SFA *presents*

GREATEST HITS 2015

HIRED PIHAKIS FILM FELLOW

WELCOMED SMITH SYMPOSIUM FELLOWS

MAPPED *Vision* FOR 2020

WON JAMES BEARD AWARD FOR BEST PUBLICATION

DELIVERED 250,000 GRAVY PODCAST DOWNLOADS

SERVED 2000 MEMBERS

PRINT REDESIGNED & EXPANDED GRAVY

hosted INAUGURAL FOOD MEDIA SOUTH

SERVED 1,000,000 WEBSITE PAGES

connected w/ 25,000 TWITTER & 32,000 FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS

Directed 70 ORAL HISTORIES OF NEW ORLEANS BAKERS & BARTENDERS, SOUTH CAROLINA FISHERFOLK, & MORE

STAGED THOUGHT-PROVOKING SYMPOSIA

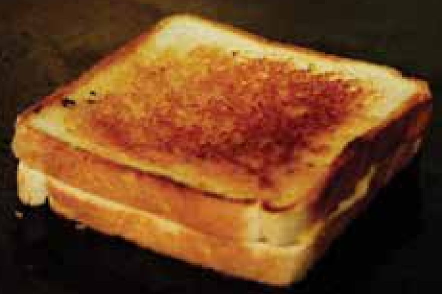
Produced 15 FOODWAYS FILMS

HONORED *a* NASHVILLE DYNAMO *a* NEW ORLEANS RESTAURATEUR *and an* APPALACHIAN FOODWAYS ADVOCATE *with* FERTEL, CLAIBORNE, *and* EGERTON AWARDS

GRAVY

$7 • WINTER 2015 • A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FROM THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE

Winter Reading



MAHALIA JACKSON'S GLORI-FRIED CHICKEN
PAGE 32

PEACHES AND CIVIL RIGHTS IN MIDDLE GEORGIA
PAGE 38

ISSUE #58
WINTER 2015

Denny Culbert

GRAVY

THE SFA SERVES YOU…

FEATURES

24
FLAG PIZZA
Chris Offutt

32
GLORI-FRIED AND GLORI-FIED
Alice Randall

38
THE GEORGIA PEACH IN BLACK AND WHITE
Tom Okie

2 FIRST HELPINGS

6 SOMBREROS OVER THE SOUTH
Gustavo Arellano

10 THE CORNBREAD QUESTION
Allison Burkette

12 CORNPONE
Allison Burkette

14 ELECTRIC JELL-O
Lora Smith

20 LAGOS OR BUST
Courtney Balestier

48 SOME LIKE IT HOTTER
Sandra Beasley

50 INDIANOLA SUNRISE
Sandra Beasley

52 LOST FAST FOOD FRANCHISES
Brooke Hatfield

57 DEEP FRIED FORTUNE
Sandra Beasley

59 FULANI JOURNEY
William Boyle

62 2015 SFA AWARD WINNERS

Cover photo by
ALLISON V. SMITH

GRAVY #58 WINTER 2015

First Helpings

A WIGGLY TRADITION

In my work for the SFA, I often read stories in which the author lovingly recalls the Southern foods of his or her childhood—homemade biscuits, collard greens, chicken and dumplings. Usually the author recalls a mother or grandmother preparing these dishes, scooping bacon grease from a tin can by the stove into a generations-old cast-iron skillet.

I have few such memories from my childhood, and I turned out just fine. It was the 1980s, and then the 90s, in Raleigh, North Carolina, at least a decade before the Triangle got hip. (I was away at college and many years too late before I learned that a young Ryan Adams had spent those same years gigging at Sadlack's Heroes, a crusty, beloved dive bar on Hillsborough Street by the N.C. State campus. Maybe we were hip all along, and I just didn't know it.) We ate at home six nights a week, and my maternal grandmother usually joined us on two or three of those nights. We went through a baked spaghetti phase, a grilled-chicken-sandwich phase, a turkey burger phase.

During those years, my parents maintained some culinary traditions from their own upbringings—country ham biscuits for special occasions, Brunswick stew on cold winter nights, black-eyed peas on New Year's Day—while others fell to the side. I bet your family did, and does, the same. In graduate school, I read an academic explanation for this common-sense practice: Traditions are not accidents. They are those rituals of the past that we choose to carry forward with us. More recently, I heard SFA board member Francis Lam tell an assembly of SFA folk the same thing. Which brings me to congealed salad (a topic you'll read more about later in this issue).

Every Christmas Eve, my mother serves a congealed salad. She fills individual dome-shaped tin molds with cherry Jell-O, chopped nuts, and fruit cocktail. When it's time to set the table, she turns each mold out onto a bread-and-butter plate lined with a leaf of iceberg lettuce. Had I stopped to think about it when I was younger, I might have guessed that this tradition belonged to my grandmother, and that my mother continued the practice out of respect. Now, a dozen years after my grandmother passed, the dish lives on. It doesn't matter whether anyone actually eats the congealed salad, but it wouldn't be Christmas without it.

TRADITIONS ARE NOT ACCIDENTS. THEY ARE THOSE RITUALS OF THE PAST THAT WE CHOOSE TO CARRY FORWARD WITH US.

As we celebrate our first wedding anniversary, my husband and I are forging our own food traditions. (It turns out that I'm more like my mom than I thought, and Kirk takes after his own mother, a talented and joyful home cook.) I hope the New Year is a time for you to reflect on your own food traditions, to revive the ones that you love, and maybe to implement something new. —*Sara Camp Milam*

I'M WITH THE BRAND

GENERIC TRADEMARKS IN THE KITCHEN

When we adopt a brand name as the common name for a product, a generic trademark is born. Many of these reside in your kitchen: Crock Pot, Tupperware, and—believe it or not—TV Dinner. Generations of Southeners recognize Coke as a generic trademark for soda.

Tabasco® has waged several trademark battles to defend its status as more than a generic term for hot sauce in popular use. When we want gelatin, we say Jell-O, but Kraft owns the Jell-O brand. It has also entered the vernacular to describe sore, tired muscles: "I was so tired from walking from store to store looking for gelatin that my legs turned to Jell-O." Jell-O was an aspirational food in mid-century Kentucky, writes Lora Smith in her article on page 14.

Another generic trademark served as the icon for our 2015 programming theme, Pop Goes the South. You've probably noticed the bright pink image we feature alongside the words. And you might want to call it a popsicle, but the Popsicle company wishes you wouldn't. It's a frozen ice treat on a stick, thankyouverymuch.

Tip Number 58 It's time to update your SFA membership! Join or renew for 2016 to keep receiving Gravy. In 2016, we explore the Corn-Fed South, from bread to syrup.

Featured Contributor

ALICE RANDALL

ALICE RANDALL IS THE AUTHOR of four novels, including *The Wind Done Gone,* which retells *Gone with the Wind* from Mammy's perspective. She is also the first African American woman to write a #1 country music song: the 1994 Trisha Yearwood hit "XXX's and OOO's (American Girl)." You might catch a whiff of the chorus of that song—"She's got a picture of her momma in heels and pearls/She's gonna make it in her Daddy's world"—in her feature story for this issue.

Most recently, Randall and her daughter, Caroline Randall Williams, wrote *Soul Food Love,* a cookbook that doubles as a love letter to the women in their family. To spend any time with Alice Randall and her work is to take in a big hit of girl power.

Here's what Randall has to say about her subject, the late gospel singer-come-fried chicken entrepreneur Mahalia Jackson:

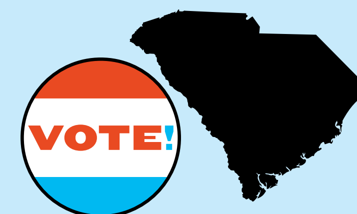
"I am tempted to stop working on my new novel and write a biography of Mahalia Jackson. She moved from maid's uniform, to choir robe, to business suit, and finally not a robe in glory, but a self-respected black body. The more I learned, the more I understood that the power of Mahalia Jackson was the poetry of her face and form adored: a brown woman's body that was independent, international, intelligent, elegantly and unabashedly large. It was a body that had transcended, on Earth, not on high, rebukes and scorn. Taking control of her kitchen and taking pride in her body, Mahalia exploded Mammy—for some of us, if not for all. She is my kitchen saint."

Tangled Up IN BLUE LAWS

12 Number of states that block Sunday retail liquor sales

7 Number that are in the South

SOUTH CAROLINA



WAS THE LAST STATE TO LIFT ITS BAN ON ELECTION DAY LIQUOR SALES, IN 2014.

DISTILLERIES

KENTUCKY has the most with **43** (18.3% of the total)

BREWERIES PER CAPITA

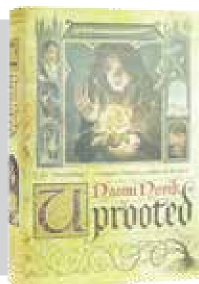
There is one brewery for every 58,747 people in the state of **NORTH CAROLINA** ranking it 1st in the Southeastern US

WHISKEY WAS THE FIRST FEDERALLY TAXED GOOD.

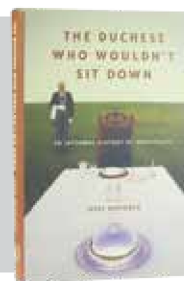
The tax led to the Whiskey Rebellion, which historians say played a role in the creation of political parties.

GRAVY BOOK CLUB

SFA staffers read more than cookbooks. In this space, we share our favorites with you. Assistant director Melissa Hall offers this issue's recommendations.



Naomi Novik serves up a magical novel packed with modern girl-power, old world folklore, and just a dash of fairy tale (the Grimm kind).



Traipse through the dining rooms of history and explore the practice and the philosophy of modern hospitality. I re-read Jesse Browner's book every year, often just before an SFA event.

In one big, beautiful book, Joe Dabney legitimized an often-forgotten Southern region. He also reminded this homesick eastern Kentucky girl that she used to know how to make blackberry dumplings.

SOMBREROS OVER THE SOUTH

WHAT LIES BENEATH THE HAPPY HAT

by Gustavo Arellano

South of the Border, Dillon, South Carolina.

Kate Medley

EVEN THOUGH I HAVEN'T HELD IT IN NEARLY FIFTEEN YEARS, I can easily picture the sombrero my father wore as an adolescent. It hangs in the bedroom of his childhood home in the Mexican village of Jomulquillo, Zacatecas, redolent of tilled earth and *ganado* (livestock), its straw brim slightly frayed but sturdy. The sombrero is a reminder of my family's agrarian roots, the life my *'apa* left behind. That's what sombreros historically represented for Mexicans: markers of proud campesinos or *charros* (our archetypal men on horseback) who reveled in the rewards of a hard day's work.

In *los Estados Unidos*, Americans have warped them into something quite different. Here, sombreros are exclusively happy hats: permission for the wearer to transform into a one-person party. Fans of Mexico's soccer team flaunt them during international matches. Costume stores can barely keep them in stock during Halloween or Cinco de Mayo. Late-night hosts wear sombreros for comedy sketches, tipping their you-know-what to the buffoonery to come.

Here's the funny thing, though: Stateside, I rarely see a Mexican wear one. Outside of folkloric dance performances, soccer stadiums, or mariachi shows, we favor *tejanas* (Stetsons) for everyday wear. We give the sombrero the respect it deserves. It's headgear for a certain place and time—like revolutions, for instance, or to serenade a señorita in the moonlight.

I've noticed the prevalence of sombreros in the South ever since my first visit. In 2007, the kind students who hosted me at the University of Memphis decorated a lectern with a sombrero featuring more colors than a bag of Skittles. I've seen them on highway signs advertising Mexican restaurants on I-40, I-75, and U.S. Route 72, the highway that crosses northernmost Alabama and Mississippi. Spartanburg, Russellville, Danville, Charlotte: My travels through deltas, hollers, swamps, and mountains have been a Johnny Cash song come to life—if the Man in Black had accessorized with a sombrero.

