SFA GRAVY

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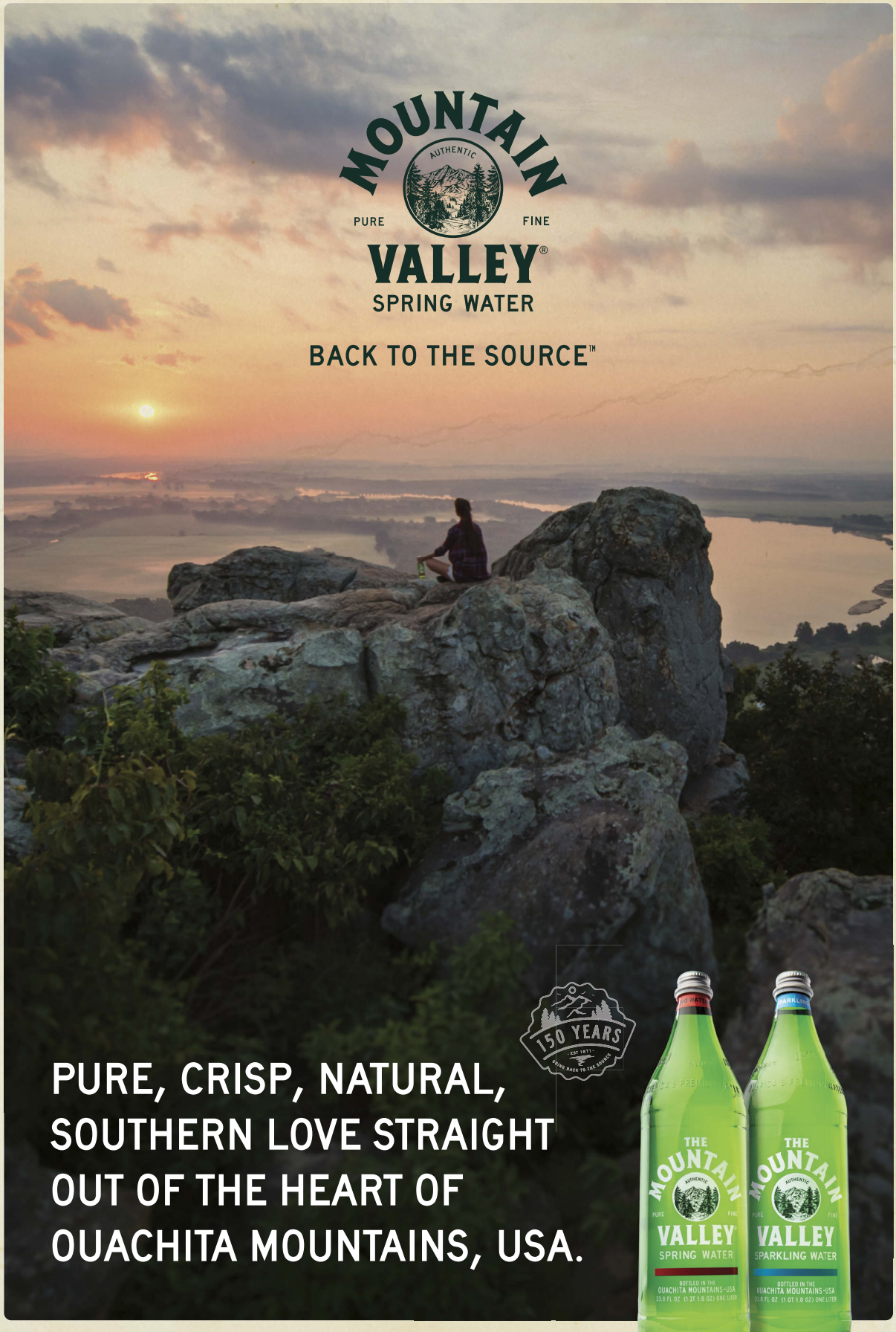
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Gravy is a publication of the Southern Foodways Alliance, whose mission is to document, study, and explore the diverse food cultures of the changing American South.

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WHIPSAWED

Notes from a season where grief meets joy

BY SARA CAMP MILAM

THIS IS THE TIME OF YEAR WHEN THE days are short and the to-do lists are long, and it's hard to even figure out *what* matters, let alone focus on it.

This time last year, I was crying in the shower from the overwhelming stress of the season. I've yet to shower-cry this December, although it might be good for me.

I lost my mother nine weeks ago. She was sixty-seven years old. I am more than half that age myself.

When I reflect on the many friends and neighbors who made touching expressions of sympathy to me, my husband, and our children after my mother's death, I feel profoundly grateful yet profoundly sad. Most of them did not know my mother well; many had never met her. To be fair, she lived nearly 700 miles away. Some of the most heartfelt sentiments have come from people who are not even close friends, but who lost a loved one unexpectedly or recently or too soon. They might not know me well, but they guessed what I needed, and they cared enough to offer it.

I'm fairly sure I'm grieving, and since I suspect there's a wide spectrum of what's appropriate when it comes to grief, I think I can give myself credit for doing so appropriately. But it doesn't feel like I thought it would—or like much of any-

Kateja/Adobe Stock

thing profound or even cohesive. The irritable, listless fog of a moderate depressive episode is a familiar, if unwelcome, companion. Thankfully, I know it will lift, though I can't control when. So far, that's what this is. Maybe there's more to come.

Today, what I needed was a lunch to take to the office, and my husband obliged by packing me a ham sandwich on his homemade sourdough bread. I've never loved anyone more. In the next week, I'll attend a cocktail party, a dinner party, and a birthday party, because accepting invitations, putting on makeup, and leaving the house seem like things I should do, lest I become a sad hermit. Plus, my mom always told me: If you don't go, you won't get invited next time.

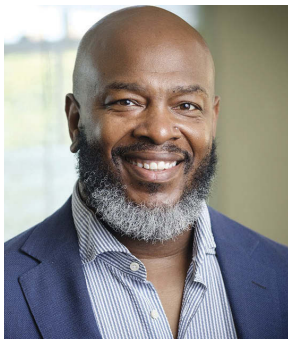
I'll send in paper products for one child's class holiday party and hope I haven't missed the sign-up for the other one, because I can't remember seeing it. I'll skip a first-grade ornament exchange and a preschool birthday party because I can't say yes to everything, and besides I have a magazine to ship out and Christmas shopping to finish and cards to mail and sympathy thank-yous to write. I'll take my children to the Christmas pageant rehearsal at our church, where I'll find out if they really do want to be an angel and a cow, respectively—or if, for the third year in a row, they'll decide at the Saturday morning rehearsal to bow out of the Sunday evening pageant. Performance aside, attending rehearsal will have been worth it because I'll see at least two dozen fellow parents in sweatpants with sleepy eyes and coffee cups, and I'll take comfort in remembering that it's not just me.

I'll wonder who those mythical people are who navigate the holiday season with inner peace and a full heart. Who find moments for grateful reflection. Please—tell me where to look, and when. Actually, to be a little kinder to myself, I do have flashes of gratitude, but they tend to hit me when my attention is supposed to be focused elsewhere: in the carpool line, or while I'm trying to concentrate on an edit, or even when I'd rather be falling asleep at night. Oh, and I've got a unicorn birthday party to host.

The holiday season will have passed by the time you open this issue of *Gravy*, and I imagine that some of my stress will have abated. If December was hard for you, too, I hope January is better. And I hope that the stories in these pages offer pleasure, inspiration, or just a chance to slow down.

My children know that my mother died, of course—I told them within minutes of finding out myself that Saturday morning in October. But I don't think they know how constantly her death is with me, in my thoughts and feelings, in my ebbing energy and fuzzy focus and and thin reserve of patience. They want to make Christmas cookies and hot chocolate and decorate the house. They want Santa Claus to bring them princess costumes and lawn tools. They want to watch *Home Alone*, but only the pranks, so I have to be nimble with the fast-forward. Their joy is exhausting and beautiful, and my god I wish she was here to see it.

FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS



DEREK S. HICKS is associate professor of religion and culture at Wake Forest University. His research and teaching areas include African American religion, religion in North America, race, the body, religion and foodways, and Black and Womanist theologies.

ANGIE MAXWELL holds the Diane Blair Endowed Chair in Southern Studies and is a professor of political science at the University of Arkansas, where she also serves as the Director of the Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society.

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SHEEKA SANAHORI is a journalist and video producer who covers the intersections of travel with culture, history, and the outdoors. In 2022, she created *Inherited Travel*, a newsletter for travelers who want to make socially conscious decisions that benefit local communities.

RICHIE SWANN has been designing the pages of *Gravy* since 2015. He lives in Charleston, not far from where he grew up in the South Carolina Lowcountry. He and his wife, Christy Irvin, also lead food-focused tours on the Istrian peninsula of Croatia through their company Istrian-Italian Travel.

JACQUELINE ALLEN TRIMBLE lives and writes in Montgomery, where she also chairs the Department of Languages and Literatures at Alabama State University. She has earned poetry fellowships from the National Endownment for the Arts and Cave Canem.

Photos courtesy of the contributor except Richie Swann (Will Crooks)

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ORIGINALLY FROM SALT LAKE CITY, BRITT FOX WORKED IN NONPROFITS AFTER COLLEGE and had every intention of staying in that field when they moved to Washington, DC. Instead, they were sucked into the hospitality scene. "I met a handful of really instrumental and wonderful mentors, and I haven't looked back," they say. Bartending and waiting tables—previously side gigs—became a central focus after Fox helped open Primrose, a French-inspired wine bar where they met their wife (and later held their wedding reception). More projects followed, with recognition from *Punch* and Tales of the Cocktail. In 2022, Fox landed at Cotton & Reed, a rum distillery and cocktail bar in their own neighborhood.

Cotton & Reed

This is the dream gig. It's a neighborhood spot, casual, high-volume, and the cocktails are really excellent. My favorite part of my job is to help folks turn from rum being a thing they had a bad experience with in college to "I haven't given rum a chance in a while." I also use a ton of agave spirits, exploring my diasporic connection to Mexican cultures.

La Tejana

Wonderful breakfast tacos in Mount Pleasant, just named to the Bib Gourmand List in DC. You will have to stand in a line, and it's worth it—easily the best tortilla in DC. I say that as a person who is fond of eating tortillas I make at home. They also have maybe the best café de olla I have had outside of Mexico.

National Arboretum

DC is such a *city*. There are free museums everywhere, and restaurants and bars abound. I like to grab breakfast and head to some nature. Here you'll find a massive azalea collection—beautiful in spring—a bonsai museum, walking trails, rose gardens, and all kinds of native plant features. We take the dogs and bring a picnic.

Anju

It's Korean food with a modern flair. There's just not a bad bite of food. The opening chef Danny Lee took inspiration from his relationship with his mother and their Korean home cooking. You feel like you're eating something that somebody's mom cooked, but dressed up and in a beautiful venue with lovely music and all the trappings of a nice night out.

