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Excavating the South's African American Food History

By Anne Yentsch

This essay is a rewritten and condensed excerpt of chapter three in *African American Foodways: Explorations of History & Culture*, edited by Anne L. Bower (Univ. of Illinois Press, 2007). Additional chapters of particular interest to archaeologists in that volume include “Food Crops, Medicinal Plants, and the Atlantic Slave Trade,” by Robert L. Hall and “Chickens and Chains: Using African American Foodways to Understand Black Identities,” by Psyche Williams-Forson. Other chapters in the volume emphasize literary connections, the cultural creation of soul food, black hospitality before World War I, and cookbooks compiled by the National Council of Negroes. Each in its own way displays the divergent talents that contribute to ethnic food studies; provides extensive references to primary and secondary sources; and also offers something of interest to archaeologists working with African American material remains.

Introduction

Nostalgia governs African Americans’ memories of foods served at family meals and other events. Less nostalgic studies by writers like Andrew Warnes, Caroline Rouse and Janet Hoskins, together with those by archaeologists, highlight connections between food and conflicts over race, class, religion, agency, and ethnicity. Each way of considering food’s pivotal role speaks to who black people are, and each tells of social and cultural identities centered on special foods, dishes steeped today in black mythology. Yet, the complex realities of African American food history are difficult to document.

Most African American cookbooks present themselves as drawing on long-standing southern traditions, but there are incongruities. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, few black families ate luxurious deserts even on special occasions. Many “traditional”

recipes evolved well after the Civil War. Much of African American food history lies in twentieth century realities. Of course, within the realm of collective memory, whether cooks prepare dishes conforming precisely to archetypes doesn't matter. What is crucial is the enduring connection between present and past, between ancestors and descendants. Exact replication is irrelevant. The tide turns on whether or not people believe the dishes are "authentic."

But, to understand African American food history requires separating myth and reality. One has to consider not simply what people ate, but how people lived, how and where they obtained food. There is the issue of "outside foods" (commercial foodstuffs, new recipes and techniques, 'foreign' influences), assimilation and its companions, choice and change.

As an archaeologist my attention is drawn to two dimensions of the food system: (a) the spaces in which people lived, worked, and ate, (b) the social relationships that guided behavior. There also are patterns of power, dominance, and resistance to consider as well as the varied paths of social change. The approach is ingredient oriented, and gives attention to small, informative facts that speak to space, place, and social action.

Archaeologists look at changes in soil color to distinguish one stratum from another. They look at the presence and absence of specific objects or design motifs on pots. They consider how these were made to see how one change flowed into another, making something old into something new even as its maker tried to follow tradition. Archaeologists constantly confront individual imprints and ethnically driven derivations.

A similar approach can be taken towards foodstuffs and recipes, especially those in southern cookbooks. Two overlapping patterns are present: Conspicuous abundance, exotic ingredients, specialized utensils, and intensive labor mark meals among the wealthy. Here, culinary display is essential. Simple ingredients and cooking techniques, scarcity and want, just a

few tools, and a focus on having enough food distinguish meals within poor southern families. Essentially this is the difference between turtle soup and catfish stew, real coffee and peanut coffee. These differences created two food traditions that speak to social identity in much the way as would two artifact assemblages of similar age from two different cultures.

Within historical archaeology, we find that details emerge with greater clarity and interpretations grow richer as the past moves closer to the present, as material fact can be meshed with historical text. Where the material record is fragmentary or hard to see and the historical narrative is unusually silent, detail fades away. For example, generic images dominate our views of food in the Neolithic. But, it is also apparent whenever an archaeologist has to view the beliefs and behavior of an underclass through eyes of the elite.

There are similar phases to researching African American foodways. Pre-1860 texts occasionally give first names of plantation cooks, but most remain anonymous. Their social identities lurk in the shadows. Yet, as ghostly as those people are, they still appear more clearly than the women who prepared meals in sharecroppers' homes. Their voices remain remarkably still within in the historical record. Their silence underscores the replacement of one form of white power by another, equally repressive system after the Civil War. These years, marked by social barriers and color lines, beginning after the Civil War and lasting into the twentieth century left hunger's scars on rural African American food customs much as slavery did.

Because the Civil War provides such a clear break, this essay is separated into two sections – foodways during slavery, and foodways after Emancipation into the early twentieth century. Throughout, the emphasis on tangible remains signals an archaeological perspective partnered with an anthropological analysis of historical documents.

Foodways during Slavery

Within African towns and villages, eating was fully entwined with almost every aspect of daily life. Getting a meal was the day's daily work for almost all. However, in the New World, African traditions were forced to accommodate other cultures; a slave's choice of what to eat was minimal; food was highly regulated. In slave-owners' eyes, only income-producing work was viable. The masters allocated food resources using a value system that cared not one whit for the rights, time constraints, or traditions of the black community.

Slaves adapted both European and Native American foods and cooking methods to African custom. They learned to prepare many new dishes. New foods included corn and collards, deer and possum, pokeweed, persimmon, sweet potatoes, white potatoes, and cassava. This process surpassed simple food substitution or retooled recipes to become a synergistic adaptation. Use of specific ingredient, however, was normally restricted by masters. Counter maneuvers circumventing white dictates and opening alternate routes to foodstuffs prevailed.

Food preferences and cooking techniques showed African lineages. African descendants continued to create meals with a vegetarian base, adding meats and flavoring to heighten taste. They hunted and gathered as they could. They applied traditional cooking methods: frying, boiling, steaming, ash baking, fireside grilling and pit roasting.¹ New vegetables--squash, peppers, green runner beans, and European greens – were easily prepared using familiar techniques. Frying food in hot oil substitutes for palm oil kept food crisp on the outside and tender inside. Cooks honed the technique to provide an array of deep fried foods from corn oysters to okra fritters and oyster puffs.

The slaves' resourcefulness in reducing hunger drew on a fierce tenacity, but some obstacles were difficult to overcome. Plantation mistresses restricted access to exotic, prestigious

foodstuffs. No slave had the ingredients needed for a meal if these included the wide range of staples used in 'white' kitchens: butter, yeast, cheese, macaroni, vinegar, pickles, flavored oils, jellies, jams, etc. Slaves had little access to luxury ingredients such as those used on Georgia plantations to celebrate special events: almonds, raisins, currants, citrons, cinnamon, cloves, nutmegs, ginger, gelatin, lemon and vanilla flavoring; coffee, tea, wine, brandy, cordials and champagne; pulverized sugar, sugar ornaments and candy kisses.² Food was hard to acquire; none afford the largesse of a planter's table.

In the quarters, time constraints demanded that weekday meals be easily prepared, contain readily available ingredients, and be easy to serve and eat. Foods that could be eaten by hand (e.g., bread, biscuits, and roast potatoes) held an advantage. People carted peas, beans, and bacon to the fields in buckets or pots and cooked them over fires where they worked.³ Tasking differed between plantations. Some people worked collectively to get a meal; at others it was done individually; occasionally one or more slaves were designated to cook for all. It is noteworthy that within the slave community, food preparation was shared between men and women in ways not seen in white households. Gender distinctions drew on different traditions and expediency was paramount.

There were male domains within food procurement and preparation: animal butchery, distillation of hard liquor, and hunting. On special occasions, men also dug pits and trenches, gathered wood, butchered animals, tended the fire, and basted slowly roasting shoats, goats, rabbits, and chickens through the night. The gender divisions and the prerogatives of rank in plantation life carved out different social niches each of which occupied its own physical space, i.e., distinct activity areas offering separate food options. Access to these and the foods therein varied as shown in a diagram designed by Larry McKee.⁴

McKee's model tackles two aspects of food procurement: the locus of control (planter or slave) and whether or not a planter sanctioned the food activities. Archaeologists can fairly easily analyze a set of faunal remains and determine quantity, quality, and nutritional components, but it is harder to see the links between slave, planter, and the larger society. McKee's model shows a straightforward pattern of provision when foods were supplied by the planter. The pattern that emerges when slaves obtained food for themselves is more complex, ruled by space and place.

Consider the areas on a plantation where food might be found and the paths leading to them. There is a continuum that begins with interior domestic space (the white woman's domain) shown in McKee's model as the plantation kitchen. There food was centrally processed. Within the big house (not shown by McKee) and its kitchen the household staff garnered a few amenities, more molasses, extra cornmeal, snippets of meat or even a handful of sweets. Most slaves obtained their food as carefully allotted rations distributed on the basis of worker productivity. Beef was normally allotted at Christmas when a whole animal was slaughtered and given to families in the quarters although some planters also butchered cattle and sheep in summer.⁵ Planters and their families gave apples, oranges, tea, coffee, stick candy, molasses, brown sugar, and liquor as favors and enticements. Thus proximity to power and behavior pleasing to power were assets. Access to liquor, coffee and tea, to sweets, to flour, and domestic meats was highly regulated although a few circumvented this through store purchases.⁶ It was not an ethical system of food distribution.

