more literal interpretation of the origins of "dodger." In his 1902 New Dictionary of Americanisms , he described the manner in which cooks "toss a mass of dough rapidly from hand to hand to give it shape" or the way a corn dumpling "dodges up and down in boiling."

The back-and-forth motion of this small bread's preparation could have given rise (pun intend - ed) to its name. But the most likely etymological possibility is that "dodger" comes from the Scots word dadge, which means "a large piece of anything," [1] and its dimin - utive form, dodgel "a lump of something." The Dictionary of the Scots Language contains an 1825 reference to "a dodgel o' bannock." Given that "bannock" was also a word used in the Eastern states for cornbread, and given the extent of Scottish settlement in Appalachia, this seems a less dodgy explanation of why the term "corn-dodger" was applied to a lump of bread made from cornmeal.

"Hushpuppy," a related term, appears in print in 1918. Though its origins are also unclear, one theory is more pervasive than others: The hushpuppy originat - ed as a scrap of cornmeal dough, fried quickly and fed to dogs to silence whining or begging. The identity of the puppy-hushers varies. Folk tales range from Confederate soldiers, to runaway slaves, to hunters, to beach-front partygoers. Another theory sug - gests that the "hush" part of hushpuppy developed from "hash," from the French hache, "to cut into small pieces for cooking." Yet another theory, from the 1977 Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins , holds that the name "hushpuppy" dervies from the water dog or mudpuppy, a salamander legend - ary for its size and ill temper. The mudpuppy would be considered desperate food; including "hush" in the name for cornmeal-and-salamander makes sense—you certainly wouldn't want your neighbors to know you ate it.

Though none of these folk etymologies are likely accurate, they make for good stories. And they are more than just tall tales: Folk etymologies encode cultur - al information in their explana - tions of our linguistic world—the fanciful accounts of corn dodger and hushpuppy show us, for example, that attitudes toward cornmeal have changed. The bread flour that colonists initial - ly regarded as uncooperative has become a touchstone of Southern cuisine. The variety of names for cornmeal-based breads speaks to that status. In the end, the best explanation for these two terms is the one that neither story-tellers nor linguists are willing to offer: Sometimes we just don't know.

[1] Do refrain from using this label for people, as the DSL notes that 'dadge' can also be used in Scots to mean something akin to "tramp" or "slut" in English.

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FEAST OR FAMINE

CORN'S ROLE IN AMERICA'S (PRE)HISTORY

by Tanya M. Peres

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CHARLES FAIRBANKS and his Florida State Uni - versity student archeolo - gy crew meticulously scraped dirt from their excavation units for weeks. It was 1961. They had broken ground in June at Horse - shoe Bend National Battlefield Park in central Alabama to search for Nuyaka, a historic Muscogee (Creek) Indian village on the Tal - lapoosa River. They had cleared a wading pool–sized circular stain of dark brown, almost greasy dirt. Nearly three hundred years prior, native peoples had filled this earthen storage pit with broken bones of deer and turtles, pulver - ized and carbonized hickory nut shells, peach pits, broken ceramic pots, and flecks of charcoal from cooking fires. As the crew scooped the remnants of these long-for - gotten meals, Fairbanks squinted, peering from the edge of the unit. A white speck caught his eye. He stepped into the pit, moving gin - gerly. The students paused, fixing attention on their professor.

Fairbanks pulled a trowel with a worn wooden handle from his back pocket. He knelt on the smooth floor of the excavation unit. With a wrist flick he uncov - ered several cracked white egg - shells. The closest student held a small glass jar, ready to pack the specimens for a trip back to the lab in Tallahassee. The rest of the crew laid down their shovels and

rulers and headed over to see what else they might find. They were not disappointed. Following Fair - banks's lead, scraping carefully, they uncovered more eggshell pieces and a remarkably well-pre - served egg. In an adjacent pit, they found burned corncobs.

The students spent the rest of the day in deep discussion about the ancient meal these small ar - tifacts narrated. Fairbanks, drawing on his Philip Morris Commander cigarette and on his vast knowledge of Native Amer - ican lifeways, may have declared it the first known evidence of sofki eaten with custake, a com- bination we know today as grits and eggs. Prior to the arrival of chickens, which European set - tlers brought to North America, the Muscogee and other groups before them ate their sofki with turkey or duck eggs.

No matter which bird bore the eggs, the preparation of the sofki was constant. Through a process that would come to be known as nixtamalization, Muscogee cooks soaked corn kernels in hardwood ash and water before cooking the rinsed and softened kernels in a ceramic vessel until they reached the consistency of gruel. In a step not unlike adding butter or sausage gravy to the modern version of grits, they also added crushed hickory nuts, hickory nut oil, or deer-bone marrow. Topped with an egg, this mix became a satisfying and nutritious meal.