Illustrations by Bridgette Blanton / Tiny Pencil Studio

Most Visited Places is an ongoing digital and print series underwritten by The Mountain Valley Spring Water.

South Carolina football fans cheer on the Gamecocks at Mason Jar in New York City, October 2023.

OFFSIDES FOWL

USC fans roost at NYC bar.

BY HANNA RASKIN

Photos by José A. Alvarado Jr.

TWO MEN WALKED INTO A BAR IN MIDTOWN Manhattan, and this was most certainly not a joke. The University of South Carolina had a 3:30 P.M. date with the University of Georgia, college football's defending national champion, and odds-makers said the Gamecocks were supposed to lose by twenty-seven points.

In the fall of 2022, Daniel Watts and Ethan Lustig were on campus for the perennially lopsided matchup, tailgating with their fraternity. But since they'd graduated and moved to New York City for jobs—Lustig's in real estate; Watts' on the PGA of America's sales team—they decided to watch the 2023 game at Mason Jar on E. 30th St., arriving almost ninety minutes before kickoff for bar seats.

Lustig ordered a screwdriver to harmonize with his "morning mentality," and as the bartender mixed it, he explained their stools would soon be whisked away to accommodate the crush of Gamecock fans.

"You haven't been here for a game?" he asked the pair, understandably correlating their subtly striped USC polo shirts with regular attendance at the second-most important venue in the Gamecock universe, after Williams-Brice Stadium. "It's a...."

Only one-third of that assessment is printable. But it's 100 percent accurate.

Watts grinned.

"Good!" he said. "Like Columbia! Everybody's happy!"

To put it more precisely, everybody is in the giddy, stand-close, shout-loud, USC-can't-lose mood brought on by screwdrivers, pitchers of Miller Lite, and rounds of High Noon hard seltzer. In Columbia, gameday starts on Friday afternoon and winds down just before dusk on Sunday, an epic bacchanal compressed into a maniacal viewing party at Mason Jar. Since USC football fans began congregating at Mason Jar in 2010, the gathering has become so popular that owner Brendan Gardner, mindful of the fire marshal, declined to say how many people he serves in his bi-level bar and restaurant on football Saturdays.

"Two-fifty," he told me when I asked for an estimate. "That's not true."

On the paper of its printed menu, Mason Jar is what Gardner calls "Carolina-forward," with pork in the eggrolls and bourbon-infued syrup on the chicken and waffles. But most Gamecock fans order wings and soft German pretzels: Mason Jar's indisputable Southern status comes from drink, not food. Summoning a far-off region in a restaurant setting is a tricky proposition, complicated by ingredient availability and line cooks' training. A bar, though, is a blank canvas for the people who populate it, as Mason Jar and its big brand–swilling patrons demonstrate.

The swirl of tristate density and SEC exuberance on display at 43 E. 30th St. represents the Columbia experience so realistically that Gardner's business partner, Ed Martinson, suspects their bar has become a USC recruiting tool. According to the school's admissions data, 13 percent of its first-year class hails from New York or New Jersey.

"I see all these USC flags in Queens, and I think we had a little bit to do with it," Martinson said.

BRENT BOUKNIGHT, a Columbia native, refused to fly to New York for a conference this weekend without first locating a USC bar there. For him, it's hard to imagine arbitrarily taking on a team late in life. Team loyalties in SEC states run deeper than religious affiliations and political party preferences: Because USC didn't have a certain engineering program when he finished high school, Bouknight enrolled at Georgia Tech rather than give his money to Clemson.

But in the New York metro area, there isn't much room for football fields, let alone a storied program. Martinson went to Manhattan College in the Bronx and casually rooted for Villanova's basketball team, so he was surprised when a couple of USC alums approached him about Mason Jar serving as their home base. He initially nixed their idea of hanging Gamecock banners over the bar, but he shrugged and said they were welcome to watch the games at his new restaurant, which hardly did any business on Saturday afternoons.

"We didn't know what to expect," Gardner said, remembering how they'd hoped the deal could yield fifty customers. "They packed the place."

Soon thereafter, the banners went up. At the suggestion of the New York City Gamecocks club president, Gardner loaded "The Fighting Gamecocks Lead the Way" into the house sound system and ordered cases of Firefly sweet tea vodka—then a two-year-old South Carolina novelty. By season's end, the vibe was fixed.

As a club member in 2012 told a writer from *Free Times*, Columbia's alt-weekly, "People are from South Carolina and you can see it in their

mannerisms, the way they dress from the Gap. It's great."

Through reported stories like that one, headlined "New York Bar Makes Gamecock Fans Welcome," and tailgate chatter sparked by souvenir t-shirts, Mason Jar seeped into Gamecock lore. While Martinson can't prove it, he says he's confident that "if you're a USC fan and you come to New York, you come to Mason Jar," even if it's the middle of July.

When those fans show up, bartenders pull down Gamecock game helmets from ledges of honor above the bar and help stage selfies. USC alumni can be sure their social media followers will know what Mason Jar stands for.

And it's not just South Carolinians, current and former, making the pilgrimage to New York City. Every year, in recognition of their service, USC's Gamecock Club hosts Martinson and Gardner at a game in Columbia. "They roll out the red carpet," Gardner said.

JAKE KENNEDY LEARNED about Mason Jar from his buddy's beer koozie.

The two-time USC alumnus, who received his BA in 2001 and JD in 2004, Kennedy made a mental note to check out the bar for an away game. When USC plays at home, the Pawleys Island, South Carolina, resident is in the stands.

Kennedy wasn't the only season ticket holder at Mason Jar for the showdown against Georgia. With discount carriers offering ridiculously cheap airfares from South Carolina (I paid $46 for my Charleston–Newark roundtrip ticket), the bar is becoming a top game day choice for faithful Gamecocks who won't venture into enemy territory. "Oh no, I don't go to Athens," Kennedy scoffed when I suggested it.

Bouknight could have driven his RV, tricked out for tailgating, to the University of Georgia. But a small encampment of visitors wouldn't have the all-USC atmosphere of Mason Jar, which functions like a Columbia, South Carolina, embassy a few blocks from Koreatown.

Nowadays, Mason Jar doesn't just cue up a fight song before the game starts. A DJ stationed on the balcony stirs the crowd with songs that get faster and louder as kickoff approaches. The main bar area was already thronged with young women in crop tops and young men in Gamecock jerseys when "Let's Get It Started" blared. By the time the song segued to "Welcome to the Jungle," empty beer buckets were clanging on coat hooks.

"There's nothing like South Carolina football," said Eileen Dzugay of Saddlebrook, New Jersey, who'd never heard of it before her daughter Daphne became a Gamecock. "Nothing compares. It's off the charts."

Dzugay was at Mason Jar with her husband and another New Jersey couple with a kid at USC. Although none of the four could pinpoint the mystique that brought them to the bar, their attempts to describe it landed in the vicinity of "boozy jollity."

Of course, the South's relationship with alcohol isn't as simple as caricatures of bootleggers would suggest, but its drinking culture is strikingly distinct in its emphasis on tradition, honor, and masculinity. All those vexed values—which have historically been twisted into pretexts for racism and violence against women—come up in the context of football, one of the wettest of Southern spectator sports.

Because USC wears garnet and Georgia wears red, the latter color wouldn't have been in evidence at Mason Jar for the Bulldogs game, except that red is also the color of the two-ounce plastic cups that the bar uses for shots. Throughout the first half, Gamecock fans had plenty of shot-taking occasions, like when South Carolina quarterback Spencer Rattler connected with wide receiver Antwane "Juice" Wells for a seventeen-yard touchdown, or Georgia quarterback Carson Beck was sacked midfield.

USC went into the locker room with an eleven-point lead. Mason Jar patrons went wild.

After the half, USC didn't score again. The Gamecocks beat the odds but lost the game, 24–14. Watts looked as though he might cry when I passed him on my way out, crossing a floor sticky with hard seltzer spilled in tipsy excitement and tipsier frustration. Still, he greeted me with the kind of South Carolina mannerism that his fellow alums found so comforting a decade ago, and northeasterners find so compelling today.

Bleary and somewhat blurry, he said, "I hope you had a good time."

Hanna Raskin is a Gravy *columnist and founder of* The Food Section*, a newsletter covering the American South.*

Mason Jar regularly fills to capacity with South Carolina fans on college football Saturdays.

"SELL WHAT IS TRUE"

SFA honors Eddie Hernandez with Lifetime Achievement Award.

BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

A LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD IS A funny thing.

It's an honor bestowed by peers to acknowledge the honoree's talent and accomplishments. A testament to a brilliant career, to a legacy that future generations can look to as inspiration.

But it also implies that the winner is at a point in their life where they can reflect—that is, there's no more reason to look ahead, because their best days have already passed.

Even though I'm just forty-four, I've received similar honors from journalism associations in southern California and from my alma mater, Orange Coast College. I've always told the audience in my acceptance speeches that, while I'm flattered and humbled by the recognition, I'm not done. When I talked to Eddie Hernandez, winner of the 2023 Southern Foodways Alliance lifetime achievement award, I asked whether he felt the same.

The gravelly-voiced Hernandez laughed.

"I'll retire when I'm dead," said the sixty-nine-year-old co-owner of the Taqueria del Sol chain, which he founded in Atlanta in 2000. "But it's nice that people think of you as doing something with your life.

"I didn't set [out] to be a leader or a teacher," he added. "I just wanted to enjoy what I did. As long as you do that, I think you can go to wherever you want to go."

Hernandez, who was born in the northern Mexican city of Monterrey, has earned all the superlatives that usually come with a lifetime achievement award. His Sur-Mex tacos made him a pioneer; an immediate star at a time when Mexican food in the South consisted of too much yellow cheese, and Latinos were just starting to establish a widespread presence. Hernandez is a role model: an immigrant who came to the United States as a young man with dreams of becoming a rock star in Texas but instead found success in a completely different profession.

He's a multiplatform star, with a cookbook, appearances on television shows, and six restaurants in Georgia and Tennessee he co-owns with his business partner, Mike Klank. Like any good longtimer, Hernandez loves what he does—and especially where he does it.

"When I came to Georgia in '87, I felt welcome," he told me in a phone interview. "It was not the way that it was portrayed to me—that it was racist, it was very white, that they don't like Latinos.... I was able

Photos by Bita Honarvar

"I'll retire when I'm dead...but it's nice that people think of you as doing something with your life."

Turnip greens at Taqueria del Sol

to mingle with everyone. I never felt displaced."

To this day, friends of mine who know that I write about the South still can't believe that the region is home to vibrant Latino communities—and great Mexican food. That's why Hernandez's SFA lifetime achievement award made me so happy. He's the second Latino to earn the honor, after Houston-based chef Hugo Ortega in 2017.

