SFA GRAVY

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FEATURES

Dhanraj Emanuel

Chef Cheetie Kumar of Garland in Raleigh, North Carolina

ON THE COVER:
Illustration by Rachelle Baker

To see who's who on the cover, visit southernfoodways.org.

MORE THAN DIVERSITY: INTENT AND REAL INCLUSION

In this issue, a cornucopia of writers and artists of color represent a re-upped commitment to writing the South as it is—and food writing as it should be.

BY CYNTHIA R. GREENLEE

Illustration by Rachelle Baker

I'D LIKE TO THINK I DON'T NEED to explain why this issue—amplifying the work of writers, illustrators, photographers, and editors of color—needs to exist.

After all, what a stellar lineup within these pages. Among the offerings, we have a tour of Savannah, led by three gifted cultural observers. Anthony Ocampo, a leading Asian American studies scholar and a second-generation Filipino American, visits Savannah's only Filipino restaurant. Princeton professor and Birmingham native Imani Perry is the author of many books, including *More Beautiful and More Terrible: The Embrace and Transcendence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. In this issue, she muses about the city's sense of morality and its sweet tooth. Travel and food writer Nneka Okona heard that the historic Bryan Slave Mart building once housed an enslaved butcher's shop, and we all benefit from her curiosity. Please read more about who's who in this issue on our Featured Contributors page.

I have no illusions about the ways of our world: that racism thrives; that people of color are shamefully underrepresented in food media and especially in its leadership; and that we at the SFA have work to do.

I began curating a contributors of color issue after last year's Fall Symposium in Oxford. That event explored food and labor, such as how food festivals undercompensate the culinary "talent" and how immigration raids affected one Mississippi community. The speakers raised issues, some hackles, and discomfort that one participant framed as a seeming duel of "old-timers versus Wakanda." Not all discussions were comfortable. Nor were all of them intergenerationally fraught. SFA needs more thinkers of color and younger people like the speakers who voiced concerns about labor rights, xenophobia, and economic justice. That said, change shouldn't be the burden of a single person, group, or event.

I can't control what *Gravy* readers or SFA Symposia attendees think or feel. But I have a say in what we publish in *Gravy*. And while I wasn't around in the early days, I know that there've always been members who don't shy away from the reality that food is inherently political. Indeed, in 2006, SFA cofounders Lolis Eric Elie and the late John Egerton pushed SFA to codify racial reconciliation as an essential part of its mission.

During the production of the last issue, conceived in partnership with an MFA program at the University of Georgia (founded by writer Valerie Boyd) and guest edited by Rosalind Bentley, we realized late in the game that, of ten full-length articles, only two were written by authors of color. That was due to many factors: number of students and mentors interested in food writing; the writers we followed up with; our editorial choices; and the natural attrition that happens when stories don't pan out.

Should SFA cast a wider, more frequent, and public net for submissions? Yes. Do contributors of color whom I've talked to consider *Gravy* artist-friendly and culturally competent enough to place their stories here? Not so easy an answer: Sometimes yes, and sometimes no. Do the stories here reflect the multilayered South they—and you—know?

For the spring issue of *Gravy*, most of our compelling pieces about marginalized communities and people of color were written by people outside those communities. (One great exception was Martin Padgett's story about the queer restaurant scene in Atlanta).

In this publishing economy, authors

of color are often tokenized and relegated to writing personal essays or stories of collective trauma. They are simultaneously squeezed out of reportage about their own communities. Reporting is literally valued more than commentary: Publications pay more for it, assuming that it takes more rigor and work than documenting the self or one's community. That's not necessarily the case. In this issue, we assigned first-person essays, hybrid pieces that blend history and the present, and reported pieces. Even so, we lagged on reported pieces by writers of color. Going forward, we aim to assign more.

All of SFA's full-time staff are white. Our editorial team consists of four people: a white woman, a white man, and two black women—myself and this issue's visual editor, Nicole Crowder. Last issue was guest-edited by *Gravy* contributor Rosalind Bentley, with visual editing by Bita Honarvar, both women of color.

Now a look at who is in this issue: We improved on the contributor numbers from the last issue. At my request, we cut SFA director John T. Edge's column. Nine of this issue's authors are people of color—the overwhelming majority. Similarly, about half of photographers and illustrators were also people of color: black, Latinx, Asian American (notably, there was no Native American or indigenous writer in this issue, a gap we will remedy in issues to come).

Numbers can signal there's a problem. They can't tell us why editorial disparities exist in food media, though it's not hard to figure out the big reasons why. Just like it's not hard to commission contributors of color—when you actually try. Racism troubles the workforce, and it's not necessarily the hood-wearing, epithet-blazing racism Americans pretend is a relic of the past. Racism rears its head before people even land jobs: Research shows that job applicants with names like Jamal or Lakisha are far less likely to get interviews than the Emilys or Matthews of this world. It would be willfully ignorant to think literary circles are immune to this bias.

In publishing, seemingly innocuous processes exclude. To be an editor is to be a gatekeeper. Even the best-intentioned editor may repeatedly tap the same small pool because we know those freelancers. You'll notice that many of the writers and visual artists in this issue have never been in *Gravy* before. Accomplished in their fields, they aren't exactly new voices, just new to this publication.

Providing a platform for writers and artists of color—particularly emerging ones and those from the South—should be a top priority for *Gravy*. Southerners seem to specialize in fantastic, place-based yarns. Here, stories supposedly erupt from Southern ground like hot springs. But that narrative abundance will only arc toward inclusion and justice if we work hard and tirelessly to make it so.

We who bring you *Gravy* must keep in mind what Elie and Egerton wrote about racial equity and SFA in a open letter fourteen years ago. And then we must apply its call broadly, consistently, and intentionally to these pages: "Our fear is that ... the organization might be tempted to assume that such reconciliation will take place naturally, without premeditation, among people of good will, and that silence is an indication that all is well. We disagree. It is too easy to slip into the comfortable assumption that if no one is talking about racial inequities, they no longer exist."

Cynthia R. Greenlee is a North Carolina–based historian, James Beard Foundation Award–winning writer, and deputy editor of Gravy.

Kinitra Brooks is the Audrey and John Leslie Endowed Chair in Literary Studies at Michigan State University. She specializes in the study of black women, genre fiction, and popular culture and is the author or editor of three books, including an edited volume on Beyoncé's *Lemonade*. When she is able to retturn to her native New Orleans, she looks forward to eating charbroiled oysters with fresh French bread from Drago's Seafood or Neyow's Creole Café.

Sarah Holtz is an independent radio producer and documentary artist based in New Orleans. She reported and produced the Cajun Field Trip season of *Gravy* podcast. A radio obsessive, in her spare time, Sarah volunteers at WRBH and hosts a blues show on WTUL. Stuck inside, she craved the jama jama (sautéed spinach) and fried plantains from the Bennachin's booth at New Orleans Jazz Fest.

Jason McCall holds an MFA from the University of Miami. An Alabama native, he teaches at the University of North Alabama. His latest collection is *Two-Face God*, and he coedited *It Was Written: Poetry Inspired by Hip-Hop*. When the time is right, he hopes he can make it back to Hooligans in Tuscaloosa for a gyro combo and an extra side of fried okra to share with his wife and friends.

Top: Allie Siarto; Middle: Debra Levi Holtz; Bottom: David A. Smith

Andrea Morales is a documentary photographer and journalist who was born in Lima, Peru, and raised in Miami. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times* and many other publications. She is a producer at the Southern Documentary Project, an institute of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. She hopes she can soon snuggle with a plate of tacos al pastor, pico, and a hot-off-the-griddle gordita at Mundo Latino taco shop in Oxford.

Anthony Christian Ocampo is a writer and sociologist from Los Angeles. He is the author of *The Latinos of Asia: How Filipino Americans Break the Rules of Race*. He teaches in the department of sociology at Cal Poly Pomona. He lives in Pomona with Schmidt, his chocolate-colored rescue pup, and Joe, the biochemist. The first place he plans to hit up after quarantine is Thirsty Cow, his favorite all-you-can-eat Korean barbecue joint.

Top: Brad Vest; Middle: Tom Zasadzinski

Imani Perry is the Hughes-Rogers Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University. She is the author of six books, most recently *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons*. Born in Birmingham, Perry lives in Philadelphia with her sons. She was able to cook most of her favorite comfort foods in quarantine, except she couldn't get catfish.

VIVA LA TAQUIZA

We'll gather again—over tacos.

BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

FOR AMERICANS, SUMMER TRADITIONALLY GOES FROM MEMORIAL DAY weekend to Labor Day. In the South, that's when white shoes and seersucker become fashionable, and gin replaces bourbon. In Southern California, though, we have a longer, tastier understanding of the season. It's whenever *taquizas*—taco feasts—reign.

From around Cinco de Mayo to the Day of the Dead in early November, the smell of meat grilling on outdoor flattop stoves and the sight of people double-fisting *cuatro de asada* (a serving of four carne asada tacos) and a margarita while chatting with loved ones in the noonday sun signifies *el verano*.

Families hire *taqueros* to make tacos of all sorts of provenance—carne asada, carnitas, barbacoa, al pastor—for backyard parties, even weddings. Companies book taqueros for employee-appreciation picnics. Over the last decade, Southern California's love for al fresco tacos has inspired large-scale fiestas that draw dozens of restaurants and thousands of customers to eat in the sun and listen to live music.

They are our versions of barbecues: Yes, they are about eating, and they are also chances to meet local taqueros and celebrate community and culture. Recently, taquizas have begun to catch on across the South.

Members of the Latin American Student Association at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville held one last year to pay for programming. The Salvation Army in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, has hosted a taquiza every year since 2014.

Taquizas have been staged in Charlotte and Shreveport, Nashville and Norfolk. And in suburbs like Cary, North Carolina, and Duluth, Georgia. Even tiny Waveland, Mississippi—population around 6,000, of which only 2.5 percent are Latinos—held

Oriana Koren

a taquiza last year. And they are planning another for this July, if coronavirus-mandated social distancing doesn't cancel it.

This pandemic arrived when taquizas were catching on in *el Sur*, but still not ubiquitous. Now, when we need to strengthen the bonds between strangers more than ever, the future of taco festivals is in doubt. I remain hopeful that taquizas will soon be as common in el Sur as community barbecues.

I VISITED MY first Southern taquiza in 2014, outside the Eagle Lake Convention Center in Lawrenceburg, Kentucky. A row of food vendors—Mennonite women with delicate fried pies, beaming kids hawking sugary lemonade—jostled for attention. Among them stood Taqueria Garcia.

I knew Southerners had learned to love Mexican food at Tex-Mex-style restaurants, but I was shocked to see a bona fide taquero there in central Kentucky, to hear the thud of his cleaver on a cutting board, and to listen to the fast Spanish patter of the cooks.

Men and women wearing University of Kentucky T-shirts approached the Taqueria Garcia trailer. At first, workers and customers both looked wary. Taqueria Garcia's trailer displayed signs with explainers about dishes, along with a pronunciation guide. The proprietor spoke English. Before long, *gabachos* smiled as they asked questions. A line quickly formed.

In the years since, the line has grown. Today, Taqueria Garcia still cooks and sells at Lawrenceburg gatherings.

Taquizas showcase culinary democracy at its most delicious. Taqueros bring a selection of meats, salsas, and aguas frescas, icy drinks made from fresh fruit and water. Everyone waits in the same line and dresses their tacos in cilantro, lime, onions, and salsa from the same condiment station.

You don't host a taquiza for one family or a few friends. You do it for as many people as possible. Before they became popular in Southern California about twenty years ago, tacos were cheap fuel, not the centerpieces of meaningful family gatherings. A taco-only party was gauche.

Home taquizas followed the American acceptance of meat-market and restaurant tacos. Then, as food trucks went mainstream in the early 2010s, taco festivals took off. Suddenly, it seemed every metro area with a majority Mexican population had one. And then they also started to pop up in unexpected places, like el Sur.

Courtesy of the Norfolk Taco Festival

ABOVE: From Kentucky to Alabama, the taquiza is making its way to points south.
OPPOSITE: Prepping for crowds at the 2018 Norfolk Taco Festival in Virginia.

I've now attended taquizas as both a critic and a judge. And as much as I love tacos, I have recently grown tired of festivals that purport to celebrate them. Early festivals were exhilarating, triumphant public statements that showcased how and why tacos mattered. But problems followed.

Organizers charged outlandish ticket prices but failed to share in profits. Taqueros were expected to sling thousands of servings in the name of "exposure." Decorations skewed stereotypical: colorful skulls and Mexican wrestling masks. In the process, taco festivals became indistinguishable from each other. Every half-eaten taco tossed in the garbage represented a failed attempt at cultural education.

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL in the time of the novel coronavirus. When taquizas return, the South has a chance to forge a new tradition that goes beyond gluttony and gross commerce.

If I get to travel el Sur this fall, I know where I want to go—to the Birmingham Taco Fest, scheduled for September. Advance tickets are just five dollars, and proceeds benefit Bare Hands, a nonprofit devoted to fostering dialogue via arts and culture. That work includes teaching art classes at the local YMCA and staging an annual Dias de Los Muertos celebration, inspired by Mexico's sacred Day of the Dead tradition, Decoration Day observations across the South, jazz funeral processions in New Orleans, and Birmingham's own history.

Bare Hands, it seems, does things right. That makes a lot of sense when you learn that the organization's president, Marcus Castro, is the son of Guillermo Castro, a Mexican immigrant credited with introducing high-end Latin American food to the Magic City. And Guillermo's brother, Jorge, runs the Taco Fest. In the hands of people like the Castros of Birmingham, it seems that the future of Southern taquizas will be strong.

Oriana Koren

Gustavo Arellano is Gravy*'s columnist and a features writer for the* Los Angeles Times.

DRAGON FRUIT

Hylocereus undatus

BY AIMEE NEZHUKUMATATHIL

Nicole Crowder

THE NEON PINK OF A DRAGON fruit screams summertime, pop music, sunglasses balanced on the top of my head, weather too warm for socks. It means vintage MTV and stretchy spheres of Bubble Yum popped and snapped in the back rows of a school bus. It's electrocution. It's the shade of lipstick I was never allowed to wear, full of pearl powder and unpronounceable chemicals, the shade worn by Boy George, Whitney Houston, and various members of Duran Duran on the album covers I cherished most.

You would think a fruit that screams this loud would have a veritable pop of flavor, too, but most people agree that the dragon fruit, for all its bluster and noise, tastes like the quietest of melons. Still, the dragon fruits my parents grow in their backyard and proudly bring in a sack when they visit—these fruits hand-watered and tended by my parents—are as sweet as peaches to me. These fruits are native to Central America, but the first time I tried one was at a dinner in Singapore. I was a visiting writer at a university there, and I had brought my mother along as my guest. I was so taken with the color that I went searching for more. During our downtime, I asked a taxi driver to take us to Lau Pa Sat, one of the 114 famous hawker centers full of local food in the heart of Singapore. There, I was assured by my hosts, dragon fruit was a flavor present in many of the food stalls—offered up in colorful shakes and ice creams and jams.

To get to this intensely colored fruit, we begin with one of the most ethereal displays of blossoming I have ever witnessed. The flowers bloom in full for just one evening. That means they have one precious night to be pollinated by a bat or bee, and turn the flower into a dragon fruit. Otherwise the six-inch, greenish-white bloom wilts by sunrise—a whisper of heat and bat wing rattling the crumpled, pale blossom.

Even its name seems like fantasy—including its alternatives: the Cinderella plant, night-blooming Cereus, or simply strawberry pear—but there is nothing fake about the alluring dragon fruit. The bold pink is due to a rind chock-full of lycopene, giving it that scene stealing shock of color. Each fruit grows to about three to four inches long and is dotted with tender and supple green leaves, like scales on the eponymous dragon. The ghostly white insides carry tiny, black seeds, making it similar in appearance to a kiwi. In fact, its texture and taste are often compared to a muted kiwi—not as sharp, but still sweet—especially when chilled.

