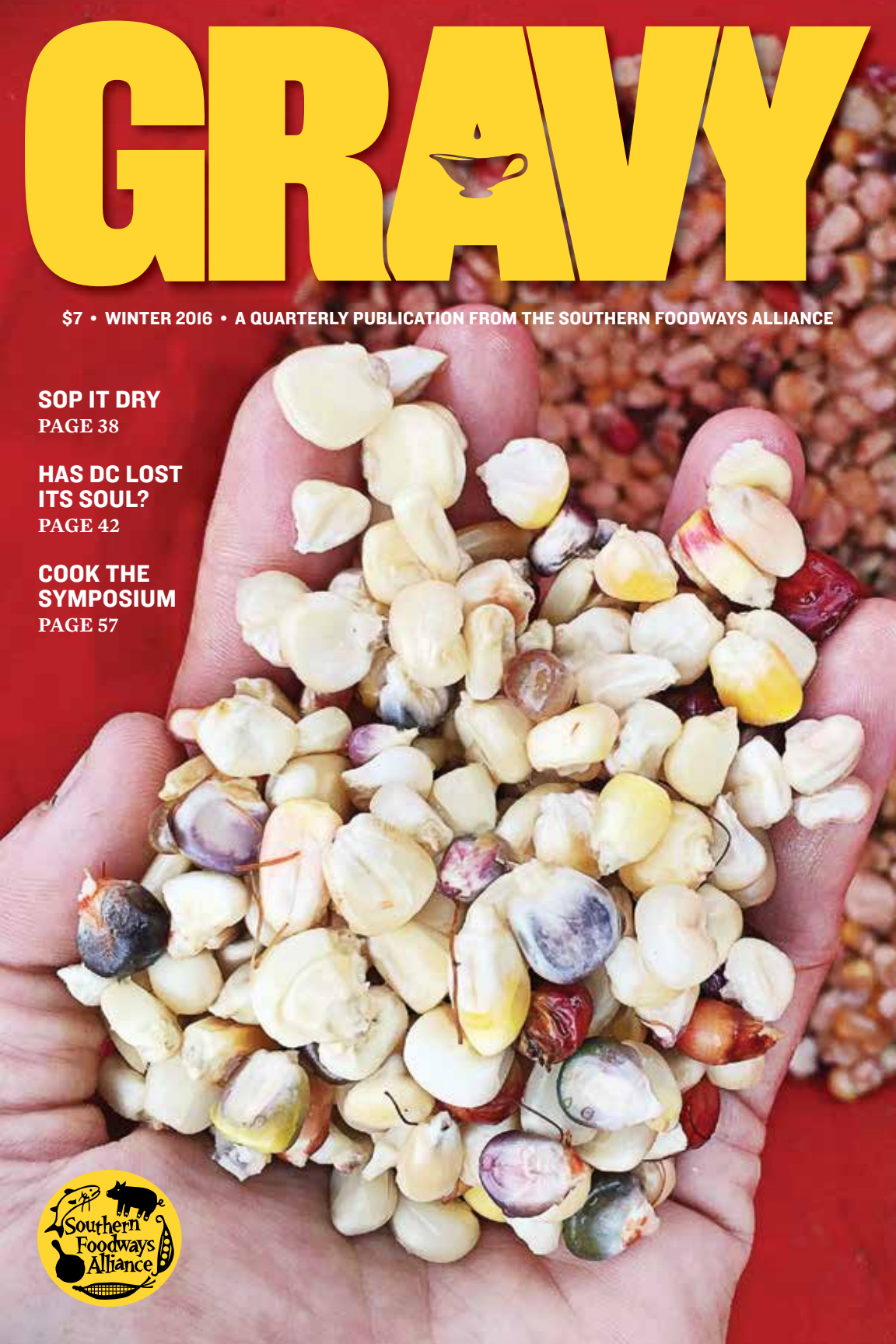
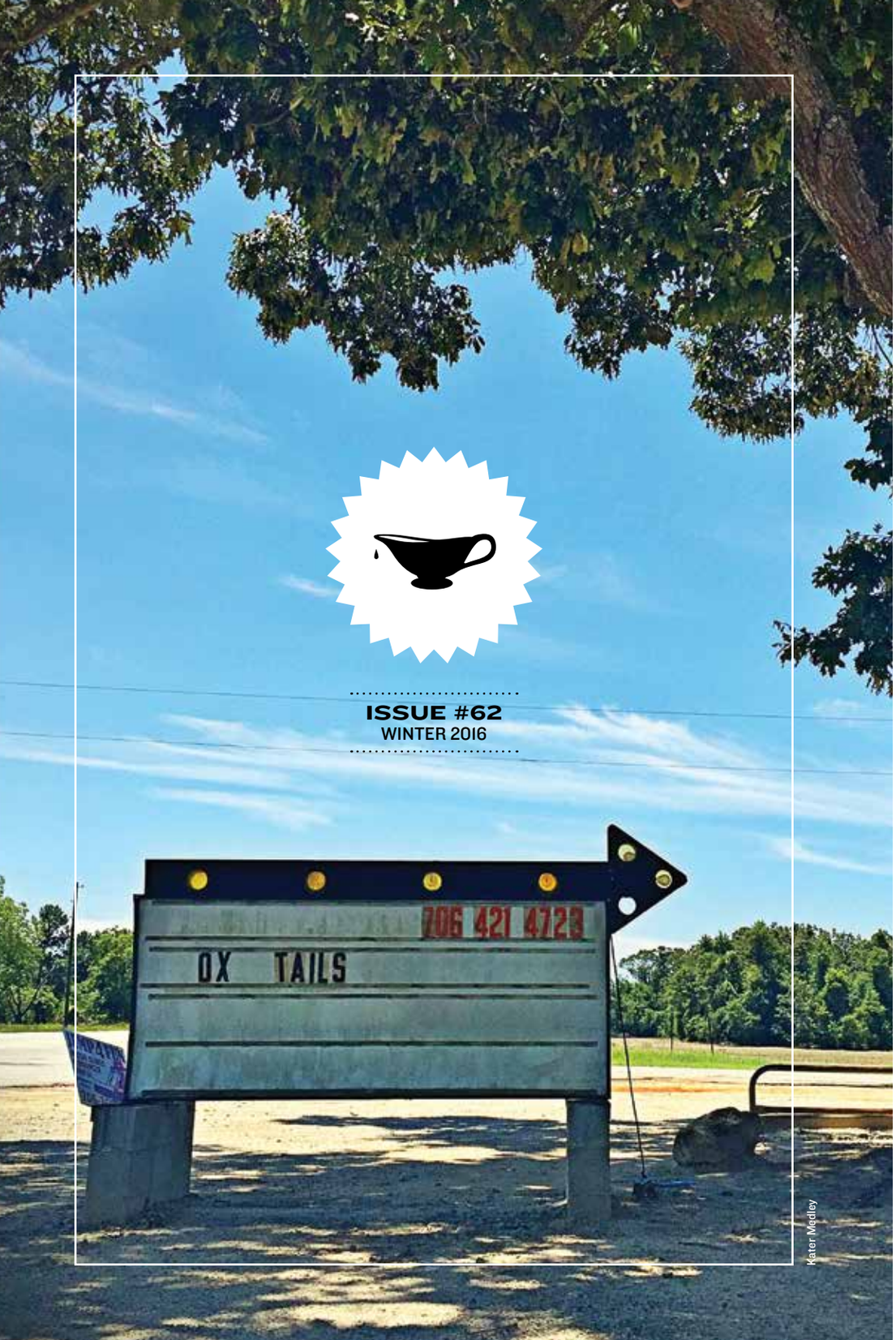
GRAVY

$7 • WINTER 2016 • A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION FROM THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE





Kater Medley

ISSUE #62
WINTER 2016

GRAVY

THE SFA SERVES YOU...

FEATURES

Cover photo by **KATE MEDLEY**

First Helpings

LEFT TO RIGHT: Jennifer V. Cole; Osayi Endolyn

GRAVY GETS A STIR

THIS EDITION OF *GRAVY* marks my twenty-sixth consecutive issue as editor. Let's be honest: You need a break from me, dear reader. And given the circumstances, I am happy to oblige. By the time you read this, I will be at home on maternity leave, reading mysteries with my feet up and a quiet, sleeping baby snuggling by my side. That's how it's supposed to go, right? Just making sure.