The award doesn't just mean a thumbs-up to Latino contributions in the South or to the enduring success of a small restaurant chain. It's an affirmation of a worldview that the rest of the country should take up as gospel. Hernandez's story is one of creative adaptation: He took the culinary traditions of his old and new homes and found delicious ways to bring them together.

Nothing better exemplifies this than his Sur-Mex origin story. Early in his culinary career, a customer gave Hernandez a bag of turnip greens. He "had no idea what they were, no clue." But they reminded him of quelites, a catch-all term in Mexico for tender greens served as a side. So Hernandez cooked down the turnip greens into a Mexican-style potlikker, with chicken stock instead of ham hocks and a bunch of tomatoes, garlic, and fiery chiles de árbol thrown in. Where most Southerners would use cornbread for sopping, Hernandez offered tortillas.

"Southerners like it because it's kinda like they've had it," Hernandez said, describing the first time he served them at Azteca Grill, a restaurant in south Atlanta that he began to work at in 1987. "Same with Mexicans. I integrated two cultures into one dish, and everyone is happy."

Hernandez described Mexican food in the South at that time as mostly "heart attack recipes. The people who were cooking Mexican food were in it for the money." He had already started to offer traditional Mexican meals like chiles rellenos and tampiqueña (a combo platter from the Gulf of Mexico region that includes meat, guacamole, black beans, and white cheese). But the success of Azteca Grill's turnip greens taught Hernandez he could push patrons to try new concepts, as long as there was a baseline where everyone could feel comfortable.

That was the philosophy behind his second breakout dish: fried chicken tacos, which he made famous at Taqueria del Sol.

"All it is is a piece of fried chicken," Hernandez

Fried chicken taco at Taqueria del Sol

said. Southern customers "relate to that. They know what the damn thing is, but not with lime cream. Once they tried that, they knew I was good, and they were willing to try anything on the menu, because they knew that I could make it.

"Sell what is true," he concluded. "Don't sell a fake idea."

I've eaten Hernandez's greens and his fried chicken tacos. The veggies are hearty, with enough spice to keep your palate honest but not so much as to overwhelm it. The jalapeño-lime crema on the fried chicken tacos tempers the fattiness. Hernandez's signature offerings still feel innovative, decades after he developed them.

Even as Hernandez said he has no interest in slowing down, he's easing into, if not a final act, then definitely a place that allows him to look back yet also forward.

Hernandez has seen the rise of Mexican cuisines in the South in the thirty-six years since he entered the business, and he welcomes it "taking over." He's not worried about losing fans to competitors, joking, "I know expensive restaurants in Georgia selling eighteen-dollar tacos. I sell them for three [dollars], and just as good as anything they can do."

He's thinking about opening one more restaurant, while also planning a return to music as a producer, because it "has always been my thing." Hernandez said he feels like "I'm thirty-four. My body tells me I'm not, but I feel like I'm ready for another fifty [years]."

More importantly, he wants to help out the next generation. Shortly before our interview, he attended a meeting to help metro Atlanta Latinos enter the restaurant business.

"I already got my fifteen minutes," Hernandez said. "I want the ones who are coming up to push forward, so that others can say, 'I can be one of them.' I want to encourage the Latin guys who don't know how cuisine can change your life.

"Just the fact that I started this thing doesn't make me better than anyone," he concluded. "Learn from what I did, and make it even more mainstream. The more people want to know how to eat [like I cook], the better everyone is going to be."

Gustavo Arellano is a columnist for both Gravy *and the* Los Angeles Times.

FROM THE SOUTH TO THE SOUTH

Flavors of the Philippines find a home at Pêche in New Orleans.

BY NICOLE CABRERA MILLS

MY HUSBAND LIKES TO SAY THAT I WENT from the South to the South. I grew up in Mindanao in the southern Philippines. Mindanao has a large Muslim population, which makes the food very different from the rest of the Philippines. My father is a farmer. My mother has been in the food business for most of her life. In 2001, I moved to New York to go to culinary school at the French Culinary Institute. I met my husband, a New Orleans native, in New York. After several years of working around New York, Los Angeles, and the Philippines, fate brought us back to New Orleans in 2011.

I joined the opening team at Pêche in 2013 and became the chef de cuisine in 2019, Even before that promotion, I was given the freedom to create specials, which allowed me to push the boundaries of a New Orleans seafood grill and see what our diners liked or didn't like. For the most part, I found that they liked just about anything. Naturally, because of my background, Asian flavors came through—and they worked surprisingly well with the ingredients we sourced at the restaurant. I never have to force anything when it comes to developing dishes for the Pêche menu. The focus has always been Gulf seafood and farm produce. What can I do with what's available? The result is usually a combination of the South I grew up in and the South I live in.

Southern food has evolved a lot in the last decade. How many rice dishes can I make? How many vegetables can I fry, and how many ways can I fry them? I've been a part of that evolution, even though I didn't recognize it right away. I don't conform to the norm of what people think Southern food should be. I take Southern ingredients and turn them into dishes I like to eat, often incorporating inspiration from my past. I'm not afraid to use fish sauce, soy sauce, and vinegar. I often cook with shrimp as a flavoring agent, and I use a lot of herbs and pickles to enhance the flavors of dishes. When people come to Pêche, I don't think they are expecting a specific cuisine. I think they expect big flavors and they expect the food to taste bright and fresh. Some of the flavors may be surprising though not completely unfamiliar.

In a predominantly white male–dominated industry, I am a female Asian immigrant running a restaurant in the South. The gravity of this work often escapes me. At the end of the day, I just enjoy cooking good food.

Abraham Rowe

Kale Salad

Serves 6

- **16 ounces baby kale***
- **1 cup crispy rice (recipe follows)**
- **1 cup salted peanuts, toasted**
- **2 apples (Pink Lady, Fuji, or Jonagold), sliced thin**
- **1 cup thinly sliced or julienned radishes (Purple Daikon, Watermelon, or Breakfast)**
- **1 cup julienned kohlrabi**
- **6 tablespoons chili garlic crisp (may be store-bought or homemade; recipe follows)**
- **3 teaspoons lemon juice**
- **Salt**

In a large bowl, combine kale, crispy rice, peanuts, apples, radish, kohlrabi, chili crisp, lemon juice, and a sprinkle of salt. Mix well and adjust seasonings to taste.

**If baby kale is not available, use lacinato kale and cut into ribbons (1 inch thick).*

Crispy Rice

Makes approximately 1 pint

- **2 quarts soybean oil**
- **1 pint cooked popcorn rice**
- **1 pint rice flour**
- **Salt**

In a deep pot, heat the oil to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Make sure the pot is filled no more than halfway.

In a mixing bowl, toss the popcorn rice with rice flour. Make sure each grain is individually coated with flour. Strain off the excess flour using a fine mesh strainer. Once excess flour is sifted out, fry the rice in 2 batches until golden brown, about 3 to 5 minutes. Season with salt. Allow the rice to cool before using.

Chili Garlic Crisp

Makes approximately 1 quart

- **1 cup sesame oil**
- **1 cinnamon stick**
- **1 tablespoon star anise pods**
- **1 tablespoon Sichuan peppercorns**
- **1 quart soybean oil**
- **2 cups brunoise shallots**
- **½ cup brunoise ginger**
- **1 cup chopped garlic**
- **¼ cup chili flakes**
- **2 whole dried ancho or guajillo peppers**
- **6 whole dried arbol peppers**
- **½ cup sesame seeds**
- **¼ cup brown sugar**
- **¼ cup soy sauce**

In a deep pot over medium heat, combine the sesame oil, cinnamon, star anise, and Sichuan peppercorns. Bloom the spices until fragrant, about 2 to 3 minutes. Heat oil to 350°F, then remove from the heat. Steep the spices for 15 minutes, then strain. Discard the spices. Puree the sesame oil with the chili flakes and dried peppers. Set aside.

In a deep pot, combine the soybean oil and the garlic. On high heat, whisk continuously until the garlic is golden brown. Remove from heat and strain the hot oil through a chinois. press out all the oil and lay the garlic flat on a sheet pan lined with a towel. Return the oil to the pot. Carefully add the ginger and fry until translucent, then add the shallots and fry until golden brown. Quickly remove the pot from the heat and stir in the sesame seeds. Then quickly add the chili-sesame oil mixture, brown sugar, and soy sauce. Add the fried garlic and mix well. Allow the mixture to cool before storing in an airtight container.

Nicole Cabrera Mills is the chef de cuisine at Pêche Seafood Grill in New Orleans. She cooked the Tabasco Keynote Supper at the 2023 Southern Foodways Symposium.

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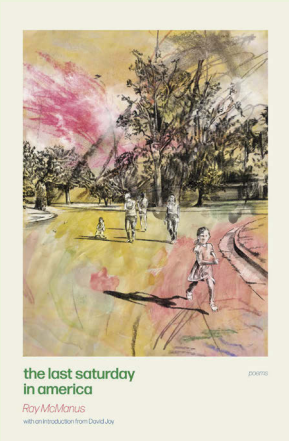
MAR 12

"These are poems about boys listening to men who were once boys who listened to men, the blind leading the blind."

—David Joy
from the introduction



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APR 2

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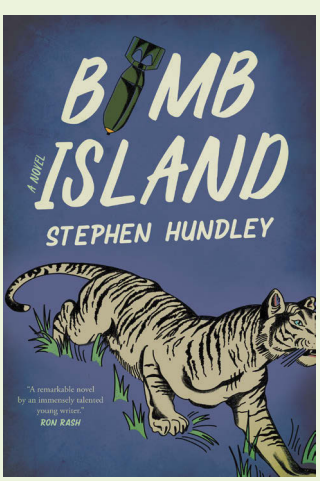

MAY 7

THE GIRL WHO BECAME A RABBIT
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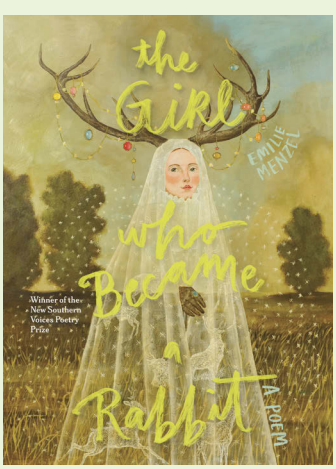

"I couldn't put it down. And, when I finished, I was changed."

—Molly McCully Brown
author of *Places I've Taken My Body*

SEPT 10

Also from Hub City Press

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Barbecue Villanelle

BY JACQUELINE ALLEN TRIMBLE

Each year we throw a family barbecue.
They pile like thirsty sinners from their cars
to have a little taste of Dad's home brew.

The pig is slain. The pit is dug. A few
tend fire all night. Their stories jab and spar.
Each year we throw a family barbecue.

Someone will sing before the night is through.
Chicken ain't nothing but a bird, his bar.
He's had a little taste of Dad's home brew.

