindset toward food. Many American families have begun to turn to farmers to provide them with good quality, fresh produce. By doing so, we are strengthening our local communities and providing support to small farmers in Georgia and across the nation. I believe that taking advantage of farmers markets will provide many benefits for the future as well, hopefully encouraging more sustainable farming practices as well as reducing our impact on the environment.

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Subsistence Farming
by Kathryn Doornbos
Gianoulis, supports. We defy the laws of seasonality and freshness by carting fruits and vegetables in order to ensure that food is always fresh and available. Some advertisements "began to show in the late 1800s called 'The Emigrant.'" This image of Aunt Jemima has been a prominent symbol in American culture for more than 100 years. In a way these women have caused the American diet to disengage from the importance of place. In the weeks following the new White House garden, national seed companies have seen sales increase by 25-30% compared to last year. Perhaps, as a nation, we are realizing that, in the spirit of a well-known Crisis proves, ‘we cannot eat money.’ Subsistence farming shouldn’t be extraordinary or newsworthy; it should be an everyday practice in maintaining a connection with the food we eat, the place we live, and the last borders of personal sovereignty afford us.

Aunt Jemima by David Loos

Aunt Jemima has been a prominent symbol in American culture for more than 150 years. In 1889, Christ Rutt and Charles Underwood of the Pearl Milling Company developed the first ready-mix pancake. They used Aunt Jemima as their logo. Tsg Gianoulis explains that the precursors of the Aunt Jemima stereotype: “Based on the pre-Civil War stereotype of the fat, jolly, no-nonsense mammy, the character of Aunt Jemima was first introduced in a minstrel show in the 1880s. The Emigrant.” Gianoulis suggests that “the image of Aunt Jemima and funny black mammy was comforting and safe to many white consumers.” Aunt Jemima Pancake Ready-Mix was paired with the soothing image of a mammy figure, and the overwhelmingly popular image of Aunt Jemima spearheaded the growth of the Pearl Milling Company, which was eventually renamed the Aunt Jemima Mills Company in 1914.

Disappearing boundaries of time, space, and money allowed many families across the nation to acquire certain commodities, such as Aunt Jemima products, that would make the average American’s life easier. The first ready-mix pancakes were made from wheat, corn, rye, and rice flour. The ingredients’ availability, cheap production costs, and bulky supply allowed families with a simple source of sustenance. However, critics have argued over the cultural implications of the Aunt Jemima products for about as long as the product has been in existence.

In Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs, Paische William-Forson emphasizes how black women were not “a threat to white men’s virility and white women’s bodies, a white man’s own desires for black and white women’s bodies notwithstanding” as opposed to a black woman in a domestic setting that could be in direct contact with vulnerable white women. She further analyzes “how power can be present in even the most mundane objects of our material lives” (49). Her insights provide a basic understanding of the empowering historical connotations that were applied to many images, especially Aunt Jemima, and how these implications led to the construction of a historically significant racial icon.

John Stuart, President of the Quaker Oats Company, purchased the Aunt Jemima Mills Company in 1929 as a strategic marketing move that would further enhance the company’s ability to supply the increasingly fast-paced nation with more convenience products. “One of Aunt Jemima’s more important historical functions,” Doris Witt explains, “has surely been to obscure just such ideological conceptions stemming from the exploitation of assembly-line labor in the development of US consumer capitalism—exploitation, moreover, of a heavily immigrant female labor pool whose boundaries were policed through the continual renegade of the color line” (38).

Nancy Green, Anna Robinson, Aylene Lewis, and Gladys Knight were all spokeswomen for the Aunt Jemima products, and they all represented physical manifestations of the figurative Aunt Jemima. In 1937, the Aunt Jemima symbol was copyrighted as a trademark by the Quaker Oats Company. After the symbol was trademarked, numerous advertisements and campaigns were launched to promote the Aunt Jemima products. Some advertisements “began showing kids and moms making not just pancakes but ‘Aunt Jemima.’” Nearly all of these advertisements depicted only whites in domestic settings while the images captured the recurring power struggle between whites and blacks simply by the lack of an African American in the ad regardless of the fact that these white families were relying upon Aunt Jemima for sustenance.

In 2009, the Aunt Jemima logo and the image of Aunt Jemima itself (New York Times) were featured on the first front page of a major national newspaper. It is remarkable that such an event is newsworthy to far removed American culture. Somehow, the concept of growing and cultivating sustenance for your family has become extraordinary.

Subsistence farming wasn’t always this novel. In fact, for the vast majority of agricultural history it was the most direct and simple means to feed one’s family. Even since humans settled in the Nile Valley people sustained themselves from what they could grow on their own land. It was a matter of life or death. Eating food that you are not intimately attached to by means of killing, cultivating, or foraging is a fairly new concept in the spectrum of history. In the American South, the trend towards agribusiness in lieu of subsistence began during Reconstruction. Before that time, rural families provided the vast majorities of their foodstuffs for themselves. Subsistence farming served as an alternative to share-cropping for some, but in most cases it was practiced because there was no other choice. In this era the average farmer supported 3-5 individuals with their food production. By the mid-1930s, the average farmer was supporting approximately 25 individuals. Today a single farmer supports an astounding 200 people (Institute). (This number takes into account only food products ‘grown in the United States. If we were to factor in the food produced by the rest of the world, the number would be much higher.) In less than two centuries, we have drastically changed the nature of agriculture and our means of sustenance. Certainly, this change has fostered a new era of convenience and variety. But what have we lost in the transition?

We have, principally, lost cultural awareness of the origins and means by which our food is produced. Subsistence farming requires a family to live in harmony with their surroundings, working with the earth to cultivate a relatively constant supply of sustenance. It requires acute knowledge of the place where one lives and constant, dedicated physical labor in order to flourish. Our grocery fueled lifestyle antagonizes all that subsistence supports. We defy the laws of seasonality and freshness by carting fruits and vegetables thousands of miles from farm to supermarket. We forget the man hours and nuances required to raise a vine-opened tomato. We can dispense with the places where we live and, instead, rely upon the mythical notion that a place like Tucson, Arizona, a city surrounded by a desert whose water is supplied by a pipeline, even exists is testament to our disengagement from the importance of place (Kingsolver 32). For eons cities flourished only where the perfect combination of fertile land, amble water, and protective landscapes existed. Today we coax them out of nothingness. Maybe that’s okay, but I find it disconcerting.