Overall, the space immediately surrounding the big house was where slaves tread carefully; Plantation owners and their wives were both watchful and wary. Here the master on a well-run plantation fully governed what was allowed and what was not. Adjacent to the mansion, formal gardens sometimes held edible plants. The kitchen gardens, supervised by the planter's

wife and tended by slaves, also lay relatively near the big house. These were tempting places offering opportunities to grab fresh vegetables. Outbuildings usually included, besides the kitchen, a storehouse, smokehouse, and well. Some planters also built a mill, a spring house, a dairy, a granary, even an ice house or greenhouse. Outbuildings were often locked; all were closely watched.

The barnyard domain with its stable, cow barn, corn crib, hen house, pigpens, and dog kennels lay slightly further away, although tightly connected to the big house. Planters controlled or tried to control these back areas, tension remained high, and slaves took foodstuffs at their peril, although plantation records sometimes note theft of the coarse grains used as animal fodder. Set somewhat apart, lay the planter's orchard, where children stole eggs from bird nests and almost everyone took fresh fruit according to its season: apples, pears, peaches, figs, cherries, quince, plums, apricots, and nectarines.⁷ After emancipation, the orchard's food resources disappeared since sharecroppers had neither space nor time to spend raising fruit trees.

Moving outward, one reached planted fields, fenced pastures, and rice paddies. As a reward for conformity, some masters allowed slaves to raise livestock here. Planters also placed slave housing outside the immediate vicinity of their own homes, yet still nearby. People had little privacy, although they could build poultry yards and fenced-in gardens.⁸ Activities could be observed by any and all. Wary men knew with their neighbors' habits and let this knowledge guide their own food search. The slave quarter homes and yards were thus situated in a border area between the mansion's carefully ordered cultural space and its less orderly fringes. In coastal areas, the latter contained piers, landing places, rivers and creeks which served as roads. Slaves used whatever they could find at the water's edge – frogs, turtles, blue crabs, shad,

sturgeon and various other fish – and took chances on whether or not to obey rules in marginal places.

On all plantations the built landscape merged with natural land, unimproved and under no one's control. Such spots offered freer access to food. Slaves possessed a modicum of independence within woodlands, meadows, swamps, and forests, marshes, creeks, and open bays. Information networks with Native Americans provided additional knowledge of the terrain and further access to its resources. Families emerged that merged African and Indian; children had parents and relatives among both groups with vested interests in making sure the youngsters grew up learning Native American traditions. In fact, the strength of the alliance between Indian and black gave rise to a Louisiana term, grif, identifying the mixed ethnicity.⁹ The techniques they were taught and the training they received infused food collection and preparation within slave and maroon communities. Indications of medicinal plant use similar to Native American traditions can be seen at sites in Tidewater Virginia.¹⁰ A former Carolina slave pointed out that a smart man “et a heap o’ possums an’ coons der bein’ plenty o’ dem an’ rabbits and squirrels.”¹¹ Foraging in these freer zones remained an important part of daily life within rural black communities at least as late as the mid-twentieth century.

Basically, slaves had few foodstuffs to work with. Planters often doled out the coarsest flour – dredgings and shorts. Many were stingy, supplying but a monthly peck of rice or cornmeal for adolescents and adults; five to eight quarts for children. Skeletal analysis reveals malnutrition, especially in young children.¹² The diet of children varied. One Lowcountry planter instructed the children's cook to be particularly careful that no child ate anything unwholesome. Children's rations were half an adult's: two quarts of potatoes in potato time; a pint of grits and a pint of salt during grits-time (October to April); one cup of small rice from April 1st to October

1st on Tuesdays and Fridays with meat. Each Thursday the children received molasses, but not adults unless they had behaved well and were healthy. The children's Christmas allowance was 1½ lbs of fresh meat; 1½ lbs of salt meat, one pint of molasses, and two quarts of rice. This was a Spartan diet, but the instructions mandated it be cooked "cleanly and well."¹³ Some planters fed them like animals: a little bit of bread in the morning, nothing at noon. Dinner arrived in a huge wooden trough and consisted of greens or bones or corn bread in buttermilk.¹⁴ Children ate by hand or scooped up food with oyster or mussel shells. They fought dogs over chicken feet.

Archaeology at slave quarter sites yields evidence of substandard rations supporting the documentary record and its accounts of the dismal situation. The Georgia and South Carolina rice coast is an example: Once a week Sea Island planters supplied either a peck of corn or a bushel of sweet potatoes; once a month they handed out a quart of salt. As one observer wrote, "When the hardest work was required, [slaves] received a little molasses and salt meat."¹⁵ It took tenacity to survive; it took looking out for one's interests. Throughout slavery, anyone who built a workable food procurement strategy, who rarely went hungry and had a choice of food, as McKee observes "had achieved a kind of independence."¹⁶

A planter's power reached into the heart of a slave's homes and life, and spoke to the smallest details. When it came to parsing out butchered meat on plantations, planters usually gave slaves the meats they thought least desirable.¹⁷ These consisted of the head, innards such as intestines, fatback, necks, tripe, and sometimes the heart, kidney, liver or ribs. Lamb went into the plantation ovens; goat was grilled in the quarters. Even poultry could be divided so that slaves got only innards, gizzards, or feet.¹⁸

Slaves turned these less desirable body parts into notable dishes by creating special recipes for each anatomical element. Families gradually developed distinctive ways of cooking

that set each piece apart, passing on the recipes to children. Cookbooks, particularly those published after the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, reveal the practice in distinctive recipes for pig's tails, fried brains and eggs, tripe stew, gizzards and gravy, neck bones and rice, livers and lights, simmered chitterlings, and maw salad as well as baked, fried, or pickled pig's feet and ears.¹⁹

The lack of food was egregious; the inhumanity staggering. Surely planters knew that hungry men would steal, and that men, women, and children would ease hunger any way they could. Inadequate rations were a tacit license for theft.²⁰ Singly or in groups, slaves stole hogs and sheep, chickens, turkeys, and geese. They milked cows at night, and surreptitiously roasted oxen and fattening swine. They took corn, cabbage, potatoes, pumpkins, turnips, sugar cane, and virtually anything that grew, usually from the ends of rows, and from other unobtrusive places. Slaves quickly mastered scrounging, scavenging for food and hiding the evidence.²¹ Archaeological assemblages indicate adults stole preserved foods such as hams, sometimes taking the tableware too. Adults also took rice saved for seed, and feed (i.e., corn) from horse and mule troughs. Theft, an essential, adaptive maneuver, often brought pleasure. A northern observer concluded, "Corn, chickens, flour, meal, in fact, everything edible, became legitimate plunder for the Negroes when the rations furnished them were scanty."²²

Families ate many wild foods. Children gathered greens and berries, picked fruit and nuts, searched for quail eggs, and brought home stray turtles. Men hunted and women learned to fish. Both men and women planted vegetable gardens for family use and for market. The responsibility to acquire food crossed all age and gender lines – a tradition that continued into the twentieth century.²³ Some families began to raise a few animals, to could sell goods at market, on street corners or door to door, even to their mistress, and keep the cash.²⁴ Other canny slaves

gifted planters with fresh fish, eggs, oysters, or shrimp. There was an unspoken assumption behind this. You let me hunt and fish for my family and I will keep bringing to your door that which you can't get by yourself. Even though hunting was a mechanism of white male competition, a means of male bonding, a way to demonstrate superiority over one's peers and one's slaves, both planter and slave honored this silent agreement.

Slaves ate from hunger, for nourishment, and with little opportunity to select their own food. They used whatever was available. Take Lucinda Williams's succinct directions: "bile de greens--all kinds of greens from out in de woods – and chip up de pork and deer meat, or de wild turkey meat; maybe all of dem, in de big pot at de same time! Fish too, and de big turtle dat lay out on de bank!"²⁵ Archaeobotanical evidence is not particularly enlightening here. Greens vanish without a below-ground trace as do roast potatoes or other tubers. Charred seeds provide evidence of squash, corn, grains (wheat, oat, rye, pearl barley), a variety of beans including black-eyed peas, wild and domesticated fruit (melons, cherries, berries), and native plants at Virginia plantations.²⁶ Sturdy fruit pits and hard nut shells also endure. Sometimes microscopic plant residues adhere to clay pots. Occasionally archaeologists recover corn cobs, but these speak more to the development of better varieties and not to corn's role in a meal. Since most plant remains decompose quickly, the archaeological record for meals among any group of individuals who depend primarily on vegetable protein is lean. Beverages slip beneath the cracks among groups who use a hodge-podge of vessel forms. We learn more from written records which tell us slaves drank, among other beverages, real coffee (rarely), peanut coffee, parched corn coffee, cottonseed tea, apple cider, corn whiskey, grape wine, dandelion wine, elderberry wine, dewberry wine, persimmon wine, and buttermilk.²⁷

The archaeological record is more informative about meat, but the animal bones archaeologists recover at slave cabins do not say much about decision making, risk avoidance, gendered behavior, patronage, or food preference. They do, on the other hand, tell us what was eaten (horse, sheep, or cow), whether it was nourishing, if the cut was choice (a chop, a t-bone steak) or taken from a young or old animal. They don't say much about how the meat was cooked. Yes, one can tell that a wide range of foods were eaten, from pork ribs to pig's feet, from quail to wild duck.²⁸ But, when were they cooked and how? Outdoors or inside? Which were liked best? Was the meat provided by the master, raised by the slave, hunted or stolen? As McKee points out, "a rib from a stolen pig looks no different from one from an animal distributed as rations."²⁹ These questions can't be answered by simply reading Lucinda's directions.

