GRAVY

WINTER 2017 • A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FROM THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE • $7

Sweet Potato Crop Picker, *2017, cotton and linen pulp, lace, velvet ribbon, sequined and embroidered fabrics, trims, appliqués, fake fur, feathers, gouache, chains and Mayan (Kaqchikel) hair ribbon, by Lina Puerta. For the 2017 Fall Symposium, with the support of 21c Museum Hotels, SFA commissioned* From Field to Table: Seven Tapestries Honoring Latino Farm Laborers from the American South, *by multimedia artist Lina Puerta. To learn more about Puerta and her work, visit southernfoodways.org to watch* Lina Puerta: A Visible Tapestry, *a short documentary by SFA's filmmaker, Ava Lowrey.*

GRAVY

THE SFA SERVES YOU...

ISSUE NO. 66

WINTER 2017

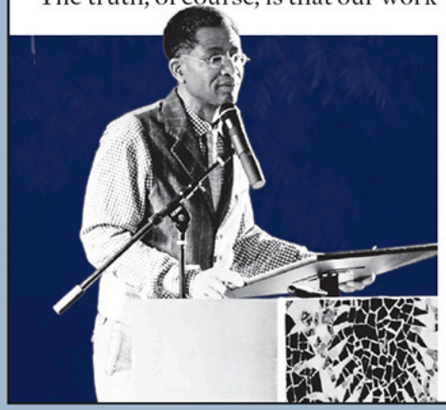
FEATURES

First Helpings

WE ARE EL SUR LATINO

In 2017, SFA explored El Sur Latino. At our Fall Symposium, founding SFA member Lolis Eric Elie took stock of divisions in our region and our country and traced their historical, social, and psychological roots. (I should mention, he accomplished this in a probing, challenging, charming thirty minutes. Head to our website and watch the video if you don't believe me.) He asked, in conclusion, "why don't we plan on a destiny that's big enough for every one of us—all and each?"

Destiny is a hefty concept. How did a conversation about food get us here? The truth, of course, is that our work both is and isn't about food. We share transformative narratives, lead complex conversations, and, through those narratives and those conversations, work toward a more equitable and inclusive future for everyone in our region. And it's been that way for almost twenty years now. Since our team was smaller, younger, greener, and no less dedicated to our mission. Since I was in high school.



This year, we focused our gaze on Latino Southerners—their contributions, their struggles, and perhaps most importantly, their quotidian presence as a growing and vibrant part of the fabric of our region and our nation. The features in this issue of *Gravy* are adapted from Fall Symposium presentations. These stories are not exotic. They are everyday, and that's a beautiful thing. In his Symposium talk, Elie challenged the audience, "Why don't we reexamine what we mean by 'us' and 'we,' and see if we might be able to spell larger words with the same letters?" As you read this issue, we encourage you to do the same. —*Sara Camp Milam*

FEATURED CONTRIBUTOR
PAUL REYES

Writing this piece for Fall Symposium seemed to unearth memories and feelings you hadn't addressed in a while. What was that process like?
It took a long time for me to take a more honest look at my role as a light-skinned Hispanic American. Ultimately, the forces that brought this piece to fruition were both personal and external—becoming a father, and the death of my grandmother, who was the most profound connection I had to the culture. But also the larger, more anxious conversation that's erupted over race in America and the fact that I live in Charlottesville, Virginia, which in a single weekend became a kind of shorthand for the threat of white nationalism. So the truth is that I've always been asking myself these kinds of questions, but tepidly. And it was the confluence of these other factors, which I could never have anticipated, that pushed it to the surface.

How would you describe the editorial sensibility you bring to VQR Quarterly?
I cut my teeth in general interest magazines in the late 90s and early 2000s. *Harper's*, for the most part, with freelance gigging among such publications as *Lingua Franca, The New York Times Magazine,* and *GQ*. That led to several years at *The Oxford American*. So magazines are my most profound education, that mix of literary curiosity, political engagement, and the need to entertain each particular audience. Entertainment isn't beneath a literary magazine, fun isn't beneath it—if you apply those elements the right way. VQR had already blown apart its own category of publication with the extraordinary journalism and imaginative packaging during Ted Genoways' tenure as editor. My mission is to take that and bring it with me toward an experience that moves beyond the magazine, to occasional content and social media experiments and other brand extensions. I want it to reflect a passionate engagement with the world not just through emboldened journalism, but through a curiosity for the ephemeral, an attraction to seeking out these little accidental discoveries of the sublime.

What are your aspirations for your tenure?
I want to build an infrastructure that allows us to be more competitive in a digital age. We're a full-time staff of three, so we're spread pretty thin. But with fundraising and new revenue streams, it's possible to hit that sweet spot in terms of staff—a good sized team that keeps *VQR* active on all fronts. As for the editorial side, I want to make this a home for as diverse a population of writers as you'll find anywhere. I've picked up on this perception of international magazines as being somewhat alienating to American readers. But *VQR* is very much an international magazine—as engaging to non-American readers as it is engaged with issues outside our borders. I would love for every issue to be a reflection of a sensibility that is both committed to the American experience—in all its crazy, glorious variety—while being truly invested in voices and cultures radically different than even the mix we'd find here. The lighter, shorter answer is that I want to create a magazine that is full of surprises, that is unique in its embrace of that effect, and nails it every time.

TOP: Ellen Reyes; OPPOSITE: Chelsea Loper

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN

Tweeting about chard is the only thing that will save us

BY AUSTIN L. RAY

Kendyll Hillegas

I'VE BEEN GROWING CHARD IN A small pile of dirt in my front yard since fall 2015. I've been been tweeting observations about that same chard since January 2016. And more recently, I've come to believe that tweeting about the leafy green vegetable is, perhaps, the only thing that will save us.

You don't necessarily have to grow chard to tweet about it, but one does make the other easier.

Chard is resilient, which means you can grow it in all seasons. Water it semi-regularly during a brutal summer and it will nobly persist, its colorful stalks sprouting gorgeous blades that, much like Sheryl Crow, are gonna soak up the sun. In the dead of a Southern winter, it somehow does the same. The world is often a difficult, angry, and hopeless place. Chard abides—take some reassurance in that, and tweet about it.

Call your chard harvest "dope-ass." Refer to your chard as "the shit." The juxtaposition of swear words and chard is surprising and delightful. Plus, it lets people know that you're fucking serious.

Insert the word "chard" into DJ Khaled lyrics that you tweet in ALL CAPS. Try adapting Migos songs as well, but stop when "Bad and Chardee" just doesn't work. Make chard into a meme. Dig into the absurdity in a way that makes others feel like they're missing out. They'll ask if you have recommendations for keeping squirrels away. They'll stop you in the office kitchen and say things like, "I want to start a garden—what should I do?" Grow chard, friends.

There are plenty of ways to eat chard, but the easiest is to tear the leaves from the stalk into small-ish chunks, then sauté them. Add chard to soup, pasta, tikka masala. "It's healthy," you can tell your haters as you shovel box after box of Annie's Homegrown Creamy Deluxe Organic Macaroni Dinner down your throat. Don't forget to tweet about the dish, which you now refer to as "chard 'n' cheese."

It might confuse people that you seem obsessed with chard, but that's OK. Grow so much chard that you don't know what to do with all of it. Bring chard to the office and give it away. People will understand, or they won't. Live your best chard life.

Thanks to chard, you can walk onto your lawn and be reminded that not everything is chaos and existential dread. Some things are good. Some things are chard. Don't forget to tweet about them.

Austin L. Ray is a new dad and decent-enough gardener in Atlanta, GA. He's written for Good Beer Hunting, Rolling Stone, The Oxford American, *and one terrible gas station periodical.*

Boudin Dolmades: Narrative of a New South Dish

AT GREGORY'S 26 CORNER Taverna in Astoria, Queens, the owner posts nightly at one of the ten tables to gab and drink wine. Waitresses sling roasted lamb with artichokes and lemon potatoes. You don't book a table at Gregory's; you build a relationship with the restaurant and its regulars. Beneath a mural of Mykonos, Jean-Paul Bourgeois, the Louisiana-born chef at Blue Smoke in Manhattan, built a relationship with the woman who became his wife.

Before their first date, Candace Koehl had never eaten Greek food. Two years into their marriage, Candace Bourgeois is now a Gregory's obsessive. Each time they return, Jean-Paul cadges the dolmades from her Greek salad. True to his Thibodaux birth, he's keen on rice dishes.

For a boudin that reflects his life and his roots, Bourgeois smokes pork shoulder and toasts Sicilian pistachios. For the wrap, he tucks and rolls pickled mustard greens. Two tight green bundles, served atop a mix of Duke's mayo and Dijon mustard, grace each plate. Shavings of pistachio confetti the whole. This isn't fusion, Jean-Paul says. This is what his life tastes like. —JTE

La Victoria: 21st Century Corridistas

The corrido is a ballad, or narrative song, native to Mexico. Considered the foremost folk expression of Mexico's rural working class, corridos were introduced to the United States by post–Mexican Revolution migrants.

Corridos have helped define what it means to be Mexican in the twentieth (and twenty-first) century, touching on topics from the Mexican Revolution to the Gulf War in Iraq, from the assassination of Pancho Villa to the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Corridos have focused on the Korean War and the terrorist attacks of September 11, on farm labor leader César Chávez and President Barack Obama.

Activism and social justice underpin the music of La Victoria, a mariachi band composed of Vaneza Mari Calderón, Mary Alfaro Velasco, and Rosalie Rodriguez, which brings a modern sound to a traditional genre. For the SFA's 2017 Fall Symposium, they composed three original corridos set in the US South. Two of these songs follow, with lyrics in the original Spanish and in English.

La Victoria will return to the SFA stage for our Winter Symposium in Birmingham, AL, on February 24, 2018. To learn more about corridos, read *Gravy* columnist Gustavo Arellano's "Song of El Sur" in our summer 2017 issue. You can also find the article online at southernfoodways.org.

Brandall Atkinson

"El Corrido del Big Apple Inn"
Vaneza Mari Calderón

Pido permiso y buenas tardes
Cruzo el país para contar
Una historia, de un sabor
Que nadie, nunca podrá igualar.

Juan Mora, ahora Big John
Llegó a Mississippi para trabajar
Y por toda la calle Farish
Vendía tamales, receta familiar.

En mil novecientos treinta y nueve,
Abrió sus puertas el Big Apple Inn
Y sigue guardando el mismo sabor
Que llevó de Mexico a Jackson en tren.

Big John siempre fue el rey
Y amable con la manada
Si no tenían para pagar
Tras una tiznada, comida les regalaba.

En los años sesenta,
con sus sándwiches de orejas,
Saciaba el hambre de todo Jackson,
Y luchaba contra la violencia.

Quien pudiera pensar, que iba a saborear
un tamal pasando el bayou
Pero aunque cambie de apellido,
Lo "Mora" lo lleva en el alma.

Yo por ahora me despido,
y esta historia que nunca termine
Continuará en el Big Apple Inn,
En Jackson, Mississippi.

"The Corrido of The Big Apple Inn"
Vaneza Mari Calderón

Excuse me and good evening
I cross the country to tell
A tale of a flavor
That no one can ever match

Juan Mora, now Big John
Arrived in Mississippi to work
And all along Farish Street
He sold tamales, from a family recipe.

In nineteen thirty-nine
The Big Apple Inn opened its doors
It has kept the same flavors
That on a train he took from Mexico to Jackson

Big John was always the king
And very kind to the crowd
If they didn't have money to pay for food
He would give it to them free, but not without a scolding

In the '60s
with its 'Ear sandwiches'
He satiated hunger in Jackson
And fought against violence.

Who would have thought that they would
taste a tamale, passing the bayou
And although last names change,
The Mora spirit stays in the soul.

For now I say 'goodbye,'
may this story never end
It will continue at the Big Apple Inn,
In Jackson, Mississippi.

"Los Fields de Calzones"
Rosalie Rodríguez

Quisiera no fuera cierto
lo que les vengo a entonar
La historia de una mujer
acabada de llegar

Con deudas y sin papeles
buscó trabajo en el campo
Sin protección de las leyes
no evitará los daños

Pizcó melones en Georgia,
y el tabaco en Michigan,
Camotes en Mississippi,
tomates en Florida

Se le acercó el mayordomo
con arma en sus pantalones
Que lo acompañara al campo
para tener relaciones
Pa' no perder su trabajo
entró a los fields de calzones.

Con el correr de los días
nunca paró de llorar
La situación imposible
que ella tuvo que aguantar
El patrón de los panzones
no dejó de amenazar
Cansada de tanto abuso
se decidió reaccionar

Un día acabando en el campo
abrochándose los botones
Sonaron cuatro balazos
avisando a los patrones
De aquí se acaba el abuso
allá en los fields de calzones.

"The Underwear Fields"
Rosalie Rodríguez

I wish it were not true
What I have come to sing for you
The story of a woman
Who had just arrived

Undocumented and in debt (to a coyote)
She looked for work in the fields
Without legal protection
She could not avoid the dangers

She picked melons in Georgia
Also, tobacco in Michigan
Sweet potatoes in Mississippi,
Tomatoes in Florida

A supervisor approached her
With pistol in his pants
Telling her to accompany him to the field
To have relations
In order to not lose her job
She went to the Underwear Fields

As days went by
She wouldn't stop crying
About this impossible situation
That she had to deal with
The boss of the big-bellied men
Would not stop the threats
Tired of all the abuse,
She decided to react

One day, after the assault in the field
while fastening his pant buttons
Four gun shots were heard
notifying the bosses
That the abuse was to end there
in the underwear fields.

EKPHRASIS FOR A PHOTO FOUND AFTER THE FLOOD

Sugar Land, TX, 1957

The sugar factory wasn't far from the prison, & that's a good measure for my grandfather: sugar or criminal, constellations of granule or salt-on-the-rim echo. He used cow bones to coax the molasses away while a man plotted his escape from nostalgia—that rabid dog of running toward, then backing away when memory's sudden leash gets too close. Affination was the process of separating a decade from its stalk. Affination was my mother's hand in the syrup. Affination was chasing the ghosts away from the furnace. When Pedro Infante died, it rained airplanes, & the workers gathered around to sing corridos as they built their grief into crystal basilicas for grocery store shelves. Refined agringados. Abuelo's hands went from cotton candy to wasps' nests & back again, dunked in buckets of ice-cold beer to soothe the long, mechanical days stamped on his timecard. Back then, the clock moved like small, rotating hammers—rapid exchange for more & more hunger.