The cards and accusations fly on cue.
The smack talk is so loud it hits the stars.
Each year we throw a family barbecue.

And soon the fighting starts (ain't nothing new).
The past is never past. It's so bizarre.
By now they're halfway through my dad's home brew.

Come morning Mom will wake the dozing crew.
Repentant, they will dine. The perfect char!
Each year we throw a family barbecue
and have a little taste of Dad's home brew.

Illustrations by Simone Martin Newberry

A Psalm of Praise for the Funeral Processional

BY JACQUELINE ALLEN TRIMBLE

Praise for the hands that bring the water, the blessed water,
case after case, hands as holy as John the Baptist's and as healing.
Let our parched throats be baptized in the cooling streams.

Praise for the colas, teas and lemonades touched with lavender
or mint picked from home-grown gardens. Praise for the wine,
the muscadine, harvested and fermented with care. Come,
sip with us in silence. Let your work of hands and days
be a balm for our sorrow.

Praise for the culinary stewards, practiced in rituals of death.
They comfort us with gifts, tightly wrapped in foil and labeled.
This is for after. These are the promises of the saints erecting
bulwarks in freezers of the bereaved.

Praise for the non-cooks with their paper goods or plastic ware,
restaurant gift cards, flowers plucked at the grocery store
then lovingly arranged in a cherished vase or coffee can.
These are the pure of heart. Let their offerings keep us
from the market with satiety and delight.

Praise for the cut up cantaloupe and watermelon, the grapes, deep blue,
red, and green, the hands of bananas, the sweet cool of kiwi.
Praise for every store-bought cookie, every homemade cake and pie,
for every chicken, roasted or fried, every sandwich platter
and frozen casserole, every pot of collards or squash or stew.
Praise for our bowl overrun with communal bounty,
for every catered dinner, family breakfast brought to our door
hot and ready to be taken. Let sustenance overshadow this misery.

Praise for the ones who make the repast on the hardest day of our lives.
They spread the table before us in the presence of our grief,
fill us with all that is good, right and delicious. Their hands anoint us
with olive oil, overflow our plates, slake our loss.

Praise for all the mouths brimming with prayer. Let them be blessed.
Let them bless this house, this family, this food. Let us take and feast
on this love persisting like the grief in our hearts.

Aunt Mae Supervises My Chicken Frying

BY JACQUELINE ALLEN TRIMBLE

After Ashley Jones

: and is reminding me cast iron and lard are God's gifts
: quips, when I say *lard is bad for you*, she is healthy as a horse and full of lard
: and wonders if I seasoned the buttermilk well enough
: if I added enough onion salt and garlic because *Baby Girl, flour has no flavor*
: is reminding me marinade is key to moist chicken
: is instructing me on the finer points of dredging
: is remarking Panko violates Southern chicken law
(though there is no Panko in sight)
: is saying she doesn't see any pepper in that flour
: is saying the flame is too high
: is emphasizing the difference between golden and burnt
: is noting if I cook it too fast it will be raw on the inside and inedible
: and I am going into the bathroom to take a breath and recenter myself
: and catch her adjusting the burner when I come out of the bathroom
: and I am thinking things I can say to my great aunt only with my eyes
: and she is throwing up her hands with *It ain't my chicken*
: and whispering loudly to my husband *Or her grandma's*
: then praising God her sister never lived to eat a raw, unseasoned version
of our family's sacred chicken recipe
: and I am wondering why I didn't go to the drive through
: as I place hot chicken on paper towels then a platter
: and finish it with a little Lawry's
: and set the platter next to the rice and green beans and biscuits
: and smiling, smiling, smiling as Aunt Mae eats her third piece sans lard
: until she asks me *Why are these biscuits so dry?*

Jacqueline Allen Trimble is the author of two collections of poetry and chair of the Department of Languages and Literatures at Alabama State University.

SADIE'S SOUTH *on a* WESTERN PORCH

How Louisiana foodways survived and thrived for generations in Los Angeles

by ***DEREK S. HICKS***

ON A WHIM, I DECIDED TO MAKE my first pot of pinto beans. My grandmother, Sadie Lucille Dean, was a pro at making them. She added just enough ground beef in the mix to throw you off, but this was not chili. A ham hock provided the base of flavor. Throughout my childhood, her pinto beans were an autumn and winter staple in our house.

So, these many years later, my grandmother was sitting on her porch as she took my call and provided step-by-step instructions on how to make her pinto beans. She was dismayed that, for all the cooking I do, I'd never made them before. After she gave me some general advice about soaking dried pinto beans and what seasonings to put in, which were simple but always included Louisiana Hot Sauce, I inquired about why she used ground beef. She explained that the extra protein made the beans more robust and filling. The goal was to make them a full meal for my grandfather, a sanitation worker. "Besides," she said, "it just makes it taste better." Listening to this ninety-five-year-old woman's culinary guidance revived memories of sitting on her front porch, eating bowls of pinto beans and rice. It was no accident she instructed me from that porch, a sacred site in our community.

The Porch

Sadie's porch has long served as a canvas for cultural expression, bearing traces of the South transplanted to Los Angeles. It was the only porch on the block where people congregated. To this day, my grandmother sits there on her little white bench, protected by a massive bush that offers shade against the heat. At ninety-five years old, Sadie still gets dressed and puts on her nicest earrings and a little makeup just to sit on the porch in anticipation of someone stopping by. Inside the house, photos and paintings of Louisiana folklife depict the same custom of porch-sitting, a ritual that has long been central to my grandmother's identity. Anyone with the privilege of visiting would experience the intricate interplay of place and the numerous genuine performances that unfolded within that space. As frequently as spiritual and culinary expressions found their stage on her porch, it was also a place where individuals whose humanity had elsewhere been denigrated and debased by racism and discrimination found nourishment. Sadie is made of central Louisiana stock, and this heritage was imprinted on her porch. On any given day, an observer might be transported perceptually to a porch in Louisiana, Mississippi, or Alabama.

Sadie's path to this porch is connected to multitudes of African Americans who migrated from the South to places like Chicago, New York City, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Detroit. Her religious and culinary training arises from the place of her birth and rearing: Colfax, Louisiana. Born there in 1928, Sadie, as her parents and grandparents had before her, existed under the imposing shadow

LEFT and RIGHT: The author and his grandmother at her home in Los Angeles, August 2023

of the Colfax massacre of 1873. Not a decade into Reconstruction, former Confederate soldiers and Ku Klux Klan members murdered upwards of 150 Black freedmen and militia members after a tumultuous gubernatorial election. The exact death toll remains unknown. The white mob slaughtered Black soldiers as they surrendered. Therefore, Sadie's hometown epitomized the full weight and toll of Jim Crow.

At the age of twelve, she began helping her grandmother, a domestic worker, clean the homes of white families in Colfax after school. There, she learned the Southern protocols of Black workers being forced to enter and exit through back doors and take meals on the back porches of the homes they served. It's no surprise that Sadie's front porch has always been a place of affirmation.

Sadie's Southern Performance

"Sadie" is widely known throughout our Watts section of Los Angeles, yet relatively few neighbors know her by that name. To most, she is "Mama Dean." Mama Dean is what she performs. When I was a child, Sadie was my sometimes-strict grandmother, but Mama Dean has always been a soothing force in the community, enveloping everyone with magnanimous concern. To frame what she does as performance in no way suggests her engagement with others is inauthentic. To the contrary, her performance, recapitulating her Southern upbringing, was recognizable to other Black migrants from the South as a connection to home. Scholar Diana Taylor maintains that performance acts as a critical mode of transfer, transmitting "social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity" through reiterated behavior. From a chest of cultural practices groomed in the South, Mama Dean created sacred moments of food and faith in real time. She skillfully integrated her Louisiana roots while embracing Los Angeles as she adopted ways to connect to her community that reminded them of the South. And if performance constitutes the transmittal of many cultural practices, such as dance, song, colloquialisms, and ways of "telling the story," then Mama Dean performed and distributed a consolidation of religious and culinary cultural productions nurtured and tested over time in the South.

Mama Dean's porch provided her a space to carry out her unique form of activism. Her porch was a strategic tool facilitating engagement with and for the community. What unfolded there was not merely a restatement of her church's theology or even a replication of church services for those

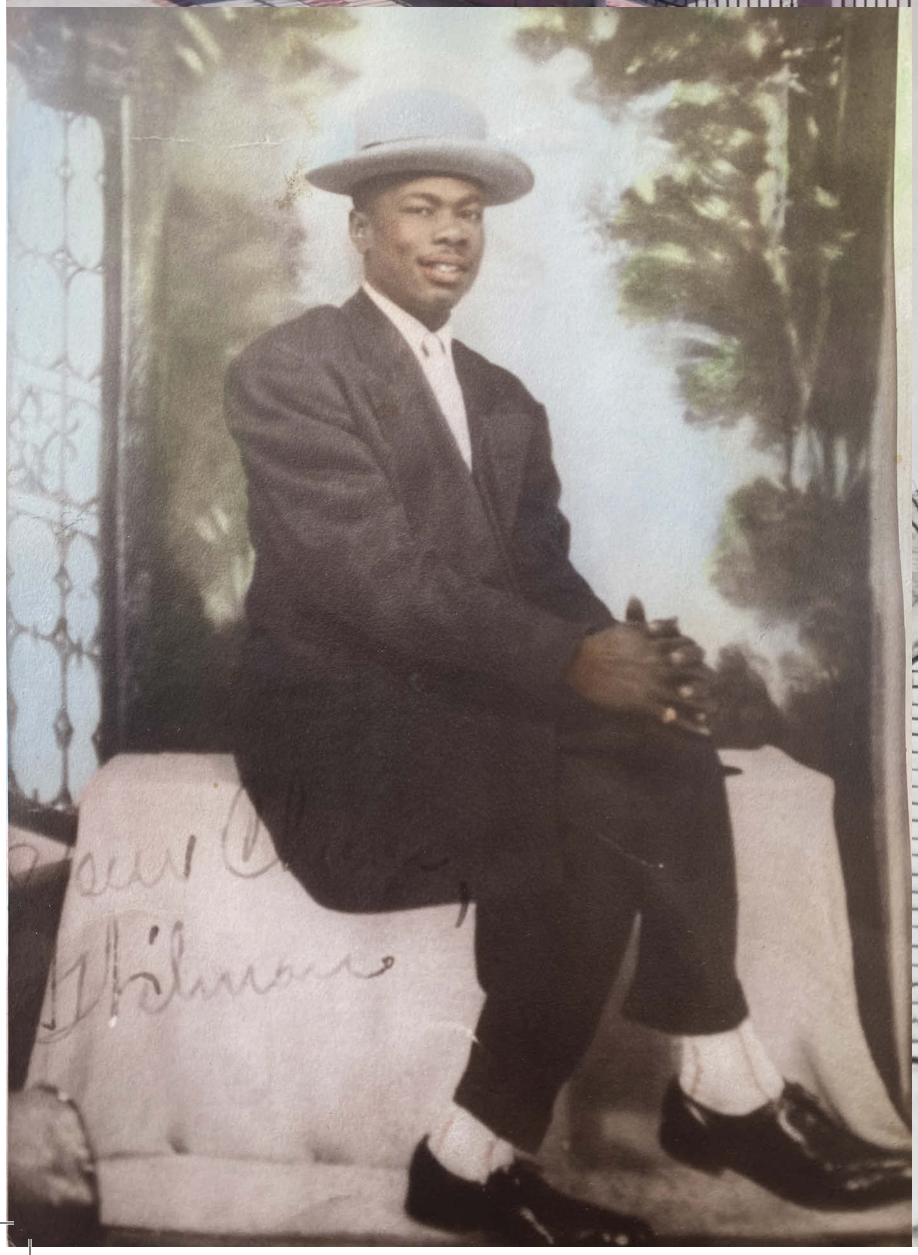
Zaire Love

who didn't typically attend. Mama Dean's porch embodied a religious experience unto itself. Her front-porch religion was a substantive and subversive collection of activities that empowered broken people to make meaning of their lives and strive for new possibilities.