There's a lovely cocktail, perfect for the summer, that I like to make on the rare occasion we find dragon fruit in our local supermarket: slice and remove the skin of one dragon fruit and blend the flesh with one-third cup of vodka, a dash of freshly squeezed lime juice, and a quarter cup of coconut milk. Toss in a few ice cubes to make the glass sweat. Garnish with an edge of extra dragon fruit for a tropical touch.

On those weeks in Mississippi when the air outside is like a napping dragon's exhalations, there's no sweeter cocktail to lull us out of a sleepy, slow summer evening. If you do catch a sunburn, you can mash up a bit of the dragon fruit flesh and apply it to the tender pink of your skin to help soothe it like an aloe. The dragon can be both the wildness we call out when we see this pink egg, and it can also be the balm. This is the fruit for a time of year when the sun and all its gallop don't merely feel as though they have nudged us from a static winter, but into a fully alive, roaring season—when everything you touch feels like it could give you a blister and a bit of wild burn.

Aimee Nezhukumatathil, the author of four books of poetry, teaches creative writing in the MFA program at the University of Mississippi. She is a 2020 Guggenheim Fellow in poetry. This essay appears in her newest book, World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments *(Milkweed Editions, August 11, 2020).*

DINNER IN SANCTUARY

For a North Carolina woman, cooking offers connection—and escape.

BY TINA VASQUEZ

Photos by Lauren V. Allen

Juana Luz Tobar Ortega inside St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Greensboro, North Carolina

FOR MORE THAN A THOUSAND DAYS and a thousand nights, Juana Luz Tobar Ortega has lived in what she calls "the golden cage."

The cage is both a physical place and an uncomfortable in-between status. An undocumented Guatemalan immigrant at risk for deportation, Ortega took up sanctuary in St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Greensboro, North Carolina, to avoid being forced to leave the United States. Even as the country's well-oiled deportation machine, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), has drastically ramped up deportations across the nation, the agency observes its 2011 "sensitive locations" memo, which outlines churches, hospitals, and schools as places immigration enforcement should not take place.

Ortega knows what it's like to be technically safe but stuck inside indefinitely. A short walk around the block or a quick grocery-store run isn't an option; ICE could pick her up the moment she stepped off the property and deport her to Guatemala, where she fears for her life.

But at least her gilded cage has a kitchen.

For Ortega, a mother of four in a mixed-status marriage, cooking has been her saving grace and source of income. Ortega's husband and their two youngest children are U.S. citizens, and the couple's two oldest daughters are recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The Obama-era program gives undocumented people who came to the United States as children the abilities to legally work and obtain a driver's license if they meet certain requirements. Broadly, DACA offers protection against deportation, but it is currently being challenged by the Trump administration.

Until recently, Ortega lived in the church by herself, her bedroom a former vesting room and storage area. While Ortega's family can visit any time, they have school and jobs. Ortega's husband, Carlos, works long hours in maintenance, but he comes to dinner on some weeknights and stays with her each weekend.

Those meals at the church have allowed

While Ortega is able to spend time with her family, she spends much of her time alone in the church that has been her home for more than three years.

Ortega and her family to have a semblance of normalcy now, in the latest chapter in a lifetime of separations. Ortega fled Guatemala in the early 1990s after receiving politically motivated death threats, leaving behind her two eldest daughters. She applied for asylum in 1998 and was denied, as was her appeal. She returned to Guatemala in the late 1990s to care for her ailing daughter, using a fraudulent visa to return to North Carolina in 1999. Here, Ortega built a life for herself. She married Carlos in 2006, had two more children, and worked as a seamstress for a furniture company in High Point. In 2011, ICE argeted Ortega for enforcement at her workplace. She was detained, but eventually released. Years passed without incident, but then President Trump took office. In 2017, ICE gave her just thirty days to leave the country.

"When my family is here with me and I can cook for them, it's like the day flies by.... I don't feel sad anymore because I'm with them and we are doing the same type of things we used to," Ortega said with the help of an interpreter. "When I'm cooking for them, my mind is where I am. It's like a good distraction."

Many immigrants report that cooking in sanctuary calms them and serves as an antidote to the what-if questions that plague them. It's not just a mindless way to occupy their hands or pass the time—it is a tangible connection to their pre-confinement lives. They can control this one, small thing during a massive upheaval that can last years.

Ortega's oldest daughter, Lesvi Molina, said her mother's skill in the kitchen has always been a pivotal part of their family.

"Thanksgiving, New Year's, Christmas—Mom was cooking. People at church, family members, they all look forward to her cooking. ... She feels a lot better if she's cooking," Molina said.

As the eldest child, Molina was raised by her grandparents on their farm in Guatemala while Ortega lived and worked in the United States. It wasn't until Molina was almost ten years old that Ortega was able to send for her. It felt like living with a stranger at first, Molina said.

"When I got here, I already knew how to cook. Maybe it's a cultural thing, but I learned from helping my grandma," Molina said. "What broke the ice for my mom and me was making tamales together. I was taught by my grandma one way, and my mom taught me another way. It was that time in the kitchen together that made me feel like we were getting to know each other."

Molina essentially became her mother's sous chef. Many nights, Molina prepped so that when her mom got home from work, dinner was easy to assemble. This symbiosis continues in sanctuary. Before COVID-19 and before she gave birth to her own child, Molina went to St. Barnabas three or four times a week to cook and eat with her mother. They focused on family favorites, like pupusas.

"I don't think my mom has ever understood the effect her cooking has on us. I know it makes her feel good, but eating with her in sanctuary has made us feel good too, like we're all a family again," Molina said.

Ortega's two youngest children came to live with her at St. Barnabas in March 2020, when classes were canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic. One graduated high school this year, and the other is attending college.

They're settling into a regular routine and, like the rest of us now confined to our homes, it largely revolves around food. Breakfast is often quintessentially Guatemalan, consisting of fried plantains, scrambled eggs, beans, and tortillas. Sometimes it's pancakes, ham and eggs, and cheese omelets. Dinner is frequently a variation of her favorite fail-safe meal: roasted chicken, a simple salad, and rice.

Pulling together those meals has gotten harder lately. Food preparation can be tricky in sanctuary; so much depends on the congregation, the church, and what's available on the grounds. Sanctuary seekers enter protection usually after negotiations between immigration advocates and a church, and they don't have a preexisting relationship with the congregation. Most don't meet church leadership until immediately before they move in. The congregation gets a say on whether the church offers sanctuary, mostly because people in sanctuary will rely heavily on church volunteers to help provide security, food, child care, and other crucial services.

To provide sanctuary, churches usually have to have living space or room that can be converted into a temporary residence. If there is no kitchen, volunteers from the congregation may provide every

To provide sanctuary, churches usually have to have living space or room that can be converted into a temporary residence. But if there is no kitchen, church volunteers—complete strangers—may provide every meal to the person in sanctuary.

meal to the person in sanctuary. Sometimes those in sanctuary cook their own meals, but rely on the church to help provide ingredients. In other cases, it's entirely on the person's family to sort out how to feed them three times a day.

Volunteers and St. Barnabas leaders made grocery trips and provided Ortega with staples—eggs, rice, bread, beans, masa. But then the pandemic hit.

"The coronavirus has affected the food and resources we usually have. People can't go to church, or they are afraid to go to church. The volunteers are afraid. They don't want to come here," Ortega said. "The pastor and copastor have really been helping us, and anything else I need, my kids can get me when they're not studying or when they get out of work."

The pandemic has also sliced into Ortega's already meager income. Undocumented immigrants often turn to their cooking skills to make ends meet—whether it's working in kitchens, renting a food stall, or street vending. To different degrees, families in sanctuary use their culinary skills to stay afloat financially. Clive and Oneita Thompson, a Jamaican family in sanctuary in a Philadelphia church, spend a few days cooking each month—making pumpkin soup, curry goat and chicken, Jamaican bread pudding, and about half a dozen other dishes—in anticipation of their monthly fundraising dinners. At $15 a plate, those dinners pay their mortgage and other bills, as they work to hang on to the home they've built in the United States.

Until the COVID-19 crisis, Ortega sold pupusas, tamales, and stewed pork over rice to members of St. Barnabas.

"These are just the things I've always cooked and eaten," Ortega said. "No one taught me how to cook. I don't remember ever learning. Where I come from, we were just raised to do it. Learning to cook is part of being responsible, especially for me because I came from a big family. There were seven children and as the middle child, I always had to help our mom."

But this income stream has come to a grinding halt, and Ortega is unsure how she will make up this gap or how long she'll continue to be in sanctuary. Ortega is the first person in North Carolina history to have publicly entered sanctuary. For a time, North Carolina had more people in sanctuary than any other state, hitting six at its peak. But some of those people have since left the protection of sanctuary, including Minerva Garcia, a mother of three who was in sanctuary five miles from Ortega.

Even with her children now keeping her company, Ortega still looks forward to each weekend when her husband stays at St. Barnabas. When her family is together and Ortega is making her roasted chicken, it's almost as if there is no order of removal, no ICE, no threat of deportation. She knows it's not real, but it's nice to pretend.

ABOVE: Family time is pupusa-making time. LEFT: Daughter Lesvi Molina has long acted as her mother's sous chef and continues to do so in sanctuary.

No doubt, the feeling resonates with many U.S. residents. At the time of this writing, all fifty states were under disaster declarations for the first time in U.S. history. Like Ortega, we are roasting chickens and trying to pretend that everything is okay. Or at least that it will be soon. But even when Americans can leave their homes again without fear of coronavirus, Ortega will not be able to safely leave the church. Experts the world over are trying to stop the pandemic. Meanwhile, the broken immigration system grinds on, with little meaningful governmental action from either political party.

Ortega is sad and frustrated for herself, and she empathizes with everyone who struggled under shelter-in-place orders.

"It's very difficult to be trapped inside. I hope that maybe this will help people who were against sanctuary understand a little bit of what we go through. We do it because of love; I do it because I love my husband and my family, and I don't want to leave them," Ortega said.

In the meantime, she cherishes coronavirus confinement with family and daydreams about where she will eat when she departs her gilded cage.

"Every Friday night, my husband and I would go to America's Roadhouse in Asheboro, North Carolina. That is the first restaurant I want to eat at," Ortega said with a laugh. "I want the fried shrimp and french fries."

Tina Vasquez lives in North Carolina and reports on immigration and gender issues for Prism *and other publications.*

"I JUST WANT TO COOK FOR SOMEONE"

A chef's journal

BY KELLY ENGLISH

KELLY ENGLISH IS A NEW ORLEANS–BORN CHEF WHO OWNS AND *operates three restaurants in Memphis. He is also the chef of Magnolia House at Harrah's Gulf Coast Casino in Biloxi, Mississippi. On Monday, March 9, 2020, as his industry and his adopted city began to reckon with COVID-19, he started keeping a journal for the first time.*

English told Gravy: *"Every decision I have made has been with the goal of bringing back the whole team as soon as possible. I don't think I've made any completely poor decisions, but I wanted to keep track of what I would have changed. As this started, I noticed myself being drawn to certain music, so I kept a record of that, too."*

On March 16, English closed dine-in operations at all of his Memphis restaurants. Fino's switched to curbside service. Iris and the Second Line, located next door to each other, merged under the name Iris Etc., to provide family-style meals for curbside pickup or delivery.

Monday, March 16, 2020

I woke up early (if you call what I had been doing for the last few nights sleeping) to record a podcast with Jennifer Biggs for the *Daily Memphian* about the state of the restaurant business. She had to stop recording several times for me to regain my composure—I was a mess, and I hadn't expected to be. I was saying things out loud that I had only said to myself before. Part of the game of restaurants is the projection that everything is great, even when it isn't. I felt like I was eulogizing someone who had not passed yet.

We announced yesterday that we would begin self-delivery today, with no ties to the usual suspects that have apps on iPhones. I want to maximize the number of people we can employ instead of giving any of our revenue to third-party delivery services. We have never tried to do anything like this before, but our director of operations, Pat Gilbert, and our marketing director, Caleb Sigler, and I had been planning for weeks. Our present and past employees and my business partners have given too much of themselves to all our restaurants for us to be caught unprepared. Until yesterday, I hoped to be laughed at for overreacting.

I watched as public officials gave a mixed message: They discouraged people from eating in restaurants, without actually telling the restaurants to close.

Kelly English stands in the once-bustling dining room of the Second Line in Memphis, May 2, 2020.

Photos by Andrea Morales

I wanted our employees to earn every cent they could, but it became increasingly clear that business as usual was no longer tenable.

Early this afternoon, the President haphazardly announced that gatherings should be limited to ten people or fewer. It was obvious to me where this was going. I immediately knew what I was going to do, but I still wasn't prepared. Iris, the Second Line, and Fino's became the first dining rooms in Memphis—maybe in Tennessee—to close to the public. We made the announcement via social media five minutes after the President's press conference.

I immediately thought of my business partners, and what it must be like for someone to proactively shut down your investment before being ordered to do so. I sent most of the staff home, and those of us who remained began taking delivery orders. We were walking over an invisible bridge, and I had to show my team that I was confident and knew exactly where to step. I was more determined to be a leader than a chef right then.

In the car on the way back from my last stop around dusk, I pulled over to wipe my face of the tears. I tried to compose myself and plan for tomorrow. I looked across the street at a restaurant that was trying to stay open with nobody in it. It dawned on me that, because of the limit on gatherings, tomorrow I will have to do something I never dreamed of. I will ask the managers to lay off almost their entire staffs, and when they are done, I will have to lay most of them off. I stepped out of the car and vomited from anxiety. I know I cannot take care of our employees if our doors are closed, and I want my team to be as close as possible to the front of whatever line they are about to have to get in. I hope they will understand.

In the midst of spring's full bloom, English grappled with how to keep his restaurants afloat, employ the most people possible, and serve the community.

I also knew that that to keep our business alive, I was going to have to be the face of what we were going to do. That means going out in public, in situations where I am likely to be exposed to the virus, to fight to have a job for them to come back to—which also meant I would have to stay away from my girlfriend for the foreseeable future.

MUSIC: I listened obsessively to "Tomorrow" from the *Annie* soundtrack.

WHAT I WOULD HAVE CHANGED: I would have laid everyone off tonight if I could have mustered the emotion.

Friday, April 3, 2020

Fino's is open for curbside pickup, and we are feeding 600 frontline workers, out-of-work hospitality professionals, and people without homes every day through partnerships we have struck with local businesses and citizens to cover our costs and keep people employed. Over at Iris and the Second Line, we are delivering food all across the Memphis area, including parts of Arkansas and Mississippi. We have found ways to continue to only deliver using in-house resources, rehiring a few of both our front- and back-of-the-house team members. I am almost solely at Iris and the Second Line, outside of helping with the relief deliveries. We have fourteen people on the payroll now.

The team that is left goes through moments that I am not qualified to mitigate. We all have enormous stress that metastasizes into frustration directed at each other. Everyone is tired and everyone is having trouble seeing the hard work that the others are doing. It feels as though there is a giant scoreboard in the room where we box food for delivery—the same room where dressed-up diners used to linger happily over their meals.

I don't think anyone who hasn't worked in a restaurant can appreciate how stressful it is to change everything about how you operate. We are like a baseball team that became a basketball team overnight—sure, we're athletic, but we didn't know how to be that kind of team.

I have had my moments over the last two weeks as well. Twice, I've screamed myself hoarse—louder than I've ever booed a referee at an Ole Miss football game. Both times, I felt immense pressure. The idea of having to make another decision was nauseating. People were waiting on me, and no matter what conclusion I came to, it would leave someone absolutely enraged. Outside of work, we are all being pulled at, too. We have people here who can't see their kids because they aren't staying home, people whose spouses rightfully want them home, and all of us are scared for our health.

I think we're starting to catch our groove, though. We've had bumps, like losing an entire walk-in cooler one night. But both of our landlords have canceled rent for April, which was the only reason that I was the only one that had to take a pay cut and we didn't have to lay anyone else off.