Southerners just can't seem to get enough! In October, a photo of University of Louisville President James Ramsey and his staff wearing sombreros and shaking maracas at a Halloween party went viral, prompting an apology. That followed Clemson University offering its own *mea culpa* after cafeteria workers served Mexican food while wearing sombreros. South Carolina is *obsessed* with the damn hat. In her 2012 book, *Sombreros and Motorcycles in a Newer South: The Politics of Aesthetics in South Carolina's Tourism Industry*, P. Nicole King examined the notorious sombrero haven South of the Border, a square mile of fiesta off I-95 in Dillon, just across the line from North Carolina. Towering over the roadside kitsch is Pedro, a 77-ton, 100-foot-tall Mexican wearing—yep—a sombrero. Here, curious visitors can eat at a sombrero-shaped restaurant, book their wedding at the Top Hat Club, or climb up the 200-foot Sombrero Observation Tower to take in views of the Carolina countryside. It's lit up in neon at night, hanging over the horizon like a UFO ready to descend.

Sombreros over the South: What a perfect metaphor for the Mexicans who live here, aliens in their new home.

SUMMER, 2014. My wife and I visit a Mexican restaurant on a Friday night in Kentucky cave country. There's a twenty-minute wait, so we stare in awe at the crowd: all white, their tables laden with fajitas, nachos, and canteen-sized margaritas. And we stare at a booth where friends and family sing "Happy Birthday" to a college-age woman as the restaurant staff crowns her with...a sombrero.

There are no debates about cultural respect or appropriation; tonight, everyone is a Mexican. That's the magic of the sombrero—and its harm. As

Mexicans have migrated to the South over the past twenty years, too many folks reduce us to a seemingly silly hat.

The first time I had an inkling that *raza* lived in *el Sur* was in 2008, when a young man with a twang rang up my purchase at a video-game store in Orange County, California. I bought the Xbox 360 version of *NCAA Football 08*, the one with former Arkansas Razorbacks legend Darren McFadden on the cover. The clerk said his favorite team was the Auburn Tigers. When I told him that Mexicans were only allowed to root for UCLA, USC, and maybe the Texas Longhorns, he said that wasn't the case for Mexicans in Alabama.

"There are Mexicans in Alabama?" I asked, incredulous.

I'VE HEARD CHICANO COLLEGE STUDENTS IN KENTUCKY PROUDLY CALL THEMSELVES "APPALACHICANOS."

"Yep," he said proudly, adding a "War Eagle!" for good measure, along with some harsh words about Nick Saban.

The time of treating Mexicans in the South as a novelty—a sombrero!—is over. A twenty-first-century Great Migration of Latinos to the region is forging a new identity. Call it Sur-Mex: simultaneously of the South and Mexican, with the hyphen representing not a division but a conduit over which to exchange traditions. I've written much about how non-Latinos in the South endorse Mexicans through our food, always asking for more of the authentic stuff (breakfast burritos from a roadside stand in Grimsley, Tennessee? Sure!). But far more accepting are the Mexican children who grow up Southern. From Louisiana to the Florida Panhandle, the Ozarks to Appalachia, these kids absorb regional identities, from accents to pickup trucks, and create new ones firmly rooted in the land. I've even heard Chicano college students in Kentucky proudly call themselves "Appalachicanos."

This is happening despite politicians who do everything possible to make the lives of these young people and their parents miserable. A great many of them are undocumented, or come from families with at least one family member without papers. And still they become Southern.

OUTSIDE OF THE SOUTH, Latinos also think of the Sur-Mexican as novelty. Place any good ol' *chico* or *chica* anywhere else in the United States or Mexico, and they'll have two strikes against them, as Mexicans and Southerners. *Ni de aquí, ni de allá*, as the saying goes—neither from here nor there. It just doesn't compute for the rest of us that Mexicans would ever find paradise in the South, far from the comfort of the Southwest. Yet they go, drawn by a beautiful way of life and opportunities ripe for the taking.

So far, Mexicans have done most of the work of forging a Sur-Mex culture. Now it's time for native Southerners to go beyond the sombreros. Teaching Mexicans the lay of the *tierra* is essential—the music, the cuisine, the cults of Ale-8-One and bluegrass, of Dusty Rhodes and mirliton (which we call *chayote*). In turn, Southerners can learn from Mexicans; loving the food is a good start. Learn, too, the importance of immigration reform, the glories of our musical rhythms, the community festival that is a quinceañera, or the genius of trucker movies (on that note, organize a *Smokey and the Bandit* marathon and pair it with the Mexican cult classic *Lola la Trailera*—Lola, the Truck-Driving Woman).

It won't hurt y'all to learn a bit of *español*, either. I do my bilingual part in this *columna*, but start listening to any local Spanish-language radio stations, or watch your Univisión channel. And, like Gullah and Cajun and the Native American languages that gave names to rivers, cities, counties, and mountains, let Spanish seep into the Southern vernacular. It already has in Louisville, where Latino students have added a new entry—"Lubo"—in the lexicon of ways to pronounce the Derby City's name. Say it out loud: "Lubo." Makes as much sense as "Loo-vuhl," no?

Fotolia

And if Southerners don't embrace Mexicans? We'll do fine—we're a surviving lot. But then Mexicans won't bother to fully bond with Southern culture. The youngsters who are the future will migrate away, turned off just like hundreds of thousands of folks, black and white, in previous generations. Mexicans want to be part of the South, they really do. Now, it's up to Southerners to listen and let them join.

Heavy lies the sombrero, oh wonderful South. Are *ustedes* ready to wear it?

Gustavo Arellano is the editor of OC Weekly *and the author of* Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America. *He presented a version of this piece at the 18th Southern Foodways Symposium.*

THE CORNBREAD QUESTION

WHAT DO YOU CALL IT?

by Allison Burkette

Denny Culbert

OFTEN I AM ASKED HOW linguists research the ways in which different people use language. The long answer has to do with collecting data and doing theoretically grounded analysis, perhaps even some correlational statistics. The short answer is simple, and perhaps more elegant: We ask them.

In the late 1920s, a group of American linguists undertook what is to date the largest survey of American English ever conducted. They called it the Linguistic Atlas Project and began by interviewing speakers in New England. After they completed the New England survey, they moved down the East Coast, creating the Linguistic Atlas of the Middle and South Atlantic States (LAMSAS, for short).

LAMSAS fieldworkers Raven McDavid and Guy Lowman talked to over 1,100 people over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, spending six to eight hours with each informant. They wrote down answers to the interview questions in International Phonetic Alphabet, a set of symbols that can be used to precisely document speech sounds. McDavid and Lowman asked each interviewee about 800 questions—yes, eight *hundred*—most having to do with words for things commonly found around the house and farm. They asked questions using a shotgun-style technique: long questions aimed at eliciting a short answer, followed by a set of lengthy follow-up questions gauged to hit an even wider target.

Here's an example of a basic question: *What is baked in a large cake made of cornmeal?*

And here's a not-so-basic set of follow-ups (McDavid was famous for these, this one in particular):

Now, you mention cornbread. What do you mean by cornbread?

Do you have more than one kind?

Suppose you have the kind that doesn't have anything in it except cornmeal, salt, and water? What do you call that?

Do you ever remember any kind of cornbread that people talked about making before the fire on a board or something like that, only larger?

Are there kinds that they cook in ashes?

What kind is about an inch thick, very large and round?

And sort of like a sphere and maybe it has a little bit of onion or green pepper mixed up in it and you cook them in deep fat and eat them with fish or other fried seafood?

There is something else that you sometimes have that you boil in cheesecloth with either beans or greens or something with chicken, made out of cornmeal. What would you call that?

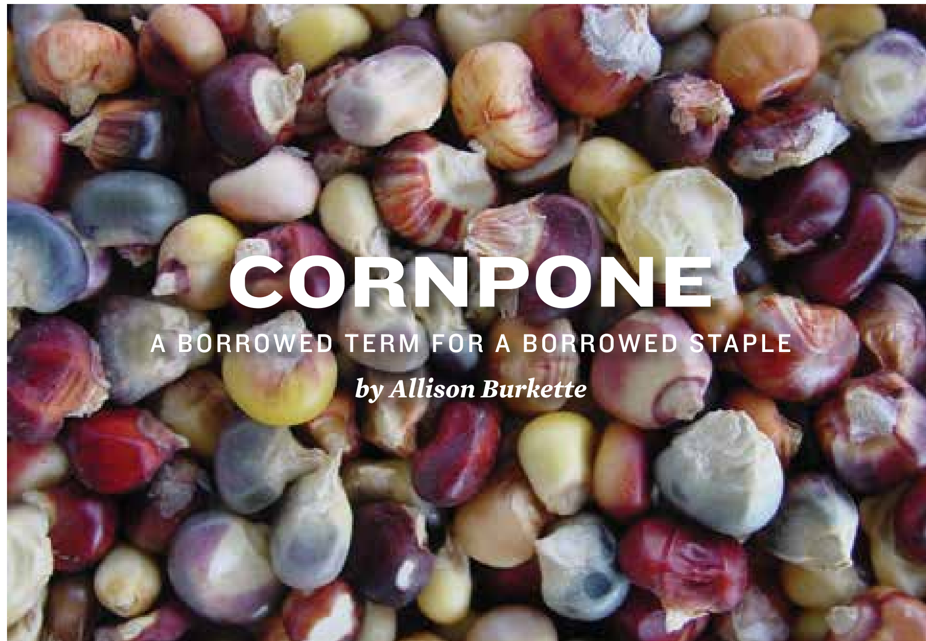
And then there's the kind of cornmeal that you cook in a deep pan and it comes out soft and you dish it out like you would dish out mashed potatoes onto your plate beside your meat.

THE LAMSAS SURVEY RETURNED OVER 390 DISTINCT ANSWERS TO THE CORNBREAD QUESTION. THAT'S A LOT OF WORDS FOR CORNBREAD.

Even given the breadth of McDavid's follow-up questions about cornbread, it still may surprise you to know that the LAMSAS survey returned over 390 distinct answers to the cornbread question.

Some of the terms are regional, some are local, and some are individual. Some terms reflect a particular method of cornbread preparation, like "hoe cakes," which are made out in the field when dough is baked over a fire atop a wiped-down hoe. Some terms carry with them their cultural origins, such as "pone" (Native American), "ponhaus" (Pennsylvania Deutsch), and "bannock" (Scottish), just to name a few. Some terms reflect the addition of other ingredients, like meat scraps ("crackling bread") or eggs ("eggbread").

I can come up with reasons for, histories of, or background stories for a lot of the terms, but that many cornbread variations are hard to explain. I've not run across another Linguistic Atlas question that elicited as many terms as the cornbread question did. It's a testament to the cultural import of this foundational food.



CORNPONE

A BORROWED TERM FOR A BORROWED STAPLE

by Allison Burkette

Living Seed Company

SOMETIMES, DURING THE course of researching the relationship between language and culture, a single word or concept emerges that seems to carry with it the whole of history. Take "cornpone."

I've seen several discussions of "cornpone"—or "ponebread," or simply "pone"—that slip in a statement or two about the dish, and its name, being of Native American ancestry. Clues as to the more specific origins of "pone" can be found within the *Indian Vocabularies*. Reprinted as a series, these thin volumes contain vocabulary lists made by European colonists who recorded their contact with various Native American tribes. One of the earliest is Captain John Smith's *A Map Of Virginia* from 1612, which describes his encounters with the Powhatan, who are depicted as supping on "broth with the bread they called *Ponap*."

William Strachey, also in the Virginia colony, wrote down a list of Powhatan words in his 1612 vocabulary. It contains entries for *asapa* (which he defines as "hasty pudding"), and two words, *apones* and *appoans*, which are likely singular and plural for "bread." In the 1640s, Lutheran priest Johannes Campanius collected examples from the area around Wilmington, Delaware, to compile his *Vocabulary of the Unami Jargon*, a list that contains several variously spelled entries for "bread": *poon*, *pone*, and *pane*. Farther north, we have James Madison's *Vocabulary of New Jersey Delaware*, collected in the 1850s and containing an entry for "bread" as *apoon*.

As Powhatan, Unami, and Delaware are all from the Algonquin language family, we can make an educated guess that "pone" is Algonquin. The geographical territory covered by these languages accounts for what would have been the colonial American corn belt. The whole East Coast was rife with corn-based contact between Native Americans and early colonists. The persistence of the term "pone" as part of our American cornbread vocabulary suggests that different groups of colonists adopted this term at many points of contact throughout the Atlantic states.

Colonists didn't just borrow the word for cornbread; they also borrowed Native American ways of preparing cornmeal, adapting the recipes to suit English palates. Native Americans made cornbread in one of two ways: with a paste of crushed green corn kernels, or from a batter made by adding water, salt, and animal fat to cornmeal. They would use a thin paste to make flatter cakes, resulting in something more like a cornmeal pancake. They treated a thicker batter as bread dough, shaping it by hand into loaves for baking.