On a more philosophical level, we have lost a degree of personal sovereignty. We are independently and culturally so deeply invested in large-scale agritnbusiness that, I can safely say, the majority of Americans wouldn’t know how to grow, forage, or kill their own food. Culturally, these skills are designated as unnecessary and primitive.Personally, they rank as markedly uncomfortable compared to the ease of air-conditioned supermarkets and drive-thru restaurants. Fair enough. But at some point convenience subsides to habituation. A subtle theme can be found in the historical connotations that were applied to many images, especially Aunt Jemima, and how these implications led to the construction of a historically significant racial icon.


"Establishing Land-Grant Universities" Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida www.ifas.ufl.edu/land_grant_history/events.html


http://www.ifas.ufl.edu/land_grant_history/events.html


Leah Chase
by Erin Garner

Leah Chase is the executive chef and, with her husband, co-owner of Dooky (pronounced ducky) Chase restaurant in New Orleans, Louisiana. She is known as the Southern chef of New Orleans and has fed tourists, celebrities, political leaders and New Orleans residents in the fifth ward for over sixty years. She has also authored three cookbooks and has been featured in many others. In 2000, she hosted a national PBS cooking show, "Cooking with Leah." Her restaurant is famous for many things: its place in civil rights history, the art collection inside, and, of course, Leah’s Creole cooking.

"Cooking with Leah." Her restaurant is famous for many things: its place in civil rights history, the art collection inside, and, of course, Leah’s Creole cooking.

Leah Chase

Leah Chase was born in Madisonville, Louisiana, a rural area near the northern side of Lake Pontchartrain in 1923. Because the town had no Catholic high schools for black children and Chase’s family wanted her to attend a Catholic school, she moved to New Orleans at age 14 to live with an aunt and attend high school at St. Mary’s Academy (Grayson). After graduation, she worked at Colonial Restaurant in the French Quarter—her first taste of the restaurant business. She married Edgar “Dooky” Chase II in 1945. Shortly thereafter, she started working at his parents’ restaurant, first as a hostess. She gradually assumed more responsibility in the business, altering the menu to better reflect her Creole heritage (Global Gourmet, History Makers).

Dooky Chase restaurant began as a stand selling homemade po’boys and lottery tickets. By the time Leah began working there in 1946, it had become a sit-down establishment. Although the restaurant boasts her husband’s name on the door, Leah does all the cooking and Dooky keeps the books (Global Gourmet). However, she has had no classical training as a chef—her recipes are only inspired by her family’s meals and her Creole heritage. She does not measure her ingredients, cooking instead by relying on the look and texture of her dishes. Despite her lack of training, she is considered one of the best chefs in the nation, particularly in the South. She does not delegate much in her kitchen, preferring to be as hands-on as possible.

One of Chase’s signature dishes at Dooky Chase is gumbo z’herbes, served once a year on Holy Thursday. Traditional gumbo z’herbes recipes are meatless because of Catholic Lenten traditions, and the gumbo is rarely served outside of Lent. Chase’s, however, contains several types of meat. Recipes for gumbo z’herbes call for anywhere from five to fifteen different types of greens (Chase’s uses nine), but traditional cooks usually use an odd number of greens to bring good luck. Simpler recipes are quite different from traditional gumbo, and many do not call for any sort of thickening agent, such as okra, roux or file. Some are not even served with rice (McGregor). The gumbo z’herbes at Dooky Chase, however, includes file and is served over rice. Though it may still keep breaks traditions, Chase is largely responsible for keeping gumbo z’herbes alive. Before she started preparing the dish in her restaurant, the tradition had nearly disappeared from Louisiana. Many who still prepare it are older people, like herself.

Dooky Chase is home to artwork from many notable African-American artists, many living in the New Orleans area. Chase began her art collection by simply hanging posters of fine art prints around her restaurant in the 1970s (MacCash). When she first began collecting original works, Chase would often trade meal paintings. As her collection and her restaurant grew, she transitioned to paying artists with money instead of food. She has served on the boards of directors for several New Orleans arts and cultural establishments and is a lifetime trustee of the New Orleans Museum of Art. She has even spoken before Congress in favor of greater funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. Some art critics and other collectors have said the collection at Dooky Chase is the best collection of African-American art in the country.

More impressive than the art collection, however, is Dooky Chase’s history as part of the civil rights movement. During the 1960s, activists groups would gather to talk about the civil rights movement and eat Creole cuisine at Dooky Chase. People of different races would come to the restaurant and talk about strategy—where should they hold their next sit-in? How difficult would it be to protest in a certain location? Though such meetings were illegal, the restaurant was so popular that police left the situation alone. Though Chase did not participate in the meetings, her role in the civil rights movement was an important one: preparing food to serve to activist groups while they met (Shaban).

Many civil rights leaders, including Thurgood Marshall and Martin Luther King Jr., along with countless other African American activists, dined at Dooky Chase during the height of the civil rights movement. The restaurant continues to be a political meeting ground (Jenkins).

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in September 2005, Dooky Chase filled with five feet of water. Because the restaurant is a historically significant part of the city and a special place for many residents, other members of the New Orleans restaurant community helped 86-year-old Leah reopen her restaurant. Other restaurateurs hosted a benefit in the French Quarter to raise money for Dooky Chase to reopen, complete with Leah’s gumbo. Their efforts raised over $60,000 to help the Chases reopen their establishment in 2007. The Southern Foodways Alliance was responsible for much of the fundraising, and Starbucks donated $150,000 toward the renovations (Severson).

