



Lucky Ryan, a Vietnamese restaurant in Buras, Louisiana

GO AHEAD, SURPRISE ME

WORDS BROUGHT ME TO food, not the other way around. I'm a reader before I'm an eater. (And I'm *definitely* a reader before I'm a cook. Ask my husband.) So I take extra pleasure in this year's SFA programming theme, Food and Literature.

I care how food tastes. But when I'm reading, that's not usually what I'm reading for. Delicious means something different to everyone, and so it effectively means nothing. Your savory, your delectable, even your crispy—they might be different from mine. So I'd rather a writer take me to a place I haven't been, or help me see a familiar place in a new light. Or introduce me to a person whose story will surprise, or delight, or inspire me. When I get the chance to offer advice to writers of food or drink,

I always urge them to put people and places ahead of flavors.

Of course, there are readers and editors whose tastes run counter to mine. And there are writers, from critics to poets to novelists, who deliver those gustatory descriptions with precision and beauty. They're not the primary focus of these pages. And that's intentional.

The features in this issue conjure South Louisiana, past, present, and future. They remind us that the region is constantly evolving and adapting—demographically and even topographically. The ground shifts beneath the feet of those who make it their home. This shifting is sometimes tragic, sometimes triumphant, and it all but ensures that rich and complex stories will never stop tumbling to the surface. —Sara Camp Milam

Claire Bangser



FEATURED CONTRIBUTOR
**MAURICE
CARLOS RUFFIN**

EAST NEW ORLEANS NATIVE
Maurice Carlos Ruffin is a graduate of the University of New Orleans MFA program in creative writing. Ruffin is a nonfiction columnist at the *Virginia Quarterly Review* and a contributing editor to *Know Louisiana* magazine. His writing has also appeared in the *LA Times*, *The Bitter Southerner*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Massachusetts Review*. One World Random House will publish Ruffin's first novel, *We Cast a Shadow*, in January 2019.

What's a dish, from a particular restaurant or kitchen, that you can't get anymore in New Orleans?
I'm going across the city in my head thinking about places I used to go all the time. Barrow's catfish was really one of a kind, the best

of its kind. Some churches would regularly serve 'dinner plates,' a plate piled high with fried fish, peas, mac and cheese, cornbread, for five or seven bucks. Since Katrina, most of those church congregations have gotten smaller, and others have disappeared altogether.

What would you say to someone who is not from New Orleans and thinking about moving to the city?
New Orleans is as welcoming as it is complex. It's such a unique place, and it can give you so much. Be prepared to give back. Have a plan for how you can contribute to the community and to disadvantaged people. One of the worst things I see is when people come down here and don't know that we say hello when we pass

someone on the street. It's important, so be aware of the little things like that. Listen more than you talk. And if you want a good meal, make a good friend. Hang around their cousin's house or aunt's house. That'll be where you can get a good meal.

Was there a specific event or news item that motivated you to write about gentrification in New Orleans?
It wasn't one moment, but I've been noticing how rapidly the change is happening. I thought I'd see a new restaurant once a month. It's more like once a *week*. Every week, one place is opening and another is closing. They open with a big fanfare and close with a whimper. I hardly have time in my schedule to go to some places before they close.

FROM BLACK HANDS TO WHITE MOUTHS: CHARLESTON'S ENSLAVED COOKS

Kevin Mitchell, a chef and culinary instructor from Charleston, South Carolina, earned his MA in Southern Studies from the University of Mississippi this spring. SFA foodways professor Catarina Passidomo advised Mitchell's thesis, "From Black Hands to White Mouths." Here, a peek into his research.

CATARINA PASSIDOMO: You trace the lineage of black chefs and caterers in Charleston back to the early nineteenth century. Discuss the importance of

professional cooking for enslaved and free people of color during the antebellum period in Charleston.

KEVIN MITCHELL: A lot of

professions were closed off to blacks. And the professions that were seen as more feminine—cooking and cleaning and sewing—were the things that were left open to blacks. That particular lineage is important to me because it allows me to see where I came from.

CP: You highlight the ways in which some black cooks used cooking as an avenue to their freedom. But there are complexities, too. Can you talk about Sally Seymour, a free woman of color who ran a catering business and owned slaves?

KM: I discovered that because of the labor market in Charleston at that particular time, those were the only people available to her. Someone like Sally Seymour who would become free and open up her own restaurant or pastry shop, of course, needed laborers. She needed people to help her run that shop. And so someone like her was able to, in a sense, reap those economic benefits to having slave labor. Hopefully, some of those slaves would have been able to purchase

their freedom and go on to open shops of their own.