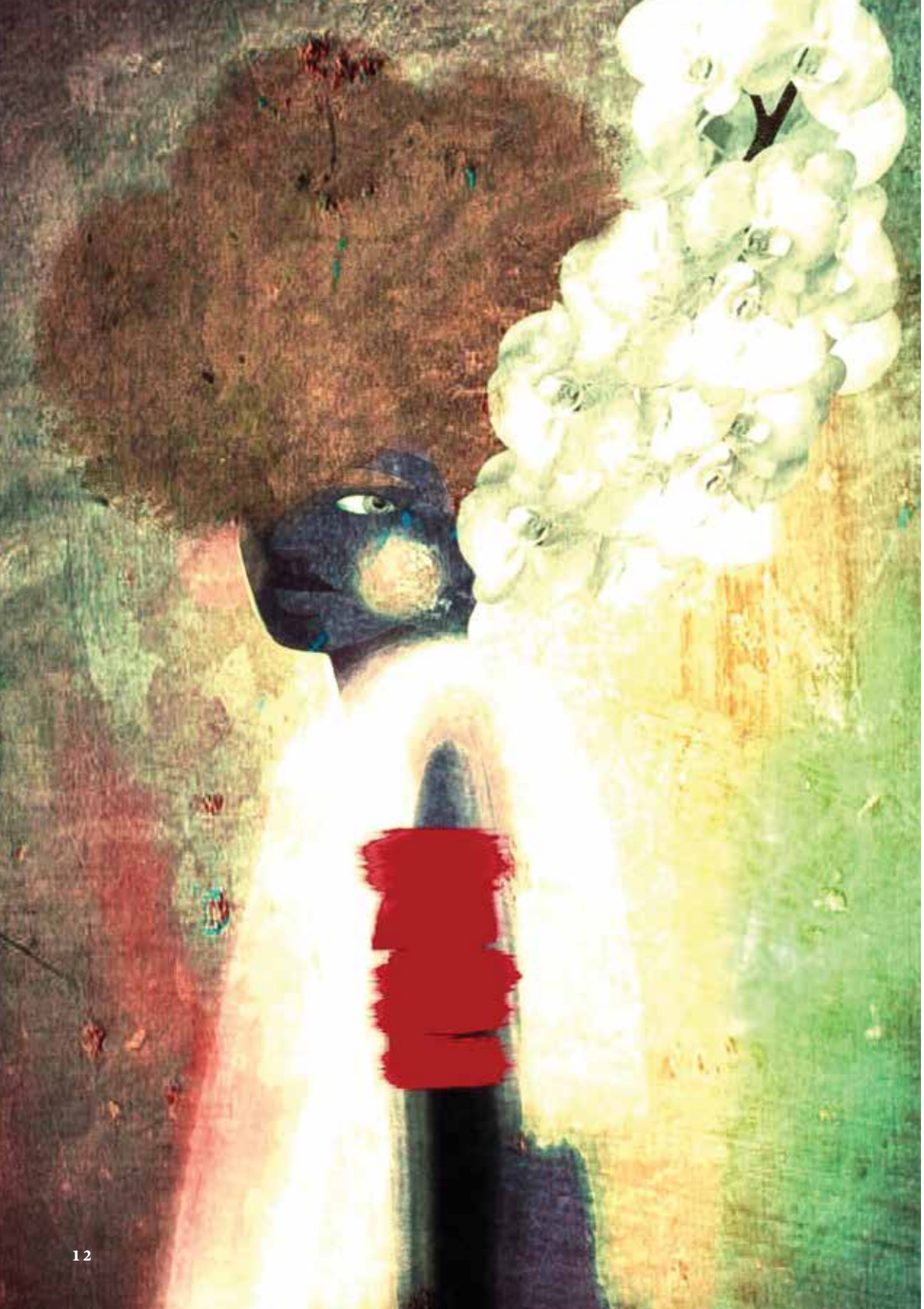
Yellow Brick, Broken Sign With Lighthouse, flashe and gouache on wood panel by Alex Waggoner.

EKPHRASIS FOR A PHOTO TAKEN AFTER THE FLOOD

AFTER THE GREAT HURRICANE,
there is Isabel. Isabel with the industrial
fans giving back the pobrecita dust, drying out what's left
of Houston's bathwater, Isabel with the vinyl floors
peeling & curling away from the walls
like her skin does to the bones. With her cigarette
patiently keeping time. Isabel, always with her back
turned. Isabel with her stove not in frame,
the oven's intestines spilling out indelicately.
Isabel with her kitchen island cluttered:
Maxwell House coffee containers
full of volcanic ash, pastel Bakelite bowls,
half-empty bottles of spit & water,
Crisco stacked like regret. Isabel with her left arm on fire,
Isabel with her hand in knots, Isabel with flour still
under her fingernails. With the curtains she made,
the dress she made, the pants she hates wearing
because she couldn't make the roses come
alive on them. Isabel on a dining room
chair, waiting for her husband to resurrect
from gunpowder, dripping milk into her teacup.
Isabel & her collection of aluminum
foil, how she'll put the Styrofoam universe back
together on those old hangers scattering the floor.
Isabel, with her body thin like an old recipe
no one can find anymore, the one for her tortillas
that keeps disappearing. Isabel, with her instructions
on how long to let the dough rest, & how long
was it? Thirty minutes? An hour?

Iliana Rocha was the 2017 Southern Foodways Symposium poet-in-residence. She is assistant professor of creative writing at the University of Central Oklahoma. Her work has appeared in the Best New Poets *2014 anthology,* The Nation*, and* Blackbird. *Her debut collection,* Karankawa*, won the 2014 AWP Donald Hall Prize for Poetry.*

Camo 2, acrylic, enamel and gouache on wood panel by Alex Waggoner.



Na Pali, digital illustration by Erin Robinson.

LOOK AGAIN

Seeking blackness

BY OSAYI ENDOLYN

I WANT TO TELL YOU ABOUT MY experience at Sweet Home Café, the stellar cafeteria-style restaurant that holds center space in the Smithsonian's National Museum for African American History and Culture in Washington, DC. I want to tell you about the geographically-minded menu that challenges the narrow definition of what black food can be, accomplished by its embrace of the diaspora and how it evolved and improvised from West Africa, through slavery, and during the Great Migration in these United States. I want to talk about the long, silent line for oxtail pepper soup and the wistful expressions on people's faces when a cook announced that the kitchen was behind, and he was sorry but no, this group wouldn't be eating oxtails for lunch. I want to talk about my order of shrimp and grits and how at least three diners asked which line I got them from and were they good, then went to acquire their own serving because I could only nod and point with my mouth full. I want to talk about eating by myself in a room filled with a couple hundred people, most of them black, a multigenerational space buzzing with energy, discussion, deep thought, emotional fatigue, and pride stemming from the exhibitions beneath our feet.

But I can't share all this without first explaining how Sweet Home Café functions in the massive historical narrative that is the NMAAHC, and how this museum figures into what it means to be black American, a tragic and triumphant story that I swear to you, we have never been told so fully. But even *that* becomes difficult without first acknowledging what the experience of blackness has looked like for me in my three-plus decades, in this brown-skinned, American-born, half-Nigerian, half-black American body. Even though blackness exists on its own, as a state of mind, a political identity, a cultural claim, let's be real—you can't talk about historic blackness without addressing whiteness, because blackness and whiteness as constructs—race as a construct—were created as tools to justify economic growth. To get where I want to go, I have to tell you about being black in a white-centered America.

The day of my museum visit, I woke up at 6 A.M. in my hotel room near the National Mall. My laptop browser was already set to the NMAAHC's free ticketing page. At 6:30, same-day tickets would become available and I was determined to get the first timed entry at 10:30. The museum has been at capacity every day since it opened in September 2016, submitting to hourly passes to stem the flow of 2.1 million visits in its first year. The average stay at most Smithsonian museums is two hours. At the NMAAHC, the average visit lasts for six. I was ready to be surrounded by an African American narrative. I craved a cultural respite. Ten days earlier, my current city, Gainesville, Florida, had withstood the arrival of a white supremacist speaker whose name I refuse to write because he is such a ridiculous, dangerous fool. The city, and the University of Florida (a publicly funded

campus legally compelled to provide space to this man and his message) had been on edge in the weeks leading up to the event. I had been on edge, too.

White people, friends of mine, presumed that I wasn't acutely aware that a white supremacist was coming to town, so they sent me links. I opened text messages asking me to read news stories illustrated by violent pictures from the August 2017 Charlottesville goon squad march of angry white men with their torches. Other white acquaintances emailed to ask about news sources for the event because apparently that's not a thing you can figure out without asking a black person in Gainesville. My nerves frayed. I made leaps of logic: If I had a baby and she died, people would probably not send me links about dead babies. They would probably not write me, "This is crazy, WTF, have you seen this? Do you know where I can find news about dead babies?" I had what felt to me like prescient knowledge of a target on my back because I'm black, a constant, simmering reality check in a country established by verifiable racists, a fact that implicitly carries such deeply embedded emotional and psychological and physiological weight that it can hardly be accounted for, and folks sent images and videos of violent people saying how they hated my blackness. Thanks for sharing!

Twelve days before I downloaded my museum ticket, I'd been part of a group text of predominantly white women in Gainesville who were planning a drinks outing. The date coincided with the white supremacist's arrival and I wasn't comfortable being out that night, which doesn't strike me as unreasonable. Someone chimed in that if the Nazis decided to hang out at the bar, they'd just go home, haha! I typed, "Cheers! Have fun being white!" but deleted it. Another black woman on the thread privately reached out to a handful of white friends who she knew better. Some folks can't afford to be cavalier about Nazis, she told them—maybe one of *you* could check this person, even though the black person still has to ask for you to do it.

A woman asked how she could be a better ally. I googled "how to be a better ally" and almost sent the link with its 156 million search results, the first of which was a *BuzzFeed* piece titled "How to be a better ally: An open letter to white folks." On this thread of highly educated women, professional badasses in their respective spheres, no one spoke up without being prodded and a lukewarm attempt at allyship revealed a lack of agency in learning about their role in systemic racism. The threat of white supremacy is not always violence. It's often intellectual laziness and a defiant refusal to be accountable for what privilege can buy—safety among Nazis while you sip your pinot grigio. I lobbed my phone across the room and turned on *Black-ish*, a family sitcom about a black man who wonders if the cost of his success has been cultural assimilation or erasure. The show is so black, it constantly deals with the threat of whiteness. You see how that works?

In California, I lived in the Bay Area, the central valley, the Inland Empire and Los Angeles and I never once had a black teacher in all my years of public schooling until I got to an interdisciplinary Afro American studies class at UCLA. I've worked professionally every year since I was fifteen and I can count on one hand and a couple of fingers, the number of supervisors I've had that were not white; even fewer who were black. Throughout my education and most of my jobs, I'm usually one of the only black people in the room, at the table, in the photo, in the audience, on the email list, et cetera. The approved lip color for the cheerleading squad was rarely my shade; I'm the only person on the conference call who is asked to account for my nationality and my "experience." Weeks before my trip to DC, a wide-eyed white guy touched my hair at the SFA Fall Symposium. He apologized later.

It might sound odd to feel at home in a museum that documents African and domestic slavery in the Americas from the fifteenth century to freedom in the nineteenth, the era of segregation through 1968, and the import of blackness in our modern-day economy, political climate, and arts scenes. I saw a depiction of Thomas Jefferson that places the dichotomy of the Declaration of Independence and his enslaved property side by side. I read classified ads placed by family members desperately in search of loved ones after Emancipation. I marveled at the collected treasures sourced by the museum: a 1950s rural Georgia midwife's uniform, Funkadelic's mothership. I watched a brief video that showed how black dance throughout the diaspora evolves from and retains its African roots. Exhibits presented the gestures of a people as a cultural language, layered throughout hundreds of years. It felt like home because this was my story, but it's also a universal, human one. No other space so clearly articulates how the African American narrative is definitively American. There is no America—in size, strength, skill, or reputation—without us.

White supremacy is often intellectual laziness and a refusal to be accountable for what privilege can buy—safety among Nazis while you sip your pinot grigio.

Sweet Home Café is educational tool and salve. It's a break after you've finished the freedom exhibit, a precursor to the cultural expressions galleries. In line, people muse over the poster-sized menu detailing a la carte dishes divided by region: fried chicken, collard greens and biscuits in the agricultural South, catfish po' boys and gumbo in the Creole coast, oyster pan roast and turkey grillades in the Northern states, and braised short rib stew and empanadas with black eyed peas, chanterelles, and corn on the Western range. I chuckled as black people posited whether the barbecue pulled pork looked alright, or if the macaroni and cheese, candied yams, and baked beans were as good as so-and-so's. I sat at a table with an elderly Alpha Phi Alpha and his wife who said she felt "drained, but happy to be there." The café diners were another form of exhibition—among many, Africans, black Europeans, white Americans. Open displays of grief, quiet rumination, outbursts of levity. When I walked through the exit it was just after 5:30. I'd been in the building, living and breathing my history for seven hours. I felt seen but not ogled, cared for but not exoticized. I'd been heard and I hadn't said anything.

Osayi Endolyn is deputy editor of Gravy.

Y'ALL COME

A Mexican traveler reflects on a decade exploring the South

BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

A DECADE AGO, I WAS LIVID in Louisville. It was my first time vacationing in the South, and I was excited to encounter a region I had long romanticized as a place of bourbon and belles, of country folk and simple living.

My best friend, his girlfriend, and I had just ordered hummus at a hipster café. It was happy hour. Even though we were the only people there, service was slow. When the waitress finally appeared with our appetizer, she pushed it on the table and quickly turned away. Her sharp eyes did all the talking. The indie music on the speakers stopped and didn't play again.

No one threw insults at us or denied service. Instead, an overwhelming sense of hate swept in, and we Mexicans got out as soon as we could.

"Did that just really happen?" my friend wondered as we sped away. We went to pick up my future wife at the Louisville airport. As we drove to our hotel, I told her we had made a mistake to travel in the South. It was not a place for us.

FLASH FORWARD TO this past October, outside the Inn at Ole Miss around one o'clock in the morning. A dozen people of color—Vietnamese, Nigerian, African American, Puerto Rican, Colombian, and Mexican—sat on the curb and shared bottles of wine. It was the last night of the Southern Foodways Symposium; this year's theme was "El Sur Latino." We raved about the food, presentations, and music we had just experienced. We marveled at this New South.

I lay on the asphalt and stared at the cloudy night sky. What a difference ten years make! I never thought I'd return to the South after that initial trip to Louisville. Now, here I was in Mississippi, far away from my Southern California homeland, and I remembered a quote that former Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak gave when anti-immigrant opponents questioned his American bona fides: "It's true I didn't come over on the Mayflower, but I came over as soon as I could."

I'm no son of *el Sur*—but now, I can't imagine my American life without it.

Photos courtesy of the author

ABOVE: Jose and Sons; OPPOSITE: Charlie Ibarra continues his family's tradition.

I HAVE VISITED the South for at least a week each year since that unfortunate Louisville experience. The reasons have evolved. At first, it was for college lectures, from Georgia Tech to the University of South Carolina Upstate, where I spoke to a cheering Veteran's Day crowd of over three hundred about why Mexicans were as American as them. Then came leisure—my wife and I haunt central Kentucky and Tennessee for the World's Longest Yard Sale. After I spoke at the Southern Foodways Symposium in 2013, the reason became reporting and documentary work for this organization.

Now, I come for friends. I've built a network of good people I can count on for dinner and a room for the night, from Appalachia to Oxford, Gainesville to the Ozarks. Those amigos are transplants and native daughters, academics and farmers, citizens and DREAMers.

In my decade traversing *el Sur*, it's become browner. I remember the first time I spotted breakfast burritos in the South, near Grimsley, Tennessee—back then, a Southern California staple little seen elsewhere in the United States. That meant *el Sur* was open to new Mexican food traditions. Meeting a Latino in a small town once surprised me; now I'm more perplexed when I only encounter white and black folks.

Most of all, I value the people I've met, and the stories they've shared. I befriended the queer son of an old Virginia family who has devoted his life to investigative reporting. A daughter of Indian immigrants who argued white supremacy with me over pilau rice off Buford Highway in Atlanta. (She said it was systematic; I merely argued it was endemic. Ah, youth....) A Guatemalan American college student who came to Winchester, Kentucky, when he was only three, who spoke no Spanish, and whose English carried a twang befitting a bluegrass star. Whites shunned him for his dark skin; Latinos thought him a traitor for not speaking *español*. He thought he could escape to Los Angeles, but the Left Coast treated him like such a freak show, he moved back to the Bluegrass State.

"I don't belong anywhere," he told me after my lecture at the University of Kentucky. "I might as well make myself belong in the South."

He didn't say it with pity, but resolve.

Chef Oscar Diaz enjoys a Sur-Mex meal.