By and large, documents are also silent on precisely how slaves cooked. In the early nineteenth century it became illegal to teach a slave to read and write. A literate slave was seen as subversive.³⁰ Oral tradition substituted for literacy. The truth is that, with some exceptions, slave *cooking* exists only in imagination unless it was observed and recorded by those who were able to read and write and had the time to do so (e.g., whites).³¹ There are snippets of information in legal documents and fragments contained in a few autobiographies (e.g., Louis Hughes' description of peach cobbler) or in a rare letter by a slave.³² One discovers more by mining slave narratives, but overall the coverage is scanty. WPA records are invaluable and insightful, but their content is based on recollections whose focus is the pleasure of eating and not the specifics of food preparation.

One fact stands out in black and white accounts: the best cooks worked in slave owners' kitchens (i.e., in a relatively private space); prideful white families believed their own cook's

skills topped all others. Food was an area of intense feminine competition. Occasionally plantation mistresses and urban white women acknowledged their cooks' creations and contributions (e.g., okra a la Maulie). But confidence in and praise of a cook's skill rarely meant she got credit for her recipes outside the home. White mistresses claimed ownership of not only their cooks, but of their cooks' everyday creations. Fancier dishes, however, were normally a cooperative venture between the slave cook and mistress. Since few slaves read, a plantation wife or daughter had to read aloud a recipe until her cooks mastered it.³³ She also had to unlock storage areas for the more expensive ingredients.

Barbecue as a celebratory food, as part of a highly public performance, is described in detail in a number of narratives. Louis Hughes' description is well rounded and even includes the ingredients for sauce, but barbecue meat rarely stands alone.³⁴ What accompanied it? How was it apportioned? What special favors did a black barbecue master receive? Were barbecues, as a masculine food provenance, supervised differently than deserts made in the kitchen? Such questions are rarely answered in historical narratives. Cookbooks, as working texts, are amplified in letters, diaries, and descriptive accounts. Ingredients, as individual foodstuffs, appear most clearly in legal documents and business records. But when the ante-bellum era is focal, the information is not well rounded.

Documents give us the most information for foods that were (a) served to guests with conspicuous abundance; (b) prepared for slave owners under white supervision; (c) chosen or ordered by a planter and his wife; (d) celebratory in type and form (e.g., wedding cakes); or (e) exchanged in reciprocal transactions (jams, jellies, fresh fruits, etc.). There is a culinary tension between extraordinary dishes and the everyday foods on which slaves depended; we know significantly less about the latter. This tension can be seen in Booker T. Washington's childhood

memories of ginger cakes, so tempting and delicious that his thought of eating one was the “height of ambition.”³⁵ With the continued rise in sugar consumption (8.4 pounds per person in 1801; 70.06 in 1905; perhaps as much 150 lbs in 1999) one needs to know how rare it was for a black child to have sweets to understand the depth of feeling in Washington’s words.³⁶

Slaves had to do a day’s work before they could cook for themselves. Where the task system prevailed, they might have time after work. Where they toiled day long and into the night, this was not possible. There was very little to work with and people often used any extras to swap, barter, or sell.³⁷

Black men and women both slave and free, joined the market chain as suppliers, resellers, and buyers. They worked face-to-face, built personal networks, drew on favors, haggled and traded. They bought and sold small barnyard birds – chickens, fowl, turkeys, geese – and a few animals; freshwater fish, saltwater fish, clams, oysters, shrimp, crabs, and turtles; eggs, honey, Spanish moss; rice, corn, and wheat; figs, peaches, berries, and melons; sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, peanuts, and perishable green vegetables. When slaves sold market commodities to their masters at below market price, this custom made good sense to slave owners. When it created scarcity, it did not.

When this commercial practice interfered with urban merchants’ profits, white men retaliated by rewriting laws to regulate how, where, and when black families could sell foodstuffs. Southern city fathers continually and unsuccessfully tried to control the black food trade. This legal wrangle reveals many aspects of southern life, especially the role slave women held in food procurement and distribution. They raised greens, herbs, and other vegetables and sold the produce themselves or to market women who then resold it. Urban slaves bought it at

the instructions of their white owners to use in town mansions. This is one reason, among others, that favored African foods slipped into culturally conservative homes.

In summary, the heritage of slavery includes barbecue and malnutrition, gardening skills with New World and Old World plants, experience raising domestic livestock, and detailed knowledge of country terrain and its natural resources together with the best ways, to hunt, to fish, to gather. Slaves came to highly value ingenuity, creativity, independence and self reliance. They compiled a repertoire of recipes for finger-friendly, quickly cooking foods and for those that cooked slowly without much supervision. They learned how to make and value meals from crop pests such as raccoons, rabbits, possums, and tree squirrels. These remain part of black ideology.

Black families also acquired an intimate acquaintance with all phases of animal butchery and meat preparation, honed marketing and bargaining techniques, and became well aware that sugar exemplified power and prestige. Slaves knew as well as planters did that in the southern oligarchy, food made the man. They knew it wasn't simply the foods a planter ate that set him apart, but the skill with which these were made and displayed; how they were shared among family and friends; their hospitable distribution; the value of generosity; and the privilege of abundance. They took these values into freedom.

Free blacks had situations quite different than those of slaves. The increase in their numbers began slowly. In Charleston, it was approximately 1500 individuals circa 1800, more than doubling (3600) by 1850. Savannah's free black population was much smaller: 632 in 1840, 705 in 1860, less than 10% of the urban slaves. The number in New Orleans grew from 1566 in 1805 to 4950 in 1810 (when 64% of the total city population was black) and reached 15,000 in 1850, dropping to about 10,000 by 1860. It is likely, based on census patterns observed

elsewhere, that free black women outnumbered free black men.³⁸ The poor among them found “hawking and carrying” to be one of the few avenues they had to support themselves and their families.

City life offered many ways to make money within the food world, and gave opportunities to free people to earn enough to buy homes or freedom for their relatives.³⁹ It was a New World restyling of ancient and informal trade networks built on personal ties between rural providers and city suppliers. Its American heart lay in open markets and a growing number of free, urban blacks. By 1778 at least 64 women hawked “cakes, nuts, and so forth in Charleston.”⁴⁰ Other energetic women took to cooking at the market, to peddling door to door. Others served in bars and hotels. Men fished for a living, raised sheep and cattle, opened butcher shops, sold fruit or vegetables from push carts, and baked bread. In all southern cities, slaves, slaves for hire, and free blacks, especially the women, found ways to get and use local foods which they either sold or produced. They supplied and catered food to private households and in public arenas. Both men and women ran cafés, restaurants, and oyster houses. By 1823, Savannah’s free women kept shops, baked pastries, prepared and sold items stretching from the lowly sausage to delicate confections. Initially the food, entertainment, and lodging business generated large profits for very few.⁴¹

A few grew wealthy as elite travelers fought to stay in their inns and hotels: In Charleston, Jehu Johnson ran the Jones Hotel (1815-1833). Eliza Lee, known as an excellent black cook, ran the Carolina Coffee House and the Carolina Hotel. Susan Wilkie was in charge of the Farmers Hotel.⁴² Black hoteliers were present in Newport, New Orleans, and later in Savannah and San Francisco. Black women also ran boarding houses, serving meals cooked by

their own black workers. Rachel Brownfield, for example, by hiring her own time and that of her daughters first rented and then bought a sixteen room boarding house in Savannah.⁴³

By 1820 there were more than two dozen female hucksters crying their wares, including cooked rice, cakes, and candies, on Savannah's streets. Emily Burke, in 1840, saw Savannah street vendors carrying large trays on their heads laden with fruit, sweetmeats, even beverages.⁴⁴ Women also made and sold delightful candies on New Orleans streets and squares: *La Colie*, *Mais Tic-Tac*, *Candie Tire a la Melasse* (based on molasses) plus white, creamy pink, almond, peanut, molasses, and pecan pralines. Street food was an art unto itself and it was undoubtedly present in most major cities of the South if not throughout the nation.

Just before dawn women arrived at Savannah's open-shed market where they held individual stalls. Burke described the range of edibles: fresh vegetables, shell fish and fin fish, birds both wild and tame, fruit from cold climates and tropical fruits from the Caribbean. She concluded, "Here almost every eatable thing can be found."⁴⁵ The Charleston and New Orleans markets were equally, if not more, well supplied. A Savannah market woman had to take away any unsold merchandise or the market keeper took it, sold it cheap, and kept the profit. She had two options: cut her prices or, once the market closed at mid-morning, sell her foodstuff on the streets.