Beginning with this issue, we welcome a new associate editor to Team SFA. Shortly after Osayi Endolyn came to us as a writer (check out her piece on Hoppin' John in the summer 2016 issue), we had an inkling she was just the person we needed to expand our editorial team. Not to brag or anything, but we were right. You'll read more about Osayi when you turn the page. Her thoughtful perspective brings a new energy to our editorial mission, and we are excited to work together to improve and expand *Gravy* in 2017 and beyond.

In addition to Osayi, I am extremely excited to entrust the spring 2017 issue of *Gravy* to the capable-doesn't-begin-to-describe-it hands of guest editor Jennifer V. Cole. Following a long tenure at *Southern Living*, Jennifer now freelances for publications from *Esquire* to *Fast Company* to *Garden & Gun* to, yes, *Gravy*. ("A Ghost in the Freezer," from our spring 2016 issue, was the most-read *Gravy* story on our website this year.) When she's not hosting bourbon-fueled gatherings on the front porch of her Birmingham home, she's on a trip to Sicily, or Mexico City, or Cartagena. Follow her on Instagram if you can handle the ensuing jealousy and wanderlust. —*Sara Camp Milam*

L: Pableaux Johnson; R: Andrew Thomas Lee

FEATURED CONTRIBUTOR
REGINA N. BRADLEY

Pableaux Johnson

REGINA N. BRADLEY, a native of Albany, Georgia, is an assistant professor of English at Armstrong State University in Savannah. She teaches and researches on post–Civil Rights African American literature, hip-hop culture, and race. At the 2016 Southern Foodways Symposium, she blew the audience away with a talk about the cornfields and cornbreads of her youth in Albany, an excerpt of which begins on page 38 of this issue. We caught up with Bradley after the Symposium to introduce her to *Gravy* readers.

What are you currently working on?

I'm currently finishing my first academic book, titled *Chronicling Stankonia: OutKast and the Rise of the Hip Hop South* (UNC Press). In it, I theorize the Hip Hop South, the cultural and generational shift that takes place with young black Southerners after the Civil Rights Movement. In particular, I focus on how the Atlanta hip-hop group OutKast is the foundation of the hip-hop South and how they influence the cultural expression of younger black Southerners outside of the arc of the Civil Rights Movement.

Which books, movies, and television shows do you look forward to catching up on during the semester break this winter?

When I'm not writing, I will make time to plunder Netflix: *Black Mirror, Hemlock Grove,* and rewatching *Marvel's Luke Cage.* I also plan to catch up with my comics: *Harrow County, Elf Quest, World of Wakanda,* and *Black Panther.*

What are some of your favorite books to teach as an English professor?

I try to pledge allegiance to the Black South and our writers as much as possible. I love teaching Kiese Laymon's novel, *Long Division*, and his collection of essays, *How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America.* Jesmyn Ward is always in the rotation, especially *Men We Reaped.* I'm teaching her novel *Where the Line Bleeds* for the first time next semester, and I'm excited!

What classes are you teaching in the spring?

This spring I'm teaching a class on OutKast and their impact on how we render expressions of contemporary Southern black identity. I am also teaching two sections of a course called Ethics in Literature. My focus for the course is the question, "What are the ethics of #BlackLivesMatter in literature?" Some of the texts we're reading include Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird,* Edward P. Jones' *The Known World,* and Damian Duffy and John Jennings' graphic novel adaptation of Octavia Butler's phenomenal book *Kindred.*

MISSED CUES

DINING ROOM POLITICS START AT THE HOST STAND

by Osayi Endolyn

Denny Culbert

I LEARNED ABOUT THE POLITICS of food and dining early. My first job was hosting at Red Robin in Moreno Valley, California, sixty miles east of Los Angeles. At fifteen years old, I was the youngest employee in the restaurant, a chain known for big burgers and endless servings of steak fries. As we approached closing time one Sunday night, just two servers worked the floor, so I alternated incoming parties between them.

One section was at the front of the restaurant, while the other was adjacent to the host stand in the bar area. Things were going fine until I tried to seat a party of African Americans up by the bar. I had just seated the front dining room. On paper, this was the right call. I guided the group toward a booth, and the man instantly shook his head and backed away. He demanded a seat in the front.

"Look around," he said to me, jabbing his finger toward the bar. "It's full of black people up there."

He was right. The bar was mostly black, and the front section was noticeably less diverse. Where I had seen an even distribution of server sales, he saw a segregated dining room.

My manager, an unflappable man from Mexico, tried to assuage him, and later expressed utter confusion at the customer's reaction toward me, a fellow black person. But even then, I got it. As a kid, my mom kept me flush with black history books and flashcards. The man was likely old enough to participate in the Civil Rights Movement or at least share tales of the Black Power Movement that evolved from it. A bar area of mostly black diners (in the context of a dining room that looked the opposite) triggered his frustration. The man didn't think I was racist. He felt like I was careless.

"You have to pay attention to these things," he admonished me. I bristled in the way that only teenagers can show irritation—it wasn't my fault that every other party had been brown-skinned. I hated that he expected me to play with the optics.

My education on this bumpy landscape of identity and dining continued almost fifteen years later. I hosted at a fine-dining restaurant in Midtown Atlanta. One afternoon, a manager called me into the office before my shift and handed me a typed letter, sent certified mail (return receipt!). She and two other managers averted their eyes as I read silently.

The letter was addressed to the restaurant owner. I recall that the author was identifed on her letterhead as a New York lawyer. She complained that I was rude to her and her husband on a recent visit. I remembered these guests. The couple, celebrating their anniversary, had been about thirty minutes late for their reservation and had not phoned to notify us that they were still en route. Another party was seated in the prime, corner banquette originally marked for them. When the couple arrived, I did have a flash of panic. The next available table was not considered as nice for a special occasion. I paused to consider other options, but seated them promptly.

The woman read my flinch as a precursor to a night of racist acts. She wrote that the black hostess was obviously offended by her, an Asian woman, and her black husband. That evening, each time I circled the dining room to assess the status of tables, an act of anticipation and timing crucial to any host, she believed I was sending passive-aggressive, anti-interracial signals.

"By the way," she wrote, "thanks for ruining our anniversary." She did not want a response to her letter. I was so visibly upset at her accusations that the managers, all white, actually apologized to *me*—maybe rethinking their decision to show me the letter at all. "We know who you are," they said.

Though these incidents took place years ago, I am still struck at how serious grievances arose from innocent, seemingly innocuous acts. I wonder if a host of a different race would have received the same complaints. It's a loaded question. And I'll never know the answer.

I do know, after several years of food and drink writing (and more recent work with the SFA), that we as a culture are more dialed into the subtle implications of food and dining, who fits in where, than ever before.

Like many *Gravy* readers, I'm intrigued by the opportunities for understanding and the potential minefields in the culinary world—back of the house, at the bar, home kitchens, in food media, and the places in between. I will use this space to explore the unspoken codes, tacit agreements, and strange circumstances that surface while eating in the South (and sometimes beyond). I hope to ask new questions and provoke discussions. Mostly, I just want for us all to get to know each other better.

Osayi Endolyn is the SFA's associate editor. She has been featured on The Splendid Table*, and her work has appeared in* Gravy*,* Atlanta *magazine,* Eater*, and* New York *magazine's* The Cut*. She earned a BA in French from UCLA and an MFA in writing from SCAD. A California native, she lived in Atlanta and now resides in Gainesville, Florida.*

Kate Medley

WHAT WEALTH IS

by Rebecca Gayle Howell

When you eat the same food as your livestock, your animals, the beasts
you rear from teat to trough—rear up for tender, the cut—
when you chew in your mouth what you dump into theirs
when you know their bodies are not today separate from your body,
the noise-making heat, green flies all around,
when the garden yard is stopped short by its wall of corn, its room of corn,
tall as any useful man, tall as money's gate,
you know: your hand, rising up and opening, is the devil to which all this prays
and in your dream you walk in past the gate, into the corn,
taller than you, into its room, and it's dark here, the husk ceiling
its own shallow, unlit, selfish sun, and at your feet the path narrows into a limit
that makes the leaves for a moment look like the ocean folding in on itself or the church
women praising with their palm fans, the church women who knew once
what to do, and so you put your god hand up and open to touch the fronds
thinking they will know what to do, and they are sharp as the stained blade your daddy
carried, sharp as the cut, and your blood hand is bleeding now, your face,
bleeding, and you close your eyes and walk because isn't this the way out?