In 2007, Chase served a meal to President George W. Bush, a gesture not well received by many in the New Orleans community. Many New Orleans residents, including Chase herself, were living in FEMA trailers in neighborhoods still devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Many felt as though the federal government had not taken enough action toward rebuilding the city and saw Chase’s service to the president as a betrayal.

Leah Chase wears many hats—chef, business owner, civil rights leader and art collector, among others. She is an unofficial ambassador for the city of New Orleans and one of the city’s most loved residents. Her legacy is large, and she is famous beyond the culinary world. For over 60 years, she has been serving up some of the best food in Louisiana and much, much more.

Leah Chase’s Gumbo Z’Herbes

1 bunch mustard greens
1 bunch collard greens
1 bunch turnip greens
1 bunch watercress
1 bunch beet tops
1 bunch carrot tops
1/2 head of lettuce
1/2 head of cabbage
1 bunch spinach
3 cups onions, diced
1 1/2 cup garlic, chopped
1 1/2 cups water
5 tablespoons flour
1 pound smoked sausage
1 pound smoked ham
1 pound hot sausage
1 pound brisket, cubed
1 pound stew meat
1 teaspoon thyme leaves
Salt and cayenne pepper to taste
1 tablespoon file powder

Clean greens under cold running water, making sure to pick out bad leaves. Rinse away any soil or grit. The greens should be washed 2 to 3 times. Chop greens coarsely and place in 12-quart pot along with onions, garlic and water. Bring mixture to a rolling boil, reduce to simmer, cover and cook for 30 minutes.

Strain greens and reserve liquid. Place greens in bowl of a food processor and reserve liquid to the pot and bring to a low boil, cover and cook 30 minutes.

Serve 8 to 10 over steamed rice.

From the Associated Press.

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For the better part of their lives, sharecroppers lived in a state of poverty, barely surviving on the Landlord's allotment of crops. Their families were often afflicted with malnutrition and diseases like pellagra and ataxia, which were symptoms of vitamin deficiencies and nutritional disorders. The South's most valuable crop, cotton, was difficult to grow, requiring a long growing period, plenty of sunlight, moderate rain, and fertile, nutritious soil. Soil depletion, drought, and poor farming practices significantly reduced the yield per acre. But cotton remained the South's most valuable crop until the boll weevil entered America's cotton belt just prior to the 1920s. Within a few years, the pest cost the South 13 billion dollars in lost crops.

Many sharecropper children became afflicted with a disease known as Pellagra. Pellagra is a vitamin deficiency disease caused by dietary lack of niacin (B3) and protein, especially proteins containing the essential amino acid tryptophan. Because tryptophan can be converted into niacin, foods with tryptophan but without niacin, such as milk, prevent pellagra.

Given the sharecropper diet of cornmeal, salted pork, and molasses, most children were without the essential vitamins and minerals required for healthy bodily development or a strong immune system. Sharecroppers, who usually did not have cows of their own, would have to purchase milk on credit from a merchant or from their contractor. Whenever the child of a sharecropper became afflicted with pellagra, it would often result in one of the two sharecropper's family: the death of the child, or even greater debt (Ngan).

As a cultural institution, sharecropping all too effectively demonstrates the way in which, poor people can be victimized by the dubious and wealthy into a system of debt peonage that makes any sort of improvement in the lives of the impoverished impossible. Along with slavery, sharecropping is an example of the ways in which the greed of a few can lead to the suffering of many.

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Farming Security Administration Photographs by Carl Lewis
"Eat something—even if you're not hungry—because you never know when you might get hungry, and you don't know what it's like to be hungry" my great-grandmother Ninnie told me to tell a boy. Even as a stuborn and picky kid of the consumer-driven generation, I dared not question Ninnie. She knew what she was talking about. Ninnie had suffered through her fair share of hunger growing up as the eldest daughter of a penniless Georgia sharecropper in the Depression-era South, and I'd heard all the family stories to prove it.

Ninnie's story is nothing unique, however. It is just one of the thousands of stories of a vast epidemic of southern rural poverty in the 1930s that left one-third of the nation "filthy, ill, and illiterate," in the words of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's second inaugural address. The economic crisis in the South was not simply a product of the Great Depression. External factors, including the growth of farm tenancy and sharecropping and widespread infertility of the soil caused by the irresponsible long-term growing of cash crops, put families across the South in dire economic straits. In fact, by 1930, more than 80 percent of southern farmers were left farming someone else's land, making very little money doing it (Godden 10).

For the better part of the early twentieth-century, mainstream America mostly overlooked the South's economic problem. Instead, Americans generally bought into what historian Sidney Baldwin calls the "agrarian myth" that "tended either to deny the existence of poverty altogether, or to explain it away" (Baldwin 22). In simpler terms, most Americans mistakenly held the opinion that "the South did not have poor people; it had farming people, and farming people could never truly be poor" (Dewey 1). As books documenting rural poverty like Erskine Caldwell's Tobacco Road and John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath became popular on a national level, however, the regional area's economic impoverishment came into clearer focus. Deprived of the climate, F.D.R. framed the "South's number one economic problem" as the "problem of old age". In 1935, F.D.R created the Federal Security Administration, which was later renamed to the Farm Security Administration in 1937. The Administration's primary goal was to put the South's back on its feet by making loans to individual farmers and constructing planned suburban communities ("FSA-OVI: About the Collection" n.p.).

To document the progress of the Administration's various revitalization efforts, the FSA commissioned a team of roughly twenty photographers, led by Roy Stryker, assigned on location across the South. As FSA photographer Arthur Rothstein later recalled, "It was our job to document the problems so that we could justify the New Deal legislation that was designed to alleviate them" (Poska). In a short matter of time, however, the photographers captured a world of "incredible America to Americans" (Garman 3). In other words, Stryker and his team took on a social mission to rid the South of tenancy and ignorance by calling the nation's attention to the problem. As photographer Jack Delano reflected, "I put many of the wrong things in our country that needed righting, and for one believed that my photographs would help to right them" (Kidd 27).