Many more black women than appear in city records were food vendors, some on a casual basis, and some full time. Their vigorous sales of cakes and apples on Savannah streets prompted the City Council to require badges by the 1790s. The council claimed it was afraid the opportunity to hawk food would decrease the number of black women willing to nurse the ill during the yearly "sickly season."⁴⁶ One has to doubt their benevolence since a similar move was later made against black males. Most women, apparently, simply ignored the law.

In 1823, six black Savannah women made and sold pastries (pies, tarts, cakes, tea cakes, puddings, candies, etc.). Four were so successful they bought both slaves and real estate. The products at one shop included fruitcakes shipped to English buyers.⁴⁷ Savannah's professional female pastry cooks reached 15 in 1860 when black men joined their ranks. Baker William Claghorn hired blacks and whites, giving jobs to immigrant Germans who stocked his store with European styled baked goods.⁴⁸ The numbers of small confectionaries continued to grow after the slavery era until, in 1930, 370 black candy makers lived inside or near the city (i.e., Chatham County, Georgia).⁴⁹

A growing number of men joined the commercial food trade. In 1810 Savannah had one black butcher. There were five in 1823 when the City Council forbade black men from apprenticing themselves to a white butcher.⁵⁰ Several men literally interpreted the law, stayed away from city market and took their trade to the streets. Later, black butchers returned in force. Nine were forced to work under a white butcher to provision the Confederate Army. Perhaps the best known was Jackson B. Sheftall, a mulatto who opened his own shop in 1849 and grew rich selling choice cuts of meat: "steaks, chops, and cutlets." An 1894 *Savannah Tribune* article notes his wealth and the shop's continuous operation as well as its addition of western beef. Concurrently, Capt. F. F. Jones had one of the largest butcher stalls in the city market while Josephine Stiles Jennings ran a combined meat and grocery store in Yamacraw, one of Savannah's oldest black neighborhoods.⁵¹ In short, Savannah's free black families, as elsewhere, prospered in the world of commercial food.

Foodways after Emancipation, 1865-1935

African descendents, their foods and their cooking techniques made such an indelible impression on white southern families, generation after generation, that whites pulled cooks and cooking techniques from the black world both before and after Emancipation. African derived cooking techniques proved so irresistible that (as only one example) by 1878 cooks in Mobile, Alabama mainly frittered (deep fried in batter) supper's vegetables.⁵² Eventually, as is typical of mythic history, southerners forgot the origins of this technique. African fruits and vegetables became commonplace although knowledge of their origin was not. Side by side with this trend, specific African, African-American and African-Native American cooking styles took precedence in preparing comfort foods, all evoking the essence of white southern country cooking.

However, Emancipation and technological advances increased the divide between public and private, urban and rural foods. The schism left a pernicious footprint on rural black foodway. The white community twisted and crushed freedom at every opportunity. Grace Hale expressed the leitmotif of liberation: "Freedom may not be an easy place or time to be, but it [was] the only place and time to be."⁵³ This held true on city streets, in country fields and inside black kitchens.

In practice, the style of cooking epitomized by the plantation kitchen was torn apart by the Civil War, while enduring rock solid, romanticized and aggrandized, in mythic history. Annabelle Hill wrote a cookery book designed for the thousands of young, inexperienced, southern (white) housekeepers who "in this particular crisis" could no longer depend on "Mother's [black] Cook."⁵⁴ One can see in various other books a similar intent based on nostalgia, but these recipes had almost no influence on newly freed cooks, especially in rural areas.

With emancipation, black people began new lives. Men started small businesses, marketing fruit, wood, and produce; women were less mobile, and stayed closer to home.⁵⁵ Those who had cooked in the big house took away their skill for fancy cooking; some were able to find work cooking as domestics or in commercial establishments. Freedmen filled southern cities until these overflowed; then they moved into Chicago and its suburbs, to Detroit, Kansas City and Cleveland; a smaller number went west during this first wave of northern migration. Among the latter were African Americans who influenced the way other Americans ate on trains, in large cities, and in Montana homes (e.g., Rufus Estes, Abby Fisher, Mammy Pleasant, numerous cateresses and railroad chefs).⁵⁶ Most, however, remained in the south as sharecroppers or tenant farmers.

The kitchen in a sharecropper's home was never "an easy place to be." Like other slaves, sharecroppers lived in restricted spaces over which they had only a pinch of control. Much of their food was sub-standard and minimally nourishing.⁵⁷ Unless they worked for their former owners, most black families were not welcome on a planter's land. Thus, while plantations had contained a wide range of food resources, sharecroppers obtained food from a narrower one. They had few cooking utensils, sometimes using lard or soup cans to make cakes of assorted sizes.⁵⁸

Thus, women who carried the knowledge of plantation cookery into freedom simultaneously lost access to the resources it required. There were barriers – time, utensils, appliances. There was the lack of special ingredients and no money to buy these where they were available. Freedman's new lives made reproduction of plantation cookery next to impossible. In rural black homes where overworked women sometimes didn't have time to wash dishes, former cooks and household maids must have hungered for culinary continuity and ingredients such as

sugar, butter, ginger, and other baking spices.⁵⁹ For many, bringing food home from the plantation kitchen had been a perquisite of their work, part and parcel of their lives; clearly this source of foodstuffs was gone.⁶⁰

Storekeepers shattered culinary aspirations further because they had their own ideas about who should buy what and how much they should pay. They catered to wealthier white farmers whose wives enjoyed the privilege of serving dishes, especially fancy cakes, not seen in black homes. Black women found buying groceries a special hassle since men lounged around the stores, whittling, gossiping, watching and commenting on who came and went, what they brought to trade and took with them.⁶¹ Black customers had to wait until all white customers were served, and usually saw their orders set aside if a white customer appeared. Some women found it less stressful to send children or men to the market whenever they could. At some stores, it was impossible to buy the ingredients to bake a cake if one were poor and black. Then too, the cost of baking powder, baker's chocolate, vanilla extract, figs, dates, nuts, oranges, bananas, and, in some places, apples put many ingredients out of reach. Cooks without the newer utensils were at a further disadvantage.

It was a double blow when large landowners also owned local stores that were outside black neighborhoods. Make no bones about it. These white men used intimidation to construct a racial divide, placing fancy baking on their side. Needing cheap labor to prosper, they circumvented the law and used any means at hand to keep black folk down, in debt, dependent, and subservient. Both diet and nutrition showed the effect of limited access to limited goods. According to Howard Odum, "those least able to buy their food [bought] the largest proportion."⁶²

Since sharecroppers had few funds, storekeepers could keep families in debt by deducting from their earnings whatever the sharecroppers spent for seeds, tools, mules, shelter, clothing, food, coffee, and tobacco; they also charged outrageous prices.⁶³ People paid off debts by doing odd chores and trading with storekeepers such items as home-made candy, peanuts, eggs, hens, small fryers, turkeys, rabbits, corn, peas, and cabbage.⁶⁴

Deep-seated, unimaginable rural poverty affected black and white alike and fueled resentment among embittered former slave owners. The tight hold that landowners maintained on land use enabled them to force tenant families to plant field crops right up to their cabin doors.⁶⁵ This fact, combined with the demands of labor intensive agriculture, made it almost impossible to keep substantial kitchen gardens. Photographs document the lack of growing space. Some tenant contracts also barred banning livestock (excluding poultry), thus forcing sharecroppers to purchase pork or other meats at high cost.⁶⁶

Meanwhile some who were free still felt enslaved. In Annette Coleman's memories of her Georgia childhood, she wasn't free. Forget that she was born circa 1910. A white landowner handed out a food allowance each week – molasses, meat, cornmeal, and flour. Much of the food was scraps from his table, scraps that had to be shared with his dogs. He whipped this girl for disobedience, insolence, laziness, and whenever she didn't do what he wanted as quickly as he wanted it done. Annette was, in essence, his kitchen slave. Together with her family, she learned to help herself to the corn, sugarcane, and sweet potatoes that grew in the outermost field rows. Survival took precedence.⁶⁷ All that women in similar situations dreamed about was “a little home, a pretty yard of flowers, and a garden, even some chickens.”⁶⁸

Many families lived in drafty, unheated, small wooden cabins that were sparsely furnished, without kitchen cupboards or shelf space, without screened doors or screened, glass

windows. These were homes that had no gas or electric stoves, iceboxes or refrigerators, or running water and sanitary facilities.⁶⁹ According to Peter Daniel, “farmers joked that they could see the stars at night and watch the dogs and chickens run . . . through cracks in the floor.”⁷⁰

Think of what it would be like to cook in this Sea Island home where “the chimney’s wide, black, sooty mouth . . . was filled with logs of wood . . . [and] pot hooks holding “iron pots in the blaze. The sandy hearth held 3-legged pots. Pots with handles. Iron kettles. Iron spiders. All had tight fitting lids.” Sweet potatoes roasted beneath mounded ash; corn husks peered through another where ash cakes also cooked. “A frying pan sat on live coals pulled out from the fire. Slices of fat bacon sputtered and spit and curled around the edges.”⁷¹

Women rose at dawn to prepare the fire while men gauged its heat by steam from the pots. People used whatever they had to cook a meal. Recorded recollections show that sharecroppers managed on very little. WPA oral histories tell of a barebones existence: “We usually eats butts meat an’ rice for supper, an’ if I’m lucky, we has some sort o’ vegetubbles, an’ maybe a little stewed peaches or such for sweetin’. . . [there is] butt meat an’ grits for the chilluns’ breakfast, . . . we don’ worry bout no midday meal.”⁷² Scratch cooking was the norm. Recipes worked by approximation--portions expanded and contracted at will. Women used what was available in the local store, what was sold from the Jewish peddler’s wagons, and what they had on hand.