That's what I've learned from the South. Politeness sometimes conceals prejudice—I'll never forget the taxi driver who said he "loved" Mexicans, yet railed against illegal immigration the entire drive. But challenges create opportunities, and I've been awed to see Latinos leap into the fray and help make *el Sur* a better place. This New South is where I recharge my batteries with food, friends, and inspiration.

THE POST-SYMPOSIUM crowd slowly peeled off until it was just me, Oscar Diaz, and Charlie Ibarra at four o'clock in the morning. Diaz and Ibarra own and run Jose and Sons, a Raleigh, North Carolina restaurant praised by *The New York Times* for its Sur-Mex cuisine (think collard green tamales and chicharrón and waffles). The restaurant is named for Ibarra's dad, a pioneer of Raleigh's Mexican restaurant scene. He moved his young family from Southern California to the Triangle in 1992, when Ibarra was six, because there were better business opportunities there. For the next twenty-five years, the Ibarras built a mini-empire with El Rodeo and La Rancherita by selling Tex-Mex style combo plates to Anglo customers, especially A.C.P. (arroz con pollo—chicken and rice covered in a cheese sauce).

I had interviewed Charlie and Oscar for my SFA presentation on the A.C.P. phenomenon. What fascinated me more was how forward-thinking they were. They'd just opened a seafood spot called The Cortez, where chef Diaz offered Peruvian and Mexican versions of ceviche, along with Carolina oysters and salads tossed with country ham and sautéed butterbeans. Ibarra boldly told me they weren't going to market their restaurant as "Mexican" but rather "Chicano," a term used by politically engaged Mexican Americans during the 1960s and 1970s and not usually heard outside of the Southwest.

"When you say 'Mexican,'" Ibarra told me, "you let people have a preconceived notion of what you're about, which lets them dictate who you are. With 'Chicano,' no one in the South knows what that is. Not only do we get to teach people about that history, but we set our identity according to our terms."

Later that morning, I reminded Diaz and Ibarra of that conversation as people left the Inn to catch their flights out of Memphis. I told them that no one back in SoCal would believe I had such deep conversations about Chicano identity and restaurants with Mexicans from North Carolina.

"Of course not," Diaz said with a laugh. "But that's fine—we'll just do the South our way, and wait for everyone else to catch on."

Gustavo Arellano is Gravy*'s columnist, even though he lives in Orange County, California, because that's how much he loves and knows the South. He has told tales of food, corruption, history, humor, and Latino everything since 2001.*

WHAT IT MEANS TO STUDY FOOD AT AN HBCU

Bolstered by history, looking toward the future

BY ASHANTÉ M. REESE

I STARE AT A PHOTO OF SEVEN women. They are presumably Spelman College students, tilling the soil of the Oval, the green space around Giles Hall, the historic building that houses my office. The Spelman archivist dates the photo in the 1890s. The women's eyes concentrate on the ground. They aren't smiling. No one recorded their names. Clad in long skirts, armed with farming tools, the unidentified women grew food as part of their education well before food studies had a name or structure. In this period, it was not uncommon for women's academic training to include homemaking skills, including growing food. My work as an interdisciplinary professor in anthropology and food studies is part of a long legacy.

I joined the Spelman faculty in 2015 to help build a food studies program that other faculty had been developing for years. I teach black women about food access inequalities, urban agriculture, and the role of race in the food system. What we know as food studies did not exist when Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were founded in the mid-1800s. The role of food in curriculum and campus life, however, was firmly in place. The women in the photo grew food for their own consumption and were likely involved in managing the Spelman College Dairy.

Spelman was not the first HBCU to connect food and academic inquiry. HBCUs and other black educational institutions were beacons in the midst of legally enforced white supremacy and segregation. To provide for the campus and build community, students, especially those attending Southern HBCUs, were expected to show industrial and practical skills alongside their academic training. In other ways, the academic and practical training that students received proved to their white counterparts that they deserved full citizenship. Perhaps the best-known example of this is Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama, founded by Booker T. Washington in 1881—the same year Spelman College was founded.

Washington's approach to educating a newly freed black population was both prophetic and grounded in the realities of the time. In 1895, Washington delivered what is known as the "Atlanta Compromise" speech at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta. In it, he extolled industrial education, lamented the focus on political positions instead of agriculture, and affirmed black labor's value to the economy. It was clear

Courtesy of the Spelman College Archives

Spelman students garden outside Giles Hall, circa 1890.

that Washington understood the pursuit of black liberation was twofold: to build self-sufficient communities and to become indispensable in capitalist markets. At odds with W.E.B. DuBois, Washington argued that agricultural training was as important as literary exegesis. An opportunity loomed for black folks to benefit from agricultural skills to create lives through which they could live as freely as one could in a racist nation. Not all HBCUs exhibited a sustained interest in this logic, however. Many became breeding grounds for black excellence, preparing students for middle- and upper-class careers in line with DuBois' Talented Tenth philosophy.

Today, food studies is a broad, interdisciplinary collection of varied approaches to food, culture, and society. The field is concentrated at predominantly white, co-ed institutions. The reasons for this are varied and complicated. More college and universities are offering majors, minors, and graduate programs. Such programs require both resources and faculty. There are no measures for the sustainability or retention of undergraduate student interest in food studies, which is important for any college because undergraduate tuition dollars are critical to financial health. For HBCUs, histories of agricultural knowledge and production have not manifested in contemporary food studies programs. Funding challenges and consolidation (or elimination) of academic programs are real concerns for HBCUs. So, too, is finding a balance between encouraging students to pursue their interests and

preparing them for an ever-changing job market. The pursuit of black excellence at HBCUs often means students favor biology, psychology, business, or other disciplines that promise white-collar jobs. I had a student ask me to break the news to her parents that she did not want to go to medical school. (I declined.) Her anxiety represents a pressing question for many students and families: What is the return on this significant investment?

Spelman is the only HBCU with a food studies program, though others offer agricultural sciences. North Carolina A&T University maintains a 492-acre farm for research and training. Other schools have creatively incorporated food in other ways. The Ray Charles Program in African American Material Culture at Dillard University aims to "research, document, disseminate, and preserve the culinary patrimony and material culture of African Americans in New Orleans and the South." Though not a formal food studies program, the Ray Charles Program demonstrates a deep engagement with foodways, infusing it into the fabric of the university, much like earlier HBCUs did with industrial and home economics training. In the spirit of social justice, Paul Quinn College turned its football field into an urban farm to address food access inequalities in south Dallas.

Beginning in the fall of 2016, Spelman students could officially declare food studies as a minor. Nearly a decade in the making, the program draws on the college's agricultural history to offer students an interdisciplinary approach to studying food. It could not be more relevant or timely. When Southern cities have the highest obesity and diet-related illness rates; when Southern families struggle with food access inequalities; when black activists proclaim that "the South has something to say" in agriculture and food justice—Spelman's program teaches black women to lead the way. Black women, whose visible connections to food are often

A laboratory at Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University), 1902

Frances Benjamin Johnston/Library of Congress

demonized through narratives of the unhealthy body, are being trained as thought leaders in food-related fields. From courses on the unequal distribution of food to food chemistry, black women students are not the *object* of study at Spelman. They do the studying. In my courses, we peel back layers of inequality in the global industrialized food systems. We explore how global formations like anti-black racism shape food access worldwide. We also explore resistance. Our students are interested in social problems, yes. And they want to learn how to shape and change the world around them. In that way, they are no different from the faceless, nameless photo that stares back at me from computer screen. They learn. They debate. They connect to and reclaim a legacy that is not visible in the broader field.

I don't see our program through rose-colored glasses. For every opportunity we have, there are also challenges. Because our program is interdisciplinary and we are a small liberal arts college, our core faculty of four pulls double duty. We have to be creative with our resources and time, which includes our finite human capital. This means I am not only responsible for developing food studies courses that did not exist before I arrived, but I am also tasked with teaching introduction to anthropology, qualitative research methods, and other courses required for sociology and anthropology majors. I am the only faculty member whose central research area is food inequalities, which means that students see me as "the food person" on campus. Juggling teaching, research, and mentoring students who want to do food justice work is taxing. And it is rewarding. Because I know how whiteness permeates and shapes the field, the work I do at Spelman is that of reclamation. The study of food at any HBCU is significant. Food—a lifeline for individual and community health and wellbeing—is both a cultural and social symbol. Black people have navigated enslavement, Jim Crow laws, and anti-black racism. Food has been a constant marker of the social climate during all these periods, an artifact of the creative ingenuity of people on the weightier end of oppression.

The students who have taken an interest in food studies at Spelman are dynamic, they are bright, and they are ready to change the world. Raesha Estep, class of 2019, is one of our first food studies students. The program shapes her as a scholar in ways that she could not have imagined. When she graduates, Raesha plans to pursue a PhD to study urban agriculture and feminist foodways.

What will happen in the next ten, fifteen, or twenty years, when several cohorts of Spelman students have matriculated through the food studies program? What does that mean for the food-related fields some of them will choose to enter? Academic and culinary foremothers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Vertamae Grosvenor, Jessica B. Harris, Psyche Williams-Forson, and Toni Tipton-Martin have already opened doors for them. Our aim is to train curious, theoretically engaged, justice-focused food scholars and activists. If Raesha is any indication of what the legacy of this program is going to be, her gardening foremothers would be proud.

Ashanté M. Reese is a 2017 SFA Smith Symposium Fellow. She is assistant professor of anthropology at Spelman College.

EVERYBODY LUNCH NOW

On midday possibilities, old and new

BY JOHN KESSLER

NEW ORLEANS—I HAVE A QUESTION. IF YOU ARE PART OF THE insane scene having lunch at Galatoire's on Friday, and it's not just any Friday but Friday the thirteenth before Halloween, so women wear witches' hats and capes over their pearls and cardigans, and boisterously celebratory groups intersperse with tables of blue-suited burghers, and a young woman from a birthday party next to you has just glitter-bombed your table, and wine bar owner and mayoral candidate Patrick Van Hoorebeek makes the rounds in a pork pie hat and lavender blazer (he would win less than one-half percent of the vote in the primary the next day), and your waitress shows you iPhone pictures of her childhood with the Neville Brothers' kids, and you're already a couple of drinks in—with all this going on, is it okay to say, "Excuse me, sir, but would you get your ass off my foot?"

The posterior in question was ensconced inside a tailored seersucker suit, and it landed on my crossed leg not once, not twice, but three times as its owner leaned over and sometimes squatted to talk to the comely glitter-bomber next to me. He moved loudly through cramped spaces with a kind of white-male-in-a-seersucker-suit-in-New-Orleans privilege that would have infuriated me had I not been having such a good time. Had not everyone been having such a good time, had not the very spirit of that ambient good time told me to just go with it. I briefly considered daubing a bit of the silky béarnaise sauce served with our soufflé potatoes on the sole of my shoe, but that would have been churlish.

Friday lunch at Galatoire's is, as far as meals go, a most specific dining experience. In a town that ritualized this particular meal (many local restaurants only open for lunch on Fridays), Galatoire's holds a special lore. It is famous for its first-come, first-served democracy: To be seated in the restaurant's main dining room with all the action, you must get in line early. It is famous for its line-sitters, the paid men who game the system by camping out on folding chairs for most of the night and secure reservations for their patrons. It is famous for the sweetness and ecumenism of its front-door staff, who try to accommodate everyone, making room for curious tourists as well as regulars and city grandees. If you miss a spot at the 11:30 a.m. seating, they may agree to text your phone if and when they turn a table. If you are politely beseeching, they work with you. It's a club, but not always an exclusive one.

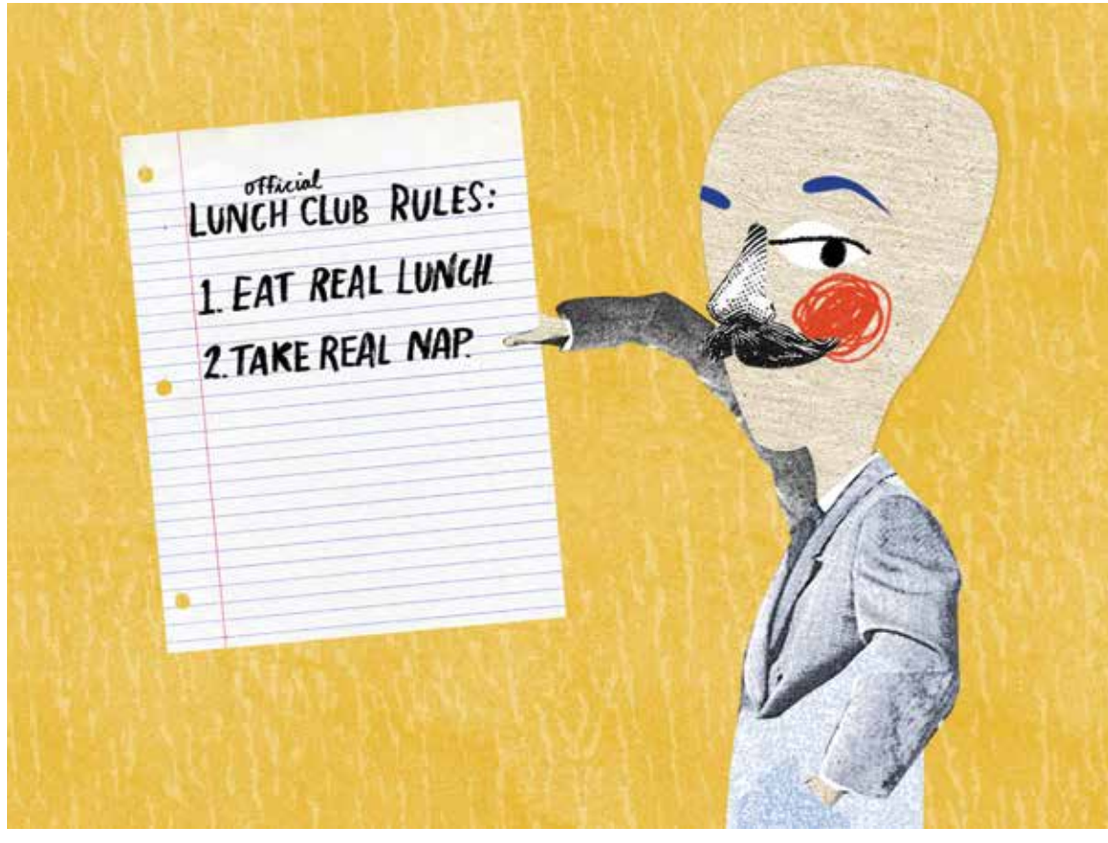
Is Galatoire's the best lunch in the best lunch city in America? I think so.

When I worked as a line cook in Denver thirty years ago, Friday lunch was still a thing there. On Thursdays I could run the entire kitchen at an expensive restaurant, moving from grill to broiler, from salads to desserts, and comfortably serve our ten or twelve guests. On Fridays we brought in two more cooks and often topped out at sixty covers. People came and stayed. They drank, they tipped well. One waiter received a line of cocaine in his check fold. It was a different crowd.

But in 1990, I began reviewing restaurants and discovered that the culture of lunch had been eroding for decades. A few spots still attracted the Friday crowd, but mostly I reviewed "express lunch" menus at the city's favorite steakhouses to keep from blowing my budget on a second dinner. The bigger story I tracked as a reporter was the emergence of fast-casual dining, which Denverites took to like ChapStick on a ski slope. I can still visualize the lines snaking around the first Chipotle.

> With all this going on, is it okay to say, "Excuse me, sir, but would you get your ass off my foot?"

By the time I moved to Atlanta in 1997, the indulgent lunch seemed a thing of the past. Yes, of course, the beloved institutions were packed—places like Mary Mac's Tea Room and Busy Bee Cafe, Carver's Country Kitchen, and Matthews Cafeteria, which I approached more as an anthropologist than a diner. Atlanta was and in many ways still is a city of lunchrooms—a midday meal that comes from a completely different tradition.