Native to Kentucky, Rebecca Gayle Howell is a senior editor for The Oxford American. *Her forthcoming book* American Purgatory *received The Sexton Prize and will be released in both the United States and the U.K. in early 2017.*

ARE YOU TACO LITERATE?

LESSONS FROM STEVEN ALVAREZ

by Gustavo Arellano

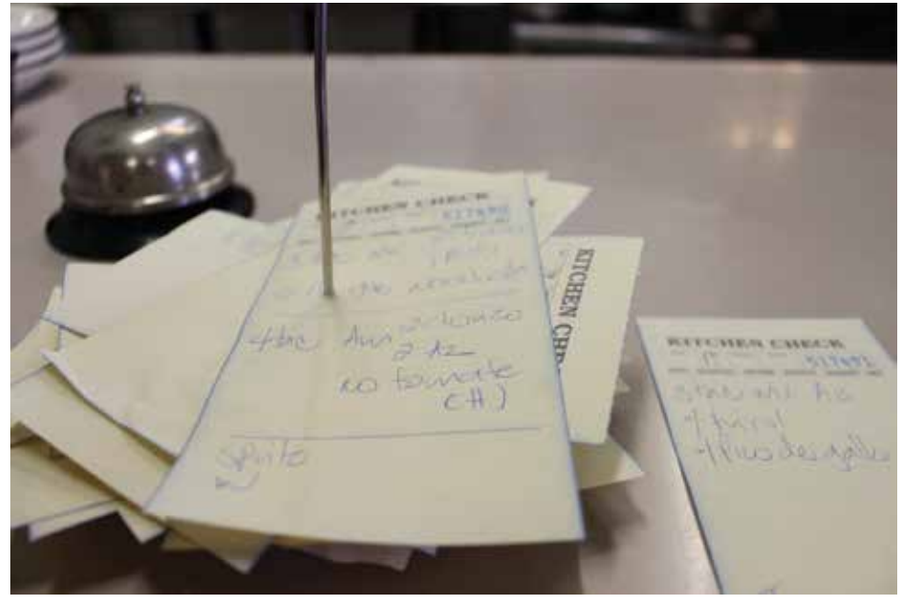
It's not often that a notorious white supremacist reminds me of Mexican food or my Latino friends. This fall, *The Washington Post* ran a story about Derek Black, the son of Don Black, founder of the influential racist website Stormfront. The younger Black has repudiated the ideas of his father, and the *Post* ran a photo of a defiant, unrepentant Don as a sort of counterbalance.

The photo's location caught my eye: Crossville, Tennessee. I don't think of the city as a focal point for racists. Every year for nearly a decade, my wife and I have spent a comfortable night at the local Holiday Inn Express off I-40 during our summer vacation. And every time we visit, we eat dinner at Cancun Mexican Restaurant, enjoying their generous margaritas, filling combo plates of cheesy enchiladas and burritos smothered in red sauce, and a salsa that scorches. We're usually the only Latino customers, and we feel fine.

This year, we hosted dear friends, Steven and Sara Alvarez. He's an assistant professor of writing, rhetoric, and digital studies at the University of Kentucky (and an SFA Smith Symposium Fellow); she's finishing her doctorate in rhetoric and composition at the University of Louisville. I met Steven years ago, when he invited me to lecture at UK, and our wives hit it off last year. The Alvarezes are wonderful, brilliant people, and we spent hours catching up that day in Crossville, ending with those giant Cancun platters.

Shortly after, the two announced that they were moving back to Sara's native New York City, where Steven earned his PhD at CUNY. In 2017, he begins teaching at St. John's University in Queens. It's a big loss for the South, as Steven has become an ambassador for Mexican food in *el Sur*. Thanks to him, I experienced the wondrous, carne asada–filled burritos at Tortillería y Taquería Ramirez in Lexington, which I documented for an SFA oral history project.

Steven has recently taken academia by storm with his philosophy of "taco literacy": examining Latino immigrant communities through the seemingly simple acts of eating and talking about Mexican food. He's lectured on the subject across the country and is doing impactful fieldwork to document how Mexican restaurants are changing the South—and how the South is changing Mexican immigrants.



Delilah Snell

Orders at Santa Fe Grill, Louisville, Kentucky

It's not *hasta la vista* for Steven and the South, but *hasta luego*. "In my research, I get to know folks, and I meet young families, and we become friends, develop *confianza*," he tells me. "So the South extends my community. I've learned so much in the friendships I've made across Kentucky."

He was able to gain that *confianza* from other immigrants not just because he's Latino, but because he approached them with new eyes and an open mind. Steven is from the copper-mining town of Safford, Arizona, the son of an immigrant from Sonora and a Chicano army veteran. Now thirty-six, he was the first in his family to graduate from college.

In the summer of 2003, after graduation, he went to work for Americorps. Steven cut trails in Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp, tutored Spanish-speaking students at an elementary school in Goose Creek, South Carolina, did construction demolition for a housing program in Birmingham, and built houses in Lexington, Kentucky, with Habitat for Humanity. There, standing at a urinal in a honky-tonk bar, Steven realized the South was more than the Faulkner novels he read as an undergrad.

"A *mexicano,* doing his thing, started talking to me in Spanish," Steven says. "We chatted for a bit, and I asked him if there were many *mexicanos* in Kentucky. I remember he said, '*Pos' bastantes, güero!*'"[1]

Steven returned to Lexington in 2012, when he interviewed at the University of Kentucky. During his job talk, he dropped facts about the Bluegrass State's Mexican population that stunned the crowd. "They had no idea there were undocumented students at the University," Steven says. "They

[1] **"A bunch, white boy!"**

had no idea about the over-100 percent increase in Mexican folks for the previous decade."

He accepted the job and dove into exploring his new home, specifically the area of Lexington nicknamed "Mexington" for its large Latino population. In the barrio's taquerías, bakeries, markets, and restaurants, Alvarez developed the idea for his taco literacy class.

"Tacos can be read," the *profe* says. "They carry social meanings—they are part of foodways networks of people who conduct their rich lives in languages. In the case of *mexicanos* in Kentucky, their foodways are bilingual. Their literacies communicate not only their identities, but also their sense of place, and, I think most importantly, are a form of communicating care."

The university approved the course, officially titled "Taco Literacy: Public Advocacy and Mexican Food in the US South," for the spring 2016 semester. Students visited local businesses, heard from restaurateurs, read articles on Mexican food (including my own), and wrote papers that ranged from straightforward restaurant reviews to ethnographic analyses of the Mexican food scene at horse races. It would have been just another cool college course if not for a January article in *VICE Munchies*. The Q&A with Steven went worldwide: He did interviews for *Buzzfeed*, Univision, NPR, and *El País* in Spain. Hundreds of other media outlets picked up the story.

The attention was career-changing. He's now planning a book that will focus on Kentucky, North Carolina, and Alabama, tracking each state's Mexican communities back to their homeland. Steven will continue the taco literacy course at St. John's and plans to educate New Yorkers on Southern and Latino-Southern foodways.

"I am thinking of organizing a writing program for college students to engage them as a community coming to the table," he adds. "Maybe not to resolve their differences, but at least to hear one another out. To communicate their views, and to listen between bites."

So why not continue in the South? "In first grade, I told my teacher that someday I was going to live in the Big Apple because I loved *Ghostbusters*. And then the Ninja Turtles came around, and I was done."

No matter where Steven lives, we'll always have Crossville. We aren't children of the South, yet we love the region and seek to understand it and help make it better. So when I read the *Washington Post* article and saw the picture of an angry Don Black, I thought: Our South is better than that. Optimistic, more inclusive. The future. And filled with Mexican food.