Most of the more than 164,000 black-and-white photographs taken by the FSA from 1935-1942 depict the immense poverty, hunger, and destitution of southern sharecroppers. Capturing a seemingly objective condition through a subjective lens, FSA photographers were in fact artists whose pictures told a story. Dominated mostly by photos of white southern families barefoot in ragged clothing, surrounded by filth and debris, eating only cornbread and biscuits, the primary goal of the FSA file was to highlight the immense poverty of rural people. The 1939 portrait of the family of Floyd Burroughs, an Alabama cotton sharecropper, perfectly depicts the image of destitution that characterized most of the FSA collection. Pictures like this one of the Burroughs family seem to offer a cry for help directed towards the rest of the country.

The framing and nature of many of the more prominent photos in the collection suggest they were obviously staged. Most FSA photographers had little problem exercising this sort of artistic freedom. They felt the reality of their mission justified it. As Kidd argues, "most seemed to have felt that the benign nature of the New Deal's rural uplift programs coupled with their own sincerity of purpose were adequate justifications for their work" (Kidd 29). Often, FSA photographers only paid attention to the most shocking of situations, so as to dramatize the depravity of the rural condition. Again, photographers felt this was a reasonable creative license since they were, after all, giving "voices" to those whose plight had largely gone unnoticed, and who were among the "most impoverished America to Americans" (Garman 3). In other words, Stryker and his team took on a social mission to rid the South of tenancy and ignorance by calling the nation's attention to the problem. As photographer Jack Delano reflected, "I put many wrong things in our country that needed righting, and for one believed that my photographs would help to right them" (Kidd 27).
As ridiculous as it may seem, the subject of an FSA photograph spoke out against the “unpermitted use of her image in a negative and inaccurate light” [Kidd 31]. In situations like this, in at least one instance, the photography of African-Americans in the South rendered the South a place of leisure, art, and culture. Mrs. Reed, the woman captured in photographer Dorothea Lange’s famous “Migrant Madonna” portrait, fled suit against the Curtis Publishing Company in 1939 for the use of her image in the Saturday Evening Post (Kidd 40).

Conspicuously absent from much of the FSA’s collection are pictures of African-Americans. While the collection does provide a brief glimpse into black southern life during the 1930s, it focuses much more heavily on white poverty than it does black life. In her book Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs, Psyche Williams-Forson points out that even when African-Americans are portrayed in FSA photographs, the manner in which they are presented often falls into racial stereotypes. For example, a search of the FSA’s collection on the Library of Congress website yields only 23 results for the term “negro eating.” When the term “black cooking” is entered, however, 138 results are returned. The considerable pictures of African-Americans in food preparation contain few depictions of stereotypes that blacks belong in the kitchen, not the dining room. To compound the problem, only a small handful of the FSA photographs accomplish anything in the way of speaking out against racial injustice and violence. As historian Nicholas Natanson comments, “If the shadow of poverty hung heavily over blacks in the FSA file, the shadow of terror was all but nonexistent” (Apel 155).

However, one wishes to view the FSA file—either exploitation and overgeneralization or bastardization and idealization of the southern underclass—one thing remains true: The images captured by the Farm Security Administration provide a lasting portrait of a people in hardship, a portrait that still contributes to many popular conceptions today.

Works Cited


Mammies
by Elea Andrews

The mammy archetype takes form in many mediums, but in all of them, her visage remains the same. In Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory, Kimberly Wallace-Sanders lays out a definition of the mammy, “Mammy’s body is grotesquely marked by excess: she is usually overweight, very tall, broad-shouldered; her skin is nearly black. She manages to be a jolly presence—she often sings or tells stories while she works—and strictly disciplinarian. First as a slave, then as a free woman, the mammy is largely associated with the care of white children or depicted with noticeable attachment to white children” (Wallace-Sanders 6). Other common attributes include loyalty, deep God-fearing principles, and a general lack of sexuality. Significantly, this archetype rose to prominence in the mid-1850s, which was the tail-end of the antebellum period. This significance is because the survival of the mammy archetype depends greatly on distorted southern memory, rather than documented history, for its recognition to continue. The history and understanding of the mammy is most accessible through her appearances in entertainment, marketing, politics, and myth.

Most scholars place mammy’s origin in 1852, which is the publication date of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Stowe’s character, Aunt Chloe, is an early prototype of the mammy archetype. After the novel’s popularity subsided, the mammy figure begins to appear in other forms of literature. In the Nadir period (1876-1915), mammy appears on postcards and in minstrel shows. In these minstrel shows, the mammy figure becomes exaggerated and even more stereotypical. With the 1930s, almost every mammy would be associated with the care of the white stereotype, and the films Gone with the Wind and Imitation of Life helped burn this image into the American memory. Hattie McDaniel’s portrayal of Mammy was so renowned that she received an Academy Award for her acting work. Some members of the African-American community criticized McDaniel for continually taking roles in which she assumed the mammy character, but she would rather continue to stay and work for the family. This link is important because the use of the name “Aunt Jemima” is a direct appeal to the mammy stereotype. In minstrel shows, this name was frequently used in scripts for mammy characters. The pancake company began using the name and image in 1890 and hired Nancy Green as the first model depicting Aunt Jemima. The first publication of her image in the Saturday Evening Post (Kidd 40).

In politics, the mammy archetype made headlines in 1923 when a Mississippi senator and a Virginia chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy suggested that a statue commemorating the black mammy of the Old South should be erected and placed in the Capitol building. This idea quickly lost favor by the majority of the legislature, but the suggestion tells us all about the exception of the mammy in a time of turbulent race relations. The United Daughters of the Confederacy, a social group which honors the men who fought for the Old South, wanted a statue that revolved a different model: an African-American woman. It is significant, however, that these women wanted the mammy figure as opposed to any other African-American actual person or stereotype; the mammy was loyal, docile, and non-threatening, and she supposedly held together the fabric of the glorified Old South. Wallace-Sanders writes:

Her large dark body and her round smiling face tower over our imaginations, causing more accurate representations of African-American women to wither in her shadow. The mammy’s stereotypical attributes—her deeply sorrowful and effortlessly soothing voice, her infinite patience, her wry, self-deprecating wit, her implicit understanding and acceptance of her inferiority and her devotion to whites—at point to a long lasting history of exploitation and oppression.