Illustrations by Natalie Nelson

I was reminded when I went to Mexico City this past spring and used as my guide the estimable Jennifer V. Cole, who knew the town and where to eat. "Why do all the restaurants close at six?" I texted her from Mexico. "Because it's a lunch town!" she texted back.

On Jennifer's recommendation my wife and I visited the seafood restaurant Contramar with friends, arriving around noon. The first thing our head waiter did was stop time. He and his team had us soon drinking wine and looking at an iced platter of clams and shrimp. There were whole fish to consider, and soft-shell crabs to crisp on the plancha, hack into chunks and roll in fresh tortillas. How hungry were we? Did we want courses or platters? We ordered a few dishes; he pushed for one or two more, including sopes, little masa cakes topped with beans and adobo-rubbed kingfish that came just at the point in the meal when stomachs growled for more than clams and ceviche. When I turned to order another bottle of wine, he had already brought one to the table, just in case.

We spent four hours there. How, I don't know; we ate and drank but not to excess. We looked at the desserts, then ordered a couple. We had espresso and talked,

the conversation lively but not absorbing. Here we were—4 p.m.!—suddenly rushing across town to change for a too-early dinner and then a concert. What we really needed was a nap.

When you eat a real lunch, it opens up a wormhole where time and space don't matter, yet before you can reenter the real world you must take a nap. That's the first rule of Lunch Club. That's why business executives in the 1960s had sofas in their offices. That's why people from Spain to Iran build naps into their days.

New Orleans is the only American city I can think of that still *gets* lunch—both the lost tradition of lunch I'm obsessed with and a development I will dub New Lunch. But let's hold on to that thought and get back to Galatoire's with its bentwood chairs and its green fleur-de-lys wallpaper, its octagon-tile floor and that light. That butter-yellow afternoon light that seems to cast an Instagram filter on one's very existence. I am so happy to have survived the morning line, to have that man off my foot, to have a French 75 in my hand, and to be toasting my brother, Tom, sitting across the table from me with a martini. The drinks are potent, so we sip slowly; we're not going anywhere, and inebriation happens in good time.

Having blown the stray bits of glitter off my butter plate, I turn from the soufflé potatoes to long batons of fried eggplant. I eat them with my fingers, as people here have for decades, dipping them in powdered sugar, which make no earthly sense except it does. The sugar runs roughshod over the trace of bitterness in the eggplant, and leaves the sensation of biting into vegetal cream.

Tom compliments a passing woman on her hat, which has a brim as wide as a manhole cover, and she hugs him. We have green salads, named here for the color of the dressing rather than the leaves, and black drum meunière with chunks of buttery crabmeat scattered atop. We get to know our waitress and some folks at a nearby table celebrating a birthday. We drink Chablis, eat caramel cup custard, and three hours pass. I feel kind of floaty by the end of it.

> Dipping the batons of fried eggplant into powdered sugar makes no earthly sense, except it does.

I DIDN'T FEEL that old-school lunch magic anywhere else in New Orleans, though I understand the mood gets close at Clancy's in Uptown. Dooky Chase's Restaurant was delightful if quiet, with ninety-four-year-old Leah Chase stopping by the tables. Boucherie also seemed subdued despite its many porcine pleasures. But here's where New Lunch comes in.

Consider New Lunch a meal psychically tied to breakfast and not a Mini Me dinner. If you loosen the definition of breakfast to make room for grain bowls and tartines amid pastries and bacon, then lunch becomes the next logical next step. Jessica Koslow's Los Angeles restaurant, Sqirl—with its bible-thick brioche toasts smeared with ricotta and jam, and its sorrel rice bowl—has led the way.

While New Lunch didn't start in New Orleans, the Crescent City has embraced it. The link that binds New Lunch to breakfast is, of course, avocado toast, a creation so versatile in execution that you can't roll your eyes at it and dismiss it as a stupid trend. At Willa Jean in the Central Business District it arrives with a poached egg, serrano chiles, pistachios, and sunflower seeds, and it looks equally at home across the table from huevos rancheros and a loaf of chef Kelly Fields' cornbread as it does from a fried chicken biscuit, a grilled wahoo sandwich, or kale Caesar salad. You'll probably be tempted at lunch to order a "frosé, y'all" (a rosé wine slushie that has become a Willa Jean hallmark), and then another, and the lunch space opens up just a bit. No, you're not staying for three hours, or even two hours, but you have reclaimed the midday fulcrum: You feel balanced, and for the instant you're not going anywhere.

New Lunch breaks down old orthodoxies, nowhere more so than at Turkey and the Wolf, the fast-casual spot *Bon Appétit* chose as its new restaurant of the year. Mason Hereford creates sandwiches, salads, and a few other items that suggest the realm of food trucks and Tasty videos, mashups so over the top they defy reason. You bite into his fried bologna and potato chip sandwich—impossibly thick, but not so thick an unhinged jaw cannot fit over it—and you don't care that your hands turn greasy with mayo and butter, and your head is ringing with the sheer crunchitude of the whole business. He sells it. Then you have a forkful/faceful of cabbage salad shot through with fried pig ears and gobs of roasted chile vinaigrette. Are you running out of steam? No worries: A tallboy and sheer animal desire keep you company throughout lunch. It is a meal of snarfable serotonin.

New Orleans-based chef and writer Tunde Wey wrote a thoughtful piece for the *San Francisco Chronicle* questioning *Bon Appétit's* recognition of Turkey and the Wolf. Why, he asked, would the magazine pick a modest, done-on-the-cheap lunch restaurant run by a white chef who caters to a predominantly white crowd in a majority black town, when a similar black-owned restaurant would go unnoticed? Is this not the ultimate white privilege, to fetishize the thrift-store aesthetic in a place that presents it with a wink? I thought a lot about Wey's words as I ate my way through New Orleans.

With the exception of Dooky Chase's Restaurant, I encountered few black diners. For the twenty years I've been writing about dining in the South, I've noticed that some restaurants self segregate while others don't. Your choice of restaurant telegraphs to your sense of identity. The other diners are your tribe.

Lunch should be the meal where your tribe consists of people who eat whatever the hell they want, need, or crave; who decide they need to escape the tyranny of time and the heavy weight of expectation; who want to park at a table and find pleasure in a meal without urgency or stress. The smart people who figure out how to create this space while attracting a diverse crowd will reclaim lunch and define it for the future. Of course, it will happen in New Orleans.

John Kessler is the former longtime restaurant critic for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. *He is working on a book with The Giving Kitchen, Atlanta's lifeline to hospitality workers in need.*

THE FEAST OF SAINT MARY

At Nashville's panaderías, a pastry chef finds meaning beyond bolillos

Words by LISA DONOVAN | Photos by ANDREA BEHRENDS

PREVIOUS: When you step into a panadería, your eye is immediately drawn to the pastries. You don't imagine that sugar can come in these colors. THIS PAGE: Flour-dusted rolls at El Nuevo Día in Madison, just north of Nashville; RIGHT: Tongs poke of out of cubbies below the shelves, which are overstuffed with a dreamscape of sweets.

MY MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER, MARY GUTIERREZ, whom I called Nana, died when I was ten. It would take me more than twenty years before I would have the courage to find my way back to her.

I took a giant step when I began obsessively stalking panaderías in my adopted hometown of Nashville about five years ago. There, on Nolensville Pike, I saw women who looked like my nana, tasted tortillas that recalled her skill, and recognized an intimate spirit of generosity and care that defined my formative years. This was not just a flirtation with new pastry.

Nana dropped out of school in the sixth grade to pick lettuce instead of learning math or poetry. She left the small village near the Zuni reservation in New Mexico where she was born and settled with her Mexican father, Pablo, and her Zuni mother, Anita, outside of San Bernadino, California. She married a white man, my grandfather William Aldridge, when she was barely seventeen. As a military wife, she traveled the country, raised four children, and worked in various factories. She left most of what she was behind and spent a lifetime replacing her language and her culture with that of my Mississippi-born and -bred grandfather. My Nana did not talk about where she came from. She did not speak of her family that I can remember. And she did not speak to anyone in her native Spanish with the exception, it seems, of me.

I am a pastry chef—a woman who uses her hands to work dough and feed people. Until recently, I denied the legacy of the woman who taught me about graciousness and giving and who was expert at the very craft I have built my life and career on. Panaderías changed that.

Customers typically serve themselves with tongs and cafeteria-style trays. RIGHT: At El Nuevo Día, the demi-baguette-style rolls called bolillos come out of the ovens two to three times a day.

ABOVE: My favorites are the custard-filled campechanas, especially those with a tangy, cream-cheese-like filling.

The first time I walked into what I now consider "my" panadería, El Nuevo Día, I was transfixed by a woman making tortillas. Deft and fast, she mounded the masa, dipping her fingertips into a bowl of water first, then, as if she had done it a million times over a million years, pressing and slapping the round of dough onto her skillet. The glorious funk of fresh masa enveloped me. My feet were on the ground. But I was no longer in my body. The room felt dimmer. My face immediately was hot and wet with tears that I didn't expect until I felt them sliding down my neck.

I had found her.

When I speak, in my broken Spanish, to these bakers, their families, and their customers, I feel far removed from the language Nana spoke to me as a child and from the generations of women whom I look like and who made me. At times I question if I should be in these panaderías, asking questions, trying to get to know the bakers while my friend Andrea Behrends takes photos. When I start to wonder whether my path through panaderias and tortillas is worthy, I look to the late John Egerton for guidance. He would have understood why I feel safe here, tiptoeing my way toward family truths, toward my place in our region.

Find the panadería in your neighborhood. Make it the place you know well enough that you know precisely what time the bolillos come out of the oven. Find the local tortillería where you can buy fresh tortillas. Take part in that community of humans feeding themselves and each other. Be a part of that simple connection.

Lisa Donovan is a Nashville-based pastry chef and writer. She spoke about panaderías at the 2017 SFA Fall Symposium. Andrea Behrends is a photographer in Nashville.


Pan Dulce
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churros
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Language, race, and empanadas

by **PAUL REYES**

What Is Latino Enough?

The author with his grandmother in Atlanta, circa 1980

I CONFESS A CULTURAL INSECURITY—namely, as a Hispanic American, I've always navigated the conversation about Latino identity with unsure footing, a vulnerability that mostly has to do with the Spanish language itself. Mine is a slightly funky ancestry: a Colombian mother, a Cuban father, a combination that leads many Latinos to say, *"¡Que mezcla tan rara!"* But even in saying the phrase myself it's clear that neither tongue works comfortably for me. I possess neither the crisp musicality *de los colombianos* nor the furry consonant-less tumbling *de los cubanos*. My Spanish is passable, sure, but it is also glaringly self-conscious, mainly because it is a first language that began to fade during a boyhood in the South, despite my parents' best efforts to preserve it. The fact that it evolved from a first language to a second one for lack of practice—for lack of commitment—evokes a mash of complicated feelings shared by anyone belonging to an immigrant family's transitional generation who feels adrift between cultures. This drifting is distinct from code-switching, the cultural and linguistic acrobatics that allow us to play between identities, to improvise. Rather, this begins as code-switching, but slowly, over time, the tools you need to switch back are harder to find.

The critical question for me is whether I can get my Spanish back, and in doing so revive a stifled heritage. Now in my forties, I've slipped pretty far into the fog of who I'm supposed to be as a Latino in America—a man whose Spanish is stilted; a father who may have missed the chance to ingrain his own son with the language, who wedges it into conversations only to watch the boy roll his eyes and sigh, because a six-year-old knows the difference between discovery and duty; a Latino shy enough with his Spanish that he doesn't drift too far from ordering huevos con chorizo or tacos al pastor at the Mexican restaurant, who clams up when the waiter throws some small talk at him; but also someone who, despite these disconnects, still gets a little choked up listening to Chavela Vargas or Eliades Ochoa.

Photos courtesy of the author

So the question of what kind of Hispanic I am has been an open one for years, with language at the center of the mystery. And perhaps that question and that mystery would have festered for another forty years or so were they not amplified and agitated by a death in the family—that of my grandmother, my mother's mother, Helda Picón Blanco Ordoñez, a woman who was, for better and worse, a gravitational force for the family, whose quirks and complaints and ailments were a subplot to any conversation the rest of us were having. A woman who was as acerbic as she was doting, as much a smart-ass as she was a romantic. A woman of wisdom. A working-class matriarch who adored her daughter's only child, a son named Paul whom she nicknamed "Pollo," not unlike her favorite part of the bird, the white meat.

> "I learned, as best I could, how to brown the meat, drain the grease, rub just the right amount of water on the tapas."

But most of all, a woman who, in her indifference to the English language, was my bulwark against the old country's culture fading out, and whose death now raises the specter of forgetting, since the voice that set the terms has been silenced.

SEE HER THERE AT THE KITCHEN table: It could be 1976, or 1984, or sometime in the nineties: Helda with a deck of cards for solitaire, arranged in stalactite lines across a doily she crocheted herself. Some doilies she gave away as gifts; others were so damned good she framed them. She was serious with the crochet business, serious about sewing, a talent she picked up as a seamstress in a Philadelphia factory, where she landed from Colombia in 1965, and which she turned into her own means of making a living after my grandparents followed us to St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1973, the city she called home ever since.

She spent countless hours in two rooms: first, the sunroom, where she sat at a Pfaff 130 sewing machine, an industrial unit with a leather fan belt and foot pedal, the whole thing loud as a jackhammer when she pressed down. Here is where she sewed dresses for a little extra cash and talked back to the telenovelas in the afternoons, unleashing a torrent with each push of her foot.

Her other headquarters, of course, was the kitchen—a modest corner of the house, the first room you passed through when you entered from the carport. You walked through a short hallway, a junk room with the washer and dryer always running, before opening the kitchen door, frail like a stage prop that swished open. That kitchen, as welcoming as it was, was also an armory. Helda always kept the skillet on the stovetop—not only because she used it constantly but so that she knew where to find it in case of a break-in. The potato rock she used to sear steaks was a backup, in case she needed to attack from a distance.

That house in St. Petersburg is where Helda laid the foundation of her influence, during weekend visits and sleepovers, where cousins reunited. At that house, through the rituals of meals at the doily-draped kitchen table, or through storytelling interrupted by the

The author's grandmother in her St. Petersburg, FL, kitchen, 1979

Pfaff in the sunroom, she held court and spoiled us. Here is where I devoured her cooking—empanadas con guiso (a mix of sautéed beef and rice and hardboiled egg), arepas con queso, caldo con huevo, ají, and carne asada. That little kitchen was a nook for the sublime. I was lucky enough that she didn't just feed me there, but taught me how to make those dishes. I learned, as best I could, how to brown the meat, drain the grease, rub just the right amount of water on the tapas, knead them out, seal the empanadas with the tines of a fork. Just enough cilantro to the apple cider vinegar so that the ají found its balance.

TO UNDERSTAND HELDA'S INFLUence, it's important to explain my family's particular American experience. My parents met in Philadelphia in 1969, their families taking radically different paths to that moment, both arriving piecemeal,

The author (center) with his Colombian family, in St. Petersburg, FL, 1980s

with their respective dramas.

The Picón family's move from Colombia began with my uncle, Jorge, which is to say it began with Elvis Presley. Discovering Elvis was a transformative experience for him, a summons to escape the increasing suffocation he felt in Colombia. He convinced Helda's sister, who already lived in Philadelphia, to sponsor him so he could finish high school in the States. Fed up with my grandfather's failing business, fed up with my grandfather, fed up with Colombia, Helda used the occasion of her birthday—and the idea of visiting Jorge in Philadelphia as a birthday present—as a way to get out, too. By May 1965, she was reunited with her son in Philly, and a few months later, as a permanent resident, she offered my grandfather an ultimatum: If you want the family to stay together, it's going to happen in America.