Gustavo Arellano is the editor of OC Weekly *and* Gravy*'s columnist.*

THE ROOTS OF FOOD INEQUALITIES

BEYOND THE FOOD DESERT NARRATIVE

by Ashanté M. Reese

On April 15, 2015, I traveled from Memphis to Ferguson, Missouri, in solidarity with activist friends in the Fight for $15 campaign. The movement is committed to raising the minimum wage to $15 an hour and securing union rights for fast food and home healthcare workers. The choice to rally in Ferguson was no accident. After the murder of Michael Brown and the failure to indict the officer who killed him, Ferguson became an important site and symbol of Black Lives Matter. Hundreds of protestors from St. Louis, Little Rock, Memphis, and other Midwestern and Southern cities filled the intersection at West Florissant and Ferguson Avenues. A parked white car, on which a protestor had handwritten NO JUSTICE NO PEACE, I CAN'T BREATHE, and BE THE CHANGE, blocked the street. Someone had

Michael B. Thomas/AFP/Getty Images

A memorial gathering for Michael Brown at the Canfield Apartments in Ferguson, Missouri

draped a United States flag over the roof. The driver honked the horn continuously while protestors chanted for black lives and shouted for fair wages. A protestor from Memphis recognized me and asked if I was alright. "This might get out of hand," he said over his shoulder, as he jogged toward a nearby McDonald's.

As a trained ethnographer, I am accustomed to weaving in and out of crowds, taking mental notes about the surroundings and conversations, snapping photos, and building relationships with those around me. I entered the field in 2012 as a PhD candidate with the anthropologist's standard toolkit: a recorder, a small notebook, a set of carefully crafted interview questions, a host of neighborhood residents who vouched for me, and a curiosity that drove participant observation. According to my dissertation committee, I knew enough anthropological theory and methods to conduct research. I was trained, but I was not prepared.

Early in my Washington, DC, fieldwork, residents shifted my research plans. They would tell me where they shopped and what they ate, but they did it on their own time, in their own ways. This often meant that I learned about family histories, relived experiences with the criminal justice system, and listened to social commentary about the ways gentrification brought increased commercial attention to their neighborhood, displacing elderly residents who could not afford to pay increasing property taxes.

During my fieldwork, I walked alone on DC streets that I was supposed to fear. I entered slumlord-owned apartments with cinder block walls and low lighting. I followed people and their stories wherever they took me.

But Ferguson was different. Not because of boarded buildings or crumbling infrastructure. Not even because of the crowd, though I sometimes felt intimidated by the sheer numbers. As I looked around at protestors fighting for dignity and economic justice, the lessons that my research participants taught me crystalized. The predominantly black crowd demanded fair wages, shouting, "I work! I sweat! Put fifteen on my check!" We yelled, "Black Lives Matter!" with conviction. The chants alternated, signaling two overlapping movements. Protestors shared space and joined forces. I questioned how I and others who conduct research on

PROTESTORS SHOW US HOW TO PAY ATTENTION TO MULTIPLE ISSUES AT ONCE. THEY DEMAND IT OF US RESEARCHERS, ADVOCATES, AND ACTIVISTS.

James Leynse/Corbis via Getty Images

At a protest for higher wages in Herald Square, Manhattan

food access could move forward with an understanding of, and commitment to, connecting different forms of injustice.

In Ferguson, the intermingled fight for racial justice with economic justice reflected what I learned in the field: People's lived experiences aren't distinct academic categories and rarely fit into any one theory of human behavior. Some of my research participants in DC, like some residents of Ferguson, live in the space where economic, food, and racial inequalities collide. They are not unlike many other African Americans across the country. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the median household income for black Americans was $36,898 in 2015, compared to $62,950 for whites. Even at the neighborhood level, research has continuously demonstrated that black middle-class neighborhoods have lower home values and less access to resources than their white counterparts.

Like Ferguson, many US cities bear residual marks from prejudicial lending, racial residential segregation, disinvestment in city centers, and white flight. Supermarkets relocated many of their stores to suburban areas, where they believed they would be more profitable. What we know as "food deserts," neighborhoods with at least 500 residents living at least one mile from a full-service grocery store, are in fact products of the sixty-year development of the suburban alternative to city living. As white people chose suburbs, the economic landscape of cities changed. In 1967, Federal Trade Commissioner Mary Gardiner Jones articulated a "revolution of rising expectations." As consumer culture paraded new products, businesses—including supermarkets—made them increasingly out of reach for city dwellers. The one-stop-shop model evident in suburban strip malls complemented middle-class white flight.

Today, we witness and attempt to eradicate contemporary food inequalities that are rooted in racism. They are intimately connected to the same forces that produce over-policing and unequal neighborhoods. Urban, predominately black communities navigate systemic failures shrouded in illusions of personal responsibility. They hope that dressing the part or working extra hours (or buying organic produce) can somehow atone for the effects of racism on the body and spirit.

A rally in New York City on August 9, 2015, the one-year anniversary of the death of Michael Brown

Cem Ozdel/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

These separate, but overlapping justice-centered efforts are not in vain. When people put their bodies on the front line, risking their freedom in pursuit of a fairer world, they highlight the complex ways in which inequalities shape neighborhoods, wages, job security, and food access. On the ground, protestors show us how to pay attention to multiple issues at once. They demand it of us researchers, advocates, and activists. To create a world in which everyone has equal access to fresh, affordable, healthy food, we have to grapple with the roots of racism that produce the fruit of inequality.

It is not enough to know where grocery stores are located or how people acquire the food they choose. Food access does not begin and end with the supermarket—it reflects societal ills that manifest in several ways. Recognizing this issue as part of racial and economic justice brings us in conversation with researchers, advocates, and activists who challenge our beliefs. If we are intentional, perhaps we will be one step closer to eradicating the roots from which inequalities in the United States grow.

Ashanté M. Reese is an assistant professor of anthropology at Spelman College, where she contributes to the new food studies program. She is working on a book manuscript entitled Between a Corner Store and a Safeway: Race, Resilience, and Our Failing Food System.

CHARLOTTE IN FIVE TAMALES

UNWRAPPING CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

by Tom Hanchett and Eric Hoenes del Pinal

Detail from a mural on Central Avenue

WHICH US METRO area has the fastest-growing Latino population? According to a recent Nielsen study, Charlotte, North Carolina, ranks first, followed by Raleigh and Atlanta. This is the newest New South. A region that has reinvented itself again and again since the Civil War is now in the midst of a newcomer revolution, as people of every background move here from across the United States and around the globe.

Charlotte is one of the fastest-growing cities in America. In 1990, Mecklenburg County, of which Charlotte is the county seat, was home to a half-million residents. In 2013, the county's population topped one million. Approximately 15 percent of new arrivals come from outside the US. That's a surprise to many of the folks who grew up in this part of the South, which historically attracted few immigrants. Today, business signs in Spanish, Vietnamese, and Arabic dot older suburban corridors such as Central Avenue and South Boulevard, signaling a profound change in the region's demographics.

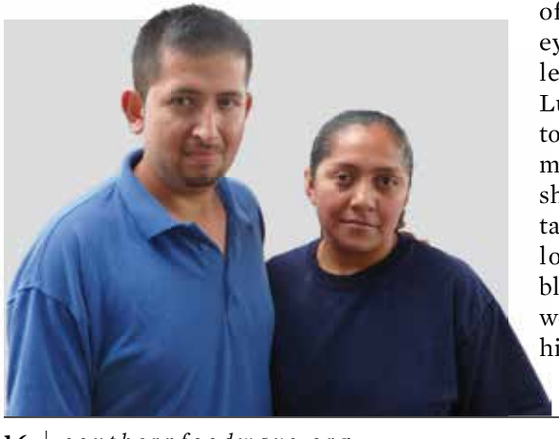
Signs on Central Avenue

Photos by Tom Hanchett

About half of the Charlotte area's immigrants hail from Latin America. Of those, half are from Mexico, while the rest represent virtually every country in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Those numbers imply a rich array of Latino cultures. Charlotte's food scene offers Mexican tacos and tortas, as well as Venezuelan arepas, Colombian empanadas, Salvadoran pupusas, and Cuban pressed sandwiches.

One item in particular, the tamale, offers insight into the diverse cuisines of Charlotte's Latino population. Many US diners are familiar with tamales, but they might not know that this

dish comes in national and regional varieties. Move southward and the wrappers change from corn husks to plantain leaves. Masa becomes moister, and fillings vary—mole sauce in southern Mexico, whole chicken legs in Guatemala. In short, tamales have cultural geography. Their flavors and compositions reveal the ways in which this dish spread from ancient Mesoamerica through the rest of the continent. Charlotte's tamales demonstrate how Latin American cultures and foodways are changing—and being changed by—the South.