Today, we received an order on our voicemail at Iris. The customers were an older couple who had lost their adult daughter to COVID-19 the day before. We were her favorite restaurant, they explained, and they wanted to order a few things that she loved from the Second Line—jambalaya and red beans and rice, specifically—to feel a connection to her. As we listened to the message, all the unnecessary stress left the room.

I took the meal to the family myself. When I got there, I put the food on the porch, called them, and backed up several feet. They came to the door together, a mother and father a little younger

than my own parents. We just looked at each other for a minute. I told them that all I wanted to do was give them a hug, and I could not. They told me about their daughter—how she loved eating out, and how much she cared about her friends and family. Then they told me that they were so sorry for what *we* were going through. That is when I got emotional. It put so many things into perspective for me. It reminded me why I cook and why we do what we do. Then they handed me a tip, and the mother went back inside to get something. She came back with a whole, uncooked turkey and handed it to me. I am going to cook that turkey for someone—I just do not know whom yet.

MUSIC: The Flaming Lips album *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots*. It feels like it was written about right now. (Two lyrics from the song "Fight Test" grab me: "For to lose I could accept/But to surrender I just wept and regretted this moment" and "There are things you can't avoid/You have to face them when you're not prepared to face them.")

WHAT I WOULD HAVE CHANGED: I would have bought that family their dinner if I had any money to do it with.

Friday, April 10, 2020

I cannot stay asleep. I cannot get my brain to stop. There is so much to plan for, and yet we cannot plan for anything with certainty. I have not fully finished anything in about a month, and this juggling act is not easy. My focus is everywhere and nowhere. Help on the way from the government cannot come soon enough, but we all have signed a dotted line that we do not know what the terms entail, because *they* do not even know what the terms entail. We've applied for a loan from the Small Business Administration, but we don't know exactly when that help will come or what the terms will be. The pressure is unrelenting.

My dad's COVID-19 test came back negative today. The Sunday before we closed the restaurants, I had lunch with him in our Italian deli, Fino's. I couldn't help but wonder if this would be the last meal I shared with the man who taught me how to appreciate food. I had a hard time getting through that lunch. I fought back lumps in my throat and tears the whole time. He saw it in me, too—how could he not? We share almost the same mannerisms, and we share the same emotional responses, albeit from different lenses.

I have so many unread emails and texts it is absurd. Friday feels like Tuesday. The days go by so slowly, but the weeks fly by like I have never seen.

I obsess over the future of the industry I love. I am beginning to believe it will never be the same. Nothing about it. I really just want to cook for someone and watch them smile and be surprised. Maybe I just want to be in control of what I think I do well.

MUSIC: *Sound & Fury* by Sturgill Simpson, specifically the last track on the album, "Fastest Horse in Town." ("That old horse just keeps on running/if he falls they'll put him down.")

WHAT I WOULD HAVE CHANGED: I would have slept in.

Kelly English cooks. He really likes doing that and would not want to do anything else.

This piece is part of the Future Tense series, underwritten by Cathead Distillery. Look for a new Future Tense essay each month at southernfoodways.org.

STRIVING TOWARD PURPOSE

Where do restaurants go from here?

BY PATRIC KUH

RESTAURANTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT MORE THAN THE CONSUMPTION of food. The clatter of dishes and the hum of a playlist serve as the backdrop to moments we carve from hectic lives. Perhaps that's how it's ever been. But the new conditions that were already transforming the business have been magnified by everything that has happened since March. Early in the month, at the Manhattan Beach, California steakhouse where I worked, we were washing our hands every fifteen minutes. We had new policies for table maintenance and customer distancing. By then, it was impossible to ignore the large-party cancellations and the drop-off in reservations.

On Monday, March 16, we ran our last dine-in shift. At the end of that uneasy service, Marcus, the waiter who closed, said, "Shall I strike the camp?" I answered yes. Instead of setting the tables for the next day, he cleared them. As I write this in late April, customers haven't sat at those tables since.

On the first day we offered takeout, I placed a bagged order through a back car window and locked eyes with an older couple who drank Martinis with us every Friday. I wasn't ready for their look: They were scared. Suddenly, I was scared for them. Restaurant closures have reminded me of the strong bond between restaurant workers and guests. This moment has made me realize how many important notions of community, things I thought were givens, were balanced on the single pillar of cash flow. Swiped card, gift card, split check, the crisp extra twenty left folded under the espresso: These represent the lifeblood of businesses sometimes barely getting by. Without money, nothing happens. We also now understand how critical restaurants are to our sense of ourselves, to our cities and towns. It will be hard to pull open a restaurant door without feeling flat-out sad about those doors that won't open again.

The coronavirus pandemic has cut through the industry like a scythe. Restaurants that were hanging on are gone; many that were vibrant have been reduced to GoFundMe links. We're left wondering what venues that celebrate togetherness will look like with distancing protocols in place. Tables six feet apart mean half the customers. And half the staff.

Even for someone who's lived through quite a bit of change in restaurants, these operating conditions are new. I used to cook, then I worked as a restaurant critic. I've worked as a restaurant manager, and I've been furloughed as a restaurant manager. What I see is an industry at a threshold. The pay disparity between back and front of the house, historically weighted toward dining room, glares when survival is at stake. Technology's disruptive ability to shift business out of dining rooms is only going to increase. The expectations of guests will have to adjust to this new baseline. The fancy places that used to send you into the night with ribbon-wrapped goodies existed in a different historical era. Today, we look at any lit storefront selling seared carne tacos, peanut-scattered kung pao, lacquered barbecue-rib-tip sandwiches, or steaming meatloaf like a beacon of hope.

In this new landscape, we see very clearly the practical and the lyrical roles of restaurants, the two poles of the business. A chasm now separates them. Dictates of efficiency and cost control seem like the opposite of warmth, hospitality, community, and the greater good. *The greater good!* That's a term from pre–COVID-19 days when things weren't yet reduced to what was essential. As we shed the unnecessary, is it fair to expect restaurants to do more than serve good food? Isn't being open enough? Is a sense of purpose even essential to a restaurant? Is there a way to remain together; to meet the divergent needs of stakeholders from landlords to owners, from crew to purveyors; and still, somehow, make the numbers work?

Jennifer Chase (this page and previous)

Access

In search of answers, it's important to examine our past. I was lucky to spend a few years living in France. That style of cooking and eating means a lot to me. The traditions of the French table represent a shared language of perfumed broths and finishing butters. In a crowded Lyon brasserie, a Paris apartment, or a Burgundian home, something beautiful and communal happens. This is my bias. In an earlier book, I surveyed the haute cuisine strand of French dining in American restaurants. I started with the arrival of Henri Soulé and a group of highly trained specialists who represented France at the 1939 World's Fair and went on to open Le Pavillon on East 55th Street in Manhattan.

Soulé was the epitome of the man-in-the-dark-suit-guarding-the-door type of restaurateur. He was Basque, and he liked to eat flaked salt cod with warm boiled potatoes and chopped parsley. But he made his living with the haute repertoire, carving tableside, and also sizing up while never fawning over those who could afford it. Once, after he refused to eject a photographer who was harassing the Kennedy family from the dining room, Soulé fought publicly with Joseph Kennedy. The story goes that the entire Kennedy clan got up and marched across 55th Street to La Caravelle, a new restaurant opened by ex-Soulé employees.

In Soulé's world, couples ate side by side, a table was yours for the evening, and you paid with a house account and signed your check as you left. If you were a really big shot, Soulé signed it for you. Every summer, when Soulé's clientele retired to seaside estates, Soulé gathered

Jennifer Chase

his cooks and waiters and set up a summer version of Le Pavillon at The Hedges Inn in East Hampton. It was a mid-twentieth-century version of the medieval ritual of moving with the court.

Let's be clear about the unspoken understanding between Soulé and his clientele. Granting a house account meant controlling the means of payment, which meant the customer had been vetted by income, gender, ethnicity, religion, and social class. Controlling the means of payment also reassured customers they would eat among their own.

When Diners Club introduced their first credit card in 1950, nothing suggested this new payment method would transform everyday life. Not wanting to undercut their traveler's check business, American Express took a pass. Department stores already had internal systems for allowing customers to purchase goods on installment plans; they didn't follow at first. The restaurant business saw the promise. *Gourmet* magazine, then barely ten years old, launched its card in 1954. Third-party guaranteed payments revolutionized access to restaurants, bypassing the Soulés of the world.

From the plush platters and banquettes of the 1950s through the piston-driven energy of today's dining rooms, American restaurateurs have recast expectations of dining. Joe Baum of Restaurant Associates made the trappings of the restaurant the attraction. The Four Seasons boasted an exterior by Mies van der Rohe and an interior by Philip Johnson. At The Forum of the Twelve Caesars, barmen wore leather jerkins or smocks. (Think less Hedley & Bennett, more Ben Hur).

In Berkeley in the 1970s, postdocs with a thing for the works of Marcel Pagnol stepped into kitchens. By the 1980s, the best ingredients were no longer flown in. They were local. The focus of the restaurant veered from the maitre d' to the chef. And recipes no longer depended on the French canon. They were more interpretive and often personal.

No matter the changes, access has remained a marker of exclusivity. Today, the wait is what's humbling. A customer may be a titan of industry, but the note a swamped hostess punches into the reservation system swiftly describes him as "baldie in a puff vest waiting at bar."

Math

Now, as we gradually reenter dining rooms, many of us vow never to take restaurant going for granted again. A server's cheery, "What will it be?" rings like an anthem of promise. But to stay open in this moment, restaurant owners will have to make hard calculations of hospitality versus efficiency. The quest to achieve quality with fewer steps is nothing new: A cook starts the braise first, then turns to breaking down fish. A bartender builds several tickets at once, putting the whiskey sour down last so the foamy egg-white head doesn't die in the well.

But the new efficiency is going to require cuts that get to the heart of the business. Restaurants reach the limits of automation more quickly than other industries. We may prefer the impersonality of an ATM machine at the bank, or the speed of a self-scan line at the grocery store, but in hospitality, it takes people on the clock to generate sales. In fact, from a budgeting point of view, labor and sales are inextricably linked.

In restaurant math, division is key. To determine a restaurant's food cost percentage, or what the wings in a chicken-wing basket cost the operator, divide the cost of the ingredient by the sale price. If wings cost you a dollar, and you sell the basket for ten dollars, your food cost is 10%. I'm leaving out the cost of the seasoning and the frying oil, but you get the point.

Labor works like this, too. Let's say I run a hot-dog cart at a baseball stadium. I agree to pay Joe and Annie $100 each to work the stand during a Saturday game. My labor is $200. They park at the stadium on game day and they make $600. That day, my labor cost is 33%. That's high for a place where there's no support staff, considering a full-service restaurant with bussers, runners and managers can average 35%. The next weekend, the stadium hosts a playoff game. More fans crowd in. My revenue this time is $1,200. Joe and Annie still cost $200 in labor, but now the math (200 divided by 1,200) comes in a little over 16.5%. Much better. In fact, it's now a business humming along efficiently.

Any increase in revenue lowers the labor percentage. That's why a chef high-fives a server who just sold a bottle of baller Napa Cab. Once it's all been entered into the cells of an Excel labor log, the extra grand is going to justify employing an additional cook on the line. That's also one of the reasons you hear the ping and see the flash of delivery-system screens in more and more kitchens: With every order that goes out the door, the labor percentage decreases.

The handoff isn't always easy. Drivers arrive without thermal bags to keep the food warm. I remember one who lowered the temperature even more by enjoying a beer at the bar. And have you seen what a stacked burger looks like after a few hairpin turns? Despite my misgivings, delivery is increasingly necessary. Added sales, as we know, lower costs. That difference can give a chef the wiggle room to raise the pay of an hourly worker or increase purchases from a local farmer, cheese maker, or miller. Delivery can also invigorate modest neighborhood restaurants. I'm thinking of two examples in a Los Angeles strip mall I frequent. Chubby Rice, a storefront on Inglewood Avenue, where the spicy wontons arrive on a layer

of chile oil, has marked off a dedicated line for DoorDash orders. Mi Zacatecas, the Mexican restaurant on the other corner, asks you to declare when you enter if you are there to sit down or pick up.

Ghost kitchens, a term for small units in dedicated buildings that execute food for delivery, take it further. They promise to get restaurant food to you without the horrible inefficiency of an actual restaurant. But they beg a question: How much of the restaurant experience can you cut out and still be in the restaurant business? A fraction of these places are now satellite kitchens, built for restaurants that don't want to-go orders to clog their operations. The ghost kitchens that prove successful will get people to download apps, market promotions directly to those consumers, increase their delivery radius, and scale up from there.

To lessen the coldness of that transaction, some people prefer the term "virtual kitchen." It doesn't really matter, for these businesses don't revolve around kitchens. They are about smartphones. Already, there's an app for every player and every stage of the restaurant experience. The customer need only type in "Italian restaurants near me" to get a reservation for her party size within seconds. She can adjust the number and time, make special requests, and cancel if necessary. After dinner, sometimes while still in the dining room, she can review the meal. By early this year, I'd grown used to the strange situation of talking up wine to a customer who'd be checking the retail price simultaneously on his phone. Crew members use their phones to check schedules, swap shifts, adjust availability, and direct message managers. Depending on the app, they can review their own shifts from a selection of smiley and frowny icons. From her phone, the manager can monitor service timelines, modify schedules, check stock on bottle inventories, and track real-time sales as servers ring orders into point-of-sale monitors. Why would anyone think that the digital sale and in-person delivery of an order of meatballs and two Caesar salads (one hold the anchovies) would present a significant problem?

But extracting the kitchen from the restaurant begs the question: What's left when you've stripped place from food? If we return to that hot-dog stand, many interactions that have nothing to do with the hot dogs have been lost. The flirtation that goes into choosing a restaurant is absent—the drive by, the drop in, the decision to return.

> This moment has made me realize how many important notions of community, things I thought were givens, were balanced on the single pillar of cash flow.

A more significant loss is the purpose. Imagine the stand is making money, but I no longer want to pay a fee to park at the stadium. I'll make the hot dogs offsite and deliver them. Over the months, the stand has become a meeting place. Joe knows a customer named Oscar likes his dog with extra kraut, and now they have a friendly banter going on about whose team is going to win. One slow day, Annie got talking to Megan about the persimmon tree in her yard. The next Saturday, Annie brought her some. Personal connections, all those intangibles that make life rich: They fall away if I merely heat the hot dogs in a satellite kitchen and deliver them to customers.

Has technology brought these changes on? Are these changes destructive? Technology made possible various American restaurant forms. Take diners, a restaurant type we often romanticize. At every stage, the development of diners required advances in technology. My friend, historian Richard Gutman, unearthed a patent application for a compact system of storage drawers, cutting boards, and cooking equipment from 1893, back when diners were still called lunch wagons. Train networks carried prefabricated dining cars from a handful of East Coast factories to destinations across the country. In the process, those stylized cars became iconic structures in the American landscape. Chrome and neon breakthroughs changed the look of diners. So did design materials like Naugahyde and Formica. Back then, spring-loaded plate dispensers were considered cutting-edge technologies.

From the pushcart to the food court, American ideas about food have long skewed toward convenience. Private-equity folks are still placing billion-dollar bets that ghost kitchens will be the next system that delivers what we wish to eat when we want to eat it. I don't want to order from ghost kitchens, but I have no problem with them succeeding. If the best part of a person's day comes out of a recyclable clamshell, then making the food within that shell is a worthwhile effort. If a chef is able to crack the code, create a brand, and scale up her business, that chef may be able to get home to tuck her kid into bed instead of saying "I love you" on FaceTime.

But can this model deliver hospitality? That's the broader question. Are a dining room, a hostess, tables, and commotion not only conducive *to* but requirements *of* hospitality? I'm going to get a little mystical here. I think that there's an exchange of energy involved in hospitality that has little to do with the buzz of a room. I've experienced this fleeting-yet-real sensation in Starbucks lines,

Samanta Helou

when I feel taken care of by a cheerful tone. I won't put it beyond the food app folks to figure out how to train, coach, and reward their workers to imbue packaged food handoffs with the positive feelings that restaurants take several hours to create. My hesitation is a little more personal.