To the English colonists, cornmeal batters were reminiscent of what they called a "pudding" back in England. The colonists baked their cornmeal puddings in crusts like pies or boiled them in bags. These "hasty puddings" required no stirring and were quick to prepare. A single batter could yield two dishes: porridge (or "mush") and bread.

Writings from the colonial era, including early American receipt books, show that the terms "bread" and "pudding" appear together, probably because the looser culinary construction of a pudding could be baked into a dense bread. These early cookbooks contain recipes for Baked Indian Pudding, Indian Hasty Pudding, and Boiled Indian Pudding, along with directions for making Indian Bread and Indian Cakes. There's even a recipe for Indian Bannocks, "bannock" being a word of Scottish origin to describe a dense, dark bread.

From poneap to pudding to pone, names and techniques blend and evolve across historical periods and cultural contact. They become part of the material world around us.

Allison Burkette is an associate professor of Linguistics at the University of Mississippi. Her research interests include language variation and its connection to cultural factors, which is the subject of her recent book, Language and Material Culture.

ELECTRIC JELL-O

REFRIGERATION BROUGHT THE JIGGLE TO RURAL APPALACHIA

by Lora Smith

Electric Orange, ***oil on panel by Lina Tharsing.***

I'VE LONG BELIEVED IN the alchemical properties of Jell-O, a powder made from ligament and bone. Add water, and all of a sudden you have a brightly colored, gelatinous solid.

My fascination started as a child with trips to the D&W cafeteria in Corbin, Kentucky. These outings were amazing for two reasons. One, I could get anything I wanted. Two, the dessert case never disappointed. After winding around the metal counter pushing a marbled plastic tray, I was electrified by the mountains of translucent green, perfectly cubed Jell-O neatly portioned in parfait cups.

Along with 7Up, a cure-all tonic in my mother's house, Jell-O was a healing food. It was my sustenance on sick days home from school.

After my second child was born, I discovered that, along with the miracle of birth and the awe of a precious new life, there was a call button I could push on my hospital bed that would prompt a Jell-O delivery. I think I pushed that button more than the one that delivered pain medication, struck by wonder each time a nurse appeared with an aluminum foil–sealed cup of orange or red Jell-O.

Jell-O drove me into the archives at Berea College to explore a collection of oral histories with mountain women that documented shifting Appalachian foodways. The majority of the women were born in the 1930s and hailed from eastern Kentucky and West Virginia. The interviews highlight traditional preservation techniques, the effects of rationing during World War II, and changes to Appalachian tables over time. That all sounded fascinating, but I was there for the Jell-O. I had heard that many of the women mentioned it in their interviews, and I wanted to know why.

The voices in the archives speak of hardscrabble farm living. Families grew, put up, and cooked almost all of what they ate. Every member of the family worked subsistence gardens that provided fresh vegetables. Meat was primarily chicken, pork, or wild game that they processed to store for winter. The women recall harvesting and foraging fruit from plentiful orchards and brambles. They talk about apples, blackberries, quinces, peaches, mulberries, plums, cherries, wild grapes, persimmons, pawpaws, and raspberries. Desserts were for special occasions. Holiday treats included sorghum-covered popcorn balls, buttermilk candy, fudge, and vinegar taffy. In the summer months, they baked fresh fruits into pies and cobblers.

Jell-O ephemera from the collection of Margaret Dotson at the Berea College archives.

Margaret Dotson/Berea College Archives

After World War II, something happened in the kitchen. In many of the stories, Jell-O marked and divided a shift in home cooking. I came to think of time in Before Jell-O and After Jell-O eras. It seemed strange that Jell-O emerged suddenly as the first commercially processed food embraced by the women of rural Appalachia, especially since gelatin dishes had been popular in the United States—even in Appalachian cities—since the early 1900s.

The *Club House Cook Book* (1929), complied by members of the Charleston, West Virginia Woman's Club, contains an extensive "Frozen Salads and Desserts" section. It features gems like Mrs. Cora Delaney Fox's Sweet Breads Salad, an aspirational dish of equal parts sweetbreads (yes, the thymus gland of a cow), celery, and "a good mayonnaise," held together inside a tomato gelatin mold.

Reading the interviews, it became obvious that Jell-O stood out in the minds of rural mountain women because it signaled the time when power lines finally snaked their way up rural mountainsides. The appearance of Jell-O in remote Appalachian kitchens was a direct result of rural families connecting to mainstream American culture through the very real connectivity of going on the grid. In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) as part of his New Deal policies, with the goal of spreading electricity and telephone services to the nation's most rural areas. Congress authorized the entity the following year. The program offered low-interest and long-term loans to governments, farmer cooperatives, and nonprofits to run power lines to isolated areas.

Kentucky was among the least electrified states at the start of the REA's work: Only three percent of the state's farms had electricity. Fewer than ten percent of West Virginia farms were electrified. In the Berea oral history collection, most of the interviewees reported that their electricity came in the early 1950s.

Prior to electricity, families used traditional preserving methods to store food for slim winters. They cured hams, canned blackberries, strung beans to dry, and fermented cabbage for sauerkraut.

Betty Bailey was born in 1937 in Clarksburg, West Virginia. Her family got electricity 1953. She recalled eating canned beef, preserved fruits, and sauerkraut in the days before refrigeration. "When I was a little girl, I remember mother had the big stone jar that she'd put her sauerkraut down in," she said. "She'd cut that cabbage and I thought that was the best stuff when you'd just put the salt on it, you know, after you'd fresh-cut it. Oh my gosh, I almost made myself sick just by eating that."

Addie Bicknell was born in 1920 in Red Lick, Kentucky, and remembered how her mother prepared apples to store for the winter months. "She'd put them in sacks, like cloth sacks, and put a stick across a barrel and hang a sack on each side and cover it over," she told an interviewer, "and then light that sulfur wood and cover it and let the apples get that smoke. Let it stay so long until they get sulfured, then she'd take them out and put them in fruit jars. I can about still almost taste them sulfured apples, they were good."

Families stored foods that had to be kept cold, like milk, in caves, springhouses, and root cellars. The oral histories chronicle dreadful journeys into dark caves and tales of unlucky girls falling into cold springs while fetching milk jugs.

Francis Davis, born in 1924 in Middle Island Creek, West Virginia, used to retrieve butter and preserved foods her grandmother stored in a hillside cave. "I was always afraid to go in that cave

Kentucky Historical Society/ExploreKYHistory

The Rural Electrification Administration at work in Kentucky.

Olive Jell-O, ***oil on panel by Lina Tharsing.***

cause I was afraid of snakes," she remembered. "After we washed our hands good, we'd have to go down there and take that rock off. And then take that board off there and reach down in that old cold brine and get a handful of pickled beans. Or if we was getting sauerkraut, we'd have to do the same thing. Oh, I hated that! Then we had to cover all that back up. Stick my hands down in that old sour brine. Muuuh! It was cold in the wintertime to do that."

Ice boxes set out on porches were an option for some rural families that lived close enough to a central icehouse. They set out signs directing drivers up their roads on weekly delivery routes.

With electricity came refrigerators. "When we first got electricity, the first thing my mother did was buy a refrigerator of course, and then she bought an electric stove," said Betty Bailey. "Had the house wired so that she could have those appliances. Well, in 1953, I was a sophomore in high school and she bought a Hot Point refrigerator. Would you believe that the Hot Point refrigerator is in my garage right now and still running and keeping ice, beverages cold for the kids? Sixty-some years later that refrigerator is still going."

Refrigeration changed household and farm labor. Women were no longer tied to wood stoves, canning massive quantities of produce. Now, they could cut corn and freeze it. Instead of cooking beans outside over an open fire for four hours, pressure canners could do it in thirty minutes on an electric stovetop. Community canneries and smokehouses faded from the rural landscape. Gelatin products like Sure-Jell sped up the process of preserving fruits.

Among those advances, Jell-O was special. Many of the women mentioned a "fancy Jell-O salad," reserved for holidays like Christmas, as a modern dish that became a family tradition.

My home's refrigerator runs off electricity from one of the earliest established co-ops in Appalachian Kentucky. And my family has a fancy red, white, and green Jell-O salad we make only at Christmas. It's a bit of an eyesore, but I love it. A scan of my local grocery store reveals ample shelf space dedicated to a carnival of neon Jell-Os. Dubious flavors like piña colada and Jolly Rancher Blue Raspberry are hard to reconcile with anything resembling a fruit found in nature. While I do believe in the magical and healing properties of Jell-O, it's really not about the taste or texture or colors, but the context in which it's consumed and the memories associated with it.

For the farm women of eastern Kentucky and West Virginia, Jell-O was a significant marker in their lives for the convenience, modernity, and the domestic labor changes it represented. And the memories of tastes that linger on their palates and minds? Those are reserved for the Southern mountain fruits of their childhood.

Lora Smith works for the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation. She is a co-founder of the Appalachian Food Summit and writes about foodways from her family's organic farm in Egypt, Kentucky.

The oral histories in this article are used with permission from "Gathering the Stories of Appalachian Foodways: An Oral History Project," archived at Berea College in Hutchinson Library Special Collections. The oral histories were conducted by Berea students under the direction of Margaret Dotson as part of her Appalachian foodways course.

SOUTHERN BELLE SALAD

- *1 bottle Coca-Cola*
- *2 Tbsp. lemon juice*
- *1/2 cup chopped pecans*
- *1 cup hot water*
- *1 pkg. cherry Jell-O*
- *1 can Bing cherries*
- *1 3-oz. pkg. cream cheese*

Pour hot water over gelatin. Add Coke and lemon juice. Cool. Add cherries, cheese broken into small chunks, and pecans. Pour into individual molds or 8-inch ring mold. Serve on a bed of lettuce with mayonnaise. Serves 8.

- Mary Frances Baals from *What's Cookin' Along the Big Sandy*, published by the Junior Women's League of Paintsville, Kentucky, in 1956.

LAGOS OR BUST

FROM NIGERIA TO NEW ORLEANS

by Courtney Balestier

Rush Jagoe

MUCH HAS HAPPENED in the two years since thirty-two-year-old Tunde Wey began developing Lagos, the Nigerian restaurant concept named after his hometown. He's grown it from a series of informal barbecues to a sellout, multi-city tour of pop-up dinners. He's been detained by Border Patrol; has gotten married; and has relocated from Detroit to New Orleans, where he opened a Lagos stall in the St. Roch Market. Then, in August, Wey shuttered that to focus on a brick-and-mortar New Orleans restaurant.

Wey started tinkering with Lagos after opening (revolver), a Detroit restaurant that features a rotating lineup of chefs. He was not one of them. He wanted to pursue his own ideas by himself. Wey had never intended to cook Nigerian food but soon found himself committed to his home country's cuisine, interested in its ability to translate a message that food doesn't have to be pretentious. Sharing this message became his mission. At pop-ups, he served dishes like peppered goat, jollof rice in tomato-pepper broth, and melon-seed soup with the intense flavor of fermented locust beans.

Wey is always thinking and questioning. It hasn't escaped him that Nigerian food actually might have a plan for him. "These are experiences that have been percolating and waiting to manifest," he says. "Nothing just happens. These are things that I've always believed in, and everything you believe in finds expression in how you live."

Wey didn't grow up cooking; he is learning on the job. He wants to serve "magnificent" Nigerian food that tastes as good as his mother's, and this may take him twenty years, "maybe never." In a sense, that benchmark might be beside the point. He is using Nigerian food to talk about how we value things, and how some cuisines—and the cultures they nourish—are marginalized while others are not.

At his Lagos stall at St. Roch Market, Wey would watch people stumble upon his menu and be confused by what they received, sometimes due to translation issues. He even sold a chicken sandwich for a few weeks, "my begrudging admittance that maybe Americans loved sandwiches more than Nigerian food." One patron opted out of egusi, a stew thickened with melon seeds, in a manner that's hard to imagine in more normalized "ethnic" restaurants: "He was like, 'It tastes weird; I can't do this. I'm sorry,'" Wey remembers.