The idea of the non-threatening mammy has been researched and analyzed by both African-American and white historians. Turner and others explain that most black women in the 19th century did not live past their old age would contradict this statistic. Turner and others explain that most black women in the 19th century did not live past their old age would contradict this statistic. Turner and others explain that most black women in the 19th century did not live past their old age; when many of these women were over blacks in the FSA file, the shadow of terror was all but nonexistent” (Apel 155).

Louise Beavers’ role as “Aunt Delilah” in Imitation of Life’s double significance. As an actress, she often portrayed characters classified as mammys, but in Imitation of Life, Aunt Delilah is a character who is modeled after the “Aunt Jemima” of pancake batter and syrup fame. In the film, Aunt Delilah is a maid for a white family, and the white family makes a great sum of money after marketing Aunt Delilah’s pancake flour recipe with her image. The family becomes very wealthy, but Aunt Delilah explains to the family that instead of taking her share of the money, she would rather continue to stay and work for the family. This link is important because the use of the name “Aunt Jemima” is a direct appeal to the mammy stereotype. In minstrel shows, this name was frequently used in scripts for mammy characters. The pancake company began using the name and image in 1890 and hired Nancy Green as the first model depicting Aunt Jemima. The first publication of her image in the Saturday Evening Post (Kidd 40).

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While many scholars label the mammy figure as a myth, the Works Progress Administration narratives suggest that, although this figure has been exaggerated, there were many slave women who took care of white children. By serving as wet nurses and babysitters, some of these women did form bonds with their masters’ children, and this pattern of black women tending white children continued for several generations. The difference is that the existence of mammys in white memory is the image that continued in entertainment, marketing, and politics, all the while becoming more exaggerated and turning one image into the myth that still exists today in pop culture.

Works Cited


Minstrel Shows
by Drayton Perkins

Following the Panic of 1837, Americans began to redefine the idea of entertainment. In 1843, four men created a form of comedy that would last for several decades and have a huge impact on the future of American entertainment. These men, who referred to themselves as the Virginia Minstrels, traveled the countryside performing for different audiences in blackface. Blackface performances consisted of white men and women who would cover their faces in burnt cork or greasepaint in order to appear black. Their routine was unique at first, but soon other comedic groups picked up on it, and the art of blackface minstrelsy had its start. A typical show had a three-part act during which several different characters would sing and dance around stage making satirical, racist remarks that instilled several stereotypes about the African-American race into the minds of all Americans.

Minstrel shows appeared at about the same time as the abolitionist movement. The various sketches gave the impression that slaves in the South were living idealistic lives and that they were pleased with their life in the plantation. A main message of the performances seemed clear, “do not worry about the shadow that they are happy with their lot in life” (Watkins, 93). The performances, which often came off as reality, were in fact merely the interpretation of reality by white Americans. The song and dance comedy frequently went beyond the walls of the theater. Most of the traveling groups sold sheet music from their performance so that it could be taken into the homes of the public. In doing so, a minstrel show had a much more widespread impact on the nation.

Several characters that would typically appear in the shows, and they all followed the same general outline of a “typical” slave family. The head of the black family was commonly referred to as Old uncle or Old daddy; his counterpart within the family was the mammy or old auntie. There were other similar family roles played, but one of the larger roles was the character that
Williams-Forson, Ain’t nobody that’s nice; Ain’t nobody that’s right.

"Wheel about, an' turn about, an' do is so; Ef'ry time I wheel about, I jump Jim Crow."

It was through these performances that several common misconceptions about the African American race were introduced into the American way of thinking. Lazy, loud, musical, unaeducate: these are all examples of the stereotypes that were started through the various acts of the minstrel shows. In many instances, the African American society as a whole was expected to live up to these stereotypes or risk punishment by whites. These stereotypes stuck with the African American race for a good half of the 20th century. Through the various blackface stage scenes, the characters introduced several misconceptions into the white society. In Buildings Houses out of Chicken Legs, for example, Psychic Williams-Forson discusses the idea that black men were thought to be "Chickens Stealers" based on the character "Jim Crow."

Minstrel shows also had their impact on several other aspects of the American Media. For many years in the early 1900s, cartoon characters resembled performers dancing and singing in blackface. In fact, it has been said that Walt Disney's original character for Mickey Mouse had several characteristics of a minstrel performer. More recently, Spike Lee's movie Bamboozled portrayed blackface minstrelsy as a hilarious ratings booster for a slumming TV network. The show, which was expected to be a failure, surprisingly turned into the nation's most watched television show. The network soon realizes the ignorance and sense of fakeness portrayed by the show and eventually stops airing it. At the very end of the movie, a long mixture of racially demeaning clips from movies of the 20th century are played across the screen, which suggests that the legacy of minstrelsy endures.

Minstrel shows had a huge impact on the American social structures. It has been many years since any such performance, and yet we still find ourselves having the same outlook on certain types of people. Through song, dance, and even cartoon shows, America portrays how a stereotype can be developed and perpetuated.

Works Cited


Psyche A. Williams-Forson asserts that chickens provided some economic stability for black families, as well as a source of protein. A great example of the financial support chicken could provide is the woman who sold fried chicken to arriving train passengers in Greensboro, Virginia. These women are seen as some of the first black female entrepreneurs. Freed slaves and their descendants used fried chicken for sale marks the beginning of this dish’s rise to the main entrée in southern food culture.

What exactly constitutes for "southern fried chicken" is a question few people can answer. The Encyclopedia of African American Food and Drink defines southern fried chicken as “Chicken parts that are floured and then fried in hot fat. The term southern fried first appeared in print in 1925.” With the information I have compiled, it is hard to define "southern fried chicken" precisely. It is as simple as chicken fried in the South? Or should it be defined by the old recipes slaves used initially years and years ago? In my own opinion, I believe that southern fried chicken encompasses a lot of factors. It is more than just the chicken itself. It is the greens and cornbread that umbrellas its roots in Africa and accepts the turmoil of slavery. Fried chicken is a product of more than just fowl and oil, but of tradition and history. Chicken that is made for the nourishment of a loved one, to celebrate a holiday or to sell for economic survival is essentially southern fried.