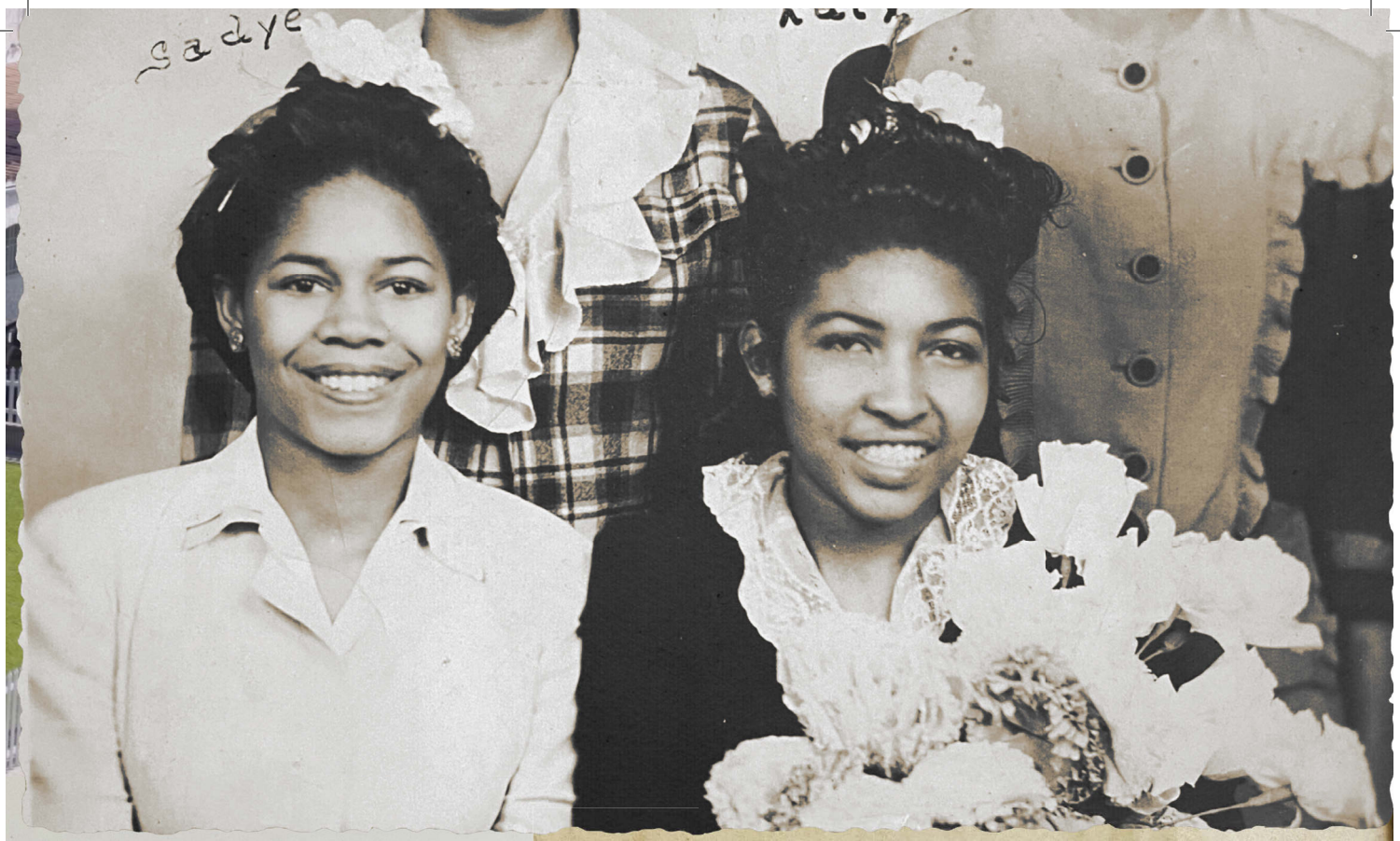
When James, one of my oldest friends, returned home after twenty-nine years of being falsely incarcerated, he sought Mama Dean, not Sadie, for the transcendence of her gentle touch, her encouraging word, and her food. James would later tell me that Mama Dean saved his life when he returned to the neighborhood from prison. The reason, he said, was that she treated him like a long-lost son who'd returned home. She warmed him up with the food she had on hand that day—a pot of pinto beans, cabbage, and cornbread. She hugged him. She read scripture. She prayed. Mama Dean simultaneously fed his flesh and spirit. Her unfettered embrace of people like James is an act of revolutionary acceptance. James consistently returns to her porch as a place of fortification, bringing books of the large-print crossword puzzles she loves.

The larger point is that social and cultural practices of place delineation expand the sacred borders for African Americans who a generally share a diasporic and migrational experience. What happens on the porch is at once Southern, northern, urban, rural, West African, American, orally disseminated, informed by sacred texts, expressed through gospel as well as blues, jazz, and hip hop. Therefore, place need not be bound by time nor geography. It is influenced by both. Nestled within a neighborhood bearing the imprint of social challenges many Black Los Angeles residents face, Mama Dean's porch remains a genteel Southern space. With a Louisiana twist,

MAMA DEAN'S PORCH HAS LONG BEEN A SPACE TO ENGAGE WITH HER COMMUNITY AND CARRY OUT HER UNIQUE FORM OF ACTIVISM.



LEFT: The author's maternal grandfather, Wilman Earl Dean; ABOVE: The author in front of his grandmother's house, August 2023 (Zaire Love); BELOW: Wilman Dean (l) with a friend and fellow WWII veteran



ABOVE: Sadie Dean at lower left; RIGHT: Sadie and Wilman Dean with Renae Dean, the author's mother, on her first birthday, Nov. 8, 1947 (Family photos courtesy of Sadie Dean and Derek Hicks)

she utilized an abundant spirit and pots of stew, fragrant gumbo, or beans to nourish and activate hope in those still suffering indignities associated with being encased in Black flesh.

Even after Emancipation, when things were supposed to be better, Black Americans experienced unprecedented debasement. Still limited in agency, Black people created portals of cultural expression to enhance their lives. Having cultivated a potent culinary and religious culture that nourished them while under the duress of enslavement, Black people strengthened themselves through the transformative and restorative power of their own cultural innovations. Although they couldn't grasp the exact meaning of freedom, they understood the significance of what they had created.

African Americans retained jazz-like improvisation as a central driving force within their cultural practices. The era of Jim Crow and the Great Migration it spurred represented an expansion of their innovative cultural self-care beyond the South. For this reason, places like El Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Watts, just up the road from my grandparents' house, recreated an entire culture of the South within its community. The congregation plucked its pastors directly from the South. El Bethel's worship and fellowship table were steeped in a Southern decorum that was familiar to the palate of the migrants filling its halls. Sometimes, the smell of ham hocks flavoring a pot of greens wafted from the church kitchen, greeting my grandmother and me as we entered on Sunday morning, .

Black people responded to debasement with a trope of *nourishment* residing within the structural forms of complex religious expression and culinary culture. Confronted with the novel manifestations of maltreatment in postbellum America, Black people both established and reshaped practices of self-sustenance in a quest to manifest a more enriched existence. A diverse spectrum of performances in Black religious and gastronomic cultural life nourished their communities, fostering vitality in regions spanning the South, North and West. This vitality radiated whether in locations as distinct as Coushatta, Louisiana, or Coffeeville, Alabama. Southern-influenced religious and culinary practices were emulated to fortify Black people through meticulously orchestrated performances on porches, in social halls, and in churches, whether situated in Chicago or Los Angeles.

Fish Fries Don't Lie

On occasion, Mama Dean hosted Friday night fish fries. These gatherings exemplified how the confluence of distinct Black Southern cultural performances manifested in the West. What I would witness on those Friday evenings was a comingling of cultural expressions that didn't seem to neatly fit together. At any given moment, you might hear debates about frying techniques coleslaw recipes. Fish fries were serious affairs for these central-Louisianans. The fish being served—cat-, buffalo, and Gaspergou, a freshwater drum fish—were treasures to this crowd. None suited my adolescent palate, which made the old folks' love for them all the more fascinating to me.

Stories always accompanied the food at these gatherings. Nothing was off-limits, from contentious church splits to whether Mama Dean's grandfather, the Reverend Lester Lee, was the best preacher; to a roll call of deaths followed by stories of the ancestors. Tears of remembrance flowed. Testimonies were shared. Elders warned children about the bones in the fish. And then the blues would emerge, replacing the gospel hymns. The rhythms of B. B. King and Bobby "Blue" Bland from the record player enticed dancing that induced sweat dripping from scalp to brow to floor.

SOUTHERN-INFLUENCED RELIGIOUS AND CULINARY PRACTICES FORTIFIED BLACK PEOPLE IN HOMES, CHURCHES, AND SOCIAL HALLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

Sisters previously praying and speaking utterances of the spirit were now swaying their hips to the music in ways the church would not allow. Theirs was a celebration of food and spirit and Southern roots and culture. What was happening on and around Mama Dean's porch were intentional acts of revitalization for debilitated flesh through the performance of the South in another place.

Mama Dean's task of nurturing elsewhere-debased flesh often unfolded as a multifaceted challenge for those navigating the unfamiliar terrain of the urban West, where newfound freedoms coexisted with the burgeoning Jim Crow political system. In 1950s through 1970s Los Angeles, Mama Dean encountered many of the same dilemmas that had confronted Black women who preceded her at the turn of the twentieth century. Migrating Black folks endeavored, to the best of their abilities, to transport religious and culinary cultures along highways and aboard trains departing the Jim Crow South, bound for the North and West. Of paramount concern became preserving some semblance of authenticity, as it was intrinsic to their ability to thrive in new surroundings. Their mission also encompassed the aspiration to reshape the tide of racial mistreatment in the North and West. One shake of Louisiana Hot Sauce on pinto beans at a time, we were encircled by Mama Dean's love. We were somebody. On that porch she prayed, then fed, then preached, then encouraged, then prayed again. Flesh and spirit were fed, marrow deep.