My grandfather was a reluctant immigrant. He settled what debts he could, pulled out his savings, and dragged his three remaining children, including my mother, to join Jorge and Helda in Philly. The timing of his arrival portended a dislocation he'd feel for the rest of his life here, for it was on Halloween that they arrived, discombobulated and exhausted, only to have to endure the weird mockery of kids knocking at the door for hours after dark, dressed as vampires and who knows what else, yelling *tiki-tik!* I know now that he was always uncomfortable in America, always tepid about the American Dream. He represents, perhaps, the immigrants who deserve their own literary epic: the tale of the lukewarm pilgrim. He was an immigrant who went home again, after fifty years of marriage, with great-grandchildren multiplying before him. He grew an octogenarian's wild hair and returned to Colombia once and for all to sow whatever arthritic oats he had left, and to enjoy—as my mother would mockingly refer to it in her bitterness over this last move—*la gloria de la Patria*.

My father arrived in 1962 at fifteen, with his nine-year-old brother in tow. The two boys were swept up in a brain-drain exodus of children known as Operation Pedro Pan, a program organized by the Catholic Welfare Bureau to extract Cuban children from Fidel Castro's communism. Pedro Pan dropped them into the narrative of exile. Their parents were lucky to get out four years later, and the Reyes family reunited—through the randomness that distinguishes so much of the immigrant experience—in Stamford, Connecticut.

Growing up, and well into my twenties, I was skeptical of the Cuban exiles' habit of mythologizing their suffering. Something about it seemed myopic in light of so many other immigrant struggles and tribulations, so many other varieties of survival and thriving. But empathy was easier to come by as my father, over the course of decades, slowly opened up about what he and his brother had been through. Empathy came quicker when I imagined two boys being told they were being sent on vacation to visit family friends in Miami, who dressed up in suits for the flight, and who, after landing in Miami, were greeted by a priest who informed them that the vacation would be longer than they'd been led to believe. That, in fact, no one could say for sure how long the boys would stay. This limbo, under the auspices of the Jesuits, who raised them among thousands of other kids in an Army barracks on the wooded edges of a weird city called Opa-locka, in a camp they called Matecumbe, would constitute the rest of their childhood.

> "As opportunities in other cities called, the family spread out, away from each other, away from the matriarchal center."

It's clear to me now that my father's struggle with exile affected my relationship with my heritage. He spent considerable energy keeping his back turned on Cuba, not talking much about it—or if he did, doing so obliquely, dancing around the pain of his extraction as a kid. It took him forty years to look directly at it, and until then he kept moving forward as an American: insistent, overachieving, as if success were a kind of vengeance for the way in which he'd arrived.

In Stamford, the family together again, my father found his father a job welding plates at a die-cast factory. It was, as Dad describes it, "shit work," and it pained him to watch his father trudge off at midnight for the graveyard shift, lunchbox dangling in his hand, uncomplaining as always. They knew of cousins in Philadelphia—a cluster of Cubans there. Why not give it a shot? The son told his father, *Go visit. If you like it, we'll move.* His father liked it, so they did.

In Philadelphia, the Picóns and Reyeses had friends in common, a Cuban couple named Lino y Blanca, who seized upon the coincidence of my father and Jorge sharing a birthday, and the fact that Jorge had a younger sister who was old enough to date. This was providential stuff: What was everybody waiting for? Let the courtship begin—though let it abide by the old man's rules. As the families got to know each other, and my father worked up the courage to ask permission to take my mother on a picnic, my grandfather said no.

> "We spoke Spanish less and less. We had no Latino friends. You do your best to fit in, and for the most part we did."

But after a while, my grandfather grew to like him, and conceded to let him visit the house on Friday evenings from seven to nine. My parents would sit in the living room while my grandfather observed them from an adjacent room, pretending to watch television but in fact keeping an eye on them by means of a strategically placed mirror. My parents would catch him staring at them in reflection, or glancing back and forth between the mirror and the television. At nine on the nose, a clearing of the throat. "Ya es hora de que se vaya, Jose Miguel." And that was that. Though they lived just four blocks away, they were left to these weekly visits—and to volumes of letters in between.

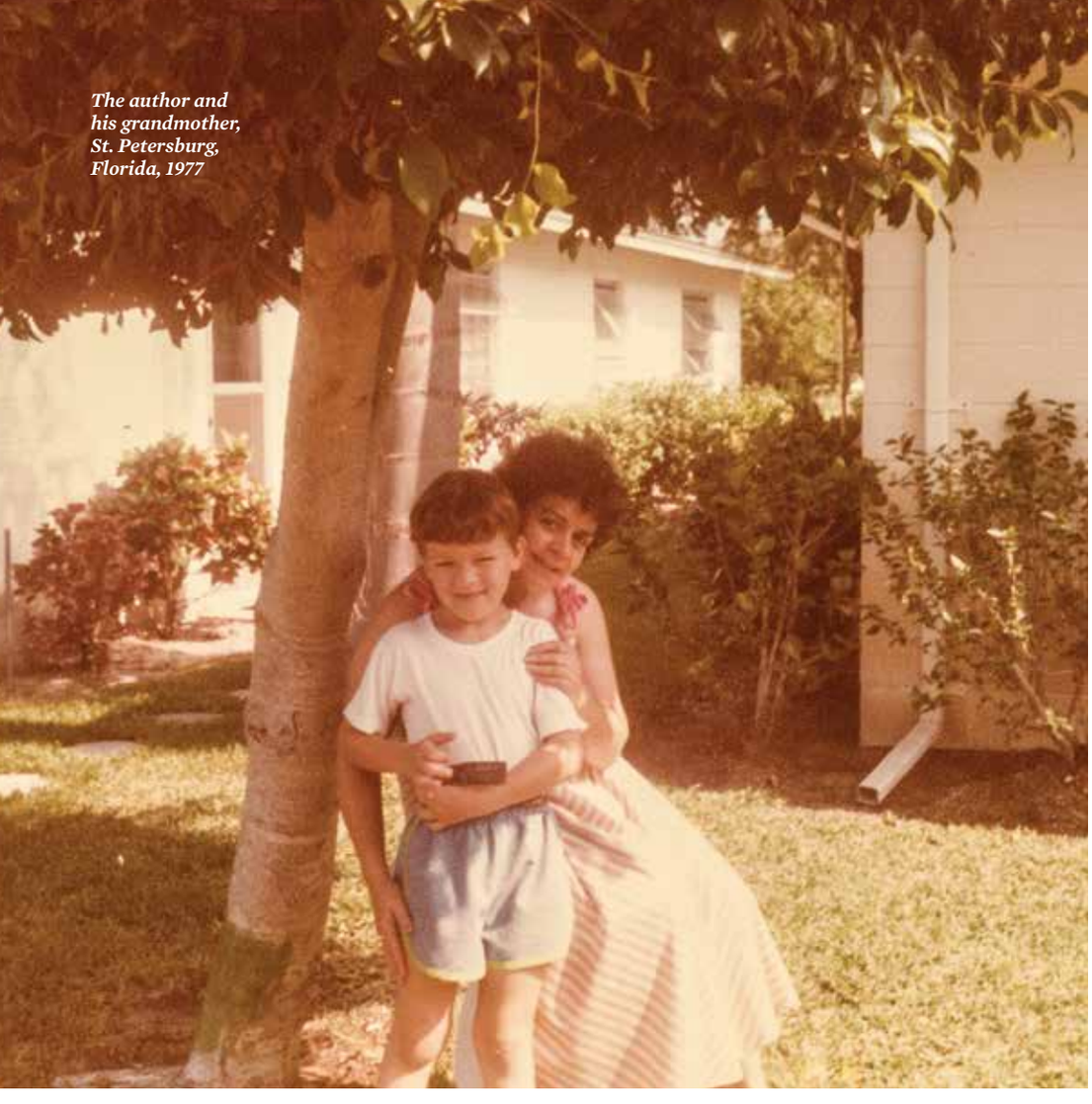
PHILADELPHIA, ST. PETERSBURG, Atlanta: Eventually, working days and studying nights, my father got a degree in architectural engineering. His career evolved from design to construction—building restaurants, specifically, which involved less finesse and more volume, less time at home and more on the road. As a workaholic immigrant with something to prove, the grind suited him.

The Atlanta phase was especially demanding. He had found work with a tragically named but quickly expanding restaurant chain called Sambo's—the racist shorthand lost on him. Though it began as a family operation, by the time my father joined the company in 1977, Sambo's had national ambitions. My father's fear of failure, and the company's expansionist visions, quickly led to him being named director of development for any Sambo's east of the Mississippi.

It was in those years in Atlanta that my grip on Latino culture began to slip. In St. Petersburg, we were an enclave of our own—a family three generations and ten members strong. But as opportunities in other cities called, the family spread out, away from each other and, more to the point, away from the matriarchal center. And though my father was insistent about speaking Spanish at home, he was never home long enough to enforce the rule. He came up with the idea of sending me back to St. Pete to spend summers with Helda, to immerse me in the language for a while, hoping it would stick.

The author with his parents and maternal grandfather

We lived four years in Atlanta, then moved to Rocky Mount, North Carolina, a town of roughly forty thousand—a shock to my mother, who had no say in the matter and was forced to leave a job she loved, forced to abandon the cosmopolitan flavors of a city in which she'd formed an enthusiastic sense of self. Atlanta was a metropolis, Rocky Mount a Mayberry. And it was in Rocky Mount that the code's switch started to stick, where the rituals of assimilation took over, where we did our best to blend in among white Southern neighbors. The three of us spoke Spanish less and less. We had no Latino friends. We practiced our Spanish on the phone with family, or at holiday get-togethers. In a small Southern town like that one, you do your



The author and his grandmother, St. Petersburg, Florida, 1977

best to fit in, and for the most part we did. Our fair complexions helped. My father's job, working for Boddie Noell Enterprises to build as many Hardee's as the South could hold, at the dawn of the phenomenon known as the breakfast biscuit—that helped, too. In fact, the lifestyle his job provided seemed to do a lot of the assimilation work for us. We lived in the right neighborhood. he worked for the right people. I went to the right school.

Even then, we could be on the receiving end of racism. We were fair game. I was ten when I realized it—an epiphany through a friend's teasing, the son of someone who worked with my father. I wasn't the target, but my father the foreigner was. I forget what prompted it, but I'll never forget the moment, the slur, and the smile with which he said it—*spic*—over and over again because he could see the pain it caused, easing out the "S" and snapping the "C" like a rubber band against the skin. That last consonant like a flick between the eyes. Even more complicated was that this cruelty was delivered not with bile but in jest, a ribbing.

My father tells his own version of this experience. He was having breakfast at the Carlton House, a relatively fancy spot where families went for brunch after mass, where the business class expensed long lunches. He was there with a handful of colleagues and his boss, who genuinely liked him, had hired him, groomed him. On that day, his boss pointed to a coffee cup and said, "Jose, how do you get twelve Cubans to fit inside that little cup?"

My father shrugged.

"Tell 'em it floats."

The table laughed. My father laughed, complicit in the humiliation. What was he to do? And who am I, even as an adult, to judge him? In high school back in St. Petersburg, in the late 1980s, I failed to strike back when my friends slapped that same epithet on me as a nickname. *Spic*. They were loud when they said it, too, calling to me across the courtyard. No faculty stepped up, no administrators—not even the Spanish teacher. Perhaps the strangest part of it was that they knew better than to say such a thing to our Chilean classmate, who was darker, more obviously Hispanic, even though I know he heard it. To them, I was safe. White enough to pass, white enough for them to think it didn't really count.

In thinking about the ways in which we identify ourselves, it seems likely that we are defined as much by our crucibles as our rituals. And yet, is that Latino enough?

Being white enough to pass made a lot of things easy in the South. But the cost of resting in that advantage revealed itself as I got older, in the shame I felt at being an outsider among family who riff freely in the family's first language, who get the joke on the first telling, who double down with idioms I've never heard. To have missed out on all this feels like an indictment of my own laziness, because I've always recognized a duty in preserving my heritage—one that I may have been shirking, sure, but a duty nonetheless. As if this wasn't complicated enough, my sense of duty has somehow been coupled with a false confidence in being Hispanic, an ability to exploit it when it suited me. In my twenties and thirties, I enjoyed the exoticism of being Cuban, and the power of revealing it, fully aware that Cuba, a forbidden island, possessed a certain cultural cachet to Americans.

The idea of being secretly (or discreetly) Hispanic points to a deeper concern: that I have been able to enjoy the privilege of not having assumptions made about me, of not being judged by the color of my skin. My family may have suffered slights, but for the most part we had the luxury and freedom to make a first impression based on character, or personality, or skill set—first impressions that many of my Hispanic brothers and sisters aren't afforded, and which are certainly denied to my American neighbors of any race that isn't white.

BY THE TIME WE RETURNED TO Helda in St. Petersburg, in 1984, living just a few miles away, I was more or less comfortable with my betweenness, with the clumsy code-switching I'd do between the school week and weekends, visiting with her. I was a teenager, my Spanish wobbly, and half our conversations at the time involved her tisking me or repeating what I'd said to her but with the verbs tidied up, tucking the articles and adverbs where they belonged.

Helda did her best to impart Colombian Spanish, which she and all Colombians believe to be superior. In fact, she mocked

every other dialect but Colombian. She was classist when it came to articulation, and for her the Colombians were regal speakers without affectation.

There was one moment—just a moment—when my Spanish finally pleased her, when she didn't just nod that I'd passed but actually praised me. We were on vacation in Colombia. I was fifteen—the first time I'd been back since I was a baby, when my mother had taken me on a kind of showcase tour among her grandparents and cousins and an extended circuit of two dozen aunts and uncles. This time around, it was just me and Helda, my cousin Jeff, and his father, Arnold. We'd been staying at my great grandmother's home in Bucaramanga for a couple of weeks already, and had hired a driver to take us to see a fortress just outside the city, a spot with some historical, Catholic gravitas that Helda insisted on visiting. We puttered up a mountain in a tiny four-door Toyota, found the fortress, took the tour, slouched through its tunnels and admired the view of the valley from its ramparts. We then made our way through the heat back to the car. I flopped into the front seat, lowered the window and rested my arm on the door, fingers on the roof but with my thumb resting between the frame and the open rear door. Helda got in behind me. And with a hot, electric suddenness, I heard her door shut, the hinge click tight, and felt a current of pain shoot from my hand to my toes. No more than a second passed, in slow motion, and I screamed, "¡Hijo de puta—abre la puerta!"

Helda opened the door. I looked at my thumb, turning black, ballooning. The driver inhaled when he saw it. When I turned to look at Helda, I found her laughing—a belly laugh, couldn't even catch her breath laughing, waving away tears laughing. The strangeness of it—the shock and hurt and insult—replaced the pain for just a moment, and I asked her: *Why are you laughing?*

"Mi vida," she said, "su español salió perfecto!"[1]

Even the driver was impressed. "El gringo habla bien!"

> "Paying attention isn't easy—the interrogation is painful—but it is critical."

HELDA DID NOT DIE PEACEFULLY, but at the mercy of brain cancer, an excruciating diminishment. By the time she'd discovered it, she had already moved into a nursing home run by nuns in Plano, Texas, where my mother had moved a while back. Helda adored the nuns and was an adopted member of the staff before she grew too weak to help. I was a father by then, busy enough that our relationship was mostly restricted to phone calls and, more often, her voicemails that scolded me for not calling back quickly enough. Busy...stretched thin... on the road...overworked...overwhelmed. Hospice. That's when you drop everything and go. I visited her in July and helped choose her last room, which had a view of a small garden—something green to soothe her if she happened to gaze out the window.