Works Cited


Plantation Kitchen

If the old adage that "the kitchen is the heart of the home" is true, then for the Plantation South, the big house kitchen was where the heart was. Without the plantation kitchen, and the black women and men who ran them, the Old South could not have existed. In many ways, the plantation kitchen provides a window into the inner workings of the plantation society through which one may view the complex relationships of the issues of race, class, and gender as they became entangled with one another in front of an open-fire hearth. The plantation kitchen became a distinct society within the white, male-dominated Antebellum South where mastery was often achieved through years of labor, care, and continuous apprenticeship (Fox-Genovese 542). As master craftsmen and women, plantation cooks worked toward the creation of some of the most defining and palatable characteristics of the modern American South.

The plantation kitchen first emerged from roughly 1820 to the start of the Civil War in 1860. Most plantations were located in what is known as the "Black Belt" region of the American South. Running from the Mississippi Delta to the South Carolina low country, the "Black Belt," was the region in which the majority of African slaves labored in fields of cotton, tobacco, and rice. Away from the fields and "separated from the Big House by only a few yards of boardwalk under foot and a lean-to shelter overhead" (Walker 40) was the plantation kitchen. As a general rule, most plantation kitchens were built away from the main residence for protection from fires. The placement of the kitchen as its own physical entity would have given the plantation family which has been the single most significant and palatable characteristics of the modern American South.

The plantation kitchen was the heart of the home. The kitchen was where the family and guests in the big house would be served their meals. In the kitchen was where the women and men worked hard, and the men would often have more a more secure and comfortable existence than working solely in the fields, was no simple endeavor. Cooks in the kitchens, though slaves, "might be highly—or even professionally—trained, or they might have learned at the side of an older cook, possibly their own mother" (Fox-Genovese 158). The kitchens ran on a hierarchy of power, with the chief cook expecting "swift obedience from her helpers, especially from her own daughter [and]...low had patience with dropped dishes or files in the dessert" in the preparation of the three daily meals and the occasional feast for the family and guests in the big house (Fox-Genovese 74). The kitchen was the "kitchen's throw up much noise and bustle, quarrels, confusion," all under the watchful eye and skilled hand of the chief cook. Representative of the cook's unique power on the plantation, Genovese notes that it was often unimportant to hear "the crack of Mammy's whip across the back of a stupid, slovenly, or incompetent helper" come from the kitchen door (Genovese 542). Fox-Genovese comments on the status of the cook in the plantation society stating, "cooks were respected by the black as well as the white folks" and that often the chief cook was regarded to be by masters as their "right hand hound" and "were "looked up to" by all the slaves on their respective plantations (Fox-Genovese 160).

As master craftsmen and women, plantation cooks probably held the techniques of the kitchen with skill and ease. As a general rule, most cooking was done in a large open-hearth fireplace sometimes with stokes of wood or to "twelve feet high" (Fox-Genovese 160), although a rare exception was a planter wealthy enough to furnish an iron cook stove for his cook's purposes. Inside the fireplace, a multitude of cast-iron pots hung about...
It was so popular, Georgia currently
Interestingly, a distinctive and divine cuisine, but
The substituted grits for millet porridge. Lobster, crabs, crawfish, raccoon meat, fried chicken cooked in
evidence suggests otherwise. The Persians did, however,
After nearly four hundred years,
Thus contributing to its decline in economic
similar to enslaved women's creation of souce, a soup consisting
people adapted their cooking techniques to the New World. Mande women were
The diversity and roots of African American cuisine or soul food can be traced back to
these and other culinary customs of slaves made for large meals that were the center of social and religious events such as potluck dinners and Sunday dinners. In my home,
These other kitchen customs of African Americans are widely considered as southern. Historical evidence suggests that the Ibo and Mande were among the largest ethnic groups to arrive in colonial Virginia and the Carolinas. The Igbo people were distinguished for their superb yam cultivating skills and for their use of palm oil for frying. Their use of yams and palm oil to make dishes like yam fofoca was later replaced with making sweet potato dishes and pan frying with pig fat to make fried chicken and crakckings.
Similiar to the Ibo, the Mande people adapted their cooking techniques to the New World. Mande women were experts at deep-frying, and they used every portion of the chicken in their unique cuisine. They would traditionally serve fried chicken with greens and dumplings. This practice has many similarities to the traditional Sunday dinner of an African American family. The innards of the chicken would later be used to make soups similar to enslaved women's creation of soup, a soup consisting of leftover portions of a pig. The African-American tradition of eating chicken, particularly fried, on special occasions, originates from the Igbo and Mande who ate poultry as a part of religious ceremonies.
After nearly four years, the techniques and recipes that enslaved Africans used to create fulfilling dishes are still used in many African American kitchens today. My mother and grandmother, for example, salt pork to add special flavor to various vegetables. The recipes of my African ancestors continue to play a special role in modern American foodways.

The mention of the word peaches arouses a delicious aroma of memories, summer days, and pleasant times. Whether eating peaches in a cobbler, with pork tenderloin, as ice cream, or with plain sugar, it is easy to reminisce about younger days while enjoying peaches. But the history of peaches and their cultural implications for the South reach much farther than a memory.

There are three different families of peach—clingstone, freestone, and semi-freestone—that are used for different purposes, some for canning some for eating whole. There are conflicting claims on the exact origin of peaches, but most researches believe peach cultivation began in China, centuries before the birth of Christ. In fact, peaches are mentioned in many ancient Chinese writings including those of Confucius. The United States Department of Agriculture found a species of wild peaches in China, the only country known to have cultivated peaches before the fall. The peach was grown in the New World, and evidence suggests otherwise. The Persians did, however, bring peaches to the Romans, who in turn brought them to the Spaniards in the sixteenth century and to the English and French in the seventeenth century. Also, the botanical name for the peach, prunus persica, means Persian apple in Latin (Gould 8).

