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Marcie Cohen Ferris

2018 Craig Claiborne Lifetime Achievement Award Winner

The Southern Foodways Alliance's Craig Claiborne Lifetime Achievement Award goes to an individual whom all thinking eaters should know, the sort of person who has made an indelible mark on our cuisine and culture, set national standards, and catalyzed important dialogues.

The award is named for the Sunflower, Mississippi native Claiborne, a transformative journalist who declared Southern food and foodways "the vastest and most varied of all traditional regional cooking in the country."

This year we honor Marcie Cohen Ferris, a native of Blytheville, Arkansas, who has done transformative work at the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in Utica, Mississippi, published genre-defining books, framed public dialogues about food and identity, and helped pioneer the food studies discipline. As a professor in the Department of American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she taught a generation of students, her research interests have spanned the foodways and material culture of the American South, the history of the Jewish South, and American Jewish identity and culture.

Ferris' *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (UNC Press, 2005) was nominated for a 2006 James Beard Foundation Award. She is co-editor of *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History* (University Press of New England, 2006). In *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region*, (UNC Press, 2014) she examines how food has expressed and shaped Southern identity.

Marcie has proved a key leader in the food studies and foodways field, speaking often and well at symposia, mentoring colleagues, and serving on countless committees. She has defined the possibilities of her work this way: "The study of foodways... addresses a central issue in the humanities: how do we connect the great dramas of history with the lives of ordinary people." From 2006 to 2008, she served as president of the Southern Foodways Alliance board of directors. Under her leadership, the SFA expanded and enhanced its academic work and grew into a national organization.

"Marcie is a tireless advocate and cheerleader for her students," Sara Camp Milam, SFA managing editor, said when presenting the award. "She has encouraged scores of emerging scholars—most of them women, and myself included—to reach further than we thought we could. She has made us her peers."

In October 1999, SFA presented the first Craig Claiborne Lifetime Achievement Award to Edna Lewis, the doyenne of American regional cooks. Today, we commission a portrait by Oxford, Mississippi, artist Blair Hobbs, produce a film by Ava Lowrey, and toast a life and work at the SFA fall Symposium. That film, *Marcie Cohen Ferris Does the Work*, which premiered October 12 at the 21st Southern Foodways Symposium in Oxford, may be streamed at southernfoodways.org.

The Southern Foodways Alliance documents, studies, and explores 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. A member-supported organization based at the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture, we collect oral histories, produce films and podcasts, publish great writing, sponsor scholarship, mentor students, and stage events that serve as progressive and inclusive catalysts for the greater South. To learn more visit southernfoodways.org.