Southerners consumed, on average, 500 pounds of cornmeal a year. One study of black tenant farms in Mississippi indicated one third had no cow and “one seventh [of the farmers] went a whole year without eating chicken or eggs.”⁷³ From fall to spring families lived off root crops “banked” in yards and root cellars. Beans were dried for use year round. Perishable fruits

appeared seasonally in short bursts; gardeners reaped vegetables from spring to early fall, but grew only a limited number. Home canning here was not yet an option.

Women baked food on stone hearths in winter and outdoors in summer, regulating heat by shifting pots closer or further from the fire. Cooks flavored dishes with bits of salt port. Mothers fed infants a little bit of their own foods – cornmeal mush, catfish stew. Life was tough as Mason Crum’s details of Sea Island life reveal: flies all around; no lawn, no bath, no toilet, a hand to mouth existence, a diet of grits, fatback, collards, cabbage, sweet potatoes, molasses, butt meat, and rarely (except when winter began), fresh pork, sausage, and spareribs. Families also took whatever nature provided.⁷⁴

Southern cookbooks offer recipes whose relevance to tenant family cooking is questionable since many ingredients, no matter how common they are today, were unavailable to poor families. Simple recipes found in accounts of Sea Island’s black cooks include batters made from nothing more than meal and water; Sea Island women also mixed meal with cold water and then added hot water to make a parsimonious mush.⁷⁵ In truth, sharecropping had no food enhancing qualities and posed a number of cooking dilemmas. To move past this form of peonage with enough money to buy land demanded ferocious saving, a hoarding of nickels, dimes, and pennies, that in turn required eating sparingly and/or depending solely on what one could gather, grow, trap, or hunt. People were clear about how they felt: “We was raised up just like cattle is, and we experienced hard times . . . [but] I rather get on with eating once a week on bread and water than be a slave with plenty.”⁷⁶

Tenant farmers became landowners by surviving on bare necessities, using the most basic clothes, tools, and cooking utensils. Successful families eyed the popular Dixie Pink salmon, but didn’t buy it. Shoppers who splurged on canned goods, who bought fresh fruits (bananas,

oranges, lemons) or liquor had little left to buy land. Prudent families prided themselves on the ability to feed their households while spending as little as possible. An archaeologist looking for commercially produced material culture might conclude such families barely lived at all.

Gradually (from about 1890 to 1910) more black farmers became landowners.⁷⁷ Once a family owned its land, it created a series of discreet spaces whose organization, as with Native American yards, appeared disorderly to many white observers.⁷⁸ People raised a larger variety of foodstuffs. Families became more self-sufficient and autonomous; as one consequence families also had higher self esteem. They showed their thankfulness in church donations, church suppers, at summer revivals, and by sharing with less fortunate kin.

Black landowners still had to deal with racist storekeepers but since they owned their yards, vegetable gardens could be any size a family chose.⁷⁹ They could plant fruit trees. They could increase their poultry, add a hog, a mule, a cow, or plant a small flowering tree. Soon farms boasted pecan trees, fig trees, cane fields, and sweet potato patches. Gardeners grew collards, okra, tomatoes, watermelons, and irrigated tiny rice fields. Fruits and vegetables comprised a larger percentage of farm products.⁸⁰ Food limitation was voluntary and more limited in scope, although cost stayed a concern.

When one elderly white woman described her pre World War II childhood home, she spoke for countless families, black and white, in surrounding states. “The house was very small. The outside looked like an old farmhouse. The boards were unpainted. The yard was mostly dirt with scattered flowers. . . . The kitchen included a dishpan with water from the well, iron skillet to cook with, cabinets containing food, and a wooden stove. To cook, you would have to go outside to get the wood for the stove. We also had to chop it. There was no electricity; we managed other ways.”⁸¹

The culture of rural poverty gradually yielded to technological advance. Farm agents taught canning and encouraged decorative planting. The federal government installed rural electric lines; families put in indoor plumbing; both agricultural and extension agents touted new tools and techniques.

Susan Holt compared two African American North Carolina families, one who owned land and one who did not and summarized the difference. Everyone in the tenant family worked: farming, selling produce door-to-door, cooking for a white family. Their diet, all they could afford, was little more than fatback and bread. In contrast, the landowner ran a drayage; his wife and children raised fruit, vegetables, and livestock. The children sold berries; their mother took in laundry. This family had “money in the bank.”⁸² Their kitchen would have held equipment well above and beyond that the tenant family used. A wood stove; cupboards; closets filled with jars of home canned products meant the family could have pickles for dinner and jam on breakfast breads in summer and in winter. The complement of utensils would have grown to include an egg beater, more bowls, and some baking pans. Baking soda, baking powder, and flour might reside on cupboard shelves beside the cornmeal. The differences (hoe cakes vs. biscuits; fruit cobbler vs. red velvet cake) seem insubstantial cast against today’s food domain, but were immense for their time. Gradually, families bought large wood stoves on time; some had ice boxes and well water became the norm.⁸³ Yet, seasonal change was readily visible in their diet.

Throughout the spring, summer, and fall, rural families (whether sharecroppers or land owners) also gathered wild plants, fruits, and nuts. Forests and fields provided a variety of greens – lamb’s quarter, dandelion, pokeweed, sorrel, wild mustard, watercress, and winter cress – as well as numerous summer berries (blueberries, whortleberries, raspberries, blackberries) and

other fruits, such as peaches, persimmons, ground cherries, papaws, and even maypops (*Passiflora incarnata*) for cobblers, pies and preserves. Sassafras leaves dried, pulverized, sifted, and bottled provided one flavoring for food, while peppergrass, chives, garlic, and young onions produced others. Scuppernong grapes were ready to pick in autumn; haws, hickory nuts, pecans, walnuts, butternuts, and chinquapins also dropped in the fall.

Across the South, men with their hunting dogs were common sights. Even possum deadfall was skinned and tossed in a pot. Families enjoyed roast possum served with sweet potatoes, cornbread and gravy. Alert hunters also brought home muskrat, beaver, and other game. They foraged among creeks and marshes, ate alligators and whatever else lurked there.

Variations in flora and fauna, in climate and weather created regional nuances. Individual emphases also varied: Rice, corn, or wheat might dominate; pork might take precedence over beef, hot breads over cold. In Louisiana, Effie Burn's grandpa raised yellow and red plums, figs, dates, sweet oranges, sour oranges, grapes, and pecans.⁸⁴ Citrus farmers raised ten varieties of orange trees near New Orleans; bananas grew wild on Pecan Island. Along the Gulf coast and in the deep south, families grew two crops a year, filling winter gardens with white cabbage, rutabaga, turnips, onions, shallots, garlic, endive, mustard, roquette, radish, cauliflower, beets, cress, lettuce, parsley, leeks, English peas, and celery. Gardeners put in a second planting that additionally held ginger, okra, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, cashews, bene plants [sesame], pinders [peanuts], potatoes, arrowroot, strawberries, and melons.⁸⁵ The accessibility of a wide range of fresh fruits and vegetables spurred a variety of different recipes, visible in cookbooks, and gave more complex flavors to Gulf Coast dishes. People in the uplands had a single shorter, growing season and fewer plant choices. Yet, as railways grew quicker, adding more efficient

refrigeration, grocers began to offer more fruits out of season from outside the region. Banana cream pie entered the scene.