A few years ago, I worked at a kebab takeout in LA's Koreatown. The magazine business was reeling from loss of advertising dollars, and I needed extra income. I donned a logoed shirt and cap, pulled on gloves, and worked the late shift. Music in the karaoke club next door played so loud that we could hear it in the walk-in. (When sung by enough people, the chorus to "Welcome to the Black Parade" permeates walls.) I realize now I was hiding out in the restaurant. No one expected a working restaurant critic to be dishing up food as the clubs let out. I also came to understand how powerful it is to be accepted by members of a crew. When my carving hand flinched from the heat of the broilers, Parish, a Cleveland native who had come to LA to deejay, taught me how to angle the side flaps and use them as shields. One of the cashiers told me that she sometimes dreamed about the pinging sound Uber Eats orders make when they flash on a wall-mounted tablet. When her shift ended at 3 A.M., she'd take a seat on a stack of crates in the kitchen to wait for the first bus that would get her back to South LA. The irony struck me then. It hits me harder now: She could not afford to use the very service she spent hours processing orders for.

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In moments like that, I ask: Has eating out become a hollow transaction? What greater benefit can come from the exchange of money in restaurants and via ghost kitchens? Do staff earn health coverage after a certain quota of hours worked? Is there a system for learning skills that will lead to higher income? I'm blue-skying here—in this new landscape, why not?—but is there a way to match dollars earned by restaurant workers with the dollars they owe on student loans? What other ideas have I not entertained? Hundreds, probably.

Until now, American restaurants have been able to manage the weird amalgam of efficiency, cost control, and purpose. Transactions that rely on extreme efficiency but don't support purpose no longer feel sustainable. We see now that they were sustainable only if you were willing to concede everything that can be uplifting about restaurants. The pang we all felt when restaurants closed proved they were more than about food or about numbers—the challenge is going to be keeping that flame nurtured as we learn to run and inhabit restaurants in a new way.

People

Toward the end of Le Pavillon, Soulé fought with his staff over hours and wages. In 1960 his chef, Pierre Franey, quit, arguing that Soulé had already cut crew hours too short. "You cannot shave eggs," Franey told *Time* magazine. None of the three key factors were working: haute service was inefficient; food cost and labor percentages were out of balance; and, in an age of growing openness, exclusivity had lost its purpose. Ultimately, Soulé closed because he was no longer able to juggle the three interdependent parts.

Restaurants today are entrusted with everything from invigorating our downtowns, to maintaining links to traditions, to creating jobs. In this moment, as restaurants reopen under conditions no one imagined, I have more questions than answers. Will people gravitate to counter-service restaurants or will being greeted and served by an individual gain a new value? Will we develop a system that addresses wage disparities between front and back of the house? Can apps become restaurant partners? Can happy-hour models extend to delivery pricing, so that the price of a dish depends on the time it is ordered? Will workers have a say in what comes next? Will the young woman I saw smile at the elderly couple in face masks in the fast-food drive-through earn a wage that can support her? And what of the furloughed waitress who has been delivering boxed lunches to our hospital workers? Will the people who served America in a dark hour have voices to speak when this difficult moment has passed?

People are where the magic, the spark, and the warmth start. When restaurant doors closed in March, we did not just lose the opportunity to order our favorite dish. What saddened us was the fraying of bonds between people, the loss of relationships that we felt helpless to protect. Always demanding, restaurant work can also be uplifting. I've seen hostesses use flashcards to memorize the molecular structure of organic molecules as they prepare to take the MCATs.

I've watched dishwashers send drafts of high school essays from the office computer during breaks. I've charted my days based on the rhythms of my colleagues in kitchens—starting with the cinnamon roll a pastry chef might allow me to grab from a speed rack when I get in. Prep cooks are already there, starting the stocks, sending back the fish that doesn't look great, maintaining the walk-in temperature log. As the clock moves forward, the number of people increases. Here, a barback makes the big ice cubes for the single-barrel bourbon someone will enjoy hours later. There, a chef shows a novice cook how to turn vegetables that will glisten on the short rib special. And there, a waitress runs a rack of glasses through the machine a second time because, after she's done polishing them, she wants them to gleam on the table.

Guests are the final piece. With them, it's a restaurant. Without them it's a dark room, eerily lit by point-of-sale screens. When we sit at what poet Thom Gunn called "the neat arrangement of the cloth," we conjure our better natures. We gain renewed appreciation for excellence. We become aware of our community. We display a heightened civility. Well, so long as the wait isn't too bad.

Patric Kuh is the author of The Last Days of Haute Cuisine *and* Becoming a Restaurateur. *He lives in Los Angeles. He began writing this essay as a talk for the SFA Spring Symposium on the Future of the Restaurant, which was scheduled for March 28, 2020. Then things took a turn. We thank Patric for adapting—and we believe that restaurants will, too.*

POETRY

by Jason McCall

Are They Black Owned?

He spent most of my childhood nights as a chef
in a Montgomery hotel, but
my father doesn't care about the chef
who catered all the movies he didn't have time to watch
or the chef who spent all that time on Food Network.
He doesn't care about white sauce
and the debates around whether it counts
as a barbecue sauce, a dressing, or just another weird gift
from the gods of North Alabama.
He doesn't care about the whiskey selection
at the restaurant we use to make the visitors feel
like there's a real food scene in our city.
He doesn't care about the meat and threes
in Florence tasting more like East
Fairview or West Fairview.
He doesn't care about much
enough to ask twice about it, but he asks again:

Are they black owned? He only cares
that the plates I can afford because of my new job
help put food on another black family's plate.
He doesn't care to talk about lunch counters
and marches and firehoses and bombs and
water fountains and doors
he couldn't dare touch, and I don't care to ask
because the only thing worse than living
in hell is being asked to return as a tour guide
for a son who comes home twice a year.
He only cares about making me
remember everyone who's sitting at the table with me.

Illustrations by Daniel Fishel

When It's Hard to Name Your Favorite Restaurant Because It's Hard to Name the Dead

I can't skim pictures of the dead
malls and make a joke about the late

stages of capitalism or what the loss
of a Sbarro means for the fabric

of America. I won't write an elegy
for all the times I put a coin on a greasy arcade

cabinet and claimed my spot in the world
like De Soto marching through Chickasaw lands.

There's room for someone
to write a postmortem manifesto

on supply and demand, on evolution,
on the internet, on Amazon.

I won't speak ill of the dead
shopping centers because somewhere

in Montgomery Mall there's a ghost
of a scared boy who never felt loved

in the world more than when his mother let him tag
along for the day. Like every god, the boy's mother

had her own day of the week,
and Thursdays were her day to run

clothes back to Gayfers or bring
lime suckers back from Regions for the boy

who loved banks because he didn't know
there were other places to get lime suckers.

On a good Thursday, the day never ended
without a lunch at Morrison's Cafeteria.

The boy didn't know Morrison's was an Alabama
company and he didn't know he was taking part

in a dying ritual and he didn't know
that one day people would be afraid

of this mall and the people who worked in this mall
and the people who lived near this mall.

The boy didn't know he was supposed to have better
choices for a favorite restaurant.

The boy doesn't even know he's a ghost;
he's still there nodding his head

when his mother asks him if he's enjoying their outing,
and that's the real reason I won't talk

about places like this. I don't want to disturb him.
There's no reason both of us have to lose this place.

When My Wife Gets to Tell You About White Sauce

She'll tell you everything
starts with the rivalry between

Whitt's and Big Bob Gibson.
She'll let you know that people who really know

white sauce know to order the turkey
and not the chicken. And she knows

how to tell who goes too heavy
on the mayonnaise and too light on the vinegar.

And these lessons don't matter because I love
white sauce because I actually hate white sauce,

but I love listening to my wife tell the world
how much she knows because after two strokes

there are times when she doesn't know the right way
to hold a knife or how to add

tax on a receipt. And every time I see her struggle I want
a minute in the octagon with whatever god

decided to crack her brain open twice.
But a minute boxing god is a minute I lose

of her talking someone through the right
amount of pepper or how much you can tell

just by watching the sauce drip from a fork.
And this is why we always need someone

like Prometheus stealing fire from heaven. Maybe
this is why someone needed to know it was possible

to look back on Sodom even if God turned the eyes
to salt first. Maybe we all need to know we can have something

the gods can't take away, even if it's just a memory
of what good barbecue sauce is supposed to taste like.

My Grandmother's Pound Cake Is as Close to Communion as I'll Ever Get

As long as I can taste it, a part of her
lives in this world. A part of her rejects
the dates given on the tombstone and obituary.
Because a body is more than what fits
in a grave. Every slice handed
out during the holidays is another reminder
of all the things she gave to us. You can't taste a hug
until you can. You can't name the flavor
of nostalgia until dessert takes you back to a shotgun house
on the west side of Montgomery and reminds you
that some part of you will never leave that shotgun house
on the west side of Montgomery. You can't smell a false god
until someone brings home a cake from the store
and dares you to taste the difference. One day,
the recipe will fall behind a counter
and be forgotten, some great-great
niece or nephew will see a pound cake and never find
my grandmother's memory in the second swallow
it takes to push a good bite down their throats. Then, maybe
then, she'll be gone from this world just like any spirit
or old god whose altar grows cold. But until then,
she's still here, still feeding me with every crumb she left behind.

An Alabama native, Jason McCall teaches at the University of North Alabama. His books include Two-Face God, Dear Hero, *and* Mother, Less Child.

ON Adobo AND Anxiety

A meal at Savannah's only Filipino eatery becomes a second-generation identity crisis.

by Anthony Christian Ocampo

Photos by Stephen Morton

My Lyft driver asks if I'm sure I typed in the right address. And then asks again.

I'm not certain that the four-unit shopping plaza off East Derenne Avenue is my destination. Could this be the hub for Savannah's small Filipino population?

I am in the city for a weeklong conference for writers of color. The row of small shops is set back from the street and a few miles away from the historic district. I'm guessing few tourists come here. I nervously check the plaza sign and register that it houses a Caribbean restaurant and a bakery. Then, my eye falls on the eight-ray sun and three stars, familiar symbols of the Philippine flag.

I've arrived at Savannah Filipino Authentic Cuisine, the city's first and only Filipino restaurant since 2011.

Every time I try a Filipino restaurant, I wrestle with its authenticity, as if no-cooking me could ever qualify as a connoisseur. Yes, I'm a sociologist and an expert on Filipino American communities, but sometimes I wonder if I'm projecting anxieties about my own identity. I grew up in a Filipino American family and neighborhood in California, but I've never actually lived in the Philippines.

The first thing I notice is the row of balikbayan boxes—thigh-high cardboard care packages stuffed with clothing, nonperishable food, and home goods. I know them well: Filipino immigrants like my parents send them to loved ones back home. Shelves overflow with corn chips, polvorón shortbread, dried mangoes, and Philippine-brand snacks. I see the stack of Filipino periodicals, whose ink smudges on fingers more messily than American newsprint.

Stenciled on white poster board, the menu has just four options: adobo drenched in vinegar and soy sauce, pancit noodles, lumpia rolls, and inasal (barbecue chicken marinated in citrus and vinegar). These are Filipino gateway dishes—the kind we bring to potlucks with non-Filipino coworkers who know nothing about our cuisine. I settle on the chicken adobo and approach the counter.

Owner Rose Malunes emerges from the kitchen, sporting a bright red baker's cap. A registered nurse who arrived in Savannah in the early 1980s, she was part of the first wave of Filipino professional immigrants to come to Georgia after the watershed 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. After twenty-seven years in nursing, she went part-time and opened the restaurant with her husband, Fred.

She doesn't attend to me immediately, which I don't mind. Having grown up around Filipina matriarchs who ran everything from households to hospitals, I'm accustomed to the "I've got shit to do right this second, but trust, I will get to you" demeanor I see in the way Rose moves. It gives me time to study a small whiteboard to the left of the register where daily specials are written, dishes only Filipinos or those intimately acquainted with our food would know.

Fried bangus. Milkfish.

Dinuguan. Pork stewed in blood.

Halo-halo. A mishmash of beans, gelatin, flan, and rice crisps over shaved ice, drenched with evaporated milk, and topped with purple ube ice cream. So colorful and decadent.

I consider switching my order to signal to Rose that I'm not one of those—God forbid—Americanized Filipinos. But to be honest, I've avoided eating dinuguan most of my life. The only time I ever ate it was when I met my partner's sister for the first time and I was still trying to prove myself to his family. I stick to the adobo.

"Hey, darling. What would you like?" Rose asks.

I internally debate whether to respond in English or Tagalog. I'm generally uneasy speaking my parents' ancestral language, except when I'm drunk.

"Boneless ba po ang bangus?" I finally say. I ask using "po," the term of respect used reserved for Filipino elders. Later, I recount this story to my mom, and she tells me I placed the "po" in the wrong place. I'm retroactively embarrassed.

If Rose notices, she doesn't let on. To my relief and surprise, she expresses her appreciation that I'm even speaking Tagalog, considering the vast majority of American-born Filipinos don't. As she takes my order, she asks me The Question: "Where are you from?"

For Asian Americans, this question, when it comes from a white person, lands as a racial microaggression, an inquiry that makes them feel like outsiders. Never American. Not American enough.

But between Filipino strangers, it signals a desire to connect, to see if your story is like my story. I know Rose isn't asking about where I live; she is asking me where in the Philippines my parents are from. With this question, I feel more at home.

I try at first to muscle my answer out

★ ★ ★

I consider switching my order to signal to Rose that I'm not one of those—God forbid—Americanized Filipinos.

in Tagalog, but revert to English.

"My dad's family is from Cavite. My mom's from Sariaya." Before migrating, they lived mostly in Manila, but these are the provinces their families are from, both a few hours' drive away from the capital.

Rose shares that she's from Iloilo. She senses my knowledge of Philippine geography is lacking and tells me it's in the southern islands.

"Would you like anything else?"

I tend to avoid sugary drinks, but I spot a drink dispenser with a juice I immediately recognize as kalamansi. It's a walnut-sized fruit that's like a cross between a lemon, a lime, and an orange. I was introduced to it when I was six, during my first visit to the Philippines. I remember how my Philippine-born cousins referred to me as "Merkano," which sent me crying to my mom. Drinking kalamansi juice made me feel more Filipino than American. It still does today.

Ten minutes pass, and Rose brings me a to-go container with a couple of pieces of lumpia on the house. I inhale half my food before realizing I forgot to take a photo for the 'gram.

Rose tells me not to hesitate if I need anything, but customers are trickling in, mostly for takeout. Two friends, a Filipino and African American man, dine in. The Filipino man spends most of his meal proudly explaining everything about the Philippines he can to his friend, starting with the food on the plate and then his own migration history. Intermittently, he turns his gaze to Rose, standing attentively at the counter, and she fills in any gaps about Filipino food or culture that he may have missed. In this moment, it clicks: Savannah Filipino Authentic Cuisine is as much a classroom as it is a restaurant—even for us Filipinos. Here I was listening to two Filipino immigrants explaining to a black Southerner how their birth country was colonized by their adopted one. A moment predicated on a shared connection to U.S. empire.

Before I leave, I let Rose know I have a few more days left in Savannah, and that I'll try to come back with some of my writer friends. In Filipino culture, it's customary for people who are about to part ways to promise a future hangout, even if there's no expectation it will actually materialize. It's considered rude not to, even if both parties know it probably won't happen. As it turns out, Rose doesn't play like that.

"What's your favorite Filipino food?"

"Palabok." The one dish I always request for my birthday. Noodles mixed with shrimp sauce, decorated with grilled shrimp and hard-boiled eggs, topped with crushed chicharrón. Flavor and texture for days.

"I'll make that for you."

"Oh my goodness, no, you don't have to."

"No, it's okay. Bring your friends on Friday. And take my number."