CP: Another interesting component of your work is the use of sales ads for enslaved cooks. Can you tell me about these ads, how you found them, and what you learned?

KM: The ads were given to me by David Shields [of the University of South Carolina]. These ads are interesting because not only are they looking for specific levels of skilled cooks, these skilled cooks were of course enslaved. Just the fact of an ad being published in a newspaper for the sale of a human body... I was able to go through the ads and see those levels of cooks and understand the amount of skill that each one of them had. There was a French cook, a complete cook, and a pastry cook. So I was trying to decipher which were the most valuable to their slaveholders and why. Those three types of cooks were highly sought after by the slaveholders. Being able to have these particular cooks gave the slaveholder a certain status, especially when they entertained guests.

Through my research, it seems like the pastry cook was the most valued and the most skilled, because they not only dealt with the sweet things, but they had to know the savory side as well. They also seemed to be the ones who trained other cooks behind them.

LEFT: Courtesy of Kevin Mitchell; RIGHT: Marra Locklear/Stocksy



BUD BREAK IN VIRGINIA

KIRSTY HARMON, THE WINEMAKER FOR Blenheim Vineyards who studied microbiology in college, pours rkatsiteli, her pineapple-scented white wine made with grapes first grown in the Republic of Georgia, and talks about how a side gig as a calligrapher led to her vocation. Over lunch at Gabriele Rausse Winery, on a creek bank outside Charlottesville, Virginia, Ian Boden, chef and owner of the Shack in nearby Staunton, plates a riff on the Lao dish known as larb. It's made with Hickory King grits, Allan Benton's bacon from Tennessee, and dried shrimp from Louisiana. A rhubarb sorbet and a Stinson Vineyards late harvest petit manseng, flush with tangerine and honey, follow cold fried chicken and a killed lettuce salad tossed with fiddleheads. "French winemakers now come here from Burgundy," says Peter Rausse, son of pioneering Virginia winemaker Gabriele Rausse. "In Burgundy they make Burgundy. Here, we can make anything and everything." —JTE



SMOKE AND MIRRORS

BARBECUE NATION, CURATED BY the Atlanta History Center, charts a cultural timeline of this fabled American craft. Twenty years in the making, the inclusive and expansive exhibit opened this May and closes next June. Here are highlights:

The material culture game is strong

Ogle a chopping block, worn concave from cleaver work, loaned from Skylight Inn of Ayden, North Carolina; a burn barrel, rusted to a beautiful auburn, signed by Rodney Scott of Charleston, South Carolina; and a fleet of portable patio smokers, including an aluminum Char-Broil model from 1948 that resembles a wheeled trash can and features a chopping block rear spoiler.

Honest barbecue has long been imperiled

The wrapper on a bottle of Wright's

Condensed Smoke, made in Kansas City around 1900, promised: "This bottle will smoke a barrel of meat, cheaper, safer, and quicker than the old way."

Women get the last laugh

Printed in block letters across one wall is a bold declaration: OUTDOOR COOKING IS MAN'S WORK. The curators —Jonathan Scott, Jim Auchmutey, and Craig Pascoe— have subversively positioned that quote, from a 1941 James Beard book, above a majestic image of a woman pitmaster, her arms raised high at a 1970s Harlem community barbecue.

As a bonus, the Atlanta History Center has tapped a variety of SFA work for the exhibit, including a documentary film on Helen's Bar-B-Que in Brownsville, TN. To watch Helen Turner work, step to one of the woodsmoke-perfumed viewing theaters, set in a makeshift pit bank (or visit southernfoodways.org). —JTE

Jason Hailes/Atlanta History Center



SFA EVENTS

For details and ticket information, visit southernfoodways.org

JUL 12

Julian Rankin reads and signs
Catfish Dreams at Square Books
OXFORD, MS

AUG 12

2018 Egerton
Award Ceremony
NASHVILLE, TN

AUG 13

Brown in the South Dinner
Volume 2
NASHVILLE, TN

AUG 16

Barbecue Digest
Volume 2
MEMPHIS, TN

SEP 10-11

Southern Foodways
Graduate Symposium
OXFORD, MS

OCT 11-13

2018 Southern Foodways
Fall Symposium
OXFORD, MS

In 2018, the SFA explores literature and food, twinned cultural expressions.

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