Essentially, change in traditional foodways first occurred within cities and towns. Recipes attributed to black cooks became more varied in urban texts. The unequal partnership between white housewives and black housekeepers was one nexus of change. The daily journeys of black domestic workers moving between black and white communities opened a path through which food habits and innovation ebbed and flowed. When urban relatives visited country kin, innovation spread. However, as historians point out, the kitchen in white middle class homes was contested terrain – one in which white women radiated racial superiority, yet also needed the cooperation and skill of their black cooks. They depended on them for creative and extraordinary dishes to serve in undisputedly rivalrous table contests. This form of womanly competition appeared at church dinners and quilting parties in the black communities too. Maya Angelou, in *“Hallelujah! The Welcome Table,”* gives a recipe for her grandmother’s Caramel Cake and explains, “Momma would labor carefully over her selection, because she knew but would never admit that she and all the women were in hot competition . . . none of the other cooks would even dare the Caramel Cake.”⁸⁶

A common assumption is that black cooks were in charge of the kitchens of their employers. However, they did not control the menu or purchase the food. In small towns, Georgia grocers sent black delivery men with order books to houses where white wives provided grocery lists for weekly delivery.⁸⁷ Occasionally there were black cooks, like Rosa, who bought food and were reimbursed later. On such occasions, Rosa cooked “turnip greens and cornbread, black eyed peas, or sweet potatoes.”⁸⁸ Marcie Cohen Ferris provides other examples of black cooks introducing similar foods into southern Jewish homes.⁸⁹

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the food system was restricted in some ways, broad and expansive in others, pieced together with simplicity, abundance, and local flavor. A changing set of favorite dishes evolved. Plantation kitchens had introduced African American families to cakes, pies, puddings and tarts, to jams, jellies, preserves, fruit-based wines, brandies, and vinegars. White households demanded these from each and every cook they hired. African American country cooking gained new depth as black women blended traditional European recipes into their home cooking and family rituals, as they acquired more foodstuffs and new appliances. Ice cream makers appeared at church picnics. Sunday meals were embellished beyond necessity.

Across the south, black foodways were a product of change, assimilation and acculturation. The puny food rations during slavery led to an expansive use of edible wild foods in daily diet. This, together with their own produce, grew the subsistence base for black family food. Food choices gradually and steadily increased among land owning families and brought more “outside” foods into their homes. Young women who entered historically black institutions such as Spelman College in Atlanta took classes in home economics although domestic service was not their goal. Similarly courses for those who would enter domestic service were offered at Hampton Institute and Tuskegee. In K1-12 schools, teachers taught cooking using simple textbooks published in northern cities containing northern recipes. This too expanded and “whitened” the range of food selection.

Throughout the early twentieth century, progressive reformers reached out to families outside the schools, especially in the countryside. One official captured the government thrust in a 1911 letter: “Through the tomato plant you will get into the home garden and by means of the canning you will get into the farm kitchen.”⁹⁰ Some women working as Home Demonstration

Agent for the USDA had immense influence in rural communities.⁹¹ They taught hygiene, sanitation, food preservation, and home gardening using girls' clubs as venues. Their goals were improved health among rural families, higher incomes and more independence for farm women.

Home demonstration agents encouraged women to improve horticultural techniques as well as to try growing new and unfamiliar vegetables. Consider the woman who grew 34 different vegetables in a North Carolina garden. She both acquired prestige and became an example for her neighbors. Similarly, women in another county learned how to (a) build and (b) plant hotbeds and cold-frames which gave them the ability to serve vegetables early in season or out of season.⁹² Rich men, for centuries, used these skills to demonstrate power and acquire prestige. Here, we see it operative at the local level, expanding the range of foods served in small homes by ordinary women. Last but not least, women baked and brought their very best creations to summer revivals and church suppers thereby raising expectations throughout communities. But, because of segregation and limited income opportunities, many left these rural areas.

People moving out of the South during the Great Migration wanted their familiar homegrown cuisine once they arrived in the North or West. The food domain in selected areas of northern and western cities (Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, New York, Los Angeles, etc.) reverberated to a new rhythm. Black families kept culinary memories alive by shopping for food on each return trip home. Their relatives baked, preserved, canned, and saved favorite foods – the ones so dearly missed – and sent them north, packed in paper bags and suitcases. Soul food was on the move.

Conclusion

Both prejudice and poverty forced pre- and post-Civil War African Americans to create a cohesive cooking tradition built with limited resources and “making do.” Before the Civil War, black slaves learned how to combine foods and cooking methods from their own African heritage with European and Native American traditions. Plain vs. fancy cooking marked the divide between slaves (and some free blacks) and the plantation elite and wealthy, white urban households. With emancipation, the boundaries that dictated what slaves should, could, and did eat were breached, yet the meals that black sharecroppers ate mirrored the slave diet. In contrast, black landowners enjoyed a steadily growing repertoire of foods while still make using of those familiar to both slaves and sharecroppers. Families sold and shared foodstuffs, added better stoves, learned to can and preserve. When they had little cash to spare, rural families drew on plants, birds, and animals from sea and shore. Many southerners also made game and wild fowl, fish, and shellfish part of their regular diet.

Local fauna was a significant source of food for rural families until World War II, and southern cookbooks, black and white alike, reiterate this fact. But changing technologies and economic conditions permitted a new, wider range of choices. Railway networks spread food distribution. Yet, racial prejudice still shaped eating patterns, dictating when and where one could eat. In the cities, families became consumers. Women bought from curb markets or neighborhood stores and patronized Jewish grocers who stocked shelves with African Americans in mind. Black cooks worked in white homes where they taught immigrant women how to cook southern vegetables and took home for themselves knowledge of different cuisines. Many became formidable cooks with a talent for food fusion.

Women carried their culinary skill into wider arenas through church suppers, in restaurants, as caterers for large events and small. They cooked in boarding houses and in

commercial establishments. They became well acquainted with “outside” foods, which added sophistication to their own creations. They were both resourceful and experimental. Their food exchanges built communal strength.

This review of the black side of southern food history illustrates how a rich culinary tradition was born out of necessity and innovation. By including information from archeological deposits, court and business records, cookbooks, slave narratives, memoirs, and other sources, this essay has tried to provide a sense of the forces that acted upon Africans and African descendants, and in turn, the way that they fought against limiting conditions--through steadfastness, stealth, commerce, and inventiveness--to eat food of increasing diversity.

Notes and References

¹ Jessica Harris, Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons (New York: Atheneum, 1989); Anne Yentsch, A Chesapeake Family and Their Slaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 196-208. Zainabu Kpaka Kallon provides contemporary recipes for a wide variety of African foods, some of which seem to be prototypes for African-American dishes made in the south (e.g. gombondoh). Zainabu Kpaka Kallon, Zainabu’s African Cookbook with Food and Stories (New York: Citadel Press, 2004).

² E. Merton Coulter, “A Century of a Georgia Plantation” in Mississippi Valley Historical Review 16, no. 3 (1929), 337.

³ Genia Woodberry account in The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, ed. George P. Rawick (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972-79), pt. 4, 221.

⁴ Larry McKee, “Food Supply and Plantation Social Order: An Archaeological Perspective,” ed. Theresa A. Singleton, “I, too, am American”: Archaeological Studies of African American Life. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999) 218-239.

⁵ James Mellon, ed. Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember (New York: Grove Press, 310, 323).

⁶ Virginia store accounts also show purchases of rum, brandy, molasses, and sugar by slaves. See Barbara Heath, “Slavery and Consumerism: A Case Study from Central Virginia” African American Archaeology Newsletter, 1997.

⁷ See Wendell Holmes Stephenson’s “A Quarter-Century of a Mississippi Plantation: Eli J. Capell of Pleasant Hill,” The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 23, no. 3 (1936), 364.

⁸ Take, for example, the family at Oakley Plantation whose porch faced the back of the Great House. See Laurie A. Wilkie, Creating Freedom: Material Culture and African American Identity at Oakley Plantation, Louisiana, 1840-1950, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000). In recent years, archaeologists have paid close attention to these spaces (Wilkie, op. cit; Barbara J. Heath and A Bennett. “The Little Spots Allow’d them: the archaeological study of African American yards,” Historical Archaeology, 2000 34(2): 38-55. Also see P. A. Gibbs, “‘Little Spots Allow’d Them’: Slave Garden Plots and Poultry Yards.” Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter, 1999, 20(4): 9-13.

⁹ Gwendolyn Hall, Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992) 118; Daniel H. Usner, Jr., Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: the Lower Mississippi Valley, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Maria Franklin. An Archaeological Study of the Rich Neck Slave Quarter and Enslaved Domestic Life. Colonial Williamsburg Research Publications, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA, 2004.

¹¹ Julius Nelson in The American Slave, ed. Rawick, Pt4, 144-46.

¹² Joyce Hansen and Gary McGowan, Breaking Ground, Breaking Silence: The Story of New York’s African Burial Ground (New York: Henry Holt, 1998).

¹³ See Mason Crum, Gullah: Negro Life in the Carolina Sea Islands, originally published by Duke University Press in 1940 (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 246-249.

¹⁴ Ralph B. Flanders, Plantation Slavery in Georgia 1933 (Cos Cob, CT: J.E. Edwards, 1967); Mellon, 38.

¹⁵ Whitelaw Reid, After the War: a Southern Tour, May 1, 1865 to May 1, 1866 (London: S. Low, Son, & Marston, 1866; New York: Harper Torchbacks, 1965), 94-95.

¹⁶ McKee, 233.

¹⁷ Prior to the nineteenth century and a sea change in animal butchery, planters provided whole animals as provisions. Joanne Bowen, “Foodways in the Eighteenth Century Chesapeake,” The Archaeology of Eighteenth-Century Virginia, ed. T. R. Rheinhart (Richmond, VA: Spectrum Press), 87-130; Franklin, op. cit.