"What's your last name?"

"Just put 'Tita Rose.'" Auntie Rose.

I can't stand up my new auntie.

Rose Malunes and her husband, Alfredo, have made what was once an abandoned pizza joint into an eatery that's part small grocery, classroom, and community meeting place.

Rose was born in 1960, fourteen years after the Philippines gained independence from the United States. Her mother operated a sari-sari store in the central market of Iloilo, selling everything from seasonal fruits and vegetables to shampoo and cigarettes. From age six to the end of nursing school, she worked at her mother's store, where Rose says she developed entrepreneurial acumen.

"I have been exposed to all the business side," she says, noting that several aunts and cousins also owned businesses in the same market. "I guess that's the reason why even when I [was] a nurse, I still want to do some business."

Just as thousands of other dutiful Filipina daughters had done, Rose was convinced by her family to pursue nursing, guaranteeing their golden ticket to upward mobility—a green card to work in the United States. As Catherine Ceniza Choy, professor of ethnic studies at the University of California-Berkeley, points out in her book *Empire of Care*, Philippine nursing schools have churned out a seemingly endless supply of workers since the first academies were established during the U.S. colonial period. Due to their training and English proficiency, they are perfectly groomed to fill labor shortages in U.S. hospitals. A recent report by the Migration Policy Institute found that 30 percent of foreign-born nurses in the United States come from the Philippines.

In 1984, with a cohort of fifteen Filipina nurse recruits, Rose boarded a plane to Georgia. The weather and pace of life

★ ★ ★

Rose Malunes and the two hundred Filipino Savannahians are not an aberration in the Filipino American story. They are part of the through line.

in Savannah were not too different from Iloilo. Getting used to the American diet was harder. Her first meal upon arrival was a Shoney's dinner courtesy of the hospital administrator.

"Oh my God, they're eating grass," Rose recalls seeing Americans cruising the salad bar. "I don't think I can eat that one. They are eating grass! They love grass!"

Barely 100 Filipinos lived in Savannah when Rose arrived, but at Candler—the oldest hospital and nursing school in the state—there was a visible community of Filipino nurses, many from the same region of the Philippines as her. Close to a decade would pass before the thought of cooking professionally crossed Rose's mind. But about the time she got married, in 1991, she started experimenting, selling Filipino food from a pushcart in the hospital wings on her days off. Within an hour, the pushcart would be empty.

After years of double duty, a coworker in the radiology department mentioned having a vacant unit in a shopping plaza he owned—a former pizza parlor that had been abandoned on the heels of the Great Recession. Rose decided to go for it, getting permits, clearing out the building, and enlisting her husband and brother-in-law's help.

The first few years, Rose wasn't sure the restaurant was going to make it. She had rejected the conventional wisdom of immigrants opening restaurants where a critical mass of their countrymen settled. There was no comfortably established community to keep her business afloat.

"Filipino food is not famous in the South, especially here in Georgia," Rose says. Beyond cooking, Rose had to play ambassador, educating customers about how Philippine cuisine and culture were influenced by Spain, China, Mexico, and the United States.

"You have to teach them what it is because they don't know what it is, so you have to introduce it. You have to explain to them, and sometimes you have to let them taste it."

I research and write about the way Filipino immigrants and their children carve out their place in American society. I think a lot about the way this adaptation process differs by demographic context.

Before arriving in Savannah, I did what I usually do when I travel to a city for the first time: I checked the U.S. Census website to see how many Filipinos live there. Four hundred in 2010. Half that number seven years later. In the census tract where the restaurant is located, where a fifth of Savannahians live, there are just twelve Filipinos. Demographically speaking, the Filipino population in Savannah is negligible.

As a Filipino American, something more powerful than population drew me to the restaurant that week. Sociologists who study immigration don't usually care about food; they'd rather study education or labor-market outcomes.

But the history of Filipinos on this continent is inextricably linked to foodways. Filipino shrimp farmers arrived on the Gulf Coast in the sixteenth century. In her book *Filipinos in Louisiana,* the historian Marina Espina writes about the Filipino seamen who deserted their posts on the Spanish trading ships traveling from Manila to Acapulco. About a decade before the Declaration of Independence, they established a community near modern-day New Orleans, in a small fishing village named Saint Malo. Espina's decades' worth of research, much of which was washed away during Hurricane Katrina, reminds us that the history of Filipino Americans, and Asian Americans, have roots in the American South.

In this sense, Rose and the two hundred Filipino Savannahians are not an aberration in the Filipino American story. They are part of the through line. And while I am not a Southerner, eating with Tita Rose at her restaurant connects me to this genealogy.

Forty-eight hours later, I'm back at the restaurant with four friends from the conference. All but one, the Filipino writer Meredith Talusan, are either new or relatively new to Filipino cuisine. Fortunately, there's a poster on the wall near our table that serves as a sort of primer.

"Your palabok is ready," says Rose, with a familiarity like we've known each other for years. "It took me a long time. It's hard to make palabok." I worry that I took too much of her time since she's a one-woman show in the kitchen. But then Meredith says palabok is her favorite dish, too. I feel slightly less embarrassed.

I try speaking Tagalog again. To my surprise, even with an audience of one very fluent Filipino, I succeed.

"Your Tagalog is pretty good," Meredith says. I catch a look of approval from Rose in my periphery.

For a second, in the middle of Savannah, I feel more Filipino than I've ever felt before.

Anthony Christian Ocampo is associate professor of sociology at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona and the author of The Latinos of Asia: How Filipino Americans Break the Rules of Race.

Pleasure AND *Prohibitions*

Savannah's history of regulation, revelry, and sweet treats

by **IMANI PERRY**

Caramel apples dry in the kitchen window at Savannah's Candy Kitchen. The city's well-established sweet tooth contrasts with its decidedly unsweet rates of poverty.

Jač Malloy

Cheryl Day is the owner, with her husband, Griffith Day, of Savannah's Back in the Day Bakery. She is at work on her second cookbook, which will tell stories of black women bakers, including her great-grandmother, who was born into slavery in 1838.

Jennifer Chase

The two women I met, who were casually proselytizing for Jehovah, warned me not to go down to the waterfront at night. "It's too wild down there!" They sat, I stood, in one of Savannah's twenty-two squares. ¶ Although I've been to Savannah more times than I remember, I noticed something this time that I hadn't attended to before. Each square is a palimpsest of history. The Revolution, the Great War, the African, the Confederate, the French, the other Great War. In the thick of flora, the monuments pose cat a corner to one another, at once composed and cluttered. Founded in 1733, Savannah is an old city for the United States, with a politely vexed history.

I'd made my way to this square on the way back from an antique store that I visited on the very off chance that it might still have the earrings I'd coveted a decade ago (of course, no earrings). I said, "How y'all doing today?" That was all the greeting the two women needed to get going.

They were friends and retired. They told me they sat in that square often in the afternoon. Were it not for the sign and copies of *The Watchtower*, I wouldn't know they intended to encourage me to join the ranks of the 144,000 who will make it home to Jehovah after death. Both were easy conversationalists. One looked like a Southern city woman, wearing green separates, tortoiseshell glasses, and a straightened, coppery, tapered haircut. The other was more country. Her arms and long fingers stretched out along the back of the bench. Her afro was salt and pepper, her skin a remarkably smooth blue-black. Her voice was deep, but raised in a singsong whenever she cooed over the tiny dogs that led their owners past us.

The problem, as they described it, is a problem of many tourist destinations in the South. Visitors, released from the shame and shreds of dignity they carry at home, came there to get wildly drunk. They didn't know how to act, didn't have any home training, and cut up badly.

Southerners are, generally speaking, both exacting in their judgment and good at alcohol. These people, however, from out of town couldn't be trusted. I trusted

their judgment: “You a little bitty thing too, and look like you from around here,” and avoided the waterfront at night.

When Savannah was founded, three things were outlawed: slavery, lawyers, and rum. All three prohibitions failed stupendously in the face of prospective wealth. The elegant, even lavish, downtown area is a testament to the prosperity gained by the forbidden: the port, the cotton gin and exchange, and black people made Savannah rich. And so pleasure here, as nearly everywhere, has a gripping, anguished underside.

I must admit, I was a little bit surprised when the women started talking about a new health-food store that they enjoyed. It had good prices, they said, even though it was part of gentrification’s encroach. I wasn’t surprised that they liked the healthy goods, mind you. I’ve always rejected the tendency to talk about Southern food in terms of what’s “bad.” Eating greens, beans, corn, and even freshly slaughtered meat, the mainstays of our foodways, is one of the healthiest habits in the nation.

Our nutritional deprivation these days is more than anything a consequence of fast food, mass production, and poverty. I think of the health-food industry as so often very white, moralizing, and as I said, gentrifying. But this place, they told me, was nice. The country woman said a young man who worked there gave her an effective cure for her constipation. While approving of the rates for green beans, the other cautioned that you have to be careful when it comes to vitamins, “cause you can’t be sure what all they’re putting in there.”

It’s true. Regulations are both necessary and tricky. They save lives, and sometimes they destroy them. I thought about that the next day, walking around Savannah, when I came across one of its many tourist destinations: the only museum devoted to the Prohibition period in U.S. history.

Among its features is an exhibition on one of the more colorful characters in a Technicolor Southern history: Carry Nation. Hailing from Kentucky, Nation claimed she received a message from God after her first husband died from alcoholism. She was a soldier for temperance. At first, she entered bars and threw rocks, but at the suggestion of her

Southerners are, generally speaking, both exacting in their judgment and good at alcohol.

Jennifer Chase

Queen of Tarts pastries at Back in the Day Bakery

second husband (she reportedly said this was the only smart thing he ever said), she began to wield a hatchet instead. She hacked away at tables, counters, and stools for the Lord. Her antics put me in the mind of one of Savannahian writer Flannery O'Connor's best quotes: "Whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one."

From the julep at the Kentucky Derby to the Sazerac of New Orleans, the South is known for mixing a good drink. Yet, the moral and religious argument against drink has also flourished in the region. Perhaps that makes sense. We know the price of the intoxication.

But I also think of it as one of the numerous contradictions that we carry: preaching doing right while all the while doing wrong, the habits of a people convinced of a forgiving yet judging God. And just maybe, it is an essential refuge in a cruel history. It quiets the haunting. I do not think the South is uglier than the rest of the nation, but I know that it has been required to witness inequity up close much more.

Sugar, like liquor, soothes. But unlike liquor, it isn't charged with sin, at least not in the South just yet. Though living off the land, fresh vegetables and fruits, and farms are within hands' reach, so are the sweetnesses of extra-processed cane, beets, and corn. I imagine that during Prohibition, and between bouts of religious temperance, sugar often filled the yearning for a respite until backsliding crept up. In fact, I don't just imagine it. I know it.

After the live oaks and the draping Spanish moss, the first thing I fell in love with about Savannah was the candy. It is a confectionary paradise that shreds all of my health-nut inclinations. All the old-fashioned candy can be found there—sugar buttons, candy canes, sweet tarts—at longtime businesses such as River Sweets and Savannah's Candy Kitchen, which is the country's largest producer of pralines. Each day, it makes 4,000 pounds of the buttermilk, sugar and pecan or almond candy, that had its American provenance in New Orleans. There's a Candy Kitchen branch right by the museum, and I stopped and stocked up.

The two companies started as just River Street Sweets. But the couple that founded the family business had an acrimonious divorce. Each got two stores. The wife, Pam Strickland, kept the name; the husband, Stan Strickland, started Savannah's Candy Kitchen. After two decades in direct competition, they reunited in business. Walking by their sites in Savannah, Charleston, or Atlanta's Hartsfield Jackson airport, you can smell hot, browned sugar wafting through the air.

My favorite candy they make is the gopher. It's like what most people know as a turtle, but that name is trademarked. So everywhere else you find them, they have to go by a different name. But I think the gopher tastes better anyway, because the salted pecans are more finely ground and the chocolate just sits on top. You get the sweet taste at the top of your mouth and the salt on your tongue until you chew and the flavor bursts together.

When you eat candy, just like when you have a drink or swallow a Vicodin, opioids and dopamine are released into your brain. All of them soothe, but the sugar habit is the addiction that hits Americans youngest. And hits the South hard.

Now, I bristle at both the moralizing about Southern habits and the mockery of Southern moralizing. The thing that people have to understand is that it is one of the hardest-living regions. Yes, due to the history, but also due to the present. You'd be hard pressed to see, in the centers of tourism, how much vulnerability there is in a pretty city like Savannah. The poverty rate in Savannah is twenty-four percent, twice the national rate and ten percentage points higher than the overall rate in Georgia. For children, the poverty rate in Savannah is forty-one percent; of that number, half are living in what is termed extreme poverty, in families with income that is less than fifty percent of the poverty level.

Pleasure here, as nearly everywhere, has a gripping, anguished underside.

This too, along with the squares, the elegant homes, the museums, is the remnant of history. Savannah is exceptionally beautiful, but it does not exist in a state of exception relative to the region. Though not overrun by Walmarts and strip malls, it, too, bears the legacy of Jim Crow and economic inequality.

I stopped and talked to these women, and really any women elders I could find, because at a certain level I realized that I am not that much different than the drunken tourists on the waterfront in the way I indulge in its beauty. I partook: the delicious fish sandwiches, the beautiful museums, the good shopping, the entertaining gaming nights, and the candy. It is revelry for me, though perhaps a relatively quiet one. I tried to redeem myself by listening and seeing.

Savannah is a majority African American city. When I asked the elders about living there, I heard that there wasn't enough quality affordable housing, that the local colleges were too expensive for their children and grandbabies, that they were tired of the Northerners who came down and behaved like gentry or the old Southern aristocracy.

There's something that makes your chest ache about it all. So much building and bricklaying and surviving for so little a piece of the pie. But they also told me that they were still here, a living libation, an enduring people. And that was, more than anything, the kind of sweetness I sought.

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Chef-artist Angela Renee Chase created this miniature installation, which has a bóveda with offerings of water, cake, and fresh flowers.

THE DEAD *STILL* CRAVE DESSERT

APPETITES ARE ETERNAL IN THE AFRO-CUBAN LUKUMÍ RELIGIOUS TRADITION.

by Kinitra Brooks

ANCESTORS *always* EAT FIRST.

So I cut a big slice of sour cream pound-cake and place it on the altar dedicated to my grandmother.

As a Lukumí initiate, my paramount religious obligations are feeding the ancestors and making offerings to the *orisha*, powerful deities who guide our lives through prayer and divination. In this Afro-Cuban religious tradition, you also feed and venerate *egun*. These spirits of the departed may be related by blood or religious lineage.

Lukumí goes by many names: Many call it santería, others *la regla de osha*, translated as the right or rule of the orisha. And all rituals have rules, whatever faith you follow.

In Lukumí (a word associated with Yoruba-speaking people kidnapped from West Africa and enslaved in Cuba), you must have a *bóveda espiritual*, or an altar to the dead, at home. The bóveda fuses Catholic religiosity with West African ancestor worship. A traditional bóveda is a table, covered in a white cloth (lace, if you're feeling fancy). I set my table with multiple clear glasses of water—usually seven, God's number—in a V formation. The glass at the point of the V contains a rosary and sits in front of a crucifix.

Bóveda offerings usually consist of flowers, candles, and photos or keepsakes of the dead you choose to honor in your spiritual pantheon. I pour two fingers of Crown Royal in a glass for a certain female relative who was known to enjoy a sip in life. The dead still hunger. Their descendants' reverence quenches their thirst for life.

In my spiritual tradition, we often make a plate for the ancestors and leave it in the place specifically dedicated to them in the home. Some folks have a bóveda; others have a consecrated clay roof tile and a stick that sits in a small corner of their home or outside on the porch. We usually feed the ancestors at a big, celebratory meal, be it for a religious ceremony or a family holiday.