The forthcoming Lagos will be a more deliberate restaurant, with an aesthetic style that Wey calls minimalist bohemian ("It's not going to indulge anybody's fetish of Africa") and service on his terms: a prix fixe, family-style menu, Thursday to Sunday, reservation-only. It will be a restaurant for diners who want to sample Nigerian food presented in an intentional context.

Wey left Nigeria because it was what middle-class kids already exposed to American television shows and Burger King commercials did. "This is a strange place, this land of burgers and women," Wey remembers thinking. He went to Detroit, where an aunt lived, and experimented with college before quitting. When he first moved to the States, people would ask if he missed his parents back in Lagos. Wey's mother ran a bakery for several years and calls him before and after each Lagos dinner. He'd say no, that he talked to them all the time, but then he would write poetry, and all of it was about his parents.

WEY USES NIGERIAN FOOD TO TALK ABOUT HOW WE VALUE CULTURES AND CUISINES.

"You begin to realize the influence of what you came from, where you came from," he says.

Now, the man who used to cook to the sounds of rap and alternative rock plays Nigerian hip-hop artists like Olamide, Ice Prince, and Davido. He also still writes poetry, which he shrugs off but his friend Dave Mancini,

OPPOSITE LEFT TO RIGHT:* *Tunde Wey on St. Ann Street in New Orleans' French Quarter; Dodo (fried plantains), jollof rice, frejon (black bean coconut pudding), and obe ata (tomato stew)

Egusi (stew thickened with melon seeds) and eba (ground cassava)

Rush Jagoe

a Detroit chef and restaurateur, calls "stuff that people who study this kind of thing don't ever get to." Wey's interests are diverse, and they play into Lagos in creative ways, from the soundtrack to the offbeat e-mails advertising his pop-ups: A mailer plugging a goat-centric dinner joked that anecdotal evidence suggested Serena Williams, Rihanna, and Mother Theresa enjoyed the meat, because "everyone knows only goat can improve your tennis game, make your skin glow, and engender empathy."

Wey is not cavalier, though he feels he sometimes appears that way. Instead, he's awake to a constant sense of responsibility, imparted by his parents' generation. "I share this with all people from a certain generation who grew up in Nigeria and moved. I think if you live there it's worse, because you just see it all the time," he says. "Even when I'm having a good time, I'm reminded by my parents or whoever, 'you're here for a reason. Don't forget why the fuck you're here.' And here means the United States, here means alive, here means your presence isn't just an excuse for frivolity. You should do some shit. That's very Nigerian."

Wey came to the United States on a visiting visa, then changed his status to become a student. Eventually the permissions expired. This January, Wey was on a coach bus to Los Angeles on a pop-up tour that included Chicago, New York, and New Orleans, where his now-wife, Claire, was living. This dinner was to be held at Roy Choi's POT. Wey had cold-emailed POT, not quite realizing Choi's renown, because he felt its vibe was simpatico. In Las Cruces, New Mexico, Border Patrol agents pulled the bus over. Wey, undocumented, spent weeks in an El Paso, Texas, detention center.

Rush Jagoe

"I've been living undocumented for like eight years," he says. "It wasn't a preoccupation, but it was very present. I faced the frustrations and limitations of being undocumented every day." He plans to apply for a status adjustment.

Wey likes New Orleans, which reminds him of Detroit: "I feel like the same kind of white cool kids who live in Detroit also live in New Orleans. This is to stereotype, of course—but the conscious, black, educated folks who live in Detroit and are advocating for Detroit's equitable distribution of resources also live in New Orleans. And then, the same sort of underprivileged class of mostly black people, a predominantly black city, also live in New Orleans. And the history, the culture. The fear and the presence of random violence also exists. I feel like New Orleans is Detroit with better weather and nicer buildings. Great buildings."

He also recognizes the similarities that West African foods like bean fritters and jollof rice share with Southern dishes like Hoppin' John and jambalaya: "To the extent that what I've eaten is Southern food, it's very much West African," he says. Not that he's going out to dinner much. Mostly, he works on Lagos and plays soccer. He's currently scouting locations in New Orleans, where he will open Lagos both again and for the first time.

With a dedicated brick-and-mortar location also comes the suggestion of permanence—significant for a guy who admits that he always starts with high expectations, then gets bored and moves on quickly. A mentor counseled him once on the idea of breadth versus depth, suggesting that he pursue a single project for a month or two, then a year or two. At the time, Wey resented the idea that he had to specialize.

Now, he thinks about that prompt to stick to one thing and realizes that Lagos, through all its evolutions, is that thing. "The blips that happen are just the cadence of living, but I have been doing Lagos for two years. And I've been doing me for longer than that, and Lagos is an extension of me."

Courtney Balestier, a native of West Virginia, lives in Detroit, Michigan. Her writing has appeared in *Lucky Peach*, *Punch*, and *Gastronomica*.

FLAG PIZZA

NO HISTORY ANYONE SHOULD BE PROUD OF

BY CHRIS OFFUTT

A WHILE BACK I LIVED ON A RIVER AND GOT AROUND IN A DENTED JOHNBOAT WITH A SIX-HORSEPOWER ENGINE.

I was mostly broke during those years and bought the boat used. For an anchor I embedded an eye-bolt in a coffee can with cement, then tied a rope to the bolt. Mainly I cruised upriver then let it drift back.

An old friend visited one weekend and we took the boat out on a very hot day. Bruce is a big guy from eastern Washington, descended from outlaws and lawmen. Accustomed to a colder climate, Bruce removed his shirt and hung it on the wooden post that served as my dock. We filled the tank and headed downriver, farther than I'd ventured alone. We drifted, stopping now and again to investigate debris, and ran out of beer. At a wide, slow curve was a tavern overlooking the water.

We made land, climbed the bank, and entered through the back door. Everyone stopped talking and looked at us. We were muddy, and Bruce wore nothing but cut-off shorts and flip-flops. As our eyes adjusted to the dim light we realized that it was a biker bar filled with tough men in leather, denim, and an occasional head scarf. No one spoke. The bartender had his hands out of sight below the bartop, no doubt a weapon at the ready.

Bruce was as big as any of the bikers, but I was the smallest man there. In a scuffle, I could maybe beat up the jukebox with a chair. I moved to the bar, sensing everyone's eyes, and spoke: "We came by boat. Like to get a couple of beers."

"Boat," the bartender said.

I nodded and someone went out the back door to confirm our mode of transportation. A tall man came my way, his bare arms scrolled with jailhouse tattoos. I waited calmly. In my experience, big men don't mess with little guys. It's usually the other way around, and he might have been testing me in case I was one of those Napoleon-types who needed to prove himself. Fortunately for all of us, I am not.

"Yes, a boat," I said. "We came from down past the woods where those wrecked cars are holding the bank from washing out. Ran out of beer."

Kate Medley & Emily Wallace

The big guy put his arm over my shoulders. It felt like a load of lumber. "Anybody who don't drive a car can drink with me," he said. "Set 'em up."

"Can't," the bartender said. "Law says they got to wear a shirt. I been warned twice. Next time they'll shut us down."

"All righty," the guy said. "Somebody give him a shirt. Big Girl, you still got that one on your sissy bar?"

A huge man from the back of the bar went outside. The bartender put two bottles of Bud on the counter, and I realized I didn't have my wallet. While I was worrying about that, the giant came back carrying a tattered grey T-shirt. Bruce put it on. The front was emblazoned with an American flag and the words TRY BURNING THIS ONE!

We stayed about an hour, during which we drank for free and learned that "Big Girl" was actually "Big Earl," and anyone who said it wrong got stomped. I made sure to enunciate his name carefully, speaking like someone new to language. Bruce kept the shirt when we left. The next time I went to the bar, it was permanently closed.

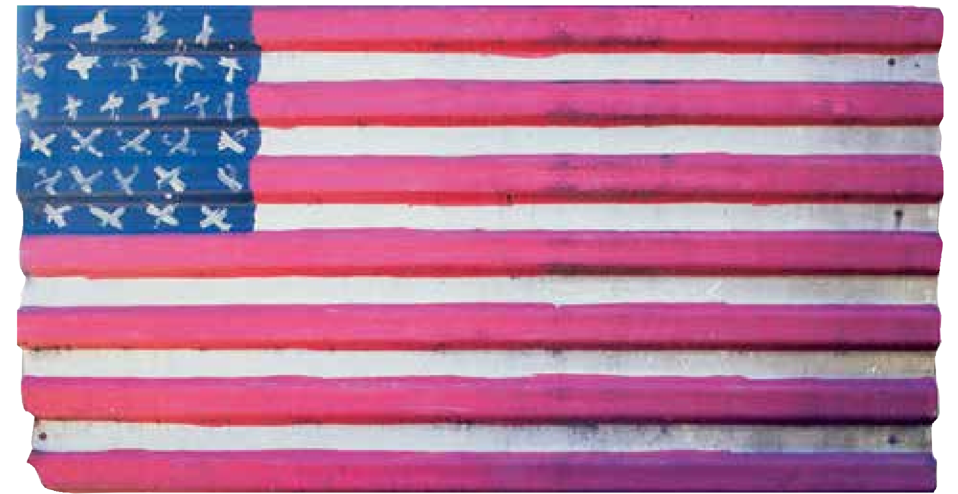
Bruce visited me in the mid-1990s, when the issue of flag-burning was in the news, on television and the radio. Throughout the 1970s, nearly half the states passed laws that barred flag desecration, focusing mainly on physical misuse such as mutilation. By 1989, the Supreme Court ruled that damaging the flag was protected by free speech. In the 1990s, flag-burning became trendy again. Politicians attempted to amend the Constitution and make burning the flag illegal. The legislation didn't pass.

In the hills of eastern Kentucky where I grew up, I walked through the woods to school. Each classroom contained the Bible, a picture of George Washington, the Kentucky flag, and an American flag. After the teacher called the roll, all of us stood beside our desks and recited the Pledge of Allegiance, then the Lord's Prayer. My mother had a large plastic American flag that she displayed on patriotic holidays.

One of my childhood chores was carrying firewood in winter to heat the house. The other was burning the household garbage twice a week. I regarded fire as a practical matter with a distinct purpose. Flags were easy to get and very flammable, which made burning one simple. I never understood the impulse to do so.

After Bruce left, I had many thoughts. What if you made the flag yourself? Suppose it was colored in crayon on paper, not really a flag, but a representation of a flag? Would Bruce go to jail if he burned the T-shirt?

I NEVER UNDERSTOOD THE IMPULSE TO BURN A FLAG.



R.A. Miller, courtesy of Scott Blackwell

I have attended dozens of Independence Day celebrations, typically cookouts in backyards. Often a cake is decorated to resemble a flag. For a group of children I once made an oblong pizza that depicted the American flag, using food coloring for the blue field of stars with alternating stripes of cheese and tomato sauce. My wife said it was the ugliest pizza she'd ever seen, but I didn't mind. The kids loved it. First they picked out the Parmesan stars, then started on the rest. Essentially, they desecrated the flag by eating it. Who, then, should be arrested—me for making it? The children who ate it? The host of the party where the crime took place? Or the parents, for allowing their kids to mutilate the flag by mastication?

I MOVED TO MISSISSIPPI five years ago, unable to recognize the state flag from the other forty-nine. I assumed that the university nickname of "Ole Miss" was an affectionate term shortened from "Ol' Mississippi." As it turns out, "Ole Miss" was the term slaves used for the wife of plantation owners in the Deep South. The owner was often known as "Ole Massa" or "The Colonel." Shortly before my arrival in Oxford, the school administration changed the sports mascot from Colonel Reb to a bear. Traditionalists were very upset, and many still are. Colonel Reb's image continues to appear all over town—a cartoon drawing in a red or blue coat with formal tux tails and red trousers. As a Kentuckian, I didn't understand the controversy but recognized that it was a deep rift.

In Mississippi, I learned that all my life life I'd wrongly used the term "Stars and Bars" to refer to the traditional rebel flag. That name designated the first flag of the Confederacy, with a circle of stars in the upper left quadrant. It was very similar to the Star Spangled Banner carried by

Northern troops. The resemblance created such confusion on the battlefield that Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard demanded a new banner. The second and third official flags of the Confederacy included the Southern Cross in the upper left corner—a blue X containing thirteen stars on a field of red. Most of the flag was white, which proved problematic. Lacking wind, the cloth hung limp and looked like a flag of surrender. The result of these clumsy designs was the widespread use of the battle flag of the Northern Virginia Army. It proved recognizable due to its large Southern Cross on a solid red expanse.