¹⁸ This practice is described by Booker T. Washington and recounted in Carolyn Tillery’s The African American Heritage Cookbook: Traditional Recipes and Remembrances from Alabama’s Renowned Tuskegee Institute (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1998) 93-94. Also see Kathy Starr’s The Soul of Southern Cooking (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1989).

¹⁹ A good example is Ruth Gaskin’s A Good Heart and a Light Hand (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968). However, it is notable that cookbooks written by black authors before the Civil Rights movement contain far fewer dishes using poor cuts of meat (e.g., Rufus Estes’s Good

Things to Eat as Suggested by Rufus (R. Estes: Chicago, 1911 repr. Dover Publications, Mineola NY, 2004), Lena Richard's New Orleans Cookbook (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), and the 1948 Date with a Dish by Freda De Knight (New York: Hermitage Press). See the detailed discussion Williams-Forsen provides in Chapter 4 of her dissertation (124-172) or Tracy N. Poe's "The Origins of Soul Food in Black Urban Identity: Chicago, 1915-1947," American Studies International 37 no. 1 (1999): 4-33. A bibliography of African American cookbooks is given by Doris Witt in Black Hunger: Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 221-28. Traditionally, European farm families were noted for a penurious use of every usable piece from a slaughtered animal from head to toe which was transferred to many regions in this country. See Lettice Bryant's Kentucky Housewife (Cincinnati: Shepard and Sternes, 1841, repr. Applewood Books, 2001).

²⁰ Alex Lichtenstein, "That Disposition to Theft with which they have Been Branded: Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law," Journal of Social History (1989): 413-440.

²¹ Mellon, 43. They burned chicken feathers and dumped the bones and guts of shad far out in rivers to escape detection. See Charles Ball, Slavery in the United States: a narrative of the life and adventures of Charles Ball, a black man, who lived forty years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a slave (New York: J. S. Taylor, 1837, rptd. Dover Publications, 2003).

²² Russell, 351.

²³ See Josephine Beoku-Betts, "We Got Our Way of Cooking Things: Women, Food, and Preservation of Cultural Identity among the Gullah," Gender and Society 9, no.5 (1995): 535-555.

²⁴ Patricia A. Gibbs, "'Little Spots Allow'd Them': Slave Garden Plots and Poultry Yards." Colonial Williamsburg Interpreter, 1999, 20(4): 9-13.

²⁵ T. Lindsay Baker and Julie P. Baker's edited collection: The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 107-117.

²⁶ One of the few African American sites where charred seeds were found is the Rich Neck Slave Quarter. These include, in addition to those in the text, kidney bean, lima bean, common bean, cow pea, and peanut, blackberry, acorn, black walnut, honey locust, bedstraw and sedge. Stephen Mrozowski and L. Driscoll, "Seeds of Learning: An Archaeobotanical Analysis of the Rich Neck Slave Quarter, Williamsburg, Virginia," manuscript on file, Department of Archaeological Research, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

²⁷ Mellon, 310-311, 351.

²⁸ Extensive lists of faunal remains from southern plantations can be found reports by Colonial Williamsburg archaeologists and in these three studies: William H. Adams, ed., Historical Archaeology of Plantations at Kings Bay, Camden County, Georgia. Report of Investigation No 5, submitted to Naval Sbmarmine Base, U.S. Dept. of the Navy, Kings Bay, Georgia, by Dept. of Anthropology, University of Florida, Gainesville (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1987); Elizabeth Reitz and Nicholas Honnerkamp, "British colonial subsistence strategies on the

southeastern coastal plain,” Historical Archaeology 17 (1983): 4-26; and Elizabeth Reitz, Tyson Gibbs, and Ted A. Rathbun, “Archaeological Evidence for Subsistence on Coastal Plantations,” The Archaeology of Slavery and Plantation Life, ed. Theresa Singleton (Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1985).

²⁹ Larry McKee, 232. A broader overview is Theresa Singleton, “The Archaeology of Slavery in North America,” Annual Review of Anthropology 24(1995) 119-140. More focused studies, based on single sites, include: Brian W. Thomas, “Power and Community: The Archaeology of Slavery at the Hermitage Plantation,” American Antiquity 63(4), 1998: 531-551; Garrett Randall Fesler, “From houses to homes: An archaeological case study of household formation at the Utopia Slave Quarter, ca. 1675 to 1775 (Virginia)” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia (Ann Arbor: Proquest Information and Learning, 2004).

³⁰ Many saw literate slaves as subversive agents rebelling against white domination. Legislators throughout the South tried to stringently enforce the rule against teaching a slave to read or write as the century progressed. Charleston, Columbia, and Savannah city councils paid particular attention to black literacy since it opened a lifeline to the broader world (Stamp, 177). In cities such as Savannah, free blacks ran covert schools so a few women may have been able to read a recipe. Literacy rates for southern blacks 1900 U.S. Census data (available on line from the Fisher Library at the University of Virginia) are extremely low: Alabama, 2100; Georgia, 1300, Louisiana, 18,000; Mississippi, 1400; North Carolina, 600; South Carolina, 600; Virginia, 7,000. Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865 to 1940 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1977, 177. Sunny Nash pointed out that many blacks were very quiet about their abilities, to the point that some wouldn’t reveal to census takers that they could read or write (“From Excavation to Oral History,” Ancestry Magazine 20(6), 2002).

³¹ Oral tradition contains few signals of change. Think of it this way. When spices were expensive and ovens unavailable, mothers taught daughters to cook one way, but their daughters, as spices dropped in price and more homes had ovens (albeit without good temperature gauges), modified the recipe. As temperature gauges became more reliable and oven heat more regulated, granddaughters again modified the recipes, as did great-granddaughters. Recipes were fluid entities, but their attributions were not (e.g., Nonnie’s cinnamon cake) and thus they wore auras of authenticity. The nuances in flavor and cooking techniques were not codified as they were in cookbooks. Modifications to recipes in the Family Farmer Cookbook (Boston: Little Brown, 1896) over its 13 editions and hundred-year history can be tracked, but changes via the oral tradition cannot be unless recorded on tape or another medium.

³² One former slave described a July 4th barbecue where peach cobbler and apple dumplings were baked on a rotating basis in iron [Dutch] ovens over open fires. The dumplings were plainly made, without spices or extra fruit flavoring (e.g., lemon, cranberry). The warm, brown-sugared fruit remained in his memory. “The crust or pastry,” of the cobbler, he remembered, “was prepared in large earthen bowls, rolled out like any pie crust, only it was almost twice as thick. A layer of this crust was laid in the oven, then a half peck of peaches poured in, followed by a layer of sugar; then a covering of pastry was laid over all and smoothed around with a knife.” See Hughes’s Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom, ed. William Adams. Milwaukee: South Side Printing Co., 1897, 49. (reprint edition Montgomery, AL: New South Books, 1979).

Letters such as this one by Hannah Valentine on May 2, 1838, are exceedingly rare. “The strawberry vines are in full bloom, and a promise a good crop of fruit. I should like to know what you would wish done with them. If you wish any preserved, and how many. If you do I will endeavor to do them as nicely as possible. If you have no objection I will sell the balance, and see how profitable I can make them. . . . The currants and gooseberries look well, and are tolerably full of fruit. Please let me know if you would wish me to make any currant jelly, and if you would like me to bottle the gooseberries. (Letter by Hannah Valentine, Special Collections Library, University of Virginia).

³³ Anne Sinkler Whaley Leclercq, An Antebellum Household: Including the South Carolina Low Country Receipts and Remedies of Emily Wharton Sinkler (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996). A more typical example appears in an 1897 letter from Ida Matthews about fig pudding: “My cook says it is one of the easiest puddings to make and she often in winter gives it for Sunday as she prepares it on Saturday . . . [cooks it] only a hour on Sunday, for my cook goes to church and only gets back a little before 1 o’clock and I dine at 3.” Archaeologists have tentatively identified Silvia Freeman as the cook and her monthly salary as \$4.00. Wilkie, 100.

³⁴ Hughes, op. cit. 48-49.

³⁵ Mellon, 358, 360. Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery: An Autobiography (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2003), vol. 1, 11.

³⁶ United States Department of Agriculture. Economic Research Service. Sugar and Sweetener Situation and Outlook Yearbook 2001. Report SSS-231. May 2001. Report accessible at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/so/view.asp?f=specialty/sss-bb/>. Wendy Woloson, Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionary, and Consumers in Nineteenth-century America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 194.

³⁷ Williams-Forsen writes of Bella Winston, who, following in her mother’s steps, sold fried chicken across from a train station. Mrs. Winston remembered her children didn’t know “there were other parts of the chicken besides wings, backs, and feet” until they were teenagers and old enough to move away from home. “When Gordonsville was the Chicken Capital of the World,” Orange County Review 9 July 1970, quoted in Williams-Forsen, 50.

³⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1841; 1860; 1870.

³⁹ Whittington B. Johnson, Black Savannah, 1788-1864 (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996), 188).

⁴⁰ South Carolina and American General Gazette, February 19, 1778. Quoted in Olwell (1996, p. 98).