Native Americans memorial - ized and celebrated the prominent role of corn in their lives through stories passed from grand - mothers to granddaughters, in meals cooked around clan fires, through male voices raised in song, and in the rattle-shaking of female stomp dances. When the ripening moon showed on sultry late-summer nights and silky hairs entwined milk-laden corn kernels, the Southeastern Indians began to prepare for the Green Corn Ceremony. It was a time to cleanse bodies through fasting, mend relationships through forgiveness, and revive souls through feasting. Busk, the name given to the ceremony by early European settlers, was an Anglicized version of the Creek poskita, meaning "to fast." The first day of the ceremony was spent feasting on the remainder of the winter food stores in preparation for the days of fasting to follow.

Fasting began at sundown on the first day and was broken at sunrise on the third day, when priests, warriors, and clan leaders purified themselves by drinking a native tea. On the fourth day, the women prepared an elaborate feast of corn, pumpkin, beans, fish, dried meat, and wild fruit. As an - thropologist Charles Hudson has noted, the ceremony was of such deep social, spiritual, and cultur - al meaning that to approximate it in the modern day would be to roll Thanksgiving, New Year's, Yom Kippur, Lent, and Mardi Gras into one feast celebration.

European explorers and Euro-

Print by James Hall and Thomas Loraine McKenney, 1837. Library of Congress

Charles Fairbanks with Rochelle Marrinan, circa 1971. Marrinan is the current chair of anthropology at FSU.

Courtesy of Kathleen Deagan

American settlers observed and chronicled these events. Benjamin Hawkins, U.S. Indian Agent from 1796 to 1816, recorded details of the multi-day festivities. John Howard Payne visited the Creek in 1835 and described the ceremony in a letter to a relative in New York. Payne noted that the Creek did not eat the newly ripe corn until after the busk was complete, a period of four days. Payne could not have known it at the time, but he witnessed the last Creek busk celebrated on ancestral homelands east of Arkansas. The next year, armies under the control of President Andrew Jackson began forcibly removing the Creek and other Southeastern Indians to what is now eastern Oklahoma. Despite the physical separation from their ancestral homelands, the Creek still celebrate busks today. That continuity speaks to the importance of the ritual for Southeastern Native American groups seeking spiritual and social renewal.

European contact brought cultural, economic, and social change to the Muscogee living at Nuyaka. Muscogee women and English traders married and raised families nearby; their children lived in both worlds. Between 1715 and the 1780s, the Muscogee traded deerskins for English textiles, cookware, guns, and alcohol. By the 1730s, tens of thousands of deerskins passed annually through Charleston, South Carolina, the closest major port for the deerskin trade to Europe. Demand for hides eventually decimated the white-tailed deer population and strained trade relations between the Muscogee and the leaders of the newly formed state of Georgia. No longer seen as valuable sources of a commodity, Muscogee hunters became hurdles to plantation-based farming and slavery. The Georgia government pressured the Indians into signing over their lands in a series of treaties between 1790 and 1805. During this era, U.S. Indian Agent Benjamin Hawkins led the federal government's "plan of civilization" to convert Muscogee men into commercial ranchers and farmers. Planners ignored the fact that Creek women traditionally farmed the land.

The devastating loss of traditional lifeways spurred a rift between the Creek National Council, which aligned with the U.S. Government, and the traditionalist Red Sticks, who saw these assimilation attempts as death sentences. Diplomacy fizzled, erupting into violence in 1813. Fighting between the two Creek groups intensified with the engagement of U.S. troops, who joined forces with the Creek National Council to crush the Red Sticks.

On March 27, 1814, the town of Tohopeka became the site of the bloodiest battle of the campaign. Led by Chief Menawa, Creek warriors, women, and children from surrounding towns, including Nuyaka, had sought refuge in this naturally defensible location on a horseshoe-shaped bend in the Tallapoosa River. Within eight hours, General Andrew Jackson's army slaughtered more than 800 Muscogee men.

According to a battle map that Isaac Stephens, a member of the Sons of Tennessee militia, sent to his uncle in Virginia, the U.S. troops surrounded the 100-acre Creek town. Written documents of the day do not number the women and children killed in those chaotic terror-filled hours, though undoubtedly some of them perished in the community's agricultural fields, where, nine months before, they harvested the first ripe corn for feasting and dancing during the Green Corn Ceremony.

The U.S. government soon stripped families of their ancestral lands and marched them to government-issued territories west of the Mississippi. Within two decades, the Creek and Cherokee communities of the Southeast were shadows of their former selves. The axis mundi turned upside down. As a result of the removal, traditions and knowledge that had persisted for millennia disappeared from the landscape.

The loss of foodways knowledge, especially the nixtamalization process, seemed inconsequential at the time. It was not. This failure to document and translate the single most important step in preparing corn for human consumption had far-reaching consequences. Native American oral traditions give us insight into the intimate relationship between people and corn. Corn was the food of the gods. Corn was the mother to all human creation.

When Columbus packed up the first bushels of corn for his return trip to Spain, it did not hold this same spiritual primacy. To Columbus and his colleagues, corn was another potential commodity discovered in the New World, destined to become a cheap and widespread food source. Ultimately, ignorance of this crucial recipe catalyzed an international public health crisis. In the early twentieth century, it reached epidemic levels in the American South—the very land where Native Americans had once thrived on corn.

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