Interestingly, in Chinese folklore and Taoism, peaches represent luck and immortality. Even today, the Chinese give the peach as a birthday gift to symbolize luck for the upcoming year. Similarly, many Chinese women put peach leaves in their hair during their weddings. Contributing to the positive connotation of the peach, farmers in Georgia viewed peach country as a kind of Eden, putting mint onto peaches on the streets and become famous (Gould 8).

The peach probably came to America shortly after the pilgrims did, either from the Spaniards (Egerton 183) or the English (Gould 4). Many governmental reports of agriculture often referred to the peach and its abundance in the New World. As one governor put it, "in some places, peaches are so common and plentiful that the country people feed their hogs with them" (Gould 8). The peach industry took off shortly after the Civil War, during which time farmers cultivated peaches in large numbers. In fact, each year there is a national peach festival somewhere in the United States. The peach is also a symbol of the South, with the saying "If the peach is good, then the rest of the South is good too."

Georgia currently ranks third in production of peaches, behind South Carolina and California. While Georgia grew about 140 million pounds of peaches and sold thirty-five million dollars worth in 2001, the peach has little influence on the present-day southern economy. Globalization allows the peach to be grown year round. In countries like Chile and Mexico, the peach can be produced and sold at a cheaper price than it can in the United States, thus contributing to its decline in economic benefit. For the Civil War, most peaches came from the South, normally near the consumer's home and were only produced in warmer months. Now, peaches grown in South America are available almost any day of the year.

So, why is Georgia still referred to as the Peach State if it is not greatly affected by peach production? The Secretary of State's office states, "Georgia is known as the 'Peach State' because of growers' reputation for producing the highest quality fruit" (soc.ga.gov). The peach was named the official fruit of Georgia in 1927 by the Georgia State Legislature for its success of global efforts to produce fruits and other items that paint pictures of what it means to be southern, southern distinctiveness is waning. The idea of a peach grown only a few miles from the store is sold at it is romanticized, not necessarily the reality that it once was. Because of this, the south's reputation is shifting from a stereotypical dinner plate to a slower, more peaceful way of life. While the peach does not bring in a large amount of revenue to a region of the United States that has advanced since the dawn of its reconstruction, its cultural implication lives on as a savior to starving farmers.

Peaches are used to make a wide variety of dishes, including (but not limited to) peach cobbler, peach pies, peach ice cream or yogurt, baked peaches, grilled peaches, boiled peaches, peach preserves, peach wine, peach pork loin, peach tea, sangria, and peach compote. No matter how you prepare them, peaches have contributed to a southern culture and economy based on pleasant food and agriculture. While their direct economic influence may be waning, the cultural impact of peaches continues to grow.
When Europeans reached the New World in the 1600s, they faced many struggles, but the most obvious and critical issue was food. The Native Americans introduced them to maize, or corn, which helped the early settlers survive. Since then, corn has continued to be an essential element of the southern diet.

Corn can be ground into meal mixed with water and salt to create simple yet nutritious bread. Though the natives ground the corn with handheld tools to produce commeal, later Europeans set up gristmills that could produce larger quantities faster. “Gristmills, or the essential basics of such that have been around since the Romans,” said Mike Buckner, a miller in middle Georgia who operates his family’s eighty-year-old gristmill. Buckner added, “the process hasn’t changed that much, the mill just makes it faster. Round stones are turned using the power of water to crush the corn into meal for cooking.”

Commeal is commonly used to produce cornbread, but in the early years the bread produced was not quite what we think of today. Native Americans showed how to grind the corn and make flat bread that would have likely resembled a griddlecake or a thin pancake. The mixture of water, cornmeal, and salt could be cooked on a flat rock heated by fire. Cast-iron skillets soon replaced the heated rocks, and over time cooked cornmeal first from hearth cookery to woodstoves. By the 1800s, some cooks would use baking soda to make the bread rise when baked. However, the flat, unleavened bread remained a staple, appearing in such forms as Johnnycake, journeycakes, hoecakes and lace bread.

Johnnycake is probably the oldest term used to describe the flat cornbread and, though the name’s origin is disputed, it is “possibly a corruption of Shawnee cake (from the Shawnee Indians) or ‘journey’ cake because it was easily prepared by travelers, or possibly based on some old English word for ‘cake’ or ‘cak’ or ‘come’ (Cakewe).” The term hoecake is believed to have originated from slaves or agrarian workers who would use a hoe as a flat surface on which to prepare the bread; “this baking procedure is a facade of the old African cooking method. African women in Angola and São Tomé baked corn bread wrapped in banana leaves in the cinders of fires.” (25)

Buckner states, “I haven’t ever heard of that being done around here, but it wouldn’t surprise me; commeal could have easily been taken to the field in a gourd or jug, mixed with water from a nearby creek and cooked on the hoe which would have polished clean from constant use in the soil.” Further, he states, “using all the tools available for as many purposes as possible was common practice and if a hoe could be used to prepare food, it probably was. After all, such methods were practical and meant less time away from the field.” Cooks in the home could also quickly fry lace bread, a commeal slurry cooked extra crispy in lard or greese, which creates a tasty appearance around the edges.

Edna Searcy, a 95 year-old daughter of sharecroppers and granddaughter of slaves did not say whether she remembered ever cooking hoecakes directly on a hoe, but she said the term was used to describe the bread even when cooked on the stove. Though, “we mostly ate pone bread,” she said. Pone bread is yet another simple but common bread enjoyed by many poor people. Commeal, salt, and water are mixed to create a thicker substance than that used for hoecakes. The dough is then kneaded and molded into a shape comparable to a hockey puck and cooked. The term pone may have come from Native Americans who inhabited the Chesapeake Bay region and who were “well known for their bread, called pone” (20). For many like Searcy and other rural poor people, it was common to use the fireplace and cast iron cooking pots with lids on which hot coals could be placed to create a small oven for baking bread.