⁴¹ Johnson, 157, 186, 188.

⁴² Jane H. Pease, Ladies, Women, & Wenches: Choice & Constraint in Antebellum Charleston & Boston (Charlotte: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 54. The hotel was well situated,

widely known, and served excellent food that included luxuries unavailable at most commercial establishments. Also see Marina Wikramanayake's A World of Shadow: The Free Black in Antebellum Charleston (New York: The Free Press, 1973) and Mrs. St. Julian Ravenel's Charleston: the Place and the People (New York, Macmillan Co., 1927).

⁴³ Timothy J. Lockley, "Spheres of Influence: Working White and Black Women in Savannah," in Neither Lady nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South, eds. Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 106.

⁴⁴ Emily Burke, Reminiscences of Georgia (J.M. Fitch, 1850; rptd. as Pleasure and Pain, Reminiscences of Georgia in the 1840s [Savannah: Beehive Press, 1978]), 27. Georgia Bryan Conrad (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute, n.d.), 16.

⁴⁵ Burke, 9-10.

⁴⁶ Johnson, Black Savannah, 70-71.

⁴⁷ Conrad, 16.

⁴⁸ Charles L. Hoskins, Out of Yamacraw and Beyond: Discovering Black Savannah (Savannah: Gullah Press, 2002), 13-14). In the 1850s, approximately 50% of Savannah's white population was foreign born, primarily the immigrants came from Ireland, but they also included Germans and a number of Eastern European Jews. These numbers come from Hoskins, quoted in Ferris. Also see Johnson, Black Savannah, 156-58.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Betty Wood, Women's Work, Men's Work: the Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 212-213). Johnson, Black Savannah, 69, 66.

⁵¹ Betty Wood, Women's Work, Men's Work: the Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 212-213). Johnson, Black Savannah, 69, 66. See Johnson, Black Savannah, 57, 99-100 and Hoskins, 40, 46, 121.

⁵² In Mobile, vegetables were treated to more than their share of frying: cauliflower, corn, eggplant, figs, grits, okra, onions, parsnips, plantain, potatoes, sweet potatoes, rice, salsify, squash, and tomatoes were either fried or frittered in at least 25% of the recipes in the The Gulf City Cookbook compiled by the Ladies of the St. Francis Street Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Mobile, Alabama).

⁵³ Grace Hale, Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940 (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

⁵⁴ Annabelle P. Hill, Mrs. Hill's Practical Cookery and Receipt Book 1867 (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1995), 12.

⁵⁵ Leslie A. Schwalm, A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 176.

⁵⁶ Rufus Estes, Good Things to Eat as Suggested by Rufus 1911(Jenks, OK: Howling Moon Press, 1999); Abby Fisher, What Mrs. Fisher Knows about Old Southern Cooking, Soups, Pickles, Preserves, Etc. 1881 (Bedford, MA: Applewood, 1995). Emma Harris (Montana Federation of Negro Women's Clubs. Cook Book) Choice Recipes of Cateresses and Best Cooks of the State . Emma G. Harris. (Billings, MT: Montana Federation, Negro Women's Clubs; Ways and Means Committee, 1927). 32pp.

⁵⁷ Sam B. Hilliard, "Hog Meat and Cornpone: Food Habits in the Antebellum South," Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 113 no. 1 (1969): 1-13. See also Hilliard's Hog Meat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Old South 1840-1860 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1972), 56-69.

⁵⁸ See the description of Maun Hanna's baking in Julia Peterkin's Scarlet Sister Mary 1928 (reprt. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 28-29.

⁵⁹ Noralee Frankel, Freedom's Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 88-89

⁶⁰ Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to the Present 1985 (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 80.

⁶¹ Picture Low country stores as weatherworn structures, with stout shutters, barred windows, and a bench where men gathered, gossiped, and whittled; see Crum, 26-27.

⁶² Howard Odum in Jacqueline P. Bull's "The General Merchant in the Economic History of the South," The Journal of Southern History 18, no. 1 (1952), 56.

⁶³ Country stores did not stock much food unless it had a long shelf life. Comparison of a 1915 Alabama store with an 1897 Louisiana store shows little variation in their contents despite their dates. (Dr. Joseph W. Reddoch, "As It Was: A Family Portrait," 1978, typescript on file in the Louisiana State Archives; W. L. Tillery & Company in Greensburg, Louisiana, Invoice book 1897, Louisiana State Archives). The Alabama country store "held groceries, canned goods, coffee, crackers, sugar in barrels, molasses, salt, sacks of flour, corn meal, hominy grits, rice, sweet and sour pickles, salt meat, kits of salt mackerel, large tins of link sausage packed in cottonseed oil ... canned salmon, sardines, Vienna sausage, potted meat, oysters, a wheel of American cheese, various cookies and stick candies. However, the Louisiana store was also a reliable source for whiskey and its invoices reveal a few spices. There were regional variations. A Tennessee store, for example, further offered cinnamon bark, chestnuts, maple sugar (a local product), dried peaches, vinegar, Irish potatoes, mustard, nutmeg, coffee, tea, sorghum, lard oil, baking powder, cayenne pepper, and other spices (J. C. Williams' daybook, 1879-1881, Williams papers, quoted in Journal of Southern History, p. 56).

⁶⁴ An example from Eli Capell's store accounts shows how this worked. On January 1st 1867 he owed a freed slave, Willie Dotson, \$97.87. After deducting for Dotson's 1866 expenses (\$94.62

½ cents), Dotson had exactly \$3.25 ½ cents in profit—money that he immediately spent buying additional goods from Capell. See Stephenson, 373; also see Bull, 40.

⁶⁵ Sharon Ann Holt, Making Freedom Pay: North Carolina Freedpeople working for Themselves, 1865-1900 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 33; Julia Peterkin, Green Thursday 1924 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 12.

⁶⁶ Pete Daniel, Standing at the Crossroads: Southern Life in the Twentieth Century (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 84.

⁶⁷ Oral interview, Caroline Davis, November 2002. In possession of the author.

⁶⁸ Interview with Emma McCloud in Daniel, 223.

⁶⁹ Jones, Labor of Love, 86.

⁷⁰ Daniel, 87.

⁷¹ Peterkin, Green Thursday, 119-120.

⁷² Typescript of oral interview with Effie Burns (born 1900). Friends of the Cabildo transcripts, Special Collections, Tulane University Library.

⁷³ Bull, 51, 55.

⁷⁴ Crum, 15-17.

⁷⁵ Peterkin, Scarlet Sister Mary, 61. Another account notes how a Sea Island woman made cornbread: “mix meal and water together with a little salt. This was done by eye and her proportions always varied, much to the author’s dismay”; Charles Stearns, The Black Man of the South and the Rebels (Boston: N.E. News Company, 1872), 86.

⁷⁶ A woman from Vicksburg, Mississippi quoted by Clifton Johnson, Highways and Byways of the Mississippi Valley (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 61.

⁷⁷ Charlene Gilbert and Quinn Eli, Homecoming: The Story of African-American Farmers (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 40-41.

⁷⁸ Dianne D. Glave, “Gardening, Progressive Reform, and the Foundation of an African American Environmental Perspective.” July 2003. Environmental History 8(3): 395-411.

⁷⁹ Crum, 15.

⁸⁰ Holt, Making Freedom Pay, 33.

⁸¹ Oral interview, November 2002. Typescript in possession of the author. While this white woman grew up in poverty, even middle class or wealthy country families used wood stoves well

into the 1930s. See Emily Whaley, Mrs. Whaley Entertains: Advice, Opinions, and 100 Recipes from a Charleston Kitchen (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1998), 8. Crum, 15-17.

⁸² Holt, 20-21. Dietary differences between southern sharecropper and landowner were steep. See Taylor, as well as Williams-Forson, particularly 125-128.

⁸³ For information on hunting see Crum, 55; Irving E. Lowery, Life on the Old Plantation (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1911), 53); and Mellon, 44.

⁸⁴ Typescript of oral interview with Effie Burns (born 1900). Friends of the Cabildo transcripts, Special Collections, Tulane University Library.

⁸⁵ Dennett, 20, 41, 123, 149-50.

⁸⁶ Angelou, Hallelujah, 13.

⁸⁷ LuAnn Landon, Dinner at Miss Lady's. (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1999, 99).

⁸⁸ Leigh Campbell in Telling Memories, 51.

⁸⁹ Marcie Cohen Ferris documents the process among Jewish families in Savannah, Charleston, New Orleans, Montgomery, and Memphis throughout her dissertation.

⁹⁰ Danny Moore in "To Make the Best Better": The Establishment of Girls' Tomato Clubs in Mississippi, 1911-1915. *The Journal of Mississippi History*, Volume LXIII, No. 2 (Summer 2001).

⁹¹ Amelia Boynton Robinson, Bridge across Jordan. Washington: Schiller Institute, 1991.

⁹² Dianne D. Glave, "Gardening, Progressive Reform, and the Foundation of an African American Environmental Perspective." July 2003. Environmental History 8(3): 395-411.

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