Pop culture presents the living dead as malevolent zombies who stalk and devour humans. Bóvedas present an older, healthful alternative. Descendants bless the dead with remembrance and offerings of sustenance. In return, the egun and orisha give guidance and protection. Connecting to the elders and the passed-on has strengthened black folks through the oppressions of enslavement and Jim Crow. Death is only a transition, never an end.

My grandmother's altar sits apart from my more traditional bóvedas because Maw Maw wants what she wants and knows how she wants it. Always was a little finicky up until she died. A medium told me she "doesn't want all that Catholic shit." Still a dyed-in-the-wool Missionary Baptist even after becoming an ancestor!

So her bóveda, in the telephone cubby of my old home, is painted white and contains one glass of water, one white candle, and purple flowers. No rosary. No crucifix. But I did have a beautiful piece of lavender and gray cloth, her favorite colors. I sprayed it with Bijan, one of her favorite perfumes.

This is tending to the dead: the weekly, sometimes daily, act of caring for loved ones' altars to deepen your relationship.

Many Christians, particularly Catholics, tend to their dead by keeping bóvedas in their homes. Many black folks keep bóvedas and don't even recognize it.

That group of black-and-white pictures

> "THE AFRICANEITY RUNS DEEP *in our cultural roots and will show up* WHETHER WE CALL OUT THE NAME ***Jesus, Allah, Damballah and/or Oludumare.***"

framed on your grandmother's mantle sitting on top of a lace doily? Bóveda.

That trio of pictures hanging on your aunt's wall that features Jesus, Martin Luther King Jr., and the family patriarch who passed on? Bóveda.

The Africaneity runs deep in our cultural roots and will show up whether we call out the name Jesus, Allah, Damballah and/or Oludumare. The boundaries of black forms of worship are flexible, at best, and sometimes near indistinguishable from each other.

I continue to identify as a Christian, and my ancestors are intercessors who strengthen my relationship to God. My ancestors comprise the "cloud of witnesses" referred to in Hebrews 12:1. As a staunch Baptist, my grandmother didn't come easily to this type of spiritual practice. But she sees the benefit in the depths of communication and connection we have established.

I reconnect with Maw Maw as I refill her water glass each Monday because the water must be "living." Every three days, as I recite the Lord's Prayer, I replace and light her white candle. We discuss which flowers she wants from Trader Joe's because she doesn't always want purple flowers. Every once in a while, she allows the more traditional white, though she never lets me place my favorite color, yellow, on her altar.

When you reestablish the bond with an ancestor, you don't need a medium to tell you what that person wants. You become attuned and accustomed to their voice in your spirit, their smell when they visit you, the shift in energy as they enter the room.

You can also set boundaries. I have made it clear that the moment I wake up and see somebody sitting on my bed, I'm leaving this entire process of discovery to become an evangelical Christian. I don't want to see them. But hearing, feeling, and especially smelling them is just fine.

Tending to ancestors doesn't always have to be a long, drawn-out conversation. That ain't tending. It's the "Good morning," the "How y'all doing today?" This eventually turns into, "What y'all feel like eatin'?"

Rarely is the meal anything more than a good helping of the rich foods in which their descendants partake. I have eaten fried chicken after Sunday church service, and I have eaten fried chicken after a *matanza*—an animal sacrifice to the orisha. The experiences are the same. And they are both damn good.

But as I mentioned before, my grandmother likes to be...different.

"I want some cake." I heard—no, felt—this request as sure I can hear my sister talking on the phone.

Excuse me? Um, Ma'am, didn't I just put a praline on your altar the other day? My grandmother was a diabetic who was forever sneaking sweets. Nothing has changed now that she is an ancestor. As our spiritual relationship became stronger, I would leave sugary sweets—mostly cookies and cakes—on her altar so she could engage in the forbidden from the beyond.

I buy vanilla cupcakes from my favorite bakery with a sweet—but not too sweet—buttercream and leave one on her altar.

Don't take this feeding too literally. You don't come back a few days later to find crumbs or a bite taken out of the cupcake. The energy is what's most important. It is the time taken out of your day to cater to their wishes. It is the love and generosity behind the gift of food.

"That cake you left was good, but it wasn't what I wanted. I want some homemade poundcake. I want you to make it for me."

Now, Ma'am. You're getting too particular. I don't mean to complain, because there's a beauty and intimacy in cooking for those who loved you dearly and have passed on.

But first of all: Why weren't these detailed requests made before I went and bought four cupcakes, adding three of them to my already generous hips?

I could easily get her a slice of poundcake, but the homemade part presented a bit of a conundrum. Homemade? By me? I can cook my patootie off. I can smother the hell out of a chicken leg. My okra with shrimp and sausage in stewed tomatoes perfects any hot summer night. But I can be hit or miss when it comes to baking.

The poundcake had to be good because both my grandmother and I would enjoy it. Yet it couldn't be so darn good that I would inhale it like those cupcakes. I finally decided to make a sour cream poundcake drizzled with a lemon glaze. I combined two recipes, slowly incorporating the milk and lemon zest into the powdered sugar for the glaze. Then I candied the half-moon lemon slices and twisted them on top of the glaze as decoration.

And it was good.

At least, that was my opinion. After making her demands known, Maw Maw didn't say a word. But I expect to hear from her later.

"

MY GRANDMOTHER WAS A DIABETIC

who was forever sneaking sweets.

NOTHING HAS CHANGED

now that she is an ancestor.

Kinitra Brooks, a New Orleans native crowned to Ellegüá, teaches literary studies at Michigan State University, where she holds the Audrey and John Leslie Endowed Chair.

APRONS FULL OF CASH

Flush times in down-and-out New Orleans

BY JUSTIN NYSTROM

L. Kasimu Harris

FOR MANY YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE 1970s, New Orleans was, to borrow a line from "Basin Street Blues," a "land of dreams." Leaving Middle America, middle-class and working-class white kids planted roots in this fertile garden of reinvention. As the region faced down an economic crisis and the city embraced tourism as its economic engine, they built lives on hospitality. In the French Quarter, these new arrivals waited tables and washed dishes and tended bar. They lived cheaply, ate and drank lavishly, and never looked back.

Measured by coldly objective means, times were tough. Between 1970 and 1990, the Orleans Parish homicide rate tripled and one hundred thousand people fled the city. The oil economy death-spiraled and the 1984 World's Fair proved an economic belly flop. And yet they came. Today, many of them look back on those twenty years as a golden age.

In the summer of 2019, for the SFA, I interviewed a range of people who have worked or still work as waitstaff in New Orleans restaurants. Some began that work more than forty years ago. Scott Harrington and his girlfriend took the train from St. Paul, in 1972, for what was supposed to be a week-long vacation. "It was twenty below zero in Minnesota," he told me as we sat in my studio, the recorder flashing. When his return date drew near, Harrington fretted. "I kept going to Pat O'Brien's because it was such a fantastic place, and it was 4:00 in the morning and people were walking around in short sleeves," he said. When his break came, Harrington sent girlfriend home on the train and called his parents to let them know he wasn't coming with her. At nineteen, he'd just won a job at Pat O's.

Server Harold "Rick" Hughes folds napkins at Gabrielle restaurant in New Orleans.

Back then he didn't know an old fashioned from a hurricane, Harrington told me. But he learned the job, and learned to loved it. "I had to buy a pair of black shoes to wear to work, and I remember going back to this little room I had. And the shoe box, I just kept throwing money in there." With that cash in his pocket, wearing one of the same green blazers he wore to work at Pat O's, Harrington dined at the city's finest restaurants. "They'd let me sit by the kitchen door on a deuce table," he said. "I would order filet mignon with béarnaise sauce and shrimp remoulade and all this stuff I'd never heard of.... I had so much fun."

Back then, most restaurants ran on cash. And cash had to be managed. One year during Mardi Gras, Pat O's owner Sonny Oechsner asked Harrington to stay late and help count the till. Still amazed, more than forty years later, Harrington told me about how he walked into the courtyard as morning approached. "[And] there were like eight or ten tables set up like you have in a lunchroom, where like eight people can sit on either side, you know, that big a table, fold-up tables, and they had 1's on one table, 5's on another, 10's, 20's, and 50's, and 100's." Drinking iced longnecks, the staff silently counted and banded bills. An hour later, they headed off to Johnny White's to drink into the morning.

By the late 1970s, Harrington left Pat O's to tend bar at Lucky Pierre's, a late-night joint infamous for prostitution. The money was great. But after watching a cop named Jan Poretto gun down a waiter in the bar, Harrington feared for his safety. Instead of working bars, he moved on to fine dining, first at the Court of Two Sisters. About that time, he convinced his younger brother, Jeff Harrington, to leave Minnesota and join him. When the younger Harrington landed a job at Brennan's, the elder Harrington followed.

Run by siblings Teddy Brennan and Pip Brennan, the pink Royal Street landmark was a machine in the 1980s. Fueled by a dramatic increase in hotel space that attracted conventions and free-spending corporate attendees, the restaurant and its staff raked in cash.

"We'd work breakfast, big Sundays," Scott told me. "It wasn't unusual to have 1,000 people on the book for Sunday morning. [We'd] do another 400 at night with a private party thrown on you for 50 people up in the Red Room, with two different kinds of wine, Champagne at the end, and after-dinner drinks, and they want to do cocktails and cigars outside afterwards." Tough duty, especially when you're serving a four-course dinner and flaming desserts.

At Brennan's the Harrington brothers met "Rick" Hughes, who moved to New Orleans around 1981 after going bust in the oil fields. The French Quarter lifestyle appealed to him: "I just liked it. You know, it was cheap, you know, at the time... You could always find a job, always... I can remember times that there'd be signs all over the place, WAITERS WANTED, WAITERS WANTED," Hughes explained. "if you paid more than $200 a month rent, you were living in a nice, nice place."

Hughes got his job through a small deception. Working at La Boulangerie, where flush Brennan's waiters sometimes drank, Hughes learned that a gentleman named Richard French had been promised a job at Brennan's. Before French could get to Brennan's, Hughes showed up to claim that lucrative job. A few days later, when the real Richard French came in, Teddy Brennan called Hughes into his office, and asked, "What have you done?" Hughes answered quickly and pleadingly, "Well, Mr. Ted, I really wanted to work here. I really wanted to work here. I've always heard—and *I really, really wanted to work here*." Brennan decided that if Hughes wanted the job that badly, he could keep it. Hughes has answered to "Rick" ever since.

Brennan's was a "slaughterhouse" back then, Hughes told me. "New Orleans, in those days, did such a huge convention thing that, I mean, you know, 20,000 people...and then right after that, 40,000 people... just over and over and over again." The money was great, but it was hard work. "You would do five turns on your station, and it was just, like, frantic.... And if a waiter couldn't handle it...he was in trouble."

One block over at K-Paul's, the Chartres Street restaurant owned by Paul and Kay Prudhomme, servers worked at the white-hot center of 1980s American restaurant culture. K-Paul's was known for bold flavors and informal, sometimes quirky, service. Upstate New York native Jeanette Meyer, who moved to New Orleans in 1982 and landed a job at K-Paul's, remembered, "If you had four people at a table and they all came in and they said, 'We all want the blackened redfish,' you could not let them order the same thing. You had to make them order something different." Prudhomme would refuse the ticket and send the server back to the table, she told me. "You'd have to entice them to get something else."

Waiting tables at K-Paul's meant dealing with oddities. When women kicked their shoes off under the table, which they sometimes did on summer evenings, Prudhomme went bonkers, Meyer told me. "He would have one waitress distract them. The other waitress would get on her hands and knees, grab the shoe, take it in the back room, and hold it hostage." Prudhomme would walk out of a back room and announce that a shoe sale was about to begin. "And we could sell it back to them. Chef would say, 'Get whatever you want for it.' Sometimes, people would have to pay us twenty dollars to get the shoe back." As the bids went higher, Prudhomme listened and laughed.

Today, New Orleans is richer, cleaner, and safer. Restaurants have matured, and the roster of dishes they serve has diversified. It's hard to imagine a restaurant today that matches K-Paul's for oddity and popularity. Or the old Brennan's for profitability. Much has changed. Training manuals and pooled tips have replaced instinct and hustle. And in the age of plastic, nobody goes home with an apron full of cash. But the stories of the 1970s and 1980s remain, proof that, in their youths, these career servers witnessed a key pivot in the city's economy and ushered in a new sort of New Orleans restaurant culture.

Denny Culbert

L. Kasimu Harris

BELOW: Hurricanes at Pat O'Brien's; OPPOSITE: Jeanette Meyer at Pascal's Manale.

Justin Nystrom is a professor of history at Loyola University in New Orleans and the author of Creole Italian: Sicilian Immigrants and the Shaping of New Orleans Food Culture. *Visit southernfoodways.org to explore oral histories of career servers in New Orleans, Charleston, Birmingham, and Atlanta.*

SAVANNAH'S BLACK MAESTROS OF MEAT

Many were enslaved. All persisted despite white efforts to ban them from butchery.

BY NNEKA M. OKONA

MY LEGS AND FEET SHIVERED WITH cold. I had underestimated how frigid a winter morning in Savannah could be. But the sun beaming on my cheeks and forehead shone so bright that I struggled to catch sight of the three-story Savannah building that Vaughnette Goode-Walker pointed out.

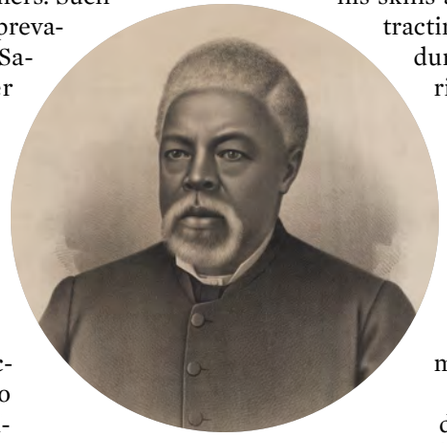
Goode-Walker, founder of the company Footprints of Savannah, led our tour about urban slavery. Just beyond the City Market, we stood in a square of perfectly pruned trees, manicured green grass, and metal benches, as she gestured to the West Saint Julian Street building, which now houses a pet bakery and store. This old brick building, she said, still has a story to tell.

From the 1850s until December 1864, the Montmollin Building housed one of Savannah's largest slave marts. Before selling enslaved Africans, before committing them to wretched lives of labor, traders warehoused captured Africans on the top floor here in what was then known as Bryan's Slave Mart.

Goode-Walker said the building later became a gathering place for freedpeople to mobilize and educate themselves in the name of better futures. But I didn't expect to hear what she said next: Between the 1840s and 1850s, Ulysses L. Houston, an enslaved man who later became a renowned pastor and community leader, worked in the basement of that active slave market as a butcher, earning his own money, making his own life, hearing the groans of other exploited people. His story of enslavement, resistance, freedom, and entrepreneurship showcases the role of artisans in the African American fight to survive and thrive.

OUTSIDE SAVANNAH'S bustling core, enslaved Africans and freedmen cultivated the land that fed the city. They raised cattle, hogs, and poultry. And they slaughtered and sold those animals, too.

Enslaved butchers sometimes won a measure of freedom by way of their skills. Some "hired their time," a practice that allowed them to work for "employers" other than their owners. Such arrangements were prevalent in antebellum Savannah and other Lowcountry cities. Working for men who were not their "masters," enslaved workers could earn wages or fees. Often, they turned over all those profits to owners. Occasionally, they got to keep a share. Historian Whittington B. Johnson wrote in *Black Savannah 1788–1864* that "hiring out" was a "hatch in the peculiar institution to escape the more pernicious aspects of slavery and live quasi-free lives."



A portrait of Ulysses L. Houston, circa 1890

Library of Congress

Jackson B. Sheftall, son of a white man and an enslaved woman, was one of these men. He took up butchery at age eighteen. A decade later, he had leveraged that first entrepreneurial move to build a mini-empire.

"There were very few free colored people like me. ... I had been doing business here a long time, and was generally thought a great deal of among the whites here. Because I kept to myself," he reportedly said in testimony before the Southern Claims Commission, which considered Southern Union sympathizers' claims to compensation for property confiscated or supplied to the U.S. Army (meaning, the Union) during the Civil War.