Chemo and Lurdes Bustos

TAMALES AND BISCUITS, SIDE BY SIDE

ACROSS THE CAROLINAS, convenience stores attached to rural gas stations serve breakfast biscuits with a slice of country ham, a hunk of sausage, or a spread of livermush. At the Poplar Tent Marathon station off Interstate 85, at the edge of the Charlotte metro, hot tamales share space with biscuits under heat lamps by the front counter.

The cashier, Anselmo "Chemo" Bustos, tells a story of blue-collar migration and adaptation. In 1999, Bustos, who comes from the tiny village of Tamácuaro, Guerrero, Mexico, followed his brother to look for work in the Carolina tobacco fields. He eventually took a job as a kitchen helper at this gas station and worked his way up to cashier and then manager.

To help Chemo combat homesickness, family members would occasionally send videotapes of important fiestas in Tamácuaro. In one of these videos, the image of a young woman caught his eye. Calls were made, and he learned that her name was Lurdes, that she came from a town called La Palma, about 250 miles from Tamacuaro, and that she was single. They were soon talking on the phone, and their long-distance relationship bloomed. Two months later they were married, and Lurdes joined him in North Carolina.

Lurdes makes tamales each day,

Laura Gonzales Perez of Tamalería Laurita

just as she did in back in Mexico. She prepares the masa, stuffs it with slow-cooked chicken or pork, spreads it with a lightly spiced salsa, and then wraps it in a corn husk to make a neat, hand-sized bundle, which she then steams for three hours.

Lurdes has also adopted the traditions of her new home. While the tamales steam, she bakes the biscuits and fills them with sausage, egg, or country ham. The Bustos' journey from rural village to big city parallels that of earlier Southerners who left Appalachian mountain hollows to seek their fortune in urban centers such as Charlotte. The old textile mills have long since closed, but fresh economic opportunities are creating a *nuevo* New South.

MASTER OF MOLE

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL spirit that drew the Bustos to Charlotte also drives Tamalería Laurita's owner and namesake. Laura Gonzalez Perez's story, like that of many Latino immigrants, involves a two-step migration: first a move from a rural to an urban area in her home country, followed by immigration to the United States. Born in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, Perez learned her way around a commercial kitchen after migrating north to the city of Monterrey, fewer than 150 miles from the Texas border.

Those skills have served her well in the ten years she's been in Charlotte. She began by running a *lonchera*, or food truck, to serve the construction workers who built up this growing city. It wasn't long before she was able to add a second truck. In 2015, Perez leased a commercial kitchen in a mostly vacant shopping center located behind a former McDonald's restaurant. She hired several cooks to help,

and almost as an afterthought, installed a to-go counter and a half-dozen tables.

Tamalería Laurita serves Mexican staples from several regions, including tacos al pastor and pozole. She offers six kinds of tamales, including spicy chicken

in the northern Mexican style, pork tamales wrapped in corn husks, and two sweet dessert tamales—one dyed a deep, sugary red, the other made with young, sweet corn.

The mole tamales are her real specialty, and a direct connection to her home state of Chiapas. From the Yucatán Peninsula southward, in areas where Maya rather than Aztec culture dominated, tamales tend to be moister and are wrapped in green banana leaves rather than dried corn husks. Perez prepares her mole tamales this way, filling them with chicken slow-cooked in a sauce made from ancho, guajillo, and pasilla peppers, plus chocolate, peanuts, garlic, onion, tomato, and black pepper. They are savory and piquant with a hint of cinnamon sweetness.

In Charlotte, traditions from separate parts of Mexico come together. Though half a dozen employees now work in her kitchen, "I have to make the mole tamales myself," she says in Spanish. "No one else gets the seasoning just right." As Perez expands her business and makes money to support her family, she also honors the *comida casera* (home cooking) that she grew up eating.

GUATEMALA THE BEAUTIFUL

WHILE MEXICANS ACCOUNT for more than half of Charlotte's Latin American population, a growing array of Central and South American food cultures thrive here, too. Charlotte now boasts at least two eateries catering to the Guatemalan population.

Panadería El Quetzal occupies a slot in a small shopping plaza built in the 1960s. Most drivers might not give it a second look. But Guatemalans readily recognize the quetzal—a bird with flamboyant green and red plumage—as the symbol of their nation. Inside, they know they'll find a taste of home.

A long glass counter at El Quetzal displays dozens of traditional baked goods, from mini-loaves of sweet, moist pan de elote (cornbread) to crispy sugar cookies called champurradas that Guatemalans nibble with afternoon coffee. Bulbous loaves of pan francés (French bread) pair beautifully with refried black beans and the hard cheese called queso seco. A crew of six bakers rolls out dough to keep up with the demand. Many of El Quetzal's customers buy bread daily.

The bakery also sells tamales. As in southern Mexico, Guatemalan tamales are sheathed in banana leaves. Inside is an entire chicken leg cooked in red achiote gravy and topped with strips of pimiento and a single green olive. The masa is wetter than most Mexican tamales, and El Quetzal serves its tamales with tortillas or a hunk of bread on the side to help sop up the masa and gravy.

In early 2016, El Quetzal's owners opened Guate-Linda—"Guatemala the Beautiful"—in another shopping plaza about two miles away. Co-owner and chef Nora Guerra serves an extensive menu of Guatemalan dishes. Alongside tamales, the choices range from snack-sized fried tostadas called garnachas, to big bowls of pepián, a hearty pre-Columbian dish of poultry stewed in a sauce of tomato, tomatillo, pumpkin seeds, and chiles. The success of El Quetzal and Guate-Linda underscores the pluralism now found in Charlotte's Latino population.

SUPERMARKET TAMALES

COMPARE FOODS IS A CHAIN of nearly fifty full-service supermarkets that stretches across central North and South Carolina, and as far away as New England. Dominican immigrant Eligio Peña started it in New Jersey, then moved to North Carolina to serve the state's growing Latino market. Compare carries an extensive selection of Latino items, as well as Asian, African, and US staples—from kimchi to fufu to Kraft Mac & Cheese. You can also buy everything you need for tamales there: masa, corn husks, banana leaves, spice packets for making gravy, and even the big pots needed to steam them.

Many of the Compare locations also feature prepared food counters or restaurants that operate semi-independently within the store. At the Compare on Arrowood Drive in south Charlotte, Dominican-born Pedro Mena runs Bahía de Gracia, which sells mangú (mashed green plantains), chicharrón (meaty fried pork cracklins), and sancocho (beef stew), as well as a Caribbean version of tamales, known as pasteles en hoja—"cakes in leaves."

For this Caribbean take on tamales, a mix of plantain and yucca forms the masa. Plantain leaves serve as the wrapper. The filling of the pasteles is made from seasoned ground beef along with green olives, onions, and red bell peppers; or shredded chicken flavored with

L–R: Ofelia de Guerra, her daughter Arlette Guerra de Hurtado, and Elizabeth Castillo with an hallaca they made

green olives, green peppers, raisins, cilantro, and carrots. The taste and consistency evoke the Creole culture of the Caribbean, where African influences are more pronounced alongside Native American and European ones. In fact, the plantain traveled to Latin America with enslaved Africans.

Mena's deli counter offers other tamales, too, including Mexican and Salvadoran varieties. At Compare, Charlotteans from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere shop and eat side by side.

HALLACAS FOR CHRISTMAS

CHARLOTTE'S ANNUAL Parranda Navideña, a Christmas celebration held each December since 2014, showcases the vitality of the city's Venezuelan community. It also suggests how elements of Latino culture cross over into the wider life of the city. Tamales play a starring role.

As a youngster in Venezuela, Tony Arreaza fell in love with American funk guitar. When he immigrated to Charlotte as a teenager, a six-string and a wah-wah pedal became his calling. He spoke little English, but hanging out at the local community college with his guitar in hand, he struck up lasting musical friendships. Today, he plans festivals for the city's Latin American Coalition and on weekends plays *rock en español* and vintage Latin pop with his band, UltimaNota.

When Arreaza thought about organizing a traditional Venezuelan Christmas party, he wanted it to be a bridge-builder. So he booked the Neighborhood Theatre, an old movie theater turned alt-rock concert venue in the NoDa neighborhood. And he spread the word throughout local Latino circles and in the mainstream music press.

That first year, hundreds of people of all backgrounds showed up to dance to live music and sample holiday foods, including the Christmas tamales called hallacas. The Venezuelan hallaca requires hours of chopping and simmering to create a rich filling of beef, chicken, and pork, plus raisins, olives, and bits of bell pepper.