Derek S. Hicks is an associate professor of religion and culture at Wake Forest University, where he is also co-chair of the Slavery, Race, and Memory Project and the founding director of the Center for Research, Engagement, and Collaboration in African American Life.

Zaire Love


VOTE

Carry a Big Stick

If the South sets the nation's political table, food policy should be high on the menu.

by ANGIE MAXWELL

MOST OF THE TIME WHEN WE TALK ABOUT FOOD AND POLITICS, WE talk about quirky events like the annual raccoon supper in Gillett, Arkansas, a college scholarship fundraiser that's a must-show political event for candidates, incumbents, and lobbyists. We laugh about campaign-trail blunders, such as the time President Gerald Ford bit into a tamale without unwrapping it. (Some still say the gaffe lost him the election to Jimmy Carter.) We get into fights on social media over mayonnaise brands. We decide whose recipe is more authentic or where a specific dish originated. I'm no different: I will fight you if you put tomatoes in a gumbo and still try to call it one. My family is Cajun, from Evangeline Parish. Food is religion there.

We use food to celebrate life, to mark death, to entertain ourselves and our loved ones, to bond across generations, to comfort the suffering, and to heal the sick. It is emotional. It should also be political.

I saw food very differently growing up. Born with severe food allergies back when nothing had labels, I was allergic to practically everything that my people cooked—all fish, all seafood, all the things. I'm not talking like it hurts my stomach. I'm talking like double-doors-to-the-ambulance kind of allergies.

When I started kindergarten, my mother said, "No one is going to watch this for you. You've got to do it for yourself." My school served fish patties for lunch on Fridays, and I couldn't breathe in the small cafeteria. On those days, I was allowed to eat outside by myself. I know it sounds sad, but I believe that's where I learned to think.

For me, as a political scientist, the answer to the question "where is the South?" is an easy one. The South is, and always has been, at the center of the political universe. Since our foodways are central to Southern identity, the question of food—who prepares it, who buys it, and who sets policy around it—should matter to every Southerner who casts a ballot.

This might seem counterintuitive to residents of most Southern states. For example, in Arkansas, the ruby-red state where I live, we know the results of elections immediately after the polls close. But the South is made up of purplish states such as Georgia, North Carolina, Florida, and Texas, with their combined 102 electoral votes. If a candidate sweeps just those four states, they'd be about 40 percent of the way to that magic Electoral College number.

If that's not enough to convince you of the South's political importance, look at how each party structures its presidential primary. You'll find that on both sides, Republican and Democrat, the South punches forcefully above its weight.

In terms of the Republican Party, three aspects of the GOP's primary structure result in disproportionate Southern influence. First, the party distributes bonus delegates to states that went red in the previous cycle, resulting in an outsized number of Southern delegates relative to the region's population. A second, newer factor is an earlier primary calendar: Nearly every primary in the South will take place by March 23, 2024. By the time the polls close in Louisiana that day, 65 percent of the Republican delegates will have been chosen, and more than half will have come from the South. Third are the state-by-state rules for awarding delegates to the winning candidates. Most Republican primaries are winner-take-all or winner-take-most. This system can have a huge impact on a candidate's momentum, even if primary-voter turnout is low.

Now, let's look at the Democratic Party. If the two major parties had the same primary rules, we'd expect to see Southern Democrats at a relative disadvantage. But the structure is actually different in two important ways. First, Democrats don't award bonus delegates based on past outcomes, so the region is not penalized for not going blue in the last election cycle. Second, the Democratic Party primary system awards delegates proportionally to candidates rather than giving all or most of the delegates to the overall winner. Together, these factors tend to keep the South relevant in national party conversations until convention time.

The South has come to be seen as a foregone conclusion come Election Day. (There are those swing-state exceptions, of course—notably North Carolina and Georgia in recent cycles.) The irony, though, is that Southern voters have a disproportionate say in determining the names on both tickets.

So, what does that have to do with food? If you own a restaurant or other food business, the knowledge that you carry a big stick should influence you to be political. Not partisan—political. Call it civic participation if that is preferable.

THIS PAGE: Photo by Mark Mulligan/Houston Chronicle via Getty Images; PREVIOUS SPREAD: AP Photo/Wong Maye-E

Foodways help define the South.
And the South is the center of this nation's political universe.

If you have not shown young people how to vote by taking them with you to the polls, do not ask them to show you how to do something on your phone.

The food industry drives the economy in much of this region and has a great deal to do with its cultural richness. However, despite the major problems that afflict the region, it feels like too many Southerners avoid talking about politics. Consequently, the region continues to suffer in ways that could be eased by the very politics on which people in the South stay silent.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD AT FAMILY gatherings, sometimes the first thing people would tell me, even before hello, was where to find the homemade dessert that I wasn't allergic to. (The dessert table was actually the top of my grandmother's washer-dryer.) It was both a sweet gesture and a reminder that my allergies marked me as an outsider. And as I looked from the outside, I could see that sometimes food took the place of real conversations. Hard conversations. It wasn't polite to talk about politics, especially among women, because you might upset people. Historically, this is much bigger than my family: That silence of politeness is exactly what made Jim Crow's gravity so strong. It held the region in a suspended state. And the more polarized politics becomes, the quieter a lot of us get.

In 1949, the political scientist V. O. Key Jr. published *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. There's a quote from the introduction that still rings true. It reads, in part:

"When all the exceptions are considered, when all the justifications are made, and when all the invidious comparisons are drawn, those of the South and those who love the South are left with the cold, hard fact that the South as a whole has developed no system or practice of political organization and leadership adequate to cope with its problems.... Southern politics is no comic opera. It is a deadly serious business that is sometimes carried on behind a droll facade."

The droll facade of one-party politics, long the Southern norm, leads to a politics of entertainment. A real contest of ideas will require confronting problems so deeply embedded that we can hardly fathom alternatives. For example, only thirteen states tax groceries. Why does Mississippi, the state with the highest poverty rate, also have the highest grocery tax in the nation? It isn't because the majority of people think a 7 percent grocery tax is a great idea. It's because everyday citizens don't even realize that most of the country does not have such a tax. Bad policies are normalized, and we become stagnant. Many of us try to help those who are suffering. We provide basic necessities to our family and neighbors to fill in the gaps, and we let government off the hook. And then that, too, becomes normal. At some point, we forget that change is possible.

I teach at the University of Arkansas, and most of my students work. They have to. Many of them work in the food industry. Restaurant owners can ask themselves: How many college students do I employ? How many of them are registered to vote? How many employees have I *taken* to vote?

People born in the twenty-first century are unaccustomed to showing up in person with physical documents and identification. It is not how their world works. If you have not shown young people how to vote by taking them with you to the polls, do not ask them to show you how to do something on your phone.

IS THERE AN AGENDA FOR THE Southern food industry for the next two decades? What is it? Who is crafting it? Too often, political engagement spikes as defense against a new policy, mandate, or—as we just experienced—pandemic. But in politics, if you are playing defense, you have already lost. Playing the long game on offense is the path to real change, and it requires vision. It requires leaders in this industry—restaurateurs, labor organizers, farm owners, chefs, and others—to imagine an ideal world in which foodways can thrive and then decide to fight for it one pragmatic step at a time at the local, state, and federal levels.

The planning for midcentury must start now, and that work is political, not polite. Food-indusstry stakeholders must ask complex questions. What kind of training would prepare restaurant workers and give them an economically mobile path? Can these young people get internship credit while working in the restaurant industry towards such a degree? What is the plan to eliminate the grocery tax? Should there be subsidies or incentives for sourcing food locally or implementing green policies? What red tape stands in the way of the food industry's success in your community? How many people in the food industry serve on your city council? How many are running for the state legislature?

Many of us watch politics for entertainment like a football game. We share hilarious memes. We poke fun at each other and ourselves. We play-fight over whether tomatoes are disqualifying in a gumbo. But both politics and food are deadly serious business. Food is intellectual and primal. It's commerce. It's an art form. It is simultaneously a luxury good and a human right. So many political issues intersect with the food industry in some capacity: infrastructure, climate change, inflation, immigration, health care, education. Foodways help define the South. And the South is the center of this nation's political universe. The region decides the presidential nominees of both parties and the leaders of those parties. Individuals who care about Southern foodways have an opportunity to lead conversations and drive change. What is your vision for the way food is grown, distributed, used? What value do you put on food, work, and food workers? If you're playing defense, it's too late. Set the terms of the debate. You have a big stick. Use it. Because what food you put on the table absolutely matters, but who has a seat at that table matters more.

Angie Maxwell holds the Diane Blair Endowed Chair in Southern Studies and is a professor of Political Science at the University of Arkansas, where she also serves as the director of the Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society.

Photo By Chris Maddaloni/CQ Roll Call via AP Images

THE SOUL OF ALASKA

Thirty-five years in, the Wyche family serves Southern comfort and soul food in our 49th state.

BY JULIA O'MALLEY

Roscoe Wyche III

A LITTLE BEFORE NOON MOST DAYS, IN a strip mall just outside the gates to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) in Anchorage, Alaska, you can smell catfish frying.

It's lunchtime at Mama Carol's Soulfood Events and Catering, a family restaurant known until recently as Roscoe's. An example of the far reaches of Southern cuisine, they've been serving catfish, pulled-pork sandwiches, collard greens, and peach cobbler in this northern city since 1988.

Almost all the food Alaskans eat travels at least 1,500 miles north from Seattle to reach grocery store shelves and restaurant kitchens. Since Russians built the first non-Indigenous settlement about 250 years ago, the food culture here has been influenced by waves of newcomers. Whether they came from San Francisco looking for gold or from Manila to work in the salmon canneries or from Tulsa to work in the oil patch, all of them brought a longing for the flavors of home.

Anchorage's dining scene is now rich with restaurants that have opened to feed those cravings—from pancit to kimchi to African American soul food. Mama Carol's is an institution whose fan base is nearly as diverse as the city itself. Its regulars include Southern service members stationed at the base.

"When my military guys come in here, that's not with their family, they are like, 'Oh my gosh, this tastes like home,'" said Rosalyn Wyche, who recently took over running the restaurant from her brother, Roscoe Wyche III.

Mama Carol's is also beloved in Anchorage's Black community, which numbers about 15,000 citizens, or roughly five percent of the city's population.

On a fall morning, Rosalyn clicked open the front door lock to get ready for lunch customers. She also runs a beauty salon just across the street. Her phone constantly buzzes with texts from children, grandchildren, friends, and clients. Her family's restaurant has served three generations of diners who come there to connect to the foods they miss—and to each other.