Privilege, connections, and skin color likely paved the way for Sheftall's success. But his status did not protect him. Local newspapers referred to his "mulatto" status frequently and with scorn.

"[...] He was a remarkably enterprising man, and the Confederates recognized his skills and success by contracting with him for meat during the war," historian Jacqueline Jones said in regards to Sheftall's work with Confederate Army General W.H. Davis. Sheftall directed forty free and enslaved men who supplied meat to Davis' troops. Jones writes in depth about Sheftall in her essay *Wartime Workers, Moneymakers: Black Labor in Civil War-Era Savannah*. From her, we know that he sold slaughtered beef, tallow, corn, and other commodities, and that his multiple wagons and horses traversed the city. We also know that he sold cow tongues and livers, and got to keep the profit from those goods.

Simon Middleton leased his labor out, too. According to Johnson, he was known as one of the "best hog butchers in the market." For the right to run his business, Middleton paid his master $12 per month. He retrieved hogs from his customers, loaded and carried them to his shop, slaughtered the animals, and returned with the requested meat.

"Hiring their time" permitted many enslaved men to build skills, savings, and clienteles. Their success threatened white butchers, and that knowledge bubbled into frustration. In antebellum Savannah, Timothy James Lockley wrote in *Lines in the Sand: Race and*

Traditions of black butchery survived slavery. Men such as Milton Puryear, a farmer in Halifax County, Virginia (pictured here in 1939), slaughtered hogs for neighbors apart from formal butcher shops.

Marion Post Wolcott/Library of Congress

Class in Lowcountry Georgia, "the greatest conflict between white artisans and African Americans arose over the retailing of meat."

Scholar Anne Yentsch documented one black butcher in Savannah in 1810. She found evidence of five by 1823. That jump might have influenced white butchers' efforts to organize against their black counterparts.

Several white butchers sent an 1820 complaint letter to the *Savannah Republican* newspaper and later petitioned the city council in 1822. Their goal: to block black butchers, whether free or enslaved, from working their trade from rented stalls in the City Market. White butchers charged that the unwanted competition had cut into their business. They also alleged that black butchers sold meat they had stolen from "respectable inhabitants of the city."

The city enacted ordinances in 1824, 1826, and 1829. Each escalated the battle. Each made it clearer that black butchers of any status—slave or free—weren't welcome to sell meat anywhere in the city. Such bans likely lowered the number of black butchers working openly in the city. But black butchers didn't quit selling meat in Savannah. Twenty years after that last ordinance took effect, Sheftall opened his butcher shop, specializing in cutlets, chops, and steaks.

The restrictions kept coming. In 1854, the city council passed an ordinance that no slave could act as a butcher without a white person present. Despite these laws, some ex-slaves held onto these skills beyond their captivity, wielding cleavers to artfully carve out livelihoods and identities. And, according to an 1894 article in the *Savannah Tribune*, the freedman butcher Sheftall grew rich in the very same era when these ordinances proliferated.

After the Civil War, when nominal equality allowed black men to compete as butchers, many emerged as well-known entrepreneurs. For them, the dirty work of slaughtering animals and preparing their carcasses could be lucrative.

Born in Grahamsville, South Carolina, Ulysses Houston was one of the boldest entrepreneurs. Back in the days before freedom, he paid his master $50 per month to have a semblance of independence. That conditional independence translated to unusual mobility; he traveled throughout eastern Georgia to secure cattle to slaughter, butcher, and later sell.

In addition to his work as a butcher, he also served as the pastor of First Bryan Baptist Church. From that pulpit, Houston boldly called for slavery's end. When slavery did end in Savannah, he was present to discuss what the coming political order would look like for the nation's newest citizens.

On January 12, 1865, the forty-one-year-old Houston and nineteen other black preachers and church officials met with General William T. Sherman, Freedmen's Bureau director General Otis Howard, and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to discuss something life-changing.

Three months before the official end of the war, Savannah's black religious leaders told Sherman's delegation what the freedpeople needed to fully realize the freedom guaranteed by the Emancipation Proclamation two years earlier. Speaking through spokesman Garrison Frazier, the men said: "The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor—that is, by the labor of the women and children and old men; and we can soon maintain ourselves and have something to spare."

Soon after that meeting, Sherman would sign Special Field Order No. 15, most commonly known as the federal government promise's of "forty acres and a mule"—a promise that went unfulfilled for the nation's freedpeople.

In a fit of determination, Houston took the order as a sign to claim the self-sufficiency for which he and other black Savannah residents had long hungered. Inspired, he led about 1,000 black Georgians to nearby Skidaway Island. It was a short-lived experiment. A year later, the land was seized as a new administration under President Andrew Johnson rescinded the order.

Born into slavery, Houston rose to become an influential politician and beloved community leader. A butcher and preacher, he led his people in times of strife and promise, leveraging his skills to gain freedom for himself and others. And his people did not forget him. More than thirty years later, 7,000-plus people flocked to pay their last respects at his 1889 funeral, considered the largest memorial in city history until that time.

His tie to the Montmollin Building—a building that to me appeared ordinary enough to overlook on a frigid winter morning—is a mighty connection.That building was both a reservoir for slavery's horrors and the key to financial freedom through butchery. Savannah, in many ways, is like this: layers of historical discoveries sandwiched between each other, thick with stories.

Nneka M. Okona is an Atlanta-based journalist whose work has appeared in Ebony, The Wall Street Journal, *and* Travel + Leisure.

Chef Cheetie Kumar at Garland, her restaurant in Raleigh, NC

Dhanraj Emanuel

HOW TO COOK AN INDIAN CHEF

Cheetie Kumar invented herself.

BY NABEN RUTHNUM

I WANT TO FIGURE OUT HOW Cheetie Kumar cooks carrots. After eating her dish twice—once at Blackberry Farm in east Tennessee, and once at Garland, her restaurant in Raleigh, North Carolina—I ask her straight up, at a strip-mall Szechuan restaurant mysteriously named Taipei101 in the Raleigh suburb of Cary.

"We get local carrots. They have to be local, and they have to be good, fresh carrots. That's the most important part of it, period. We sear them with a lot of coriander and cumin seed, and cook them in carrot juice and orange juice, with urfa pepper."

There's more to it than that, and she'll soon tell me. I'm asking her about these carrots because I believe that there's a parallel for Vladimir Nabokov's comment about writers' biographies in chef's profiles. "The best part of a writer's biography is not the record of his adventures but the story of his style," he said, in one of his extremely not-off-the-cuff interviews: Nabokov insisted on being given time to prep and write his answers, even in television interviews, where he'd read dense, careful replies from notecards. For chefs, even eloquent conversationalists like Cheetie Kumar, their story may be most reliably told on plates. This is perhaps particularly true for chefs of color, who are so often written about in terms that have more to do with types than specifics.

If Garland combines with Cheetie Kumar's name to put you in mind of a floral wreath being placed over a gently inclined brown neck, you have brought the wrong expectations to dinner.

Much of Kumar's food is Indian, sure—but the category of "Indian food" is already so vast it can only suggest the hundreds of regional cuisines of that country. And when she's building one of

her complex dishes, she's also borrowing French techniques and considering whether Szechuan peppercorns have a place in a largely North Indian array of spices. The answer to the latter question is "of course"—Garland's riffs on Sino-Indian cuisine and selective pan-Asian reach manifest in a tofu bowl adorned with rice-tapioca cracklin-peanut crunch, and those peppercorns exude their numbing glow in a dish of marinated local turnips. The menu's regionality is impossible to pinpoint, and speaking to Kumar, it's clear that the individualism of her recipes owes as much to research, tasting, and experimentation as it does to the food she grew up eating, and what she wants to eat right now. Garland's carrots tell part of that story.

"We cook the carrots until they're just tender, and then reduce the liquid down to a glaze. And then, to order, we do a little aromatic base of a lot of ginger, a shit-ton of ground coriander, and chilies. Bloom that, and then cook the carrots with the reduced glaze, a quick sautée. Then you can go anywhere with it."

We move on to talking about mustard, and Kumar mentions a technique she first gleaned from a Michael Ruhlman cookbook moments before telling me that the pickle I ate the night before was her mother's recipe—and we joke about how people are much more interested in a brown chef's familial legacy than any of the rest of her story.

The culture and cuisine of Garland are as Southern as they are subcontinental. Kumar works with the ingredients that are most closely accessible, in this city she's called home since college. And while Garland's name does have something to do with India and Kumar's past, it's an architectural echo: The circa-1960 Garland Jones office building was catty-corner to the site of Kumar's restaurant before it was razed in 2009, and it reminded her of the city where she spent her childhood. "It was very Chandigarh. All multi-colour panels, very modernist," she says. "After independence, Nehru wanted to build the 'City Modern.'" This was Chandigarh: Le Corbusier ultimately won the contract, and Kumar would be reminded of the architecture of her childhood city when she ended up in Raleigh.

When I first visited the restaurant on February 15, Garland didn't have that depleted, trembling atmosphere that often characterizes the aftermath of a Valentine's Day service. This place is used to being full, and it was when I walked in. It's a big space, one that Kumar struggled to fill in the early days. When the restaurant opened in 2013, many customers came in search of an Indian buffet, not a chef-driven menu of shareable small plates. Some took to Yelp to lament the lack of butter chicken. Influential local critic Greg Cox gave the restaurant an early boost with a four-star review in the Raleigh *News & Observer*, while influential local restauranteurs Matt Kelly and Ashley Christensen got it immediately, turning their own staff and regulars on to Kumar's food. The undeniable qualities of Kumar's cooking began to fill seats within a few months. The restaurant spans 3,000 square feet, one wall dominated by a monochrome tree silhouette while the back flowers with colorful, subcontinent-influenced pop art paintings by Scott Nurkin. A great central slab of table unsubtly suggests the community dining that Kumar favors.

Paul Siler, Kumar's husband and co-owner, was walking the floor, checking in with tables, then shaking my hand when he spotted me. We'd met a few months before, at that foodways event in Tennessee where I'd first eaten Cheetie's food. Siler, who looks like a handsome Lou Reed with better hair and a frustrating slenderness for such a champion

Braised lamb shank at Garland

Anna Routh

Garland mural by Scott Nurkin, a North Carolina–based artist and Kumar's bandmate in Birds of Avalon

Dhanraj Emanuel

eater and drinker, is a gifted host. But it's not just a gift. As Kumar and I moved between discussing her career to talking over the often-hacky, stereotype-rich method of telling the stories of South Asian chefs in the West, we admitted that the one about an inability to dissociate hard work from a sense of self-worth may be true. But Kumar was quick to draw Goldsboro, North Carolina, native Siler in: "His work ethic is just insane. He doesn't even see it as work."

Siler walked Kumar and me to a booth, where the customers seated around us noticed her rare appearance as a diner. Garland regulars are unabashed Kumar fans, and spoke up to let her know, especially when we surrendered our booth to a larger party and took places at the central table.

I ceded ordering to Kumar. The menu features some familiar touchstones—Siler and the front of house are always quick to point the skeptical parents of adventurous young diners toward the tandoori chicken. But dishes like a crispy halloumi with dinosaur kale, or the corn cake with greens that comes with a tandoor onion and fennel compote and yogurt paneer, telegraph that Kumar's domain is not a U.K.–style curryhouse, or a purveyor of regionally dedicated Indian cuisine.

Kumar's particularity gave early diners at Garland pause, and not just white Americans. "I don't think the average American guest finds too much to complain about except when they consider themselves really well travelled and experts on authenticity. But a lot of Indian people think of themselves as discerning experts on authenticity." There are as many different ideas of what "real" Indian food is as there are actually distinct varieties of regional Indian cuisine—and Garland's tables are best approached without preconceptions.

Kumar and I agree that when it comes to South Asian chefs and writers in the West, a discussion of origins and heritage takes precedence over an individual, personal story. It's what we talked about when we met in Tennessee, and I delivered a talk on the subject—while I mainly stayed in my lane of discussing what was lost when diasporic writers are perceptually trapped in a nostalgia narrative cluttered with stereotypes about the homeland, mothers, and authenticity, it had become clear to me that diasporic chefs had to combat many levels of origin-obsessed gentle prejudice before their food could be tasted as their own.

When the waiter, a fresh hire, made an error (telling us there's dill in a dish that actually features fennel fronds), Kumar was kind but quick (but *quick*) to point it out. Plates started to arrive, the Chicken 65 an early star. A boneless thigh dish with curry leaves, 65 originated in Chennai, about as far south in India as

There are as many different ideas of what "real" Indian food is as there are distinct varieties of regional Indian cuisine.

Kumar's Chandigarh roots are north. Its presence on the menu—and her pickled-chilies and turmeric yogurt sauce twist—indicate Kumar's approach to cooking: While paying respect to the origins of any dish, she aligns its flavors with the rest of her offerings. On a constantly shifting menu, Chicken 65 has had a place since Garland's initial incarnation as a walk-up window, during the five months while Kumar worked to remodel the interior of the restaurant.

"We opened the restaurant for—I mean, it's a lot of money, but $120,000. That's like 10 percent of what normal people open a restaurant for. Because it took us so long and we used materials that were already in the building."

I asked Kumar how she wants people to eat her food, if there's a correct way to go about Garland's menu.

"I want them to share. I really want to change the menu—I hate entrées, because people will say, 'I'll get this for an appetizer and I'll get this for an entree.' And that's just no fun. Putting Indian food in that sort of structure—really any food that's not French is not suitable for courses. Same with Southern food. Southern people don't have courses, traditionally, they have meat-and-three. They have a thali, really. It's the same thing. So how do you elevate that experience? We like to have a fuck-ton of food on the table, and we want to pick at a whole lot of things that sometimes elevate each other. I want that experience to be a part of the menu."

Raleigh, in the late 1990s and now, is a place where it felt like you could invent something.

Kumar's food speaks to a personal authenticity, shaped by experience, historical and cultural connections and research, by Raleigh's produce, by her book-learned techniques, and her own inventiveness. It's an approach that's becoming increasingly prevalent in the immigrant-rich South, as chef-driven restaurants from multiple diasporas trade nostalgia for personal stylistic innovation, without jettisoning a deep regard for the cultural history of food.

Much of what Kumar and I discussed when we met in Tennessee was how to defeat the typical diversity-culture-origin-story foisted on South Asian chefs, artists, and writers in the West—a story of nostalgia, of parents who don't understand, of looking back to the homeland. And the most difficult bit: what to do when some of those elements of the clichéd story were true. The architectural parallels between Raleigh and Chandigarh are the classic stuff of a South Asian truth-in-roots nostalgia narrative: Cheetie found a new home in this Southern city that reminds her of her Indian city. But it's also the stuff of unique coincidence, a story that, like these dishes, only belongs to Cheetie Kumar.

A COUPLE OF DAYS after our meal at Garland, Kumar picked me up and we tried to beat the clock for the 4 P.M. closure of a chaat-focused restaurant she'd been meaning to try. On the ride, we talked about identity: not hers, but that of her businesses. Garland was the last of the three-businesses-in-one-building that Siler and Kumar opened: It's the meat of the sandwich (or the potato patty in the phav bhaji, as I would put it if I were writing the kind of profile Kumar and I bond over reviling). Neptunes and Kings are the other two components of the compact enterprise, the bar below and music venue above the restaurant, both of which opened in the same location in 2010. Kings had previously existed in another location that was demolished, which was part of the drive for Siler and Kumar to set up their new businesses.

Kumar's childhood in Chandigarh was bookended by her birth in Pittsburgh and the family's move to the Bronx when she was eight, where her parents worked as

Kumar at work

Anna Routh

Anna Routh

biochemists. She went to college in Boston, and as a committed music fan who wanted to be in a scene but didn't want to move to LA, she dreaded the move back to New York. "I felt very hopeless in New York, thinking "How do you do this?" How do you live in America? It's very draining."