She lived until September. The way my mother tells it, in Helda's last days, her only moments of clarity were when she asked for me. Mom would have to assure her that I was somewhere nearby—mingling with the nuns, maybe—and that I'd be back soon even after I'd returned home. One morning, shocked at how lucid Helda was, asking to speak with me once again, my mother called.

I was in the car, and whether it was sunrise or sunset outside I couldn't tell you, only that the sun was low, and as we spoke she wept but I could hear that the sluggishness of the drugs was gone, that she was present, as we gushed affections to each other. It was the clearest Spanish I'd spoken since that day I howled in Colombia: pure and unselfconscious, just present, just as she was—all hers. After the call was over I couldn't even remember what I'd said, only that it was a slightly different person who had said it.

IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE TO CONSIDER where I fall between cultures, and how the perception of my race has shaped my experiences, without engaging the larger confrontation over race in America. It would be irresponsible, in fact, to consider these questions and ignore the deeper pain and insult my Hispanic brothers and sisters—and by extension, all my fellow citizens of color—have endured in a culture wherein their alienation and oppression are taken for granted.

I am one of the whitest Latinos I know. That may seem like a superficial distinction, but it is undeniable that color carries weight. We are reminded of this daily if we've been paying the slightest attention to the larger self-interrogation on race in America. Paying attention isn't easy—the interrogation is painful—but it is critical. It is my day job as an editor of journalism. It is my professional purpose. I'm certainly fortunate that a conflicted sense of self led to a career engaging these questions about race and the evolution of the American character, that the mission of my work as an editor is, in part, to foster voices in need of a platform.

Who am I among them? What have I given back based on what I've been able to reap as a Hispanic? If I'm asking what is Latino enough, I'm a breath away from the question, What is Asian enough? What is African American enough? What is enough of any distinction in race or ethnicity or culture in a country of so many immigrants? If I'm asking what is Latino enough, I'm a breath away from asking: What is American enough?

When I ask a more fundamental question—Who am I?—I think of Helda, and when I think of her I think of what she made: what she made for me, and what she made of me. I like to think that as I age and the circle of consciousness closes in, gets tighter, ejecting more frivolous memories so that the mind can carry just what it needs, that among the primary stuff that rises to the surface are the memories of her flavors, her cadence, those phrases in the purest Spanish I know—the powerful influences, embedded early. And I wouldn't be surprised if the empanada—singular as hers were, never to be replicated—turns out to be my rosebud, the word I whisper in the last scene that has the nurses scratching their heads. Charles Foster Kane's was a bobsled tossed into the fire; mine is a greasy hot-pocket stuffed with beef and rice and a hardboiled egg, the kind where you have to take a bite to make room for the ají to drip down inside and give it a little kick.

Is that Latino enough? It's good enough for me.

Paul Reyes is the editor of the Virginia Quarterly Review *and the author of* Exiles in Eden: Life Among the Ruins of Florida's Great Recession.

[1] "Your Spanish came out perfectly!"

LAS MUJERES DEL SUR

FINDING A VOICE AT THE TABLE

by SANDRA A. GUTIERREZ

Sandra A. Gutierrez

Chelsea Loper

I ARRIVED IN THE NORTH CAROLINA TRIANGLE AREA AS A YOUNG BRIDE IN 1985.

I was born in Philadelphia to Guatemalan parents. When I was five, we returned to Latin America, and I grew up fluently bilingual as a student in the American School of Guatemala in Guatemala City. I learned the histories of two countries, the lyrics to two national anthems, and the pledges of allegiance to the US flag and the Guatemalan flag. My school cafeteria served hot dogs and guacamole, brownies and churros.

My journey back to the United States was painful. It cost my husband and me our fortune, careers, family, and connections. We chose North Carolina because he earned his MBA at the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, and because we thought it the best place to raise our young family. We weren't welcomed kindly to our new home. Some people in Cary didn't want our kids to play with theirs because they assumed we were drug dealers. They said it loud enough for us to hear, but didn't dare tell us to our faces. "Otherwise," they murmured, "how else could they afford a house in our neighborhood?" Our girls were only six and seven years old. Dispelling stereotypes to clear a path for my daughters became the fire in my belly, the force that inspired me to work harder and to succeed.

I've since learned that many Latinas often find it hard to enter (or to be

invited) into Southern society. To make things worse, Southern Latinas don't have a collective voice, so finding a place to belong proves difficult. We come from different countries. We eat different foods. We speak Spanish, but not necessarily the same Spanish. Demographically speaking, Mexicans comprise the largest number of Latinas in the South. Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Salvadorans, and Dominicans follow closely, in that order.

My food writing career started when I was hired as food editor for *The Cary News*. I was thirty years old. One week into my job, my editor received a letter from a disgruntled subscriber, upset that her Southern paper had chosen "a Mexican" to write the cooking section. Before I wrote about Southern foodways, I became an expert. I deciphered secrets and history; I learned about biscuits and field peas, cobblers, and fried pies. I read and studied voraciously. In the process, I fell in love with the food, the culture, and the people of the South—*my* South.

I've encountered Southerners who assume that I'm a maid or married to a man who labors in construction. Many of these native Southerners are socially progressive folks who say they're all about diversity. But they are openly uncomfortable when they learn that I'm a published author. What Latina immigrant could possibly be *that*?

The reality is that America sees Latino immigrants inside a working-class framework: the janitor in an office building, the dishwasher in a restaurant, the cleaning lady in your home. Some Latinos do work in those roles. Latinos also work in myriad positions across every professional field. I'm one of them. We're almost invisible because we don't fit into a stereotype and because as a group, we're not often in the news.

We are Latina Southerners. We are food editors, journalists, cookbook authors, chefs, entrepreneurs, social activists, and government employees. We are first-, second-, and third-generation Americans. We may speak Spanish at home, English at work, and Spanglish with other Latinas. We are diverse and ambitious. We found our place in Southern society and we found our cultural voices through foodways. We are las Nuevas Sureñas.

LIS HERNANDEZ

Arepa Mia

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Cassandra Hovancak

Lis Hernandez is a Venezuelan who grew up in Caracas and lives in Atlanta. Hernandez moved from Caracas to New Orleans in 1998 to learn English. She planned to stay for six months and then move to Spain, where her father is from. While in New Orleans, Hernandez learned the restaurant business from Phyllis Petite, owner of Le Petite Café. One day, on a bike ride, Hernandez recalls, "I found the statue of Simon Bolivar, which is a replica of the one in Venezuela—to me that was a sign that I belonged there."

Eventually, Hernandez settled in Atlanta. A friend convinced her to sell arepas as an outside vendor at Sweet Auburn. The history of the market, founded in 1924, wasn't lost on her. During the Jim Crow era, black customers could purchase inside, but could only sell their produce outside. Race is no longer an issue when it comes to buying or selling at Sweet Auburn. Hernandez set up her first arepas stand outside, never dreaming she'd operate inside one day. "I think Southerners like my food because they recognize it," Hernandez says, pointing out the similarities between arepas and hoecakes.

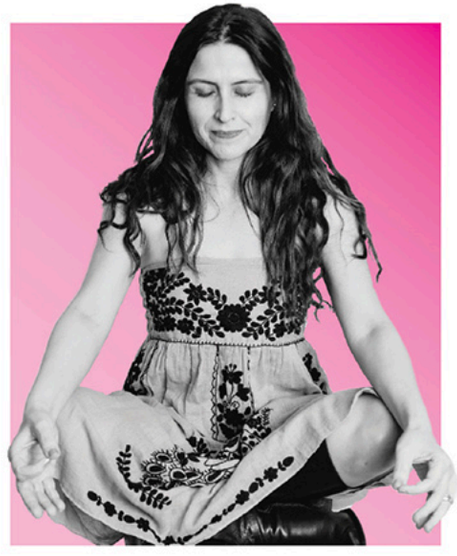
Hernandez opened Arepa Mia inside the market in 2011. "The first day I opened, civil rights activist and congressman John Lewis, a friend of Martin Luther King's, came to the market and we talked for a long time. I was touched once again to see how close that I, a Latina, was to the history of my new home," she says.

Today, Hernandez owns two Arepa Mia restaurants in Avondale Estates and the Sweet Auburn Curb Market.

IRMA PAZ-BERNSTEIN

Paletas

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE



Ashtin Paige

Irma Paz-Bernstein co-owns Paletas with her sister, Norma Paz. They specialize in Mexican-style popsicles and offer more than one hundred flavors, all made with fresh, seasonal produce.

Born in Guadalajara, Mexico ("the home of mariachis and tequila," she says), Paz-Bernstein worked as a producer for Spanish-language television networks Telemundo and Univision. Her sister asked her to help open a business in Nashville. This meant a career change for Paz-Bernstein, who was a well-established media professional. Upon arriving in the United States, many educated Latinos must redirect or reinvent their careers. Even highly valuable educational degrees earned in Latin America aren't accepted in the American job market. Few connect with a new professional passion, as Paz-Bernstein did. She says that food helped her find her place in Nashville and in the South.

Paz-Bernstein pushes the envelope with her flavors: cucumber-chile, chocolate-wasabi, rose petal, and charcoal. She wants her sons to appreciate Mexican foodways, too. Beyond paletas, "we teach them about the holy trinity of Mexican cuisine: lime, salt, and chile," says Paz-Bernstein.

This Latina entrepreneur realized that she belonged in the South—that it was really her home, when she listened to a 2008 campaign speech by then-candidate Barack Obama. "I remember candidate Obama speaking about 'all of us' having to do the work. His words made me realize that I, too, needed to do the work for *my* country; he made me feel like I mattered. I became an American citizen so I could vote for him and serve my country."

CARRIE FERGUSON WEIR

Tennessee Department of Children's Services

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Carrie Ferguson Weir is a former journalist who works as a communications officer for the state of Tennessee. Weir was born in Miami. She is the daughter of a blue-eyed American of Scottish, Swedish, and Norwegian ancestry and of a brown-eyed immigrant from Banes, Oriente, Cuba. Weir is a brunette with light skin and brown eyes. Appearance has been pivotal in her life. There is a common assumption that all Southern Latinas are brown-skinned. But Nuevas Sureñas come in many colors. For a long time, Ferguson Weir didn't know how to define herself. Her looks and her name allow her to pass for white in the South, but half of her heritage was Cuban. Who was she?

"When I was a reporter, there were people who stood up at a public meeting and said things such as, 'it wasn't like this before they moved here,'" Ferguson Weir recalls. "Those people were talking about Hispanic immigrants. I finally said something. I wrote an editorial column saying that I was 'those people.' And I never stayed silent again."

Today, Ferguson Weir calls herself a "Cuban American, raising a Southerner," and says she considers herself a Nueva Sureña, despite the fact that she still gets asked where her people are from. She cooks Cuban staples like picadillo and lechón to teach her daughter about her roots. "When my house smells like cumin or sofrito, or when I flip a flan out on a platter, that is a link to my people," Ferguson Weir says.

She wishes that many traditionally defined Southerners were not afraid of change. "I realized early on that I had moved into a different and rich culture that required my respect and deep understanding. The South has changed and will continue to change. But the good stuff—the hospitality, the food, the music, the love of a good jump into a cool river—all that won't go away. It will just be loved by a more varied kind of people who will, if they stay long enough, become Southerners, too."

RENATA SOTO

Conexión Américas

NASHVILLE, TENNESSE

TOP: Carter Andrews; BOTTOM: courtesy of Renata Soto

Renata Soto was born in San José, Costa Rica, and moved to Nashville in 1998. Soto is a founding member of the board of directors for Conexión Américas, a nonprofit that helps the immigrant community in Nashville. When Soto arrived, she found that local agencies didn't understand the complexities—sociocultural, legal, and political—of immigrants' needs.

Soto envisioned a one-stop center that would serve Nashville's immigrant and refugee community, a place where they could launch businesses and claim a sense of belonging by contributing to society.

Soto helped raise six million dollars through private and public donations. Casa Azafrán (which means Saffron's House) opened its doors in 2012. Inside, recent immigrants receive important services they need to build new lives: a law center, daycare, medical office and more, including Mesa Komal, a shared communal kitchen and business incubator.

Undocumented Latina immigrants face tremendous obstacles in the South. It's up to women with careers, education, and economic stability to lift up other Latinas. Our collective success matters. We believe it's our responsibility to make social change that will advance others. Soto embodies this by helping women like Karla Ruiz, who started Karla's Catering and Prepared Foods in Mesa Komal. and has now opened her own brick-and-mortar kitchen. Javaneh Hemmat, who also began at Mesa Komal, now sells her brand, Hummus Chick, in retail stores like Kroger and Whole Foods.

LIZ BALMASEDA

Palm Beach Post

PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

Lauren Alatriste

Liz Balmaseda is a Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist who was raised in the greater Miami area. She was born in Puerto Padre, a port town on the northeastern tip of Cuba, during the Cuban Revolution. She was ten months old when her parents, young Cuban exiles escaping Fidel Castro's government, brought her to the United States. Her father became a salesman in Miami and her mom found work as a seamstress.

Like many first-generation Southern Latinas whose parents did not attend college, Balmaseda's parents worked hard to make sure their daughter did. After graduating from Florida International University, she began her career in journalism. She worked as a reporter and feature writer for the *Miami Herald*, as the Central America bureau chief for *Newsweek*, as a field producer for NBC News, and as a screenwriter for HBO. Today, she is the food and dining editor at the *Palm Beach Post*.

Balmaseda's career path wasn't always easy. "When I was a columnist in Miami, writing on Cuban American politics and identity matters, I experienced tremendous backlash (and a couple of death threats) from anti-immigrant folks," she recalls. "Even some who ostensibly supported pro-immigrant causes made generalizations about me because exiles were supposed to think and act a certain way."

Some of Balmaseda's readers resented that a Latina was writing political op-eds

“WE MUJERES DEL SUR FOUND OUR VOICES AT THE TABLE.”

and articles on social justice. She says that one editor tried to sideline her from exile-related stories because he didn't trust her to remain objective on Cuban American issues. Balmaseda persisted and went on to win two Pulitzer Prizes: one for a story about Cuban and Haitian immigrants; the second for a story on the government raid to deport Elián Gonzales to Cuba.

Like me, Balmaseda believes that the histories and foodways of Latin American countries reflect the melding of races and cultures through time. Latin American heritage is one of inclusivity and diversity. She is fascinated by the way Southern and Latino flavors blend at the table in the Nuevo Sur. As food editor for the *Palm Beach Post,* Liz finds ways to write about people from different cultures and the food they eat. She says we still have work to do.

“What bothers me is the misused language, like when people call immigrants ‘legal’ or ‘illegals.’ Drugs are illegal. People are either documented or undocumented,” Balmaseda says. “As a journalist, I try to highlight the stories that may not be obvious to the community at large, the stories of the mom-and-pop restaurants and of inspiring cooks. I hope it helps to spread awareness and understanding among cultures—and stirs up a little curiosity about the lives of others.”

OUR FOODWAYS, OURSELVES

We need more women in this conversation about Southern identity, because as far as I can see, many men are stuck in an intractable dialogue about racism. Women, including all of these Nuevas Sureñas, lead the way by talking past the anger. We are moving forward, beyond demagoguery and division. We've started to speak. We have enough passion to risk persecution. We have enough objectivity to work through the discomfort.

We mujeres del Sur found our voices at the table. That is where we first tasted diversity, where we found commonalities, were we dared to speak without fear. Breaking bread—or tortillas—together is sacred, intimate, and powerful.