In 1894, politicians added the Southern Cross to the Mississippi state flag. Due to political ineptitude, the flag was not formally adopted until 2001. Today it is the only state flag that retains an image of the Confederate battle flag. Recently it has been the subject of newspaper editorials, radio talk shows, and shrill "debates" on social media. The difference of opinion is simple. What does the Southern Cross stand for: slavery or history? The University of Mississippi student senate recently voted to stop flying the flag on campus, and the faculty senate concurred. The flag no longer appears on the grounds of the state's flagship university.

My own relationship with the Confederate battle flag is complicated. In the early 1970s, I was a rebellious teenager in a town of 200 deep in the hills of Kentucky. I wore a Levi's jacket with an embroidered patch sewn on each shoulder: One was the peace sign and the other was the Confederate battle flag. Older boys in high school drove muscle cars, their rear windows draped with the rebel flag. Everyone had an eight-track tape player wired to large speakers that played Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Allman Brothers, and Marshall Tucker. We had guns and long hair and considered ourselves outlaws. People in town didn't like us and we didn't like them. The rebel flag embodied our sense of exclusion from conventional society. We didn't care what the Confederacy was rebelling against, only that the flag was a formal sanction of rebellion.

I left the hills with this identity, drifting from state to state and city to city. I read and wrote, published books and had children. I bought a house. My hair turned gray. I wore glasses and taught college. Nevertheless, that outlaw identity—and the music—stayed with me. None of us at home had associated the flag with either history or white supremacy. There were no slaves in the hills. Most families barely had enough income to maintain a vehicle and clothe their children. Nobody ever had the money to own another human being.

These days I understand more about the flag than I did as a teenager, but I don't look back with shame. I learned a long time ago that growing up in rural isolation meant I was an ignorant country boy. There's no shame in lack of knowledge. It's normal. Everyone has to learn, either from family or teachers or experience. The only true shame lies with people who willfully maintain their ignorance despite information; people who don't alter their perspective with age and maturity. Many of these people rely on the past because they're disappointed

THE PHRASE "HERITAGE NOT HATE" CREATES A FALSE CHOICE.

with their own present circumstances. That's a damn shame.

I've always been proud of the Kentucky flag, which depicts two men shaking hands—one wearing the buckskins of the hills, the other a flatlander in a suit. If that image were subject to change, I'd be adamant in its defense. I love that flag and hang one in my writing room. The state motto, "United We Stand, Divided We Fall," is not offensive so much as it is an outright lie. Men in suits never shake hands with hill people. State politicians don't give two whits about us. Their goal is seldom serving the people. They pass laws they don't follow, raise taxes, then vote themselves pay raises and take expensive vacations.

After moving to Mississippi, I had to revise my thinking about the Southern Cross and its inclusion in the state flag. I talked to opponents and supporters. Both sides made good points. Opponents said it represented the repugnance of slavery and a wrong-headed belief in white supremacy. They believed the flag is deeply offensive to many people who live here—white and black.

Supporters of the flag often traced their lineage to the Civil War, descended from soldiers who'd died because they were courageous young men conscripted into service. Most were from poor families that did not own slaves. Defenders of the flag say it represents history, heritage, and Southern pride. That may be the case for some. But the designer of the original flag wrote that the South was "fighting to maintain the Heaven-ordained supremacy of the white man over the inferior or colored race." That is no history anyone should be proud of.

The nature of Southern pride is extremely complex. Losing a war is a devastating blow. In addition to death, suffering, and loss of home, it is a humiliating attack on pride. Many brave men fought in the Civil War. In typical Kentucky fashion, my own family lost soldiers on both sides. I am a proud Southerner. I like our cultural traditions of family loyalty, respect for elders, and deep attachment to land. I am particularly proud of my own efforts at being a good father, husband, and citizen.

But I am not proud of our nation's history of slavery. It is our collective shame. Yes, it flourished in the South due to terrain and crop, but Northerners owned slaves as well. Slavery is a deplorable practice, barbaric and criminal. People take great effort to conceal family histories of slave-owning. The actor Ben Affleck had that information expunged

from a PBS documentary. These days the same money that once purchased a human being can now buy suppression of that fact.

In regards to keeping the Southern Cross on the Mississippi flag, a common phrase arose among its supporters: "Heritage not Hate." I gave that a great deal of thought. There is truth that the flag is a significant part of our nation's heritage. History should not be ignored, lest it be forgotten and lessons never learned. But in the past thirty years, the battle flag of Northern Virginia has become associated with a variety of discriminatory groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, Skinheads, and Neo-Nazis. If preserving the importance of the flag as heritage was a priority, it should have been protected when hate groups appropriated it. Instead, the people who believed in heritage stood idly by while the flag was used to symbolize abhorrent beliefs and justify criminal behavior.

The phrase "Heritage not Hate" creates a false choice. One does not rule out the other. In today's world, the Confederate battle flag represents both. It also represents history, which should not be rewritten simply because truth makes us feel unpleasant. Public monuments to dead soldiers are displays of honor regardless of which army the soldiers served. Military museums preserve the artifacts of history such as weapons, uniforms, and the battle flag of the Northern Virginia Army.

MANY PEOPLE RELY ON THE PAST BECAUSE THEY'RE DISAPPOINTED WITH THEIR OWN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. THAT'S A DAMN SHAME.

Many Mississippians are concerned about the effect the current flag has on business, tourism, and the ability of the University to attract diverse students, faculty, and athletes. It's not just progressive people who are disturbed by the state flag, but some conservatives as well.

A white businessman and native of Jackson told me that thirty-eight percent of Mississippi's citizens are black, so there's nothing to be gained by alienating more than a third of the population. Another friend of mine has run a retail store in Oxford for thirty years. He attends church twice a week, owns guns, votes Republican, and displayed a large Dixie flag in his store for two decades. Upon hearing that its presence might be problematic, he promptly asked his black customers if the flag was offensive. Everyone who answered said yes. He took the flag down. These are pragmatic examples, motivated by economics and social politics. They make sense. But they also view the problem of the flag as exclusively about black people.

Will changing the flag make any difference in the day-to-day lives of Mississippians? No. Not any more than baking a flag pizza could influence a child's patriotism. Sewing the rebel flag to my jacket as a teenager did not make me a rebel to society. It was a symbol, not an action, but symbols are crucial tools of identity and communication.

I AM A PROUD SOUTHERNER. I LIKE OUR CULTURAL TRADITIONS OF FAMILY LOYALTY, RESPECT FOR ELDERS, AND DEEP ATTACHMENT TO THE LAND.

The current Mississippi flag has no historical significance other than being 121 years old. It did not exist during the Civil War. If the flag is changed, everyone must maintain a clear view of the reasons. The problem is not that it offends black people. The problem is what the flag says about white people.

Chris Offutt is an award-winning author of six books and ten screenplays. His work has appeared in *Best American Essays*, *Best American Short Stories*, and *New Stories of the South*. His most recent book is a memoir, *My Father, the Pornographer*.

GLORI-FRIED AND GLORI-FIED

MAHALIA JACKSON'S CHICKEN

BY ALICE RANDALL

IMAGINE YOURSELF FOR A MOMENT in a pew in a South Side Chicago church, in 1965, or 1966, or 1967, with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the lectern—serious, head down, staring at his notes. A choir sings, one voice rising above the others. Dr. King turns away from the congregation toward the voice and smiles, the sweetest smile, a smile of true joy, as the voice sings a battle cry: "Joshua fit the Battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho, Joshua fit the Battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down." The men and women in the pews begin to clap and sing even louder as they are gathered into an army, not by Dr. King in the pulpit, but by the woman leading the choir, a beautiful woman, large and brown, in a crisp silk suit with giant buttons. When the song comes to its end, when the crowd finishes thundering its readiness to fight, led by this singer and this preacher, Dr. King says, "I think I can say, concerning this great gospel singer in our midst, our dear friend, my great friend Mahalia Jackson, that a voice like this comes only once in a millennium."

Mahalia Jackson was an international star, a principled artist who refused to sing music that was not gospel. A passionately political woman, she could wrestle attention from Dr. King, even while giving him pleasure and respite. Why would she choose to lend her name to a fried chicken franchise?

I have given a lot of thought to this question in the last few years.

I knew that my first husband's godfather, a black man named DeBerry McKissack, had designed the iconic buildings that housed Mahalia Jackson's Fried Chicken. I knew that John Jay Hooker, a prominent white lawyer, entrepreneur, and friend of Muhammad Ali's, had backed both Minnie Pearl's Fried Chicken and Mahalia Jackson's Fried Chicken. I knew that both businesses had failed. I sensed that country comedian Minnie Pearl's was fundamentally wrong and Mahalia Jackson's was somehow fundamentally right, even if they shared the same or similar recipes for fried chicken. I couldn't tell you why.

Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

Glori-fried or glorified? Is there more to the franchise than yardbird, salt, pepper, and grease? Does the business exploit the Queen of Gospel's associations with the sacred, or is her involvement with the chicken enterprise a kind of savory and secular beatification?

I was born in Detroit in 1959. I remember my family waiting and wanting a Mahalia Jackson's to open in Motown. I had a vague impression that Mahalia Jackson's was important to black America in the 1960s. But I couldn't tease out just why.

I was overeager to find the original recipe for the chicken, hoping there was some magic in the formula that would prove Mahalia's genius, hoping there was something in the taste of the chicken equal to the sound of her voice. There wasn't.

I have spoken with many, many folks who ate the chicken, loved the chicken, adored the chicken. None of them thought it tasted more than good enough. What they loved was the idea of Mahalia and chicken.

BORN MAHALA JACKSON ON WATER STREET IN UPTOWN NEW Orleans in 1911, the future greatest gospel singer of all time began singing at Plymouth Rock Baptist Church and Mount Moriah Baptist Church. Since the mid-1950s, the New Orleans neighborhood where she lived has been called Black Pearl. Back when she was born, it was simply called “Niggertown.”

Mahala moved to Chicago in 1927, joining a church choir almost immediately. She renamed herself Mahalia in honor of her beloved aunt. Four years later, in 1931, she recorded her first song, “You Better Run, Run, Run.” It would be nearly twenty years before she had a smash hit. In 1947, Mahalia Jackson recorded “Move On Up a Little Higher.” It sold over 8 million copies.

Those 8 million copies sold meant that Mahalia Jackson impacted the South’s understanding of itself, and she helped frame the North’s understanding of the South. Eight million copies sold meant that some 80 million people likely heard the song. Mahalia Jackson was the first, and arguably the most significant, black female superstar of the twentieth century.

Harry Belafonte declared her the “single most powerful black woman in the United States.” He believed there was not “a single field hand, a single black worker, a single black intellectual who did not respond to her civil rights message.”

“Move On Up a Little Higher” is a song that seems a simple promise about going to heaven. It is so much more.

When Mahalia Jackson first stepped into the national spotlight, she made a prediction about food. “I’m going to feast with the Rose of Sharon,” she sang, declaring herself a black woman fit to eat with whites. She claimed an integrated table. She raised her voice like a mighty sword, singing, “Monday morning, soon one morning, I’m going to lay down my cross, get me a crown.... Soon as my feet strike Zion, lay down my heavy burden.”

What was the cross that millions of women, mainly black women, understood Mahalia to be putting down at the end of a long Monday? Could it have been a cast-iron frying pan? Could it have been a maid’s apron? In young Mahalia’s experience, where did black women like her mother and aunt go on Monday morning? To work in a white woman’s kitchen and house. Mopping and washing and frying chicken. And that’s where Jackson eventually went.

Before she moved to Chicago, Jackson worked as a domestic servant in New Orleans. To feel the weight of that statement, remember: She was only fifteen or sixteen years old when she left the South for the North. Her first appearance in the white world was in a maid’s uniform. She left school in the eighth grade to work as a cook and washerwoman. When she arrived in Chicago, she took jobs as a hotel maid, a laundress, and a babysitter.

By lending her name and her image to the fried chicken enterprise, Jackson was trying to put a choir robe over a maid’s uniform before stripping them both off in favor of a knit business suit. She entered into respectability through the shaming kitchen door, kicking the door down as she stepped.