"For me, an hallaca is much more than just a dish," Arreaza says. "Every December, my entire family gathered to make them assembly-line style. My mom made the filling, my brother the dough, my dad cleaned the plantain leaves that you wrap them in, my sister tied the knot, and I was in charge of putting special marks on the ones that were spicy."

That old family custom is becoming a Charlotte tradition. For Latinos from other countries, the Venezuelan tamales are at once comforting and new—making and eating tamales is part of the Christmas season in many Latin American countries. For non-Latinos, an hallaca offers a new experience. For all, it's a warm part of a welcoming celebration that draws people of every background together year after year.

(RE)MAKING CULTURE

MORE THAN HALF OF LATINO residents in the South are US citizens. Many are young people, born here during the past twenty-five years. Nearly a quarter of pupils in Charlotte-Mecklenburg public schools are Latino. In Charlotte and most other urban areas in the South, there is no single Latin American neighborhood. Instead, Latinos live and work across many parts of the city and alongside people from every corner of the world.

There's a sense of fluidity, of possibility, of unexpected encounters. As Charlotte emerges as a global city, Latinos will continue to reshape the South, and the South will reshape what it means to be Latino.

Historian Tom Hanchett is the author of Sorting Out the New South City: Race Class & Urban Development in Charlotte *(UNC Press). His column "Food From Home" appears regularly in* The Charlotte Observer.

Eric Hoenes del Pinal, born in Guatemala, is an anthropologist and assistant professor of religious studies at UNC-Charlotte. He's been eating tamales ever since he can remember.

A mural by Rosalia Torres-Weiner on Central Avenue

A Meal at DELLA'S PLACE

Local foodways and entrepreneurship at a Raleigh boardinghouse

by

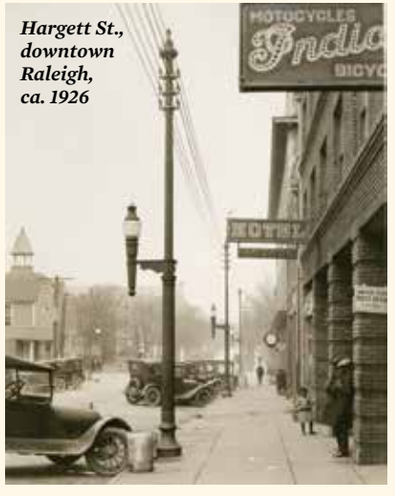
ELIZABETH ENGELHARDT

GRAVY
WINTER 2016

We live in messy, in-between spaces.

Take the Southern boardinghouse from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. The women (and some men) running Southern boardinghouses lived in cities and small towns, near remote vacation spots and railroad-accessible resorts, temporary logging or railroad camps, and more permanent factories. They clustered around schools, courthouses, and business centers. Some keepers called themselves businesspeople; others insisted they were just helping out extended family or friends. Lines blurred between boardinghouses and hotels, and also between restaurants, brothels, cafés, taverns, resorts, and private homes. Owners, proprietors, and customers negotiated the uses of these flexible food spaces.

The food was diverse, too. Ingredients for the boardinghouse table were grown in the backyard or processed in distant factories, prepared simply or in complicated dishes. Cooks chased culinary fashion or remained tried and true. Boardinghouses, and their foods, evaded easy definition. They were spaces of transition and becoming, not quite one thing and not quite another. One academic word for that is "liminal." Liminal spaces are ones in which definitions are in flux, new ways of being are tried out, and powerful transitions emerge. That is the wonder and usefulness of boardinghouses to the Southern food story.



Hargett St., downtown Raleigh, ca. 1926

Courtesy of the State Archives of North Carolina

The Federal Writers' Project (FWP), one of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal arts programs, sought to capture a portrait of everyday life in the United States in the 1930s. With that goal in mind, it is no wonder that boardinghouse keepers, lodgers, and diners emerge frequently in the FWP's papers and transcripts. In 1939, Della McCullers of Raleigh, North Carolina, told her boardinghouse story to FWP documentarian Robert O. King. McCullers ran a restaurant and gathering space she called a boardinghouse.

Raleigh branch of the African American–owned Mechanics and Farmers Bank

McCauley Hospital, a private hospital for African American patients

The few beds she kept were mostly occupied by extended family. McCullers' primary business was food. She served meals for working folks in the heart of Raleigh's African American business district.

Located in the 400 block of S. Blount Street, "Aunt" Della's place, as the establishment was called, was mere blocks away from Shaw University, the first historically black institute of higher education in the South. In the 1930s, residents of the neighborhood could fulfill all of their needs on Blount Street or nearby Hargett Street. There were general stores and gas stations, churches and beauty parlors, doctors' offices and a drug store. McCullers was born in the neighborhood in 1874, married in 1911, and widowed in 1916. When King interviewed her for the FWP, she was sixty-four years old. Before opening Della's, she had taken in laundry, cooked in private homes, operated a café, and managed a hotel.

Over the course of her adult life, McCullers successfully shifted careers and adapted her business strategies according to new technologies, changing economic conditions, and the needs of her employers and customers, both black and white. Born Della Harris, she learned how to wash and iron as a girl. Later, she learned to cook while working in the home of a white Raleigh family. After her husband, John McCullers, a brickmason, passed away, McCullers returned to the workforce to support her three young children.

The introduction of household appliances and automated commercial laundries drove McCullers' first career change. As a result, she found that fewer white families were sending their laundry out to African American washerwomen. She told

Courtesy of the State Archives of North Carolina

Royal Theater, which served African American moviegoers from 1920 to 1961

Lightner Arcade, a multiuse hub of African American life in Raleigh

King, "As I was a good cook and there was only a few places where [African Americans] could buy meals, I decided to open a small café for them to eat in." She was successful enough in this first venture to see her daughters graduate from high school and to provide for her family's needs.

A shift in Raleigh's demographics and restaurant landscape pushed McCullers' second career change. Greek immigrants arrived in Raleigh and began opening hot dog stands. Soon, according to McCullers, they expanded their menus to cater to an African American clientele. Her own café could not compete. When a neighbor built a hotel on nearby Cabarrus Street, McCullers leased it from him, installed a café, and ran both the eighteen-room hotel and the café successfully until the stock market crash of 1929.

As the country descended into the Great Depression, diners had less cash to eat out, and roomers sought cheaper accommodations. Women like McCullers struggled, too, as the costs of groceries and utilities went up. Dispassionately, McCullers said, "Well, I had to make a living somehow, so I gave up the hotel and came over here in this little place and started my boarding house." Her decision to classify the restaurant as a boardinghouse was a strategic one: The fee for acquiring a restaurant license from the city of Raleigh was greater than that for a boardinghouse, so McCullers made sure her establishment had beds in the back rooms. Instead of offering short orders, she served three fixed meals a day, charging twenty-five cents a plate (or three dollars for a week's worth of meals) and focusing on what she called "plain substantial grub."

She described a typical menu to King:

Courtesy of the State Archives of North Carolina

BLOUNT S—Contd
325-29 Sanders Motor Co Inc autos
330 Garner & Harward fill sta
Davie intersects
404 Williams John (c) barber
405 Bee Hive The 2d hd clo
406 Gill The Tailor (c)
407 Vacant
407½ Blacknall Jos H (c) restr
408 O'Neal Anderson (c)
409 Harris Bettie M (c)
410 Busy Bee Cafe (c)
410½ Spanish Am War Veterans Post No 24 (c)
414 Crump Jas (c)
415 Auto Salvage Co auto wreckers
416 Crump Susie (c)
416½ Harrison John (c)
417 Fuller's Barber Shop (c)
418 McCullers Della (c) restr
420 Vacant
421 Gill Lillian (c)
422 Koonce Lafayette F vet surg
423 Williams Geo (c)
425 Cumbo's Tailor Shop (c)
426 Dozier Sol (c)
427 **Masonic Temple Bldg (c)**
Fleming Harper L (c) dentist
Perry Nelson L (c) phys
2d fl Masonic Dance Hall (c)
3d fl Lodge Hall
429 Roberts Drug Store (c)
Cabarrus intersects
500 Third Ward Service Sta (c)
501 Tupper Memorial Baptist Church (c)
503 Gray Alex (c)
505 Williams Lottie (c)
507 Jackson Luvenia (c)
508 Freeman Benj (c)
510 Jones Chas C Rev (c)
Stronach's al ends
511 Bailey Eliz S (c) nurse
512 Harris Saml (c)
513 Cannon Grocery Co
Cannon Howard
514 Vacant
515 Hill Jerman E (c)
516 Jenkins Rosa (c)
517 Davis Thos (c)
518 Thomas Pearl (c)
519 Lytle Effie C (c)
525 Yarbough Agnes (c)
529 North State Auto Wreckers
Lenior intersects
603 Jones Oscar W (c) gro
607 Leach Coster (c)
609 Brown Mollie (c)
611 Harris Walter (c)
615 King Eva (c)
619 Rand Troy (c)
Rand Tiney (c) hairdrsr
South intersects
701 Wade Thos P (c)
705 Dubose Benj (c)
707 Shaw University Dining Room
709 Lee Jas S (c)
713 Somerville Wendell C Rev (c)
715 Jones Glenwood E (c)
717 Harris Nelson H (c)
719 Holland John (c)
725 Perrin H Cardrew (c)
729 Burns Jas M (c)
731 Vacant
Worth intersects
737 Morgan Camoline (c)
739 Freeman Alex (c)
741 Jeffers Chas (c)
745 Covington Carrie (c)
749 Morrisey Alex A Rev (c)
751 Sapp Mary E (c)
753 Horton Josephine (c)
757 Streeter Ross (c)
759 Vacant
Smithfield intersects
802 Ashley Elfieta (c)
806 Bryant Wm B (c)
808 Marks John E (c)
812 Fennell Steph (c)
813 Holden Chas H (c)
816 Williams Thos R (c)
Williams Thos R & Son (c) awning mfrs
819 Chavis Mary (c)
821 Smith Robt W (c)
822 Sanders N Wiley (c)
825 White Lonnie (c)
Bledsoe av intersects
900 Community Store The gros
901 Morgan Neal (c)
902 Logan Eug (c)
904 Burroughs Jas W (c)
905 Brown LeRoy (c)
906 Farrar Melvina (c)
908 Baker W Atlas
915-17 Stahl K E Mfg Co Inc elec coolers
921-25 County E R A (Sewing rm)
921 Stalling W Edgar auto repr
924 Smith Wm D gro
930 Solomon John T
Lee intersects
1100 (1002) Blake Alf G
1101 Lee Wm S (c)
1103 Grant Jos S (c)
1104 (1006) Robinson Philip D (c)
1105 Brown Hubert B (c)
1106 Evans John H (c)
1107 Davis Langston L Rev (c)
1109 Galloway Farfield (c)
1109½ Barber Paul (c)
1110 Bryant Bessie (c)
1111 Vacant
1112 Mitchell Lucy (c)
1113 Carter David (c)
1115 Jeffers Saml (c)
1116 Mt Zion Baptist Church (c)

McCracken Dorothy clk Durham Life Ins Co of Raleigh NC r105 E Edenton apt 312
McCranie Asa C (Martha J) emp SouBellTel&TelegCo h117 Ashe av
McCrary D Gordon clk West & Riggsbee r Marcellus E McCrary
McCrary Eunice E Mrs member Bd of Trustees of the City Administrative Sch Unit h1029 W South
McCrary Marcellus E (Eliz) mach Catholic Orphanage of Nazareth NC h Avent's Ferry rd nr Western blvd
McCrary Marion D (Louise R) asst dist mgr Durham Life Ins Co of Raleigh NC h2221 The Circle
McCrary Nancy V student r2221 The Circle
McCrary Otis F (Eunice E) dist agt State College of Agriculture and Engineering h1029 W South
McCray see also MacRae and McRae
McCray Annette (c) cook F W Woolworth Co h17 Lake
McCray Bertha (c) emp Hattie Morgan r17 Lake
McCray Carter (c; Bertha) plstr h1216 Hill
McCray Jas (c) lab r17 Lake
McCray Katie (c) prsr Raleigh Linen Supply Co r511 E Lenoir
McCray Major (c; Katie L) porter California Restr r511 E Lenoir
McCray Refrigerator Co L Brown Crosby sls and service rep 2309 Beech Ridge rd
McCrimmon Elnora (c) r321 S Tarboro
McCrimmon Ernest C (c; Bertha) clk NC Inspection & Rating Bureau h 911 E Martin apt 2
McCrimmon Frances S (c) h321 S Tarboro
McCrimmon Larsenior (c) sch tchr r321 S Tarboro
McCrimmon Telfair (c) doormn State Theatre r321 S Tarboro
McCrimmon Tressie (c) clk Maye's Pharmacy r321 S Tarboro
McCrutcheon Silas (c) lab r717 S Dawson
McCuller Oliver (c; Nettie) lab r205 W North
McCullers Aaron (c; Mattie) lab r1702 B
McCullers Alden (c) dom r110 College
McCullers David (c; Olivia) h1310 Pender
McCullers Della (c) r316 Cannon
McCullers Della (c) restr 418 S Blount h do
McCullers Duane H slsmn Atlantic Tobacco Co Inc r Clayton NC
McCullers Eliza (c) r10 Ross
McCullers Florine (c) r16 McKee
McCullers Geo W (c) r16 McKee
McCullers Gladys (c) dom h10 Ross
McCullers Goldie M (c) r316 Cannon
McCullers Hal A (Mildred) h547 E Jones
McCullers Henrietta (c) h531 (2) E Davie
McCullers John A (c) emp Dillon Supply Co 216 S West
McCullers John M (c; Maggie) hlpr h110 College
McCullers John M jr (c) janitor r110 College
McCullers Jos clk State Unemployment Compensation Comn r Garner NC
McCullers Mattie (c) lndrs r10 Ross
McCullers Queen E (c) dom r139 Lincoln dr
McCullers Rufus (c; Mary) lab State College of Agriculture and Engineering h139 Lincoln dr
McCullers Thos L slsmn S W Brewer & Son r Garner NC
McCullers Vandell (c) r316 Cannon
McCullers Wilbur L (Effie G) clk Betts Coal & Oil Co Inc r312 Perry
McCullers Wm (c) lab r1304 Hill
McCullers Willie M (c) r110 College
McCullers Winston D (c) emp Dillon Supply Co h16 McKee
McCullin Shaw Mrs (Ritz Beauty Salon) r Hotel Raleigh
McCulloch Wm F (Nora Y) tfr clk Ry Exp Agency Inc h403 Kinsey
McCullough Addie (c) dom r616 Wynne
McCullough Chas (c) porter r603 (619) W Lenoir
McCullough Danl Rev (c; Judy) h603 (619) W Lenoir
McCullough Herman (c) lab r110 E Cabarrus
McCullough John (c) truck driver r534 E Davie

Pages from the Raleigh city directory, 1935 (L) and 1939 (R). The (c) following the listings in the 1935 directory denotes an African American residence or business, including Della McCullers' boardinghouse at number 418.

"For breakfast I'll have fried salt herrings, mullets, sausage, pork chops, biscuits, cornbread and baker's bread and coffee. I let them select whatever they want, but I do not serve them but one kind of fish or one kind of meat. For dinner I have cabbage, collards, blackeyed peas, stew beef, haslet stew, pigtail stew, pig ears stew, and water. I always have some kind of fresh fish for supper, pork chops, hog liver, coffee, and things like that. I fill their plates with as much food as I can get on them...I give them plenty of [cornbread] with their meals."

A coal stove, "patched in several places with tin, and held together by wire," King observed, was the only kitchen equipment McCullers had to produce such a range of foods. While our first impression might be of quantity, a deeper look reveals that what McCullers called "plain" hid a world of complex flavors, skill, and transformation.

McCullers had clearly developed an arsenal of economical recipes. Stew beef then, as now, was often a mix of leftover cuts bundled together and sold cheaply. Pigtails, pig ears, and pig liver were all less desirable and less expensive parts of the hog. Haslet stew was made from liver, lungs, and sometimes heart. She relied on hardy vegetables with long growing seasons. McCullers shopped and cooked wisely while pleasing her customers and giving them reason to return.