Balmaseda encourages non-Latinos to try our food because “if you like it, you may become more accepting of us.” So eat more Venezuelan arepas, Cuban arroz con pollo, Guatemalan pepián, Mexican paletas, and Costa Rican gallo pinto. Join us at the table. Underneath our disagreements, our different accents, and our diverse heritages, we are all created equal.

Sandra A. Gutierrez is the author of four cookbooks, including The New Southern-Latino Table. *She delivered a version of this article as a talk at the SFA's 2017 Fall Symposium.*

A Saturday afternoon in downtown Lexington, Mississippi, autumn 1939

Marion Post Wolcott/Library of Congress

THE GREENWOOD FOOD BLOCKADE

The White Citizens' Council, SNCC, and the politics of food access

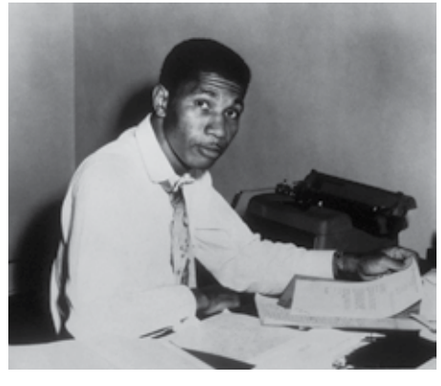
BY BOBBY J. SMITH II

Throughout the Mississippi civil rights movement, the relationship between race, segregation, and the politics of food shaped the social, political, economic, and nutritional realities of blacks, especially for those who participated in activism in the Mississippi Delta. With the decline of the cotton industry and limited access to nutritious food as a backdrop, the era created fertile soil for proponents and opponents of civil rights. For proponents, it showed the world the plight of rural Mississippi blacks and helped garner support. For opponents like the White Citizens' Council (WCC), these elements perpetuated the dual organization of the South, which enforced white superiority and promoted black inferiority. This dichotomy is best illustrated by the sharecropping system in the Delta, where the WCC and their supporters weaponized food and food policies, forcing starvation on black citizens in a concerted effort to maintain a racist political and social structure. When most people hear of the WCC, it is related to how they developed whites-only schools and segregationist media programs in response to the May 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. But the WCC was crueler still. Through local and state-sanctioned efforts, the WCC used food as a weapon to maintain white authority, disrupt black food access, and impede civil rights activism.

After Black Monday

The WCC first organized in response to the Supreme Court ruling on *Brown v. Board*. US Representative John Bell Williams of Mississippi called the decision "Black Monday." In July, Robert "Tut" Patterson, manager of the St. Rest plantation, organized the WCC's first meeting in Indianola, the county seat of Sunflower County. The Council recruited white business leaders, community members, farmers, and elected officials to employ tactics developed by Mississippi circuit judge Thomas Pickens Brady. In his speech-turned-manifesto, Brady provided the theoretical underpinnings of the Council.

Medgar Evers at his office in Jackson, MS, circa 1960



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He wrote about a forthcoming "cold war" defined by an economic boycott against blacks seeking political power. Brady advocated for systems that would leave Mississippi blacks destitute and dependent. Black sharecroppers known to be associated with groups like the NAACP were fired from plantations or were denied access to credit.

When white businesses depended on black patronage, this approach did not always work. After fighting in World War II, Medgar Wiley Evers and his brother Charles Evers returned to their hometown of Decatur, Mississippi, some seventy miles east of Jackson. The Evers brothers observed that blacks did not have access to many jobs outside of the sharecropping system. Medgar noticed that a downtown grocery store had no black employees, but the clientele was predominantly black. When blacks were in line and a white person approached, they had to cede their place. With political insight influenced by their military service, Medgar and Charles organized a boycott to force the store to establish jobs for black people. The owner acquiesced only after he lost business due to the boycott. Community-driven organizing set the stage for larger-scale activism that drew the ire of business- and land-owning whites across the state.

More than a truckpatch

In the early 1950s, most rural blacks in the Delta lived on cotton plantations. They grew their own food on a small piece of land called a truckpatch. Black sharecroppers in this remote area had no options to procure food outside of the plantation system. Plantation commissaries and a few regional grocery stores provided blacks food during the cotton

season, and the Federal Commodities Food Program supplied cheap and highly processed provisions in the winter. These provisions included canned beans and meats, flour, cheese, sugar, milk, and sometimes butter. The truckpatch, usually located next to a plantation shack, offered sharecroppers a degree of autonomy. They could grow their own beans and greens and raise hogs and chickens.

The Federal Commodities Food Program was administered by the county board of supervisors, who were either proud members of the WCC or forced to adhere to the Council's political control. If any black sharecropper was found to have participated in civil rights activism or signed desegregation petitions, they were at risk of being fired and immediately displaced from their homes. The sharecropping system inextricably linked economic and food security, and plantation owners like Patterson had the power.

The Blockade begins

By the fall of 1962, the cotton industry relied more on machines to harvest than on black sharecroppers. As a result, many sharecroppers were forced off the land and migrated to cities like Greenwood, the seat of Leflore County. In the early 1960s, Leflore County had a population of about 50,000, over two-thirds of which was black. Whites held one hundred percent of political offices and owned about ninety percent of land in the county. Greenwood was home to both the WCC headquarters and a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) field office. Medgar Evers was a Mississippi-based field secretary with the NAACP who mentored groups like SNCC. The SNCC office was located just blocks from WCC headquarters in downtown Greenwood. The office welcomed a stream of activists from all over the United States, including comedian Dick Gregory. This support angered the WCC and Greenwood's white political establishment.

In November 1962, the all-white Leflore County Board of Supervisors met to discuss the county's participation in the Federal Surplus Food Commodity Program, administered by the State Department of Public Welfare. The meeting was open to all white citizens; however, SNCC activist Sam Block noted that less than one percent of those impacted by the program were white. At this meeting, J.H. Peebles, president of the Greenwood Bank of Commerce, motioned to discontinue the federal food program. Forty of those in attendance voted in favor, and twenty-nine against. This vote marked the beginning of what some activists call the Greenwood Food Blockade.

During the Blockade, more than 20,000 sharecroppers and farmworkers were without a reliable food source. In a report from nearby Ruleville, SNCC's Sunflower County headquarters, organizers Charles Cobb and Charles McLaurin noted that the federal program was "the only way Negroes make it from cotton season to cotton season." They wrote, "If this is taken away, they have nothing at all." The Blockade exacerbated widespread poverty-induced hunger and malnutrition among Delta sharecroppers and farmworkers. This dramatically shifted the movement's focus from civil rights to food access for one year, underscoring the link between political power and the ability to eat.

> "The house they are living in has no paper or nothing on the walls and you can look at the ground through the floor."

Marion Post Wolcott/Library of Congress

A sharecropper's home with adjacent garden in the Mississippi Delta, 1939

SNCC saw this move by the board of supervisors as retribution for their Delta efforts. In response, they organized a national food drive and developed a free food distribution program in areas affected by the Blockade. Donations of food arrived by mail and freight from activists across the United States. This was the first time SNCC engaged in the politics of food beyond restaurant sit-ins.

Fighting starvation

Mississippi public welfare commissioner and WCC affiliate Fred A. Ross released a public statement in early 1963, condemning SNCC's free food distribution program. "Dick Gregory, Martin Luther King, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and similar racial agitation promoters are rendering a disservice to the Negro Population in Mississippi," Ross stated. "The cheap publicity generated by Gregory, and the gullibility of national news media who apparently relish the opportunity to disseminate half-truths and outright lies, may result in the surplus food commodity program in Mississippi being seriously curtailed or wiped out entirely."

That winter was particularly bitter, historian Charles Payne noted. Black sharecroppers earned less than usual, even though the harvest was better than usual. Organizers Sam Block and Willie Peacock, chair of the Greenwood food relief committee, wrote to the Atlanta SNCC office describing the winter conditions of blacks and the need for food: "These people here are in very, very bad need for food and clothes...the house they are living in has no paper or nothing on

the walls and you can look at the ground through the floor." Poor living conditions also created poor food conditions for blacks. Bob Moses, Mississippi SNCC director, wrote to Martha Prescod, a student at the University of Michigan, on the conditions: "We do need actual food." Moses vividly described to Prescod how after finishing a bowl of stew, a "silent hand" of a sharecropper reached to eat a leftover potato.

After months of struggling and running the food drive, SNCC petitioned President John F. Kennedy and USDA Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman to intervene. During spring 1963, SNCC testified before the House Judiciary Committee citing the denial of food via the federal food program, recommending that the government intervene on behalf of the starving sharecroppers. In response to their testimony and efforts, "the Justice department opened an investigation, and as a result, county officials were warned that unless they resumed food distribution, the Department of Agriculture would take over and continue the program." An internal SNCC newsletter reported on March 22 that the Leflore County Board of Supervisors voted to reinstate the program due to pressure from the agriculture department.

Nonetheless, the food drives continued throughout the Delta after the commodity program was reinstituted. The white power structure still attempted to dismantle the commodity food program and disrupt SNCC food drives. Eventually, the segregationists changed strategies. Instead of disrupting black food access locally, they focused on the national food stamp program.

Tenant farmers on the porch of the Mileston store in Holmes County, Mississippi, 1939; OPPOSITE: Fannie Lou Hamer was a delegate of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1964

Marion Post Wolcott/Library of Congress

Warren K. Leffler/Library of Congress

After the Blockade

Reinstating the commodities program marked the end of the Greenwood Food Blockade. The white power structure had to cede to the demands of SNCC. The next power play came in response to the "War on Poverty." This program never made a lasting impact on the Delta, due to the workings of Mississippi politicians Jamie Whitten, John Stennis, and James O. Eastland. Throughout the rest of the 1960s, these men fought to ensure that the dual organization of the South was maintained. They fought for the food stamp program, which many civil rights activists opposed. Most poor blacks in the Delta did not qualify for, or could not afford to purchase food stamps. Any county that implemented the program had to withdraw from the commodities food program under federal law.

Rather than go hungry, poor blacks would have to apply for a loan from the government to purchase stamps or establish credit with local white grocers. This dynamic increased black dependence on the white grocers and plantation owners. Historian Mark Newman noted, "Some grocery stores only accepted food stamps for the most expensive brands of food and…raised prices when the county entered the food stamp program." As a result, poverty among African Americans in the Delta was exacerbated.

The Greenwood Food Blockade illustrates a critical moment where the white power structure used food as a weapon to oppose the advancement of black civil rights. Many places in the Delta have yet to recover from the social, political, and economic struggle for equality. Delta counties today suffer high rates of food insecurity, poverty, and hunger, just as they did over fifty years ago. Manipulation of food policies at the local, state, and national levels had lasting effects. This manipulation has led to food deserts and to high rates of diet-related illnesses, including diabetes.

This article focused on how food was used as a weapon against the movement, but food was also a tool of resistance by activists. Fannie Lou Hamer turned to the politics of food in the late 1960s with the creation of Freedom Farms. Revisiting the Greenwood Food Blockade and other civil rights movement struggles provides a historical foundation for activists working in food justice today.

Bobby J. Smith II, a PhD candidate in development sociology at Cornell University, is the 2017 Medgar and Myrlie Evers Research Scholar at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. *His research was supported in part by the MDAH and the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Institute. He delivered a version of this paper at the SFA's 2017 graduate student conference.*

COME TOGETHER

Tequila handles and new traditions

BY CAROLINE COX

Aunt Anita, oil on canvas by Hayley Gaberlavage

HERE'S HOW GATHERINGS WITH MY MOM'S SIDE OF THE FAMILY go down: About twenty-five of us spill into Aunt C's kitchen in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. Two-plus decades of family photos and cards smother her refrigerator—childhood summers at the lake house, proms, graduations, and engagement announcements. My mom laughs her pitchy laugh at inside jokes with her sister. The Clemson game buzzes in the background. Grandma passes around small plastic cups of fragrant ambrosia. We drain several bottles of cold, crisp Frontera. Mom says she buys it because she prefers Spanish wine, but I'm pretty sure it's because Frontera comes in extra-large 1.5-liter bottles. If it's the holidays, my sister, our eleven female cousins, and I stretch out on Aunt C's California king bed and nod off to *The Fox & the Hound*.

In the past few years, the rosy glow with which I viewed these times started to fade. Two of my uncles got laid off in a year. The off-color jokes and political grumblings suddenly shifted into focus. Last Thanksgiving, I entered the kitchen as someone asked the names of the turkeys pardoned that year. When my generally affable uncle replied with the name of the presidential candidate I voted for, I heel-turned. I'd always been known as the free spirit in our conservative family. The one who doesn't care about football. The art school alum who hides new tattoos, the Democrat who dyes her hair pink.

Here's another family tradition: For the past two or three years, the Jenkins women have been fantasizing about an all-ladies cookout weekend. A chance to learn the recipes we ooh and aah over but don't know how to make, like my Aunt T's damn-near buoyant potato rolls. We'd been talking about this weekend for so long, part of the routine was that it never happened.

This year, Aunt T declared it was time. Aunt T is my cool aunt—she's the first person I knew who had a tattoo, a small 1990s-esque rose with a thorny stem on her ankle. She'd been known to hit the bar scene with her daughter, my younger cousin, and even pound a shot or two. We began a text thread with a few relatives. We decided on a weekend in July.

THEN WE WERE SIX. Aunt C hosted, because she always hosts. Aunt T, who travels with her own knives and pans, had received recipe requests in advance. We'd unanimously requested her potato rolls. Aunt T also announced via text that she'd be making a signature summer cocktail, which seemed to sway anyone who was on the fence about attending from a noncommittal "maybe" to a strong "*Hell* yes."

Ladies' cooking weekend had a precise schedule: Daylight hours sunbathing at Isle of Palms beach; evenings cooking family recipes. We made homemade pizzas—ricotta with spinach, caramelized onion with pineapple chunks. I learned the secret to my family's creamy dips: gobs of Duke's mayonnaise. Blue cheese dip, cold spinach dip; mayo, mayo. We mashed our version of guacamole: avocados, red onion, Roma tomatoes, Concord Foods seasoning mix, and lime juice. Aunt T taught us how to make "Summer Drink"—one can 7up, a bottle of Corona, one can frozen limeade concentrate and a handle of tequila. Pour into a pitcher, add ice, and boo-ya. Summer Drink is Aunt T's go-to

during Edisto Island vacations with my parents, aunts, and uncles. I imagined them slurping cocktails and playing games until the wee morning hours. I thought about how that could one day be my cousins, my sister, and me.

EVEN THOUGH I'D been eating potato rolls for years, I'd never heard the story behind them. Aunt T's maternal grandmother used to make them. Craving the rolls as an adult, Aunt T searched for a recipe in her mom's cooking notebooks (of which there were, by her estimation, "4,782"). No dice. When Aunt T's brother was diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma, she wanted to bring him familiar comfort. She would perfect the potato roll recipe on her own. Aunt T tried a handful of variations. She let each one rise for hours, globbing off a handful of the mound of bread dough, slick with oil and dusted with flour, the way her grandmother taught her. When Aunt T thought an iteration was close, she FedExed them to her brother in Dallas. She shipped probably a dozen batches before he gave the seal of approval. He died in 2011.

The six of us sat around Aunt C's long counter that summer night in Mount Pleasant, sweating glasses of Summer Drink in hand. Aunt T chopped a large potato and mashed it tender. She melted Crisco in a pot over the glowing stove eye and mixed it with whole milk and water, heated to exactly 123.5 degrees, measured with her candy thermometer. She mixed King Arthur flour with sugar, a dash of kosher salt, and a whole packet of fresh, active dry yeast. She greased the bowl, dumped in the dough, and kneaded like hell. That's where we came in. We floured our hands and took turns pinching and knotting dough.