"That's what soul food is all about, that homey feeling, that comforting mother's love, grandmother's love, of making things from scratch and putting it on the plate," she said.

Anchorage is Alaska's largest city, home to just under 300,000 people, hugged by the Chugach Range to the east and Cook Inlet to the west. Air

Photos by Nathaniel Wilder

Oxtails (l) and fried catfish (r) are two of Mama Carol's most popular offerings.

"We wanted the collard greens, we wanted the baby back ribs, we wanted the sweet potato pie, we wanted pound cake.... It was our way of trying to stay in touch with the South."

Force planes rumble daily out of the north. The restaurant, its sign hanging between a gas station and one of Anchorage's many legal weed shops, has a modest dining room with a few booths and tables. Its walls, painted red, are crowded with photos of famous visitors, including Rosa Parks, M. C. Hammer, Snoop Dogg, and George Clinton. There are also framed news stories from the local paper and articles about when Roscoe III was named a Lawry's Seasoned Salt spokes chef in the mid-1990s. (Lawry's, a seasoning with California origins but long associated with soul food, is also commonly eaten by Inupiat people indigenous to northern Alaska to flavor a cut of whale skin and blubber known as muktuk.)

As the weather turns cold and the mornings grow dark, Mama Carol's steam case glows invitingly next to the register. Food is mostly served cafeteria-style, so diners can customize plates with proteins like ribs or fried chicken and sides like green beans, macaroni and cheese, and mashed potatoes, reminiscent of a meat-and-three joint. Many customers come in military uniform, stopping in quickly and heading out with Styrofoam cartons that smell like warm cornbread and barbecue sauce.

ROSALYN AND ROSCOE III'S parents, Roscoe Wyche Jr. and Annie Carroll Wyche, were the first owners of the family restaurant. They had been high school sweethearts in Thomasville, Georgia. They brought their three children to Alaska in the late 1970s, when Roscoe Jr. was stationed at what is now JBER.

The family took over an existing restaurant in 1988 after Roscoe Jr. retired from twenty-six years of service, ending his career as the head of procurement for the base. Having a soul food

restaurant had been "a lifelong dream," of his father's, Roscoe III said, and the space near the base was a good opportunity. The Wyches also owned a beauty shop and a beauty supply store nearby that catered to the African American community. Roscoe Jr. and Roscoe III worked at the restaurant, and Annie, who everybody called "Miss Carol," worked at the beauty shop.

"My mom would get off at the salon and still go home and make pies and peach cobblers in the middle of the night," Rosalyn said.

The Wyche family has persevered through serious challenges over the years. They continued to operate the restaurant after the elder Wyches died, first Roscoe Jr. and then Annie. The restaurant was twice the victim of arson, once in the 1990s and more recently in 2021.

The business occupied five different locations over the years, each one offering a slightly different name and menu. This time, Rosalyn decided to change the name to honor their mother. Many of the recipes came from her side of the family.

"Now I'm going to infuse my mom in there, because that's where we got the sweet potato pies and the peach cobblers," Rosalyn said.

Anchorage is home to many small immigrant communities and a large indigenous population, with more than 100 languages spoken in its schools. That diversity shows in the restaurant's menu and clientele, Rosalyn said. Until the 2021 fire, Roscoe's occupied a former gyro shop, and it still offers gyros. The current base-adjacent location was formerly a Caribbean lunch counter, and you can still get plantains daily. On that morning in mid-November, a chef sliced a generous pernil in the kitchen, just as the first lunch customers lined up, chatting in Spanish.

"We do catering for church events, weddings, funerals," Rosalyn said. "We don't just deal with one culture; we deal with all cultures. It's kind of how Anchorage is."

Alaska's sheer distance from the South means that sourcing specialty items, like chitlins, can be tough, Rosalyn said. Scarcity necessitates some uniquely Alaskan substitutions, like Alaska-grown collard greens in the summertime and reindeer sausage in the gumbo. Though reindeer aren't native to Alaska, reindeer herding, a strategy for food security, began in Alaska over 100 years ago. Now a small amount of reindeer meat is added to pork sausage creating "reindeer dogs."

The restaurant holds a special place for many in Anchorage's Black community. Cal Williams, a scholar of Black history in Alaska, remembers Roscoe's in its earliest days as a tiny storefront with lots of regular customers. They may not have agreed on all the issues that came up in conversations, but they connected over food, he said.

"Like aromatherapy, there is a certain taste therapy—and sometimes your body tells you that you aren't going to be fully satisfied until you eat some sweet potato pie," Williams said.

Black Americans first came to Alaska in the mid-nineteenth century to work in the commercial whaling industry, he said. They were also part of the gold rush in the late 1800s. Black labor helped to build Alaska's railroads, as well as the highway that connects Alaska to the lower forty-eight. But Williams said the biggest driver of growth in the Alaska's Black population over the last 100 years has been the military.

There are few other restaurants in Anchorage where a diner can find soul food, and none with such a large menu or long history. Roscoe III sees his family's restaurant as a place where anyone, from any culture, can learn about and eat the kinds of food cooked for generations by Black families in his parents' home state of Georgia and throughout the South.

"Along with the Black community, Roscoe's food reaches out to everyone, and we invite them to

come in and enjoy our Southern cooking," he said.

When Anchorage attorney Rex Butler, a longtime regular customer, breezes through the door of the restaurant, he's usually looking for fried catfish or chicken, he said. He grew up in New Jersey but spent ten years in the South when he was in the Navy, which is where he had the opportunity to eat staples like gumbo, fried chicken and smothered pork chops. (People cooked that way in the Northeast, he said, but it just wasn't the same.) Roscoe's introduced him to oxtails, which he now orders regularly.

"It doesn't matter how long you've lived in Anchorage—and I've been up here for forty years—there is going to be a time when you want to taste Southern food," he said.

Marilyn Stewart-Richardson, originally from Alabama, was stationed in Anchorage when she was twenty-one.

"First off, I was beginning to think I was the only African American there. I was looking for others. I remember what my grandmother said as I was leaving Alabama for the first time: 'The first thing I want you to do is unite with a church,'" she said.

She joined New Hope Baptist Church, one of a half-dozen prominent Black churches in the city. And she found Roscoe's. "I've been coming ever since," she said.

For a time, Stewart-Robinson lived in a suburb of Anchorage and would drive fifteen miles to the little neighborhood where the restaurant was originally located. "When I would go there, I could honestly tell you I never ever had a bad meal," she said. "Miss Carol and Roscoe III's dad always talked to me like they had known me all my life."

Her favorite order now is ribs or catfish. The restaurant has always been a way for Alaskans to carry on their Southern heritage, she said.

"We wanted the collard greens, we wanted the baby back ribs, we wanted the sweet potato pie, the pound cake—we craved for that," she said. "It was our way of trying to stay in touch with the South."

Julia O'Malley, a third-generation Alaskan, lives, writes, and cooks in Anchorage. She is the author of The Whale and the Cupcake: Stories of Subsistence, Longing and Community in Alaska.

A cook slices smoked brisket;
OPPOSITE: Rosalyn Wyche

DELIGHTFULLY, DELICIOUSLY CURIOUS

A Panamanian restaurateur offers lessons in flavor and history.

BY SHEEKA SANAHORI

A FRIEND SHARED HER STRATEGY FOR finding the best local restaurants while away from home. Her method is simple. She asks her Uber or taxi driver, "Where are you eating lunch today?"

This question has led her to many delightful eateries frequented by the people who know their city best. I couldn't wait to use her method the next time I needed a solid recommendation.

"Where are you eating lunch today?" I asked the taxi driver who picked me up from Curaçao International Airport. I'd just flown in from my hometown of Atlanta.

"Me? I'm going home to eat," he replied. "That's the best food."

Not the answer I'd hoped for.

My next trip was to Panama. Ahead of that visit, I gathered options by reading online travel forums, just in case I got another recommendation that led nowhere.

A Facebook group for Black travelers had several endorsements for one particular restaurant in Panama City. "Best food I had while there was at Peach Fuzz International! Danny is the host with the most, and an excellent chef," one post exclaimed. I added it to my itinerary, excited to try a restaurant both Black- and locally owned.

On our last evening in Panama City, my family and I took an Uber to Peach Fuzz International. It was shortly before closing time, and I briefly chatted with chef and owner Danny Jules as he prepared my to-go order of fried fish and patacones (fried green plantains). Once I bit into the crispy, tender fish, I knew I wanted to return to learn more about Jules and his cooking.

A few months later, I was back in Panama City, this time visiting Peach Fuzz International with enough time to linger at the restaurant. I wasn't the only diner from the United States. I sat by myself at the bar in front of the propane gas–fired stoves. A group of six Americans sat behind me, with three small tables pushed together, jovially making conversation on Jules' covered patio. Local customers occasionally popped in to order plates of fish to go. Jules told me that he has served diners from around the world, including Singapore, South Africa, and Mexico.

By then I'd been with Jules since sunrise. I was starting to yawn, though not out of boredom. I wanted to see him make his signature fried fish from start to finish. First, I accompanied him to the fish maraket, where he showed me how he picks the freshest snook. He then diligently

Photos by Sheeka Sanahori

Danny Jules, chef-owner of Peach Fuzz International in Panama City, Panama, seasons fish in a blend of lime juice and 17 spices, a marinade style he calls “in the mud.”

Danny Jules (r) and an employee open up shop for the day.

weighed each one, only choosing fish that weighed one-and-a-half pounds. He also bought a ten-pound bag of limes, a key ingredient in his marinade. We took a taxi back to Peach Fuzz Interntional, where he showed me how to cut, clean, and season the snook. By the time the restaurant opened for lunch, my energy level was flagging. Jules, on the other hand, was in his stride, frying one batch of snook while coating the next in flour.

His restaurant, in a small shopping center, is not much wider than an SUV. Inside, beige-and-blue tiled walls are lined with commercial shelves stacked with bowls, spices, and serving dishes. When space permits, customers pull tables and chairs into the parking lot out front to eat the day's catch. Jules' specialty, PESCADO FRITO (fried fish), is hand-lettered in teal above the metal roll-up door. Peach Fuzz is sandwiched between a bakery and a restaurant that specializes in Panamanian bistec picado. The building sits in the shadow of the now-abandoned Juan Demostenes Arosemena Stadium, built in 1938.

Jules is Afro-Panamanian, the grandson of immigrants who moved from Barbados to Panama as they sought work on the Panama Canal and in other infrastructure jobs that promised higher wages and a better life.

He was born in Curundú, the same Afro-Panamanian neighborhood where he opened Peach Fuzz in 2013. He named his restaurant after the nickname a barber gave him regarding the whisper of hair covering Jules' scalp after a fresh haircut. I imagine he manifested his global clientele when he tacked on "International."