Jackson ventured into the kitchen to be far more than respectable: She used respectability to introduce radicalism. And like Floyd McKissick’s Soul City in North Carolina, Mahalia Jackson’s Fried Chicken empire was a fabulous failure. But before it failed, it enjoyed some very significant successes. Mahalia Jackson sought to use franchise food as a kind of Trojan horse to introduce economic vitality into the belly of black communities.

There was a bit of Marxism in her recipe. A bit of black Muslim self-reliance. And a whiff of gasoline. Here's what Gulf Oil had to say about the audacious plan:

"We are pleased to be associated with Miss Jackson, a respected and renowned personality, and her company. Since Mahalia Jackson's Chicken System is black–owned, managed and staffed and is hiring in the communities in which it operates, Gulf hopes it is helping to provide blacks business and employment opportunities."

Beyond jobs and wages, Mahalia Jackson's offered employees paid vacations, low-cost life insurance, and major medical benefits. The System grew to include a management school.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Mahalia Jackson's Fried Chicken opened in cities across the country. In her adopted hometown of Chicago, there were, at one time, five Mahalia Jacksons.

Mahalia Jackson moved on up from poverty-stricken New Orleans to European and Asian concert halls. Her face on the chicken bucket said, *this chicken is fancy, this chicken is fine*. The chicken gave pride back to black folk, just the way her music gave pride back to black folk on the hardest days that came.

In the black world, Mahalia Jackson's chicken enterprise is a culinary Camelot. A shining, vanished moment. A place where black people did the cooking and the eating, the sowing and the reaping. A place where blacks were the owners, managers, workers, and patrons. Such a place existed for a moment.

And this is what it looked like; this is how my godfather DeBerry McKissack designed it, according to New York's illustrious black newspaper, the *Amsterdam News*, "The white brick, carry-out chicken stores look like highly styled, modern churches with their red roofs climbing to high pointed peaks. Flying buttress wings, carrying signs shaped in the elongated oval of cathedral windows flank the stores on either side."

Despite the fact that Mahalia Jackson's Fried Chicken System lost money, Mahalia Jackson died a rich woman, leaving an estate of approximately four million dollars to various relatives. She didn't go into the chicken business only to make money. She went into the chicken business to help others make money, and quite possibly to redeem kitchen work, to transform it from a private hell into a public and pride-filled business defined by stock and dividends rather than slaps, insults, toting privileges, and rape.

Mahalia Jackson understood the power of food. She claimed as her greatest pleasure and entertainment feeding people in her home. She knew food to be a personal pleasure, a spiritual necessity, and a political statement.

Mahalia Jackson's Fried Chicken restaurants were embedded in the black communities they served. Due to a perfect storm of white redlining, poverty, Negro removal-slash-urban renewal destruction, and rising rates of drug addiction and unemployment, some of these neighborhoods were areas of concentrated crime. Mahalia Jackson franchise locations were often the sites and victims of robberies.

The very first Mahalia Jackson's Fried Chicken franchise opened in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1968, just months after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. My own godmother, Leatrice McKissack, wife of the architect, was robbed there the day it opened. She entered the restaurant looking sharp, a twin daughter holding each hand. A purse with credit cards and cash swinging from the crook of her arm. After the official opening, she reached into her purse and discovered her wallet was gone. Ben Hooks and A.W. Willis, lawyers and activists who founded the flagship, called and cancelled the credit cards for her.

Bob Parent/Getty Images

Mahalia Jackson sings at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963.

Today her daughters, Cheryl McKissack and Deryl McKissack, the twins who toddled into the opening of the first Mahalia Jackson's in Memphis, are the owners of two of the oldest and largest black-owned architectural and engineering firms in the world. Between the two of them they have offices in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, Nashville, New York, Miami, and Washington, D.C. I like to think they developed a taste for franchise standing in Mahalia Jackson's nibbling on a fried chicken wing, listening to all the talk about black nation-building through black wealth-building.

Psyche Williams-Forson has written ably of building houses out of chicken legs. My god-sisters have built skyscrapers, national monuments, movie studio buildings, and roads inspired by Mahalia Jackson's chicken.

Respect, economic self-reliance, risk-taking, mutual aid: These were the secret ingredients in Mahalia Jackson's recipe. At the end of the day, that day that ends in Zion, the chicken was glori-fried and glorified.

Alice Randall is an author based in Nashville, Tennessee. Read more about her in the featured contributor spotlight on page 4. She presented a version of this piece at the 2015 Southern Foodways Symposium.

The Georgia Peach IN BLACK & WHITE

Civil Rights in the Shadow of Georgia's Signature Crop

BY TOM OKIE

My father's 1967 Volvo 122 smells like dust. Pulverized foam from the ceiling and seats, dried sweat from a thousand entrances and exits on summer days, sulfur and fuzz and road dirt from the orchards. The engine putters. The windows are open, and the triangular vents shunt hot, exhaust-laden wind into our faces. We are on the way to the Station.

Out of the neighborhood, past the house with a balcony and an elderly African American gentleman in his wheelchair; up through the rural north end of Houston County, past the Dunbar place, more than a century old; into Peach County, past barbed-wire fences penning in dirty white cattle, past trailer parks and the ruined speedway; around the outer edges of the Station, past the thick loblolly pines and tall chain-link fencing that keeps trespassers out and pesticides in.

Here we are. The USDA Southeastern Fruit and Tree Nut Research Station. Down the long drive, rows of young pecans on the right, aging greenhouses on the left, we arrive at the main building, a two-story, brick-and-metal structure, thoroughly unremarkable in that institutional style of the 1960s. Inside, several laboratories and a cold room make up the building's core, encircled by a hallway and offices. Blanketing one wall are plaques with 8x10 photographs of the Station's scientists, all weathered faces and windblown hair, thick glasses and plaid shirts, one impressive mustache, two throat-length beards: the unfashionable fashion of the late-twentieth-century agricultural scientist.

I was born into this world just as my parents, fresh out of graduate school, bought their first home in middle Georgia. Thirty-two years later, as I finished up my Ph.D., my father retired. I watered seedlings in the greenhouses, thinned young peaches with a plastic baseball bat, emasculated flowers during pollination season, helped type the book that was the key scholarly contribution of my father's career, spent a summer testing mashed peach leaves for plum pox virus. The Station was a key orientation point of my childhood, a fixture of the landscape as taken for granted as the country roads that led us there.

Something—someone—nags at my memory. The black man in his wheelchair, waving at passersby. He was there almost every day. Before his stroke, my mother once told me, he had been a civil rights leader. *Civil rights?* In my young mind, this was something that happened in other places, on a national stage. What kind of civil rights movement could have occurred in middle Georgia?

Tax records peg Oscar C. Thomie Jr. as a former owner of that house with the balcony, and a search for his name yields two leads. The first is that Thomie was the president of the Houston County NAACP in the 1960s. Under his leadership, the chapter filed a suit against the Houston County Board of Education that led to a 1969 court order to integrate—an order that was still in place forty years later, much to the consternation of those who wished to redistrict the schools.

A few months later, in May 1970, Thomie led 430 black protesters in a desegregation demonstration in Perry, the county seat, and was arrested. According to a telegram smuggled out of the prison from Thomie and the other leaders, state troopers resorted to tear

Peach pickers being driven to the orchards in Musella, Georgia. In 1936, they earned seventy-five cents a day. Photo by Dorothea Lange.

OPPOSITE: Dorothea Lange/Library of Congress

gas and beatings to subdue the demonstrators, and then packed them "like sardines" into schoolbuses for a twenty-mile trip to a condemned prison camp that Governor Lester Maddox had deemed "unfit for a prison."

The second lead directs me to the Oscar Thomie Homes, a seventy-unit public housing community in north Houston County that became a half-vacant eyesore. One of eight housing projects in the city of Warner Robins, the Thomie community was built in 1964 and neglected for decades. Pointing to the broken sidewalks, peeling paint, and rusting pipes, the director of the housing authority told a reporter in 2012, "I really don't know what we can do to turn this around. Renovation would cost $11 million, demolition only $500,000."

A few miles from my neighborhood, this housing project fell into disrepair. A few houses up the street from my own, a local hero did the same, watching in involuntary silence as his neighbors went about their lives. Thomie died in 1994; the homes were razed in February 2015.

The Station was real to me, solid, permanent; the local civil rights movement was, like Mr. Thomie himself, something of a ghost. But this contrast was illusory. The Station's groundbreaking in 1969 followed twenty years of advocacy and argument, approvals and administrative suspensions. Thomie's desegregation victory and subsequent jailing, however ghostly to me, followed a long and determined campaign. Indeed, the comparison is on one level patently absurd. One campaign protested the poor health of the state's peach trees; the other the legal oppression of 1.2 million of the state's people.

To compare would cast these stories as parallel lines, which, as we know from grade-school geometry, never intersect. In the 1890s, Fort Valley whites had their peach orchards; blacks their industrial school, now called Fort Valley State University. In the 1920s, whites held their Peach Blossom Festivals to prove the worthiness of their enterprise. Blacks staged their Ham and Egg festivals to prove the worthiness of rural self-sufficiency. In the 1960s, whites campaigned for an expanded peach lab, and blacks rallied for voter registration and city elections. This parallelism holds true in the archival record. The underfunded and scattered special collections at FVSU and the better-situated Atlanta University Center archives tell the black story. Newspapers, the papers of Senator Richard B. Russell Jr., and records of congressional proceedings tell the white story.

There was nothing inevitable about the Station. Peach growers and their allies campaigned for it, Senator Richard B. Russell Jr. secured the funding, and scientists moved into it to do their work. How they did so reveals much about modern agrarianism at a historical moment not concerned with the countryside.

The white civic leaders in Fort Valley, the county seat of Peach County, had been loyal supporters of Senator Russell for almost his entire public career. As a young leader in the state house of representatives, Russell had played a key role in pushing through the new county proposal in 1924, forming Peach County out of parts of Houston and Macon counties. The county voted his way for the governorship in 1930, and for the U.S.

Kate Medley

Senate two years later. In that race, he faced U.S. Representative Charles Crisp of Americus, who had two decades of national political experience and endorsements from most of the state's major newspapers. The younger Russell won resoundingly, and his supporters around Fort Valley made Peach County an island for Russell in a middle-Georgia sea of Crisp votes.

Russell, then, was a powerful man with a soft spot for the peach growers, their place, and their signature commodity. To make their case for more federal support in the 1950s, the growers used the same language with which they had celebrated the Georgia peach industry since the 1880s. Peaches, to them, were a more sophisticated alternative to cotton. The people of the "land of cotton," they wrote in 1950, had "learned from bitter experience that they can not live on cotton alone." They needed better varieties of fruits, berries, and nuts, for "marketing in the north before northern crops are ready" and to "round out the diets of the people of the new Southland." These would include improved peaches, of course, and also Satsuma oranges, persimmons, feijoas, loquots, sapotes, avocados, olives, jujubes, bush cherries, dewberries, pistachios, and quinces—to name just a few of the thirty-four fruits and nuts they offered for consideration. If the proposal seemed outlandish, Russell did not let on, and he promised to take it up with Secretary of Agriculture Charles Brannan.

Twelve years later, the growers appeared before the Senate Subcommittee on Agricultural Appropriations, which Russell chaired. They brought along a mimeographed proposal and poignant photographs of bacteria-spotted fruit and stricken peach trees. "Why did these trees die? What can we do to prevent this loss?" they asked. "We need research to find the answers." The future of the industry was at stake, the growers said, and its demise would eliminate an essential fruit (rich in vitamin A and only thirty-five calories!) from the nation's diet. It would also send economic shock waves across the rural South. Banks would fire their agricultural finance specialists, small-town druggists would close up shop, manufacturers of pesticides and equipment would reconfigure their business or fail, freight carriers would be deprived of an enormous summer business. Intriguingly, the proposal also urged Congress to remember "the plight" of the rural labor force. With cotton and corn production mechanized, the peach industry was the only thing standing between these rural Southerners and either migration to the North or West or "the already crowded offices of our welfare agencies."

The hearing itself was not much of a grilling. At several points, Russell helped the cause with his own interjections. "When it comes to eating fruit, man has never yet developed anything which has as exquisite and delightful flavor as a tree-ripened Elberta peach," he declared.