McCullers' list was deeply responsive to the foodways of the Piedmont in which she lived. Hogs are still plentiful today in eastern and central North Carolina, and they were crucial to twentieth century foodways there, even if some of the pork McCullers bought at the store was most likely of Midwestern origin. Adding regular fish dishes speaks to the connections between Raleigh and the rivers and coastal waters of eastern North Carolina. Collards are consumed all over North Carolina, but more so in the central and eastern counties. When McCullers said she gave her customers what they wanted, she knew what that meant.

Later in the interview, McCullers drew distinctions between what her customers wanted to eat when employed versus when they were out of work. She said she faced more competition from Greek restaurateurs when unemployment was high, because people could eat "a hamburger and a cup of coffee" and be "all right for several hours."

When her customers had jobs "swing[ing] a pick or shovel all day," then "that's where I can beat the

Courtesy of the State Archives of North Carolina

Hamlin Drug Co. on E. Hargett St., believed to be the oldest African American–owned pharmacy in the United States

Greeks, because they don't know how to fix vittles like collards, turnips, haslet stew and the other things," she said, referring to to the dishes her African American clientele favored.

King observed that she had a "piccolo"—a nickel-fed juke box—with "the very latest blues recordings" on it, a picture of Joe Lewis hanging on the wall, and outdoor benches for people to gather. As a result, Della's was "the gathering place for Negroes during the evenings and on Sundays." We can only imagine the laughter, music, and community fellowship that took place there.

McCullers was a skilled, modern businesswoman. And Della's was a success. During the years she ran the establishment, she supported herself and a disabled brother and paid school tuition for a grandson whom she hoped would become a doctor. Her liminal boardinghouse holds sophisticated stories of business acumen, community patronage, and everyday foodways that brim with a sense of place and purpose.

Elizabeth Engelhardt is the John Shelton Reed Distinguished Professor of Southern Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill and the chair of the SFA's academic committee. She delivered a version of this article as a talk at the 2016 Southern Foodways Symposium.

The King-McCullers interview is archived in the Federal Writers' Project papers #3709, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The Real Thing

I tried to get inside moonshine any way I could

by
MATT BONDURANT

THIS PAGE:
Checking corn mash before distillation

THE LIQUOR STORE DOWN THE street from my house in Oxford, Mississippi, is slowly vanishing, bottle by bottle. When stock is depleted it usually isn't replaced. The land behind the store has been cleared and leveled—like a lot of Oxford recently—and a new mixed-use shopping center is coming soon. There's no more wine to speak of, and all that's left in the vodka section are dusty bottles of expensive European stuff that's quadruple distilled and made with elderberries gathered above the Alpine tree line. Sometimes, just for fun, I peruse the "specialty" whiskies, the new fad of clear corn liquor in mason jars and faux clay jugs, often with names that play on "moon" or "corn" or Southern-hick stereotypes, making claims to authenticity. The real thing, they say. It shouldn't mean anything to me; the people putting this stuff out aren't taking bread from my children or restricting my artistic ambitions. Yet the sight of it on the shelves gives me a jolt of irritation and a lingering hint of something like regret.

The first time I smelled pure corn liquor I was nine years old. A pack of us kids were out in the cornfield that night, racing through the tall rows trying to scare the shit out of each other and herd

The author's grandfather Jack Bondurant, ca. 1930s

some unwary loser, usually me, into the high-tensile strands of electric fencing at the perimeter that were nearly invisible in the darkness. This was at my uncle Howard's place in Franklin County, Virginia. The adults were sitting around the television, quietly digesting the evening meal of chicken hash, green beans, and cast-iron skillet cornbread, the crust made from super-heating the lard till it smoked, the inside white and slightly sour. My father and his brothers and sisters would crumble a hunk of it into a glass of fresh buttermilk, spooning it out like ice cream. "I'll have just a light meal," my dad used to say, "a light brown meal."

I was a small child, and that night on a dead run the wire caught me neck high, a 4,000-volt shortcut to my brain. A bit later I stood in the kitchen with my cousin Andrew, holding a rag filled with ice to my neck. I looked like I'd been garroted with a jellyfish. The adults had gone to sleep and the house was quiet enough to hear the roaring cicadas in the trees. Andrew dug around in a bottom cabinet and produced a half-gallon mason jar filled with clear liquid. "White lightning," he said.

He opened the jar and told me to take a sniff. It was like putting my face into a campfire. The heat seared my nostrils and erupted through my skull, the second dose of brain damage I received that evening. He took a sip, then dared me to. For a few minutes we swapped the jar, taking tiny sips and going into exaggerated hacking and coughing fits like some kind of vaudeville act. I thought the sole purpose of it was for a dare—how much miserable suffering could you endure? Why else would you want to drink something like that?

Over the next twenty years, I caught regular glimpses of untaxed, homemade corn liquor. On the day after Christmas in Franklin County, we used to shoot skeet in a sloping pasture that ran down to a muddy creek. The men drank eggnog and white lightning, and as the day went on, things got a bit loose. I remember my father, a teetotaler his whole life, telling me to stand behind the pickup trucks while my cousins tossed clay pigeons like Frisbees, four or five men working their pump shotguns at the same time, the crisp winter air thick with the scent of gunpowder, lead, and whiskey. At family gatherings, men would suddenly disappear, returning an hour later, bleary-eyed and grinning. I remember seeing my grandfather, then well into his eighties, leaning into the trunk of his Oldsmobile in a gravel parking lot, pouring liquid into a plastic cup.

> **He opened the jar and told me to take a sniff. It was like putting my face into a campfire. The heat seared my nostrils and erupted through my skull.**

THIS PAGE: Photo courtesy of the author; PREVIOUS SPREAD: Blue Ridge Institute & Museum of Ferrum College, Earl Palmer Collection

It's the smell that gives it away—pure corn whiskey is an olfactory sledgehammer. You have about a second before the heat of the alcohol burns away any discernable aroma, but in that first instant there is the unmistakable, unadulterated fog of rotting corn mash, the heated stew of fermenting sugars and enzymes. None of my relatives ever called it that. White mule, rotgut, wildcat, stump whiskey, white lightning, or just plain white, but not moonshine. And they ought to know, as the Bondurants of Franklin County remain one of the most notorious moonshining families in Virginia history. The real thing.

We were the branch of the family that left. When the Korean War started, my father and a buddy flipped a coin to see which service they'd join. My father lost and spent the next couple of years at a Navy base in French Morocco, Africa, as a crewman on training aircraft. When he was discharged from the Navy, he hitchhiked from Norfolk across the state to Franklin County in his Navy dress whites, Dixie-cup hat akimbo, wearing the mad grin of the free man. He got a ride with a couple of young women on their way home from college, driving a convertible Chevy. They took him as far as Roanoke, and I imagine that my father, hat in hand, watching those ladies roar away in a cloud of dust, began to think that college seemed like a damn good idea.

He eventually earned a master's degree in engineering and settled in the suburbs of Washington, DC, where I was born and raised. As a child, my dad went barefoot all summer and and worked the fields on the family farm—the endless, backbreaking labor of pulling tobacco. When I was a kid, I spent my summer making mix tapes, going to swim-team practice, and attempting to hack into business mainframes with my Commodore 64 computer via a telephone modem. It would be hard to find a larger generation gap in twentieth-century America, and for this reason I've always considered myself lucky. But the break is about more than just time. We are the branch of the family without a Southern accent. My sensibilities are more East Coast, closer to New England than the South. I prefer chowder to gumbo, Melville to Faulkner.

My wanderlust hasn't helped much. In the last twenty years, I've lived and worked in four different states and two countries. As a professor, I've had teaching jobs at four universities, making me a sort of journeyman academic, a Moses Malone or Bobby Bonilla of English departments. I've published three novels so far, one set in London and Egypt, one set in Virginia, and one set in Ireland and Vermont. I have a child born in New York, one in Texas, and now one in Mississippi. It is clear to me that I am a man of no place.

ALL THROUGH MY CHILDHOOD, my family made the requisite visits to Franklin County during the holidays and summers, and my cousins took great delight in exposing my naïveté about agricultural practices and rural life. I also heard the stories of how Grandpa Jack was once the moonshine king of the county. This wasn't hard to accept. My Grandpa Jack was a flinty character straight out of a Larry Brown story; stoic, silent as a stone, physically imposing, and with an accent that was nearly impenetrable to my ears. He would stare at me over the breakfast table, slowly masticating a biscuit, his eyes glazed over,

> **I pieced together my grandfather's life, in fact and