Today, he has a couple of regular customers who fly into Panama City on a layover that's just long enough for them to stop by and get a plate of Jules' signature fried fish.

His referral process is simple. New customers try—and love—his fried snook, cassava fries, and patacones. He asks them to tell their traveler friends. One customer who organizes tours to Panama always inncludes Peach Fuzz on her itineraries. Another loved his fried fish so much that she insisted Jules start marketing himself on social media. She made the restaurant's Instagram page herself.

You won't find Curundú on any travel website's lists for "best neighborhoods in Panama City," though. Public housing and a heavy police presence are staples of the neighborhood, which is near the center of the city. Curundú is about three miles from Casco Viejo, the colonial neighborhood originally built by Spanish settlers, which now serves as Panama City's tourist district.

A plate of fried snook and cassava fries at Peach Fuzz International.

Uber, the car-riding app, intentionally cuts off service to Curundú every evening around 6 P.M. I discovered this during my first visit to Peach Fuzz International, when I tried to request a car to leave Curundú, my to-go plate of fish in hand. It's a policy I've never seen elsewhere in the world. If you request a pickup in Curundú after six, the app automatically responds with "no cars available." Jules hailed a taxi in Spanish so that my family and I could be on our way. He's used to it, he said.

Uber's local policy for Curundú can make it more difficult for tourists to visit businesses like Jules', but the transportation hurdle doesn't deter faithful customers like Nigel Fleming, a Black American who lived in Panama City for a couple of years after college. According to Jules, Fleming

"I'd rather have people that can't cook come and work for me because I train them from scratch. I don't have to break you out of any bad habits."

was one of the first Americans to eat at Peach Fuzz International, not long after it opened.

"It's beautiful. It's like walking into your cousin's backyard in the summertime at a cookout and all your cousins are there," Fleming said. "Over there just felt really safe, like the community was protecting itself. Everyone knew whose kids belonged to who, and what area they lived in... Four or five kids are just walking down the street and coming up to Danny, and Danny's talking to them, and they're sitting in his lap and telling stories—all while he's frying fish—and I'm just like, 'This is so cool.'"

Now sixty-four years old, Jules hires neighbors in an area where jobs are scarce. He teaches his employees cooking techniques and restaurant management skills.

"I train everybody that works for me. I'd rather have people that can't cook come and work for me because I train them from scratch. I don't have to break you out of any bad habits."

JULES IS CARRYING on a particular Caribbean-Panamanian food tradition. Caribbean immigrants to Panama brought the flavors of their homes, including turmeric and curry. They blended those with the Latino and African influences that already existed locally. In doing so, they created a regionally specific cuisine marked by dishes like seafood gumbo and fried fish.

He stays true to the techniques his Barbadian grandmother taught him when he turned thirteen. She passed down this legacy to all her grandsons, ensuring the young men would have this important skill. Danny started learning from his grandmother long before he became a teenager though, often following her as a child from Panama's markets and back to her kitchen.

"My grandmother used to wake me up, she always called me 'old boy.' She would call me, 'Old boy! Let's go to fish market. Old boy! Let's go to big market,'" he recalled. "By me being with her so much, I was never intimidated by the kitchen."

Now, travelers who want to learn some of the techniques Jules inherited from his grandmother can take his cooking class, where they spend a morning learning how to cut, season, and fry fish.

When I cooked alongside Jules, we started by juicing dozens of mandarin limes, with their bumpy rind and yellow-orange flesh. Their juice is milder in flavor than that of the Persian limes we commonly find in US grocery stores. Jules told me that you can use Persian limes or even lemons in a pinch, but the brine will be more acidic.

Into the lime juice he adds his blend of seventeen spices, including black pepper, turmeric, and curry, to make the "mud," as his grandmother taught him to call the marinade. He scores each snook with six cuts along the body and smears in the spice blend so that every bite is savory.

It makes for a phenomenal melding of tastes and histories. The fish is tender, and the flavor is bright. Jules serves the snook with simple cassava fries so that the fish takes center stage. Travelers who remain in the tourist district aren't likely to taste this fusion of Caribbean and Panamanian cuisine.

A few weeks later, back in Atlanta, I pulled out the fryer in my home kitchen. I carefully unwrapped the small bags of wet and dry seasonings Danny gave me. I nervously grabbed tilapia and Persian limes from my local grocery store, unsure how my version would turn out with the substitutes. As the fish cooled in the fryer basket, the drops of hot grease still slowly dripping down, my husband and I stood over it to take our first bite. Before my taste buds could register the tilapia's flavor, my husband's eyes widened.

"This is good!" he said.

I agreed, relieved that the seasonings I'd buried in my luggage had been put to good use.

As I ate, I thought about the fried-fish traditions of African American culture, how we'd eat fried whiting and catfish on the weekends or for special occasions. I was grateful to learn about the history of fried fish from another part of the diaspora. All it took was a taxi ride past the tourist area to find it.

Sheeka Sanahori is a journalist and video producer. Her newsletter, Inherited Travel*, encourages travelers to support locally owned businesses.*

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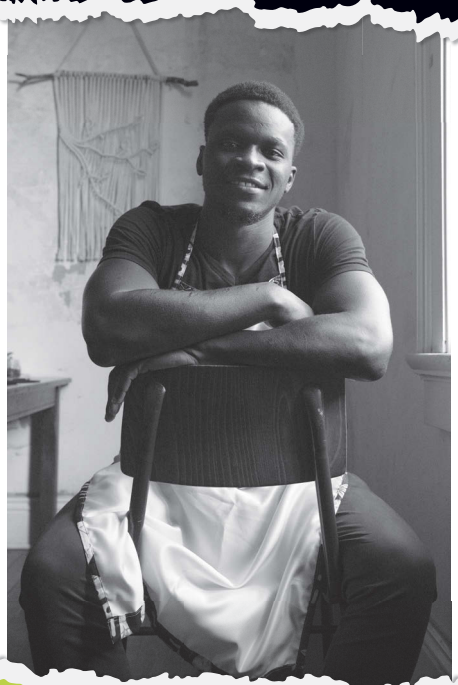

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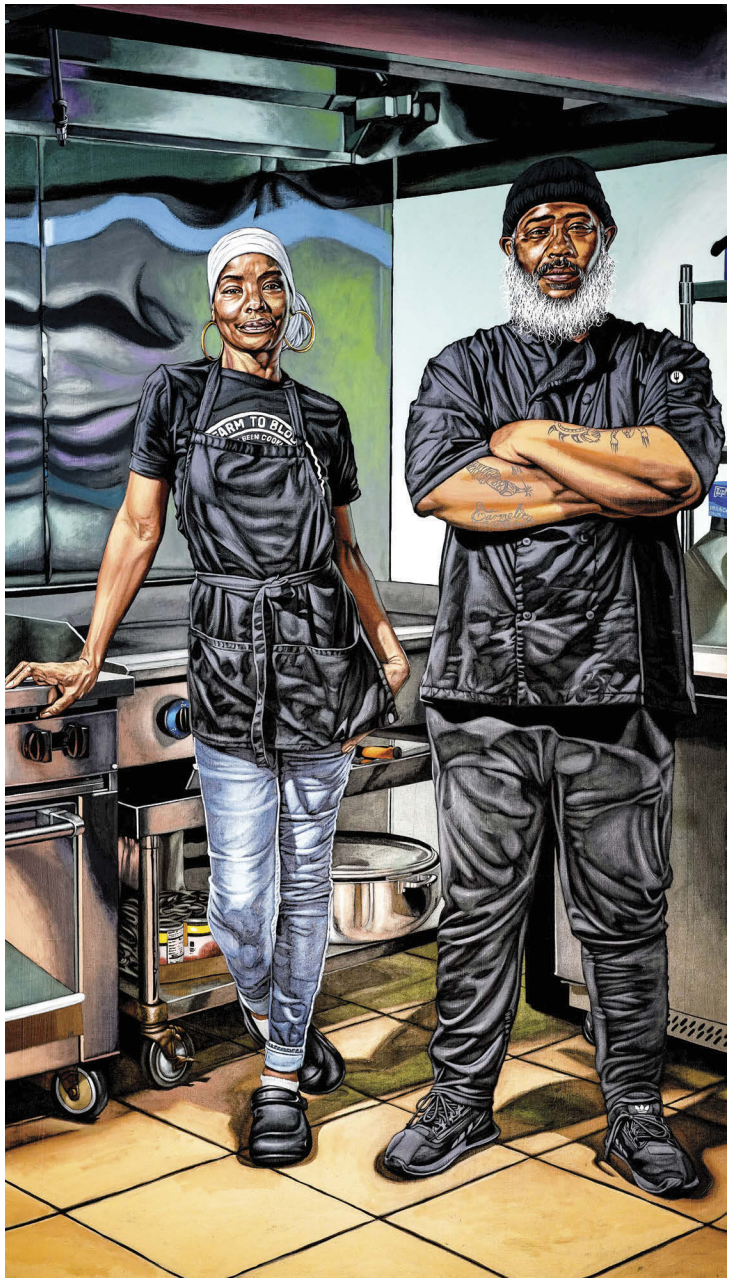

Portrait of Atlanta

CAN YOU FIND THE SOUTH BY way of Queens, New York? Atlanta multimedia artist Alfred Conteh believes so. The SFA's 2023 21c Museum Hotels Artist in Residence made his case with his monumental portrait of husband and wife Malik Rhasaan and Detric Fox-Quinlan, the owners of Che Butter Jonez in Atlanta. The couple relocated from New York City to Atlanta a few years ago and opened a food truck with dishes inspired by the Queens neighborhood where Rhasaan grew up, a place where Jamaican, Middle Eastern, and Chinese restaurants existed on one block. They also drew flavor inspiration from Rhasaan's Jamaican roots and offer several halal dishes like lamb burgers. They've jokingly called their food "hood halal." During the pandemic, they opened a brick-and-mortar restaurant in the heart of southwest Atlanta, a predominantly Black neighborhood chronically underserved when it comes to hip sit-down eateries. Conteh was a customer at the couple's food truck and has watched them embrace the rhythms of the South and the people they serve. Rhasaan and Fox-Quinlan are "synthesizing a new Southern identity with a robust food culture at its core," Conteh said.

—*Art by* Alfred Conteh; *Text by* Rosalind Bentley

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI LEADS THE REGIONAL FOODWAYS CONVERSATION.

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20 EPISODES of the *Gravy* podcast released. We joined the APT Podcast Studios network to expand our reach and passed the 3 million all-time downloads mark.

9 DOCUMENTARY FILMS produced on subjects ranging from the high cost of cheap food to the Great Migration experience in Los Angeles. We also supported the work of three summer film residents.

81 ORAL HISTORIES recorded and photographed with bakers, brewers, and farmers from Virginia to Texas

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3 AWARDS bestowed to a sno-ball stalwart, a taco impresario, and a culturally driven nutrition advocate

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