Raleigh, in the late 1990s and now, is a place where Kumar says it "felt like you could invent something." She fell in love with the city on a spring break trip from Boston, to this region that gave birth to the post-R.E.M. Southern music she loved, bands like The Connells and Flat Duo Jets. The brutal winter she faced during her senior year back at UMass and the prospect of low rent in Raleigh sealed it. At twenty-one, she moved south and stayed.

"There's something about the community here that really was palpable—I felt like Raleigh had a convergence of things. It was a capital, it had a college, it was small but had a little bit of a sprawl, it had these Asian communities and markets. The farmer's market was a big thing. The modernist architectural landscape that was like Chandigarh. And it was really affordable—I could take a breath and figure out what the fuck I was going to do with my life. I had never really done that in America—and Raleigh afforded me the time to realize I was never going to figure it out." This sense of acting on well-considered instinct, of thinking out the next steps in a place where it feels right, would carry Kumar through to the establishment of her businesses and into her role as a head chef.

We got to the Bombay Chat House just after 3:30. It's in Cary, a heavily South Asian suburb of Raleigh, the brown population growing alongside the tech sector. Cary developed as a bedroom community for the Research Triangle Park about ten miles northwest, and the growing East Asian and South Asian professional population in the 1990s led to a parallel development of immigrant-owned international markets and strip-mall restaurants.

Two kids, family of the owners or someone who works there, played in the booths next to ours as we sat down to golgappas, samosa chole chaat, and chai.

"The availability of food and ingredients is really helpful. Well, it's kind of crucial," Kumar told me. Garland doesn't have suppliers in the traditional sense—there are no trucks of produce and fish turning up on West Martin, parking in front of the tour vans for the bands who are hauling amps upstairs to Kings. Kumar and her kitchen staff make trips to individual purveyors like Patel Brothers and butchers who work directly with farms—there's no commodity meat, no fish from Hawaii or Japan, not even salmon at Garland.

Kumar met Siler soon after she arrived in Raleigh, and their relationship became part of why she stayed. But music was the core. "I was working for this management company, then realized I hated my boss, and I had enough friends in good bands. I started my own company, got these bands major label deals." Kumar was managing during a fertile time in the early 2000s music scene, working long hours to secure showcases that launched a couple of her acts. "Then I realized I didn't really want to be a manager. I'm not that personality, not a shyster-schmoozer-shaker kinda person."

There is one unique point of origin that plenty of writers seize on about Kumar. She's frequently referred to as a "rock star chef" due to what she did after ditching management: She became a lead guitarist in touring bands, a couple of which—The Cherry Valence and the still-going Birds of Avalon—used to spend upwards of six months a year on the road. Avalon's drummer, Scott Nurkin, painted that Bollywood pop art on Garland's back wall. But this piece of information is more often treated as a quirky byroad than as an essential piece of what makes Garland work.

"That whole career thing fell apart—the bands didn't want to tour as much as the label wanted them to tour, they got dropped, their million dollar deals just went poof. When I met Paul, we started playing music, and that was it. I bought a van and (we) went on tour. So that was the next twelve years."

You don't learn to be a rock star when you're touring in a van, sleeping on floors, and thriving on the music and shows alone. You learn endurance, commitment, and how to manage your drinking so your career doesn't derail, all skills that are essential in running a kitchen and a business. And in Kumar's case, she also learned how to make dinner with a hot plate, a Subway salad, the traveling spice rack that was in the back with the instruments, and a can of lentils or chickpeas.

> No cooking school, no apprenticeship, no chef mentor shaped Kumar's menu. She did it herself.

While back in Raleigh, Kumar cleared road debt by bartending and making occasional specials at Rockford, a sandwich-and-booze bar. After 2010, realizing that succeeding in the music landscape had more to do with *Pitchfork* reviews and online career management than paying road dues, Kumar and Siler got serious about opening their businesses together.

In the early days of Neptunes and Kings in its new location, the work ethic that Kumar and Siler brought from the road was essential. "I was managing both those places on the bar side, hiring and

training and developing all of the menus. We were hyper-seasonal at Neptunes—we would do like six cocktail menus a year. I was getting my bearings there, running a business. I was there full time. The other three guys, including Paul, had other jobs."

Kumar is a chef who created herself. Her inventiveness, her sophisticated experiments in integrating techniques learned from books with ingredients from regional North Indian cuisines—is the self-taught brilliance of a home cook whose first real kitchen was the one that she ran.

I looked for a tactful way of asking how on Earth she thought she would be able to make the next step from managing a bar and music venue toward her ultimate goal—running the kitchen in a fine dining restaurant. Her own restaurant.

"I didn't really think that I had a choice. I decided that I would out-work everybody. I would just be there, and I would show them that I'm not asking them to do something that I'm not willing to do. And that they can't tell me that it's too hard, that I'm being unrealistic."

"It probably didn't help our case that we were a walk-up window. Me, two cooks and a dishwasher. To go from that to fine dining was...stupid." It may have been an improbable move, but the point, for her, was always the restaurant. So it had to be done. The food window that was Garland's first incarnation served her Chicken 65 along with a "pork rice bowl, couple of chaat things, pakora. The pakora was initially more like a bonda, a ground thing, and we were doing 'frankies'—little roti rolls."

"It's still an issue—*what's the voice?* What kind of restaurant is it going to be? What's going to work? I don't know how to plate. I'm not sure if I know how to break down fish. The worries were tiny and huge, but all-encompassing."

Kumar and Siler also faced resistance from their original two partners, who made it clear that they had limited confidence in her ability to launch and run the food concept, and were leaning toward leasing out the restaurant space between Kings and Neptunes Parlour. Kumar shared some of their doubts.

"I really didn't think I knew how to do it, which is why we started out as just a window. I figured I could cook, and I knew I could work. But I didn't know how to manage front-of-house. Or thinking about wine lists, all of that. I was trying to buy some time."

Beyond the reliable support of Paul Siler as a partner in all senses, community became a defining force for Garland, and for Kumar. "I didn't really know what kind of place we were. I didn't know where we belonged, I didn't know who my peers were. I didn't know what support system I had, I didn't know if I was going to be able to do this without wearing a chef's coat."

Her peers found her: namely, Ashley Christensen, owner of Poole's Diner and a small empire of restaurants across Raleigh; and Durham chef Matt Kelly. "Great businessman, awesome chef, very intimidating," is how Kumar describes Kelly, "But also, just a very sweet bro. And he had their [staff] Christmas party at Garland in February 2014. We had opened in December. Lot of pressure, but man, what a sweet thing to do. A really big chance for us."

Ashley Christensen's presence was even more significant. "I needed a friend who was wise and knew the business," Kumar says. "And Ashley would stop by and, you know, I would cry until two in the morning. Drinking rye whiskey with her, saying, 'How do I do this?'"

"It was difficult for Raleigh to catch on, and I had so much of a crisis about how to present it, and what to call it, having the confidence to just say, 'this is what I do.' The people who got it were the ones who cooked for a living or ate out a lot."

Anna Routh

Building these businesses and the ever-evolving menu are the work that makes sense of Kumar's place in life. Finding the identity of Garland had less to do with reaching into her culinary and family past than it did with becoming a person who could do what she wanted to, in a place that she had built, in the city she loved. And identity—personal identity, a restaurant's identity—doesn't have a finishing point: It is a process, much like Cheetie Kumar's cooking.

As we start talking food specifics again, Kumar points out something I hadn't quite noticed—the carrot dish she cooked for the dinner in Tennessee was different from the one I ate in Garland.

"Now, we're doing pistachios and toasted coconut and poha and this buttermilk that's local. I just love it, and it somehow works really well with coconut milk. It's funky enough to hang on. It's a simple broth. I'm in love with poha right now. Flattened rice. That nutty texture. Sometimes we'll put toasted coconut with poha and julienned curry leaves, and it's a great crunchy textural flavourful topping. Carrots are in season twice a year, so we're always doing something with that basic recipe."

I return to Garland the day after our meal in the suburbs. Kumar's in the kitchen, and too busy to say much more than a quick hello. When the server comes, I panic and order as I have for years: small plate, then entrée. Those carrots, and the tandoori. A moment later, I feel as though I've slightly let Kumar—and Garland—down, but I know the food won't let me down.

Naben Ruthnum is the Toronto-based author of Curry: Eating, Reading, and Race. *He has also written two thrillers as Nathan Ripley.*

MUDBUGS, MINUS THE MUD

At Hawk's, the secret to great crawfish is in the cleaning.

AS TOLD TO RIEN FERTEL BY ANTHONY ARCENEAUX

Photos by Denny Culbert; Illustrations by Brandon Donnell

ANTHONY ARCENEAUX, BORN IN 1962, HAILS FROM RAYNE, LOUISIANA, *an agricultural community twenty miles west of Lafayette. As a teenager, he began farming rice and crawfish with his father, Luther Henry "Hawk" Arceneaux. Hawk's crawfish restaurant opened in 1982, the same year Anthony's daughter, Meg, was born. Today, Anthony continues to run Hawk's, which is open only during crawfish season—usually February through May. In 2015, Meg started Hawk's Boil Up, a mobile operation that takes her family's crawfish on the road for weddings, festivals, and backyard boils. Hawk's crawfish are big. And clean. It's the sorting and purging that sets them apart, explains Anthony. The steps he and his employees take before the crawfish even reach the kitchen are what keep loyal customers coming back for three-pound servings, year after year.*

Farming started getting bad in the late seventies. The rice industry took a turn for the worse price-wise, so they had to look for something else to make ends meet. That's how crawfish came into the picture.

My dad, when we were little kids, we always had crawfish ponds. We weren't selling much crawfish, but we always had a pond or two for family use. When we'd get off the bus when we'd get home from school, my dad would be boiling crawfish that he went and caught that day for us to eat in the backyard. He was real particular about cleaning crawfish. Rinse and rinse and rinse and rinse. We'd have got off the bus, we was starving to death, and it'd take him so long because he made sure that there was no little grass or dirt or anything in the crawfish.

My first crawfish sale myself was when I was in the second grade. I caught my schoolteacher two sacks of crawfish, and I sold them for $8, and that $8 lasted me just about all summer. I was the richest kid in the neighborhood. But that proved to me that you could make a few dollars with this. So all through high school, every now and then somebody would want a sack of crawfish, I'd catch them. And that's how I kind of learned the business side of it.

I was emancipated so that I could borrow money from Farmers Home Administration back in 1978. At fifteen years old, I borrowed a *whole* lot of money to jump in the crawfish business.

Now, what you have to understand is back then in the seventies, there was hardly any markets for that. Not that many people ate crawfish, just local people. So the first couple of years,

between the two of us, we had probably about 700 acres of crawfish. We couldn't even get rid of all of them. I sold crawfish by the truckloads, I can remember, for fifteen cents a pound.

After about three or four years of this, my dad—he had a building over here—he decided, "Let's try to open up some type of little café or something so we can move our own crawfish, at least some of the better ones." We only had nine tables.

About that time when we started renovating the little building, somebody had told him that Texas A&M University had devised a system that would clean crawfish. So we called one day and we spoke to the professor that was kind of in charge of that division, and he told us, "Y'all come Saturday, and I'll show you. I'll give you a tour of what we doing."

So we went out to Texas A&M, and when we got there, their system that they clean crawfish was very small. It was only like maybe 4 foot wide by 8 feet long. And we seen everything they were doing to it. So we came back and built a facility over here much, much bigger. My dad was always on the cutting edge. He always would take chances. If he thought something would benefit or work out different or a better product, he didn't mind spending money and jumping in headfirst to see if it would work or not. The first facility we had was probably 60 feet wide by, oh, probably 80 feet long. We could purge thousands of pounds of crawfish.

Everything is handpicked. Everything is hand-graded. We don't have a mechanical grader. We have people that do this all day long. [The crawfish] has to be in the perfect physical shape to have a chance of surviving through this process. So these people that grade with a mechanical grader...it beats them up, and when they get here, they're already in poor shape to start off with. That's why I try to buy good crawfish directly from the farmer, directly from the field.

When you purge crawfish, it's hard on the crawfish. You have to pump a lot of oxygen in the water. Basically, you're starving them. You're not giving them anything to eat until they digest everything. It takes a crawfish a certain amount of time to digest. It's just like humans.

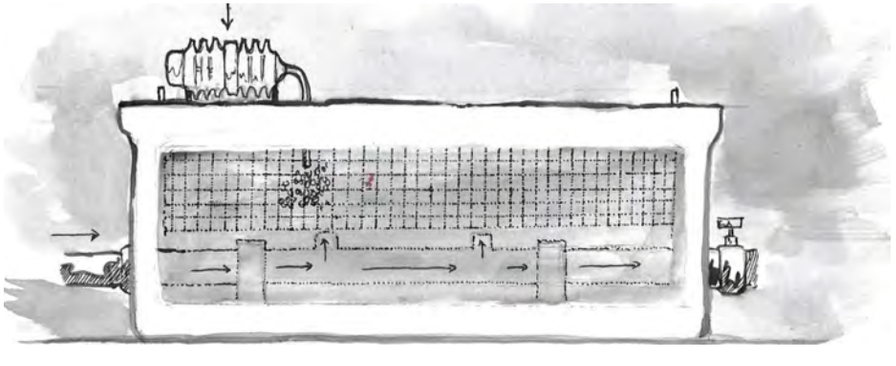
You hear people saying, "Well, I clean mine. I purge mine right before I cook them. I put salt in there." Crawfish is a freshwater crustacean. If you put salt in the water, you're killing them right before you're cooking them. He's going to spit up what he has in his mouth, and that's not the part that you're eating. You're eating the part that's on the south end, way in the back. And it has to go through a process, a digestive process, to get clean. So you're cleaning everything. You're cleaning the gills out. People suck heads. That's full of mud. The vein in the tail is the last part. What we do is we start from the tip, and when it's finished going out the back end, that's when we ready to cook them. Sometime it takes twenty-four hours when the crawfish are young, tender, but in the latter part of the season, forty-eight hours it takes to do a complete purge.

I've had times when your oxygen gets low, I've lost half of them, 50 percent. On average, you can figure about 18 percent you're going to lose, that won't make the purging system. It's hard on them. That water is so turbulent that it looks like they're boiling in the water, but it's cold water.

So after twenty-four to forty-eight hours, they're clean. They don't have nothing left in them. The key to it is to get them out before they start eating each other, because they are cannibals. You want to make sure that they're totally clean but yet not eating one another, because once they start eating one another, then the process has to start all over again.

The very first time we did some, we took them out and we boiled them, and it was amazing. We couldn't believe the taste was so much different. Most people that don't purge, they add a lot, a lot of seasoning and spices, and all that does is to kind of camouflage the taste of those unpurged crawfish. Crawfish actually taste good if you can get them good and clean.

Hawk's purging system yields cleaner, better-tasting crawfish, says Anthony Arceneaux.



A rice and crawfish field on the road to Hawk's, Acadia Parish, LA

Visit southernfoodways.org for more Sustainable South Louisiana oral histories, part of the Cajun Country Virtual Summer Field Trip, underwritten by McIlhenny Company, maker of TABASCO Brand pepper sauces.

Curbside Humor

NEAL'S DELI IN CARRBORO, NORTH CAROLINA, HAS BEEN A BREAKFAST and lunch mainstay for more than a decade. Locals from Carrboro and the UNC-Chapel Hill community pack the tiny shotgun space for pastrami biscuits in the morning and completo hot dogs come noon. When this issue of *Gravy* went to print, Neal's was open for curbside pickup only. But its business—and its spirit—was going strong. As a season of lockdown wore on, and homebound folks (read: all of us) got a little punchy, Neal's customers annotated their curbside orders with jokes, amateur poetry, and notes of encouragement. Owners Sheila and Matt Neal shared some of their favorite tickets with *Gravy*. Be well, friends. And keep your sense of humor.

SFA GRAVY

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The SFA documents, studies, and explores the diverse food cultures of the changing American South. Our work sets a welcome table where all may consider our history and our future in a spirit of respect and reconciliation.

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