Searcy also said that it was not uncommon to make commeal. An hoecake is essentially the same as pone bread but instead of being cooked in a pan, ashes in a hot fireplace would be brushed out of the way to expose the hot floor on which the bread could be cooked, hence hoecake. With a slight chuckle, Searcy said, “you couldn’t spit in the fire like you can now, you might have to cook bread in it later.” When I asked her if the bread was good, she said, “you had to brush it off, but it was sho-nough good.” Pone bread and hoecakes might also have cracklings, bits of crispy pork skin, added for flavor.

Though such terms as ashcakes and hoecakes are less common, people still enjoy commeal and the bread in new ways. Today, commeal mixed with salt, eggs, baking powder and baking soda and cooked in a well-greased pan creates a delicious treat that has evolved from the crude food of southern settlers and subsequent generations of southerners. Cornbread technology, however, has evolved slowly until very recently. Now, many premixed concoctions appear in grocery stores, and many southerners eat commercially-baked wheat four breads instead of cornbread. But the traditional allure of cornbread endures.

Edna Searcy

Maida Owens, a writer and New Orleans native, states that “in order to fully understand a cultural feature, one must understand the context in which it exists.” This statement seems to hold true in terms of the evolution of food within Southern Louisiana. It is short sighted to say that Louisiana is culturally diverse; Louisiana possesses a degree of cultural complexity that surpasses most countries. Southern Louisiana’s ethnic culture has been built upon French explorers and settlers from France, French exiles from Acadia and the Caribbean, Spaniards from the Spanish reign, African slaves, and finally English, Irish, and Scottish settlers. Also, to add to the ethnic diversity, Southern Louisiana already had Native Americans contributing to the culture during this ongoing influx of immigrants. These waves of immigration, as Maida points out, shape every cultural aspect of the area.

After establishing the influx of immigration in Louisiana, one may be able to get a better distinguishing understanding of the evolution of food within this melting pot of culture. Broadly speaking, there are two main food groups of Southern Louisiana: Cajun and Creole. From an outsider’s perspective, one may not be able to distinguish the difference between Creole and Cajun food because most foods are shared in each genre. Although these two food labels may seem synonymous, they are distinguished by their origin.

Cajun cuisine derives from an influx of French exiles from Acadia, Canada into South Louisiana. Because these immigrants were poverty stricken, they were forced to live off of what was available. Cajun food contained locally available ingredients due to the family’s financial limitations. Furthermore, because this food contained locally available ingredients, the cuisine was considered very rustic. Preparation was simple and was geared towards feeding a large family. Typically a supplementary duty within any Cajun family was farming. Feeding a large family, all of whose members did physical labor everyday, required a large amount of food. The authentic Cajun meal typically has three dishes. One pot was dedicated to the main dish, which usually consisted some sort of meat needed for protein. The two side dishes were designated for grains and vegetables, depending on what was plentiful at the time. As one can see, the development of Cajun food developed out of necessity. This tradition can be seen through common Cajun dishes such as boudin, which is a type of sausage made from pork, pork neck, rice, garlic, and green onion; corn, which is the rectum and intestines of pig cooked in any fashion; and boudin noir, which is practically anything served over rice. (Tidwell, Bayou Farewell)

In light of food being a necessity, food was also a supplementary duty within any Cajun family. If there is a hunter was a part of the family that made it. If one was to find duck, venison, or squirrel in their gumbo, one could assume that it came from the back country of Louisiana, and, moreover, that a hunter was a part of the family that made it. If there is a scoop of potato salad in the gumbo, one could assume that the chef had German influence. If meatless gumbo, or gumbo z’herbes, is on the menu, the family likely has Catholic roots, as the dish is common during Lent.

To appreciate Southern Louisiana’s food fully, one must keep in mind that Cajun and Creole food are a result of three hundred years of continuous sharing and borrowing among the many cultural groups. The French contributed sauces and breads; Africans contributed okra, barbeque, deep fat frying, and a preference for hot spices; Germans contributed sausages and brown mustard; Caribbean immigrants contributed beans and rice dishes; Native Americans contributed file and a fondness for corn. This melting pot of culture contributed to the evolution of food known today within Louisiana. Another quote from Johnnycake, “the French are acclaimed for the creation of the Creole dish, the underlying tastes good, but it can also reveal a vast amount of historical information as well. By analyzing the different ingredients within gumbo, one can get a sense of where the gumbo was made and even what kind of family made it. For example, seafood gumbo is more common on the coast because seafood is more plentiful there. If one was to find duck, venison, or squirrel in their gumbo, one could assume that it came from the back country of Louisiana, and, moreover, that a hunter was a part of the family that made it. If there is a scoop of potato salad in the gumbo, one could assume that the chef had German influence. If meatless gumbo, or gumbo z’herbes, is on the menu, the family likely has Catholic roots, as the dish is common during Lent.

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Several cultural and traditional religions observe holidays to mark the beginning of the New Year. In China, New Year, usually celebrated in late January or early February according to the Gregorian calendar, is the most important holiday, and it is marked with parades, fireworks, festivals, and special foods. In September, Jewish people celebrate Rosh Hashanah, "the head of the year," by blowing the shofar, sharing blessings, atoning for trespasses, and sharing food. Christians do not observe the New Year as a sacred holiday, but New Year's Eve and New Year's Day have become common secular holidays.

My family, like many southern families, celebrates New Year's Day with black-eyed peas and collards. According to tradition, these foods bring good luck and wealth for the coming year. Some southerners insist on including hog jowls, and one story suggests that the jowl represents a special foods and the New Year is surprisingly common in Western cultures, many of which have migrated to the United States. On New Year’s Day, Mexican families eat menudo, Polish families eat creamed horseradish, Dutch families eat apple fritters, Italian families eat sausage and lentils, Austrian families eat pink marzipan pigs, German families eat round rolls called wecken, Swedish families eat cabbage, and Hungarian families eat stuffed cabbage rolls. Almost all of these people the sharing of traditional foods reinforces communal bonds and signifies hope for the coming year.

References
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