In another exchange, Senator Milton Young (R-North Dakota) agreed that there was a "great need" for research into the pests and diseases that threatened the industry. Then, in what seemed to be a complete non sequitur, he said, "I have been down in Georgia two or three times, but never during the summer. I would like to do that sometime." Russell joined him in reverie: "It is very beautiful. I would be glad to have you come down and see the peach trees when they are in bloom. There is no more beautiful sight than a peach orchard in full bloom."

The fact that peach trees bloom in spring, not summer, underscores the point: It was the fruit's aesthetic quality, its cultural importance, that moved

Lewis Jones and Willis James Recordings at Fort Valley State College/American Folklife Center/Library of Congress.

A photo from **The Peachite**, *the quarterly student publication of Fort Valley State College, shows a musical performance during the 1944 Fort Valley Folk Festival, a complement to the Ham and Egg Show.*

Russell. The proposal passed the Senate subcommittee and, after what Russell later described as the most difficult negotiations in his thirty years as chair, the House as well. Congress authorized $500,000 for the planning and construction of the lab. Letters and telegrams of thanks poured into Russell's office, like this one from Georgia Peach Council president Edgar Duke: "I am amazed that you so willingly devoted your personal attention to our request, despite the extremely heavy demands being made on you by what, I must admit, are far more serious and important issues. I will never forget... that except for your active support and hard work, our cause was lost."

As Duke had intimated, Senator Russell had other things on his plate. Two weeks earlier, James Meredith had registered for classes at the University of Mississippi—after an all-night battle between segregationist protestors and federal marshals that left two dead and over 300 wounded. Russell had publicly and angrily protested the use of federal troops to guard Meredith. Despite his best efforts to "fight these outrageous measures with all the power of my being"—civil rights legislation moved forward. The Russell-led Southern bloc in the Senate, which had stymied civil rights reform since 1957, was broken.

Legislators, then as now, deal with a bewildering array of issues in short succession, and many finish their careers with uneven voting records. Blocking civil rights legislation and shoring up Southern agriculture may seem unrelated, just another example of senatorial schizophrenia. But there's a connection. A clue emerges from a close reading of the 1962 hearing, as the growers made their case. While their proposal offered a long list of economic ramifications of the peach industry's decline, the testimony centered on just one. As Edgar Duke put it, "Practically every other farming operation in the South is now or shortly will be mechanized, so our unskilled farm labor must depend almost entirely on the growing and harvest season of fruit and nut crops for its livelihood." As Duke and Russell may have observed, Georgia's farm population was in rapid decline, shringing by fifty percent in the decade from 1954 to 1964, while Georgia's non-white tenant farmer population shrank even faster, by nearly 82 percent. The loss of the peach industry, Duke and his allies argued, would leave these remaining agricultural workers "with the decision of relocating in other parts of the Nation or joining the long lines at the offices of our Federal-State welfare agencies."

The black residents of Peach County, however, had neither relocation nor welfare in mind. They wanted to stay, and they wanted to vote. Angered by the 1963 murder of a black inmate [IN A LOCAL JAIL/PRISON?], local African Americans organized the Citizenship Education Commission (CEC). Almost simultaneously, probably in response to the wave of sit-ins and other direct action campaigns across the South, Fort Valley's white leadership called for a formal "racial commission," to which the mayor appointed four whites and four blacks. The many examples of civil disobedience throughout the South, along with a CEC-led "Don't Shop Where You Can't Work" boycott, lit a fire under the commission. COLORED and WHITE signs above water fountains began to disappear. Certain blacks ate in white restaurants. More worked in white-owned businesses and earned promotions.

The Georgia peach's roots sink deep into the messy racial politics of Southern history.

Overt activism was new in Peach County. Prior to 1963, the path to black empowerment had been thoroughly (Booker T.) Washingtonian, led by the black administration and faculty of Fort Valley High and Industrial School. Just a few years after the school's founding in 1895, principal James Torbert proclaimed, "The negro ought to remain in the rural districts and buy land, improve it, cultivate it, and make country life more attractive, healthy and prosperous."

Thirty years on, school president Henry A. Hunt wrote much the same thing: "Negro farmers must be led to see for themselves that it is best to remain on the farm instead of having the information given to them by bitter experience in the crowded cities." In 1916, extension agent and faculty member Otis O'Neal began an annual Ham and Egg Show, a forum for black farmers to exhibit their best pork and poultry products for cash prizes. By the 1950s, it had become a nationally recognized blues festival as well as a platform for O'Neal to "pound away" at the "importance of farmers staying on their land instead of throwing down the plow" for urban jobs.

This rural development message had subversive potential. Whose land were these black farmers going to purchase and own, after all? Still, it was popular among whites—at least in the abstract. When it got down to specifics, there were problems. In 1936, Rexford Tugwell's Resettlement Administration (part of a New Deal relief bill that Russell helped sponsor) optioned several thousand acres in Peach County for a proposed Fort Valley Farms, a cooperative project of about seventy black families. Peach growers and their allies sent an urgent telegram to Tugwell. "Before proceeding further with your resettlement project in Fort Valley," they wrote, "we earnestly request that you investigate the feeling of the citizens of Peach County in regard to same. You will find serious and strong opposition." The project found a slightly more receptive audience in neighboring Macon County as Flint River Farms and flourished for the next two decades. In the 1950s, black extension agent Robert Church decided to get into peaches as an experiment in diversification, but he found no packing shed who would pack his crop. As these reactions suggest, when black Southerners talked about the importance of staying on the farms, white Southerners imagined them staying on white farms, as low-wage labor.

From 1963 until 1980, Peach County blacks fought for better electoral representation. The first black candidate ran for city council in 1964. The CEC used funding from the Voter Education Project to run regular registration drives from 1965 through 1972. They had good prospects of success. Out of twenty-three majority African American counties in Georgia, Peach County blacks had the lowest poverty rate, the highest median income, the highest rate of high school graduates, and the second-highest rate of black economic independence. By 1976 nearly 48 percent of registered voters

were black; Fort Valley elected Rudolph Carson as its first black mayor in 1980.

These efforts were hampered, though, by external pressure and internal discord. In 1972, Fort Valley whites filed a suit against Fort Valley State College for racial discrimination, arguing, incredibly, that Fort Valley's whites had been "substantially disenfranchised" by all the voter registration activism emerging from the college, and that the institution should be desegregated just like the rest of the state's university system (only fifteen of the institution's 2,300 students were white).

Meanwhile, Carson's election exposed a broader division within Fort Valley's black community between the original mission of the college to develop the rural African American community without overtly challenging white supremacy and the more activist approach of college and city leaders since the 1960s. Carson tried unsuccessfully to finesse this division. After his first year in office, he gave an interview to the local paper in which he appeared to disavow any connection to the black community. He did not want Fort Valley to become a black town, he said, nor did he want to be known as a black mayor.

In response, both blacks and whites staged major registration drives in 1984, with nearly 40 percent more voters registered than in 1980. But 90 percent of white voters turned out, compared with only 60 percent of black voters. Carson lost reelection. As of 2014, Fort Valley's population is only 13.6 percent white, compared to Peach County as a whole (51.5 percent), and the northern end of the county around Byron (roughly 70 percent).

The Station stands in white Peach County. The original research lab, first used by federal scientists around the turn of the century, was a small facility in Fort Valley. Researchers used growers' fields to conduct most of their experiments. The current laboratory is a remodeled Navy installation, adjacent to Interstate 75, with 1,100 acres at its disposal. There is a curious synchrony between the movement of federal research in middle Georgia and the movement of Peach County's white population.

When my parents moved to middle Georgia, they wanted to live near my father's workplace. Fort Valley seemed too "Old South," Dad says. Houston County had better schools, and the city of Warner Robins, home to a large Air Force base, was friendly to newcomers. So I grew up oblivious to the struggles for equality and the campaigns for rural livelihood that defined middle Georgia life for the last century and a half. Only in the last eight years, as I have researched the history of the Georgia peach, have I begun to come to terms with the inconvenient, harder edges of this local history.

The Georgia peach is an icon, serving as shorthand for Southern beauty, hospitality, sweetness, and agrarian identity. But its roots sink deep into the messy racial politics of Southern history. Some of us have forgotten all but the high points of that history. We need to hear it again in all the fear, anger, sorrow, and joy of the original experience. So that even our clichés, fuzz and all, carry some truth in the aftertaste.

Tom Okie is an assistant professor of History and History Education at Kennesaw State University, where he teaches courses in American and food history and mentors future secondary social studies teachers. His book, The Georgia Peach: Culture, Agriculture, and Environment in the American South *will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2016.*

SOME LIKE IT HOTTER

by Sandra Beasley

The restaurant waits behind a steel door
through the back of a Fort Worth drycleaners.
The password is "Scoville."
On tap? Blenheim Ginger Ale, Old #3.
Four shakers on the table—
pink, rainbow, cayenne, Sichuan.
The waiter brings a napkin for my lap.
The waiter brings a handkerchief for my eyes.
Soup of the day: cream of horseradish.
Salad greens: Osaka Purple mustard.
The music is always salsa. The salsa
is always mango and ghost chilies, over
catfish farm-raised in firewater.
If the Serrano ribs don't elicit a *Holy Jesus*,
I get my money back.
The shrimp cocktail is served with a sauce
the regulars call "pepper prom"—
Trinidad Scorpions grinding on Naga Vipers,
Carolina Reapers smuggling in Red Savinas,
poblanos feeling up habaneros in a dark corner,
a seven-pot Douglah in a single pot.
The chef recommends two dashes for flavor,
a third for bravery. I order a cup.
I dangle each naked, maidenly shrimp
over that pool of lava.
This island may be small, but I am its chief.

Illustration by Natalie K. Nelson

INDIANOLA SUNRISE

by Sandra Beasley

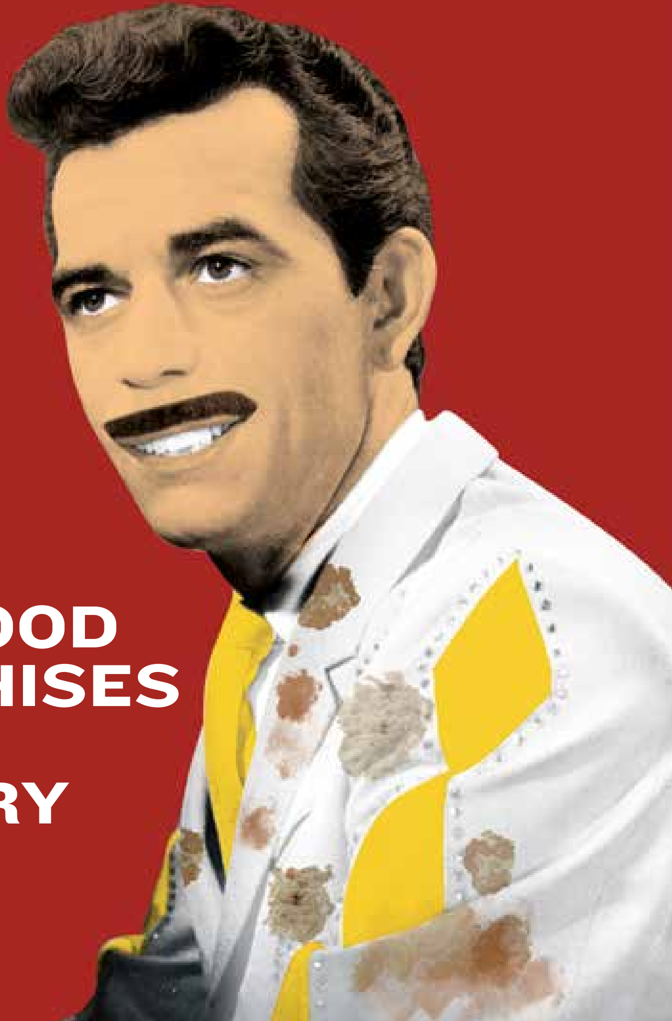
He leans against the car
while the rest of the band loads out,
scritching one quarter against the other,
finding two where he'd hoped for four,
knowing at the Chevron
he'll have to bypass the ToastChees,
knowing when hunger
is a leaking roof
a man sidles up to the hardware counter:
those cool, five-gallon glass jugs
full of rubbery this and redhot that,
knowing the soft click
of fifty cents on a grimy counter
as the clerk ladles out one lone, fat pickle,
hand-pricked with a fork,
from its tropical bath of Kool-Aid
into a tall styrofoam cup,
knowing he'll get halfway to Tunica
before pulling to a dirt shoulder,
how alien it'll look in his hand
as he leans against the car,
as he takes a bite—
overripe sugar yielding
to briny yellow flesh,
braced by seeds, the only hint
something green ever lived here.

Sandra Beasley's latest collection of poetry is Count the Waves*, published by W.W. Norton. She read these and other pop-culture poems at the 18th Southern Foodways Symposium.*

Illustration by Natalie K. Nelson

Chester "Butterbean" Biggins

It didn't take long for Chester's gravy empire to implode, felled by a truly horrific biscuit recipe. Sadly his soft, fluffy pompadour wasn't a prescient hairstyle.



LOST FAST FOOD FRANCHISES OF THE COUNTRY MUSIC WORLD

Art by Brooke Hatfield

WE CAME ACROSS BROOKE Hatfield's weird and wonderful art in 2013, when we used one of her multimedia pieces as the cover image for *Gravy*. It was a portrait of Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird* dressed in her Halloween ham costume, and it was made out of...ham.

If you are familiar with the SFA's sensibilities, you will understand why we fell in love with Hatfield and her work. So when we decided to commission an art installation for our pop culture–themed symposium, we knew just who to call.

Hatfield brought together two pillars of American pop culture that have deep ties to the South: fast food and country music. Riffing on cornpone sterotypes and bending genders and genres, she created five characters who tried to make it big in both industries, with disastrous results. Meet them on the following pages. —SCM

Jerry Lee Williams

Jerry Lee bought a tanning bed when he signed to Tennessee Records. At the height of his ultraviolet radiation addiction, this would-be cheese straw baron was a perfect shade of sharp cheddar.

Sue-Bob Caruthers

Her friends would later joke that pear salad held a Freudian appeal. (They would be correct.)

Erline Lang

Her early success opening for the Carter Family did not prepare her for the cut-throat world of potted meats. Erline spent much of the 1980s finishing off her inventory and licking her wounds.

Phyllis Terwilliger

She tried to popularize popcorn possum nuggets, but aside from some cousins on her mama's side, consumer demand played dead. Her star resurfaced during the disco era, when she had a crossover hit with "You SOB (Sure Oughta Boogie)."

DEEP FRIED FORTUNE

AFTER BROOKE HATFIELD'S PORTRAIT OF "PHYLLIS TERWILLIGER"

by Sandra Beasley

Hand me the cleaver, Phyllis asked her brother.
That woman chopped possum like nobody's business,
which is to say,
nobody makes business out of chopped possum.

Albert saw what Phyllis did not:
tightening smiles, whitening grips on their pens
as Tyson Foods' regional scouting team got a lesson
in gland removal. Scalding. Scraping.

Tastes great with A.1. Sauce, she chirped,
before popping the creature's jaw so they could count
all fifty teeth.
Phyllis had always been an optimist.

When they'd been kids, running a roadside stand,
Phyllis squeezed the lemons.
Phyllis sweetened the tea.
But it was Albert who thought to charge extra for ice,

and watching her sift Mama Terwilliger's
secret spice batter, he had a vision—
a handful of black-eyed peas, cast into that same oil,
bobbing to the top like easy money.

Thank you, the reps said. *We'll be in touch*,
the reps said, declining to taste another nugget.
Phyllis wiped her hands on her apron.
Her shoulders slumped.

That was when Albert hugged his sister as Romulus
must have once embraced Remus—
loving, but already leaving,
eyes fixed on the glittering lights of Little Rock.

Ava Lowrey

FULANI JOURNEY

GUELEL KUMBA'S AFRISSIPPI FOOD TRUCK

by William Boyle

A HANDMADE SIGN ADVERTISING AFRICAN FOOD POKES UP FROM a muddy ditch at the intersection of Molly Barr Road and North Lamar Boulevard in Oxford, Mississippi. Beyond the sign, up a gravelly hill, in front of a squat building surrounded by retired newspaper vending machines, is the Afrissippi food truck. A small, weathered black trailer, it's parked at the far end of the lot. A big white tent erected nearby and strung with lights creates a makeshift restaurant garden. There's a bar lined with antique candleholders, a boom box propped on one of the scattered tables, and—close to the trailer—a picnic table.

I'm there with my wife and our two kids. Our son, four, has brought a backpack full of Matchbox cars. He sits on the dusty ground and lines them up, etching roads into the dirt with a shovel-shaped rock. Our daughter, one, staggers around and discovers an empty water bottle that she squeezes like a bellows, simultaneously blowing a raspberry.

Guelel Kumba greets us. We've met him one other time. My wife, Katie, directed a nature program in Holly Springs when we first moved to Mississippi from New York, and she invited Kumba to play music for her young campers one summer day. I drove him from Oxford to Holly Springs and back for the occasion. We talked a lot about Screamin' Jay Hawkins, since I had *Cow Fingers and Mosquito Pie* in my CD player.

"I remember you well," Kumba says. "That's a happy memory."

A happy memory indeed. Katie and I were blown away by his songs. Guelel, a Fulani griot from northern Senegal, moved to Oxford in 2003. With local guitarist Eric Deaton, he started a band called Afrissippi, whose mission, Deaton said in 2010, is "preserving and promoting the West African–Mississippi continuum." Afrissippi fuses northern Mississippi Hill Country blues with string-based music from West Africa, framing the fundamental nature of American music in new terms. Deaton and Kumba were surprised to discover how much artists like Junior Kimbrough and R.L. Burnside had in common with Fulani traditional music.

The same spirit informs Kumba's cooking. *Fusion* is a word that's maligned, and often misused, in the restaurant business. Kumba's food truly honors many different cultures. It has West African influence, of course, but also French—present-day Senegal was once a French colony. And Kumba lived in Paris from 1988 to 1995, where he pursued sociology studies and first started performing Fulani music. (His father had tried to steer him away from studying the griot tradition, hoping he'd pursue an academic life instead.)

Kumba moved to the United States in 2001, living first in New Orleans and then New York. He has been in the American South for more than ten years now and has absorbed many traditions, cooking at a wide range of restaurants (Southern, Indian, even Japanese). In 2008, he opened a short-lived West African café in Oxford named Mama Kumba, after his mother. He mixes and matches the cuisines of Africa and the African American South; there is, after all, a thin line between many Senegalese and soul-food mainstays. Dishes like jambalaya, gumbo, and barbecue with sides of collard greens and black-eyed peas serve as a sort of cultural bridge, another indicator of the West African-Mississippi continuum.

As with Afrissippi's music, the Afrissippi food truck seeks to keep multiple traditions alive without sacrificing the spirit of any of them. On a given day, Kumba's menu may include chicken yassa, mafé (Senegalese peanut stew), pastels (meat-filled pastries served with habanero sauce), banh mi, tortas, chicken tchou, or lamb kebabs. He serves many of these dishes over grains and starches like couscous,

THERE IS, AFTER ALL, A THIN LINE BETWEEN MANY SENEGALESE AND SOUL-FOOD MAINSTAYS.

attiéké, fonio, plantains, or cheese grits. Kumba even offers beignets and coffee. He makes all of his bread—naan, Ethiopian flatbread, French bread, and pita.

Today he's serving chicken yassa gyros on Ethiopian flatbread and chicken curry over couscous. Kumba puts some Fulani music on the boom box and disappears into the truck. He starts cooking. My son is smashing cars together. A light rain begins to fall, pebbling the tent-top.

We've lived in Oxford for seven years, and these aren't smells we're accustomed to anymore. Kumba may be fusing Senegalese cuisine with soul-food standards, but today he's reminding us of home. Chicken on spits in open windows of gyro joints. Curry wafting from a late-night Indian counter. Hints of the Biryani Cart in Midtown Manhattan and Mamoun's in the East Village. We're in love before we see the food.

Chicken yassa, or *yassa au poulet*, is a traditional dish from the Casamance region of Senegal. "I make the marinade from just oil, lemon juice, onions, vinegar, and Dijon mustard," Kumba tells us. "The chicken is grilled and the vegetables and marinade become the savory sauce, which is finished with chardonnay. I believe this dish to be the inspiration for Carolina barbecue," he posits, referring to the mustard-based sauce of middle South Carolina. Scholars of barbecue might dismiss this specific claim, but they would agree that Southern barbecue draws on African influences.

When the food arrives, my son, who lives on peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches, takes a piece of chicken yassa. He munches on it, his eyes lighting up. He rips off a piece of the flatbread—crisp, soft, perfect—and shares it with his sister.

My curry is shivery-good. The chicken falls off the bone, spice-stuffed. I don't want to share it.

My wife, attending to our daughter, hasn't had any of the gyro yet. Our son is scarfing it down. I feel like a bad husband, but I don't care. It's all about the food now.

The rain lets up. Overhead, planes descend into the nearby University-Oxford airport for the next day's football game. My son is finished eating. Kumba comes over and plays cars with him.

We tell Kumba how wonderful everything is, *was*. He smiles, and it's one of those big memorable smiles, the kind that can lift you up when you're feeling battered by the world.

William Boyle lives in Oxford, Mississippi. He is the author of the novel Gravesend *and the story collection* Death Don't Have No Mercy.

GRAVY

Gravy is a publication of the Southern Foodways Alliance, a member-supported institute of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
John T. Edge
info@southernfoodways.org

PUBLISHER
Mary Beth Lasseter
marybeth@southernfoodways.org

EDITOR
Sara Camp Milam
saracamp@southernfoodways.org

DESIGNER
Richie Swann
richieswann@gmail.com

GRAVY PODCAST PRODUCER AND HOST
Tina Antolini
tina@southernfoodways.org

GRAVY PODCAST INTERN
Dana Bialek

GRAVY PRINT GRADUATE ASSISTANT
Kate Wiggins

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

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

SFA membership is open to all. Not a member?
Join us at **southernfoodways.org**
info@southernfoodways.org
662-915-3368

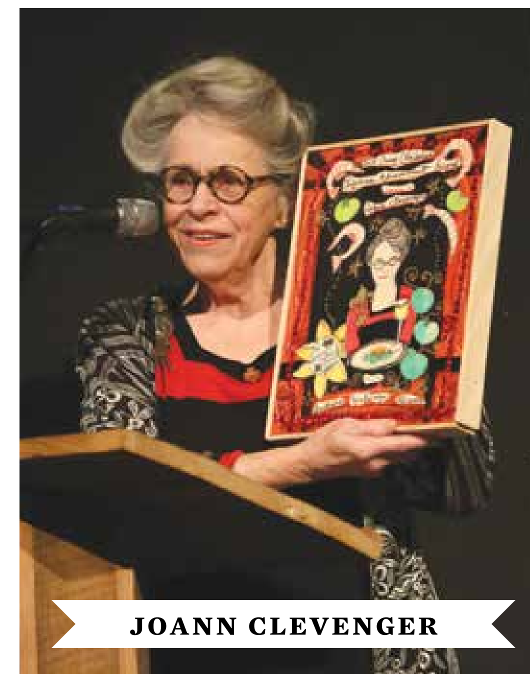
LORA SMITH

JOHN EGERTON PRIZE

LORA SMITH accepted the John Egerton Prize on behalf of the Appalachian Food Summit (AFS.) The AFS facilitates conversations among contemporary Appalachian farmers, scholars, writers, chefs, producers and other interested parties to explore how food traditions can become part of diversified local economies.

Craig Claiborne LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

JOANN CLEVENGER owns and operates Upperline, the New Orleans restaurant she founded in 1983. She owes her thirty-year success in the restaurant business to a belief in the life-giving and community-building possibilities of dining out. Clevenger reminds us that the root word for "restaurant" translates from French to English as "restore." She is a graceful, and gracious, champion for her industry and her city.


JOANN CLEVENGER

PHILA HACH

RUTH FERTEL Keeper of the Flame AWARD

PHILA RAWLINGS HACH was a native of middle Tennessee. She worked as an airline stewardess before returning to Nashville in 1950 to host Kitchen Kollege, the South's first televised cooking show, and went on to write more than a dozen cookbooks. For decades, Hach and her husband operated Hachland Hill, a bed and breakfast. She passed away on December 2, 2015.

In 2016, the SFA explores the Corn-Fed South, from bread to syrup.

GRAB A COB AND JOIN US.

SFA members receive a subscription to Gravy and other benefits.

Southern Foodways Alliance