We placed the rolls on greased pans and let them rise overnight. The next morning, Aunt T slid the pans into the oven. After seven minutes, she turned the pans and let the rolls bake for seven minutes more. The oven timer beeped as we dragged our duffels downstairs and into our respective cars, bound for our respective lives. I left Mount Pleasant with a belly full of rolls—one steaming and hanging out of my mouth like a puppy with a chew toy—and a few tossed in a Ziploc freezer bag.

Next summer's cooking weekend is already in the works, and each person will bring her signature recipe. I make a mean white-wine orzotto. Now, when I think of family gatherings, I taste Summer Drink and see flour-dusted dough. I feel comfort and belonging. I can't wait for next year.

Keeping Your Cool, oil on canvas by Hayley Gaberlavage

Caroline Cox is a writer and editor based in Atlanta. She's written for Nylon, VICE, Complex, BuzzFeed, Rolling Stone, *and* Atlanta *magazine.*

MY FATHER'S SOUTH

Old lessons ring true

BY MARIA GODOY

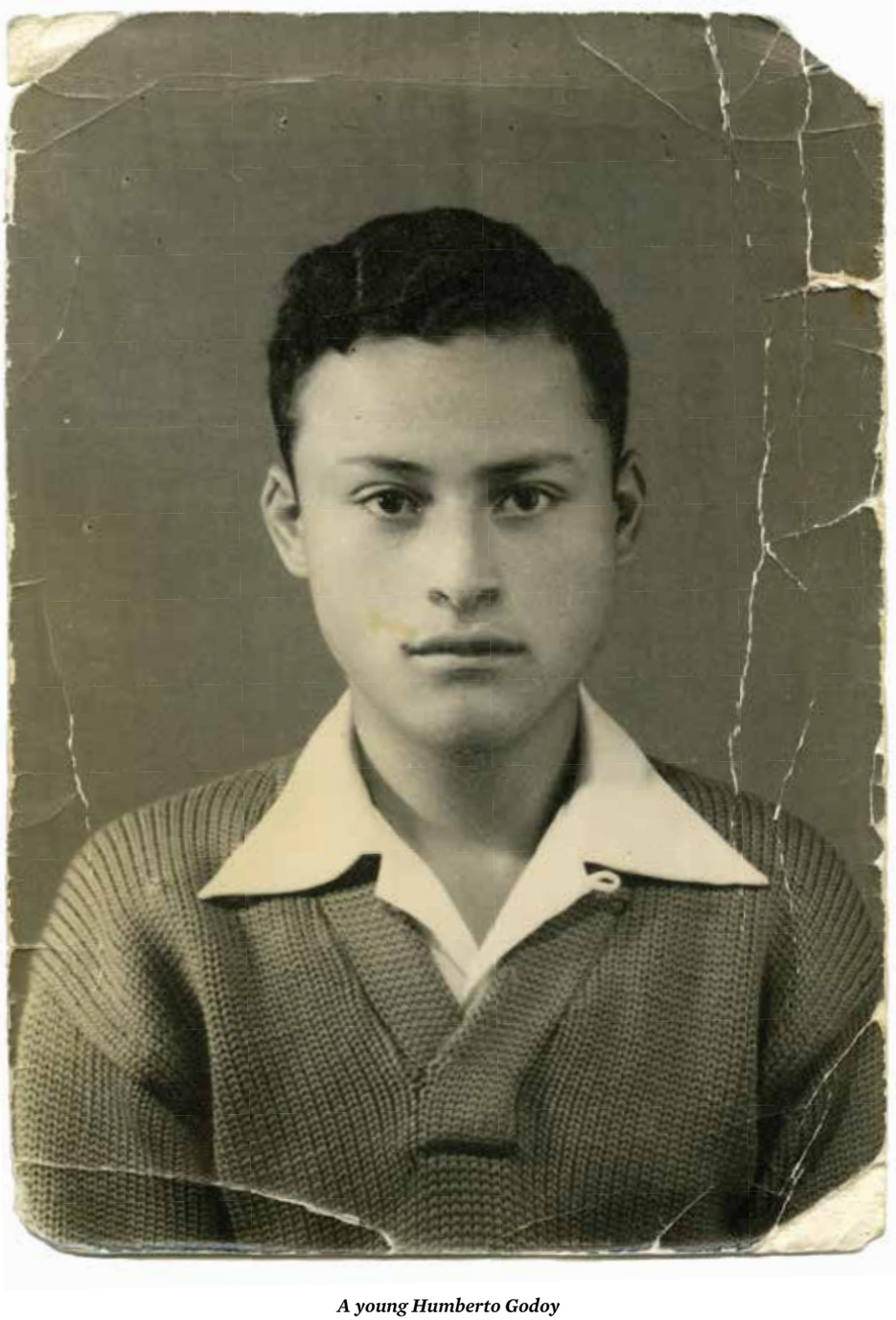
I WAS BORN IN GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala, and moved to the suburbs of Washington, DC, when I was almost five. For years, every time I've been faced with that loaded question that immigrants know all too well—*where are you* from*, really?*—I've often answered, "The South...you know, the *Deep* South." It's a corny joke, but it's grounded in reality. My American story does begin in the Deep South, in Alabama, with my father.

Jacksonville State College cheerleaders. "Bert" Godoy stands second from right.

Humberto Godoy was born and raised in Guatemala City. He wasn't dirt poor, but he was poor enough that he had to shine shoes to buy pencils for school. Those pencils wrote him a new destiny: In 1954, he won a scholarship to attend what was then called Jacksonville State College in Jacksonville, Alabama (now Jacksonville State University).

The scholarship covered tuition, but Dad still needed to pay for living expenses. Like many immigrants before and after him, he gained his economic foothold selling food. He rented a hot dog cart and went door to door in the dormitories during exams. The way Dad told it, he made friends with just about everyone on campus, including the football players. In Alabama, being friends with the football team meant that he was *in*. Papi was too small to play football, so he joined the cheerleading squad instead. (Judging from his yearbook, male cheerleaders were apparently a thing back then.) Dad was short, brown, and charming, full of hustle and spark. In my favorite yearbook photo, he's dressed in a crisp white cheerleader outfit, huddled with his white Alabama pals, all wearing big smiles—the very picture of 1950s Americana. For a time, Papi even dated the homecoming queen, a blonde, blue-eyed Southern belle.

But the acceptance he found in Jacksonville was limited. Off campus, he faced racism. My father was a dark-skinned man. This was Jim Crow–era Alabama. When Dad boarded a bus, the driver would sometimes tell him to sit in the back. My father would explain that he was not colored, using the terminology of the day. He'd say he was



A young Humberto Godoy

Photos courtesy of the author

Spanish. The driver would let Dad sit wherever he pleased.

When Dad told me this story, I asked why he didn't say he was from Guatemala.

"Because they'd just think I was Mexican," he answered, "and they didn't really like Mexicans."

"But you don't have a Spanish accent!" I countered.

"Ehh," he said, "they didn't know the difference."

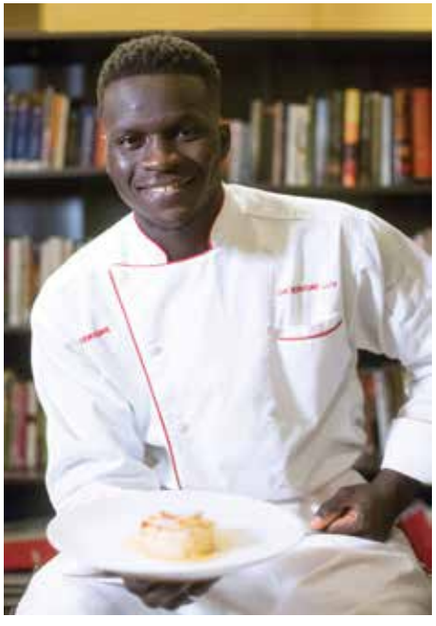
When I look at my father's yearbook from Jacksonville State, I can't find any entries for Humberto Godoy. But there are several photos of "Bert" Godoy, as his friends called him. They had another nickname for him, too, one I discovered in a handwritten message scrawled in the pages. It read, "Good luck to the best wetback I know!" When I probed him about it, Papi told me that was his friends' nickname for him. It was all in good fun, Papi assured me. But wasn't it only funny to them because they found some truth in it?

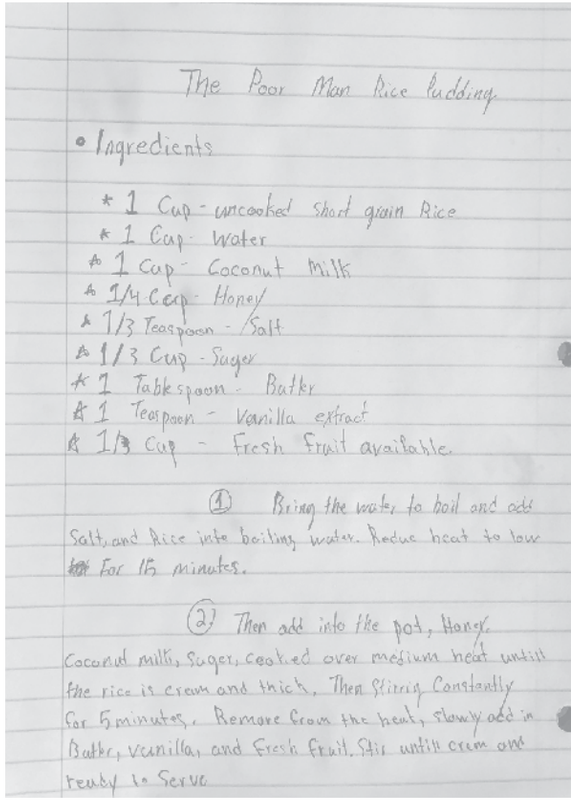
My father found acceptance in Alabama at a time when the state's Latino population was miniscule. He did so against the backdrop of a national milieu in which Mexican Americans faced discrimination and segregation. The same year my father came to Jacksonville, the United States government launched Operation Wetback, an initiative to round up and deport undocumented Mexicans. By the time he graduated in 1958, more than one million Mexicans had been deported, mostly from the Southwest.

AFTER GRADUATION, my father went on to earn a master's degree in public administration at Syracuse University in New York. He then returned to Guatemala for many years until his work with the World Health Organization brought him—and the rest of our family—to Washington, DC, in 1980. Though he never lived in the Deep South again, the place stayed with him. He loved him some fried chicken. For years, he tried to recreate the Alabama white barbecue sauce he ate in his college days. Except he was kind of clueless in the kitchen, so he'd experiment with mixing bottled barbecue sauce with vinegar and mayonnaise—a truly disgusting combination, let me tell you. Finally, one of my sisters looked up the recipe and sorted him out. When he died, my father asked that we scatter his ashes across the state of Alabama. He said it was the place that gave him his first big break in life. It had been his gateway to the American Dream.

While I am not from the South, I am of the South. I would not be who I am but for the South, and the hospitality and opportunity it gave my father. In many ways, the region has been transformed from the place my Papi knew: Today, horchatas and baleadas, tacos and tortas are as common as biscuits and barbecue. In this Nuevo South, as in the South of my father, divisive rhetoric reverberates, echoing a larger national debate about what it means to be American. But so, too, does the welcoming Southern spirit that gave a bright, scrappy young man from Guatemala a shot and embraced him as its own. Dad was, as one of his old friends from school told me after his death, "the best of us."

Maria Godoy is a senior editor for NPR's *science desk and host of* NPR's *food blog,* The Salt. *This piece is excerpted from her 2017 SFA Fall Symposium talk.*





The Poor Man Rice Pudding

- Ingredients

* 1 Cup - uncooked short grain Rice
* 1 Cup - Water
* 1 Cup - Coconut Milk
* 1/4 Cup - Honey
* 1/3 Teaspoon - Salt
* 1/3 Cup - Suger
* 1 Tablespoon - Butter
* 1 Teaspoon - Vanilla extract
* 1/3 Cup - Fresh Fruit available.

① Bring the water to boil and add Salt and Rice into boiling water. Reduce heat to low ~~for~~ For 15 minutes.

② Then add into the pot, Honey, Coconut milk, Suger, cook over medium heat until the rice is cream and thick. Then Stirring Constantly for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat, slowly add in Butter, Vanilla, and Fresh Fruit. Stir until cream and ready to Serve

DIRTY PAGES

Poor Man Rice Pudding

AS TOLD TO ERIN BYERS MURRAY BY SERIGNE MBAYE

Dirty Pages *is an ongoing recipe exhibit in Nashville. In this installment, we hear from* ***Serigne Mbaye****, a senior line cook at Commander's Palace in New Orleans. Since his teenage years, he has worked his way through numerous restaurant kitchens. He pulls from those experiences to recreate a rice pudding recipe from his youth.* *–Erin Byers Murray*

I WAS BORN IN NEW YORK, BUT when I was five, my parents sent me to a boarding school in Senegal, where I spent my childhood. My parents were going through a lot, and I was the young one, so it was easier to ship me away. I got there, this kid from America, five years old, and everything changed. It was not a fun childhood. But by the time I was nine, I was cooking for everyone at the school. When you cooked, you got known. People respected you and if you was in trouble, people could help you. They'd say, "He that guy that know how to cook."

We used to make this dish called sombi, a rice pudding. Every night for dinner, we would eat white rice with some type of sauce, then we'd save the rice and in the morning, make this sombi. It didn't taste great because it was not seasoned correctly. It was cheap. We'd only put sour cream and salt and that's it. But you ate it because you had no option. If you didn't eat that, you wouldn't eat till lunch. It was terrible but even as a young kid I knew that no matter how simple the dish, there was always a way to make it better.

I saw my parents only a few times within the nine years I was in Africa. I had to be reintroduced to them at age fourteen, when they brought me back to the United States. I learned this later, but back in the late 1980s, my mom came to America and opened up a Senegalese restaurant [in Harlem]. The restaurant closed a couple of years before I was born. Cooking is a big part of my mom's culture. In Senegal, people will teach you—but they aren't going to teach you their secrets. My mom did. She ended up teaching me everything I need to know.

I started working in kitchens in high school—I worked as a dishwasher at two different jobs during my senior year. Then, I got the chance to become a salad cook, doing *garde manger*. I worked in a Japanese restaurant, then a Cuban restaurant. Later, I got accepted into the New England Culinary Institute. So, after I went to culinary school, I ate rice pudding somewhere and I'm like, "This reminds me so much of Senegal." I got home and tried to make it and was like, "If I could just incorporate some of the techniques I've learned, I could see this come to life."

Photos by L. Kasimu Harris

POOR MAN RICE PUDDING

INGREDIENTS

- **1 cup uncooked short-grain rice**
- **1 cup water**
- **1 cup coconut milk**
- **¼ cup honey**
- **⅓ teaspoon salt**
- **⅓ cup sugar**
- **1 tablespoon butter**
- **1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- **⅓ cup fresh fruit (berries, peaches, or whatever is available)**

Bring the water to a boil and add the salt and rice. Reduce heat to low. Cook for 15 minutes.

Add honey, coconut milk, and sugar to the rice. Stir constantly over medium heat until the rice is creamy and thick, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat.

Add butter, vanilla, and fresh fruit. Stir until creamy and serve at once.

Strawberry Crop Picker, 2017, by Lina Puerta
Cotton and linen pulp; lace, velvet, sequined fabrics, handmade woven textile, trims, appliqués, velvet ribbon, fake fur, feathers, pom-poms and gouache.

GRAVY

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Southern Foodways Alliance

THE MISSION of the Southern Foodways Alliance is to document, study, and explore the diverse food cultures of the changing American South.

Our work sets a welcome table where all may consider our history and our future in a spirit of respect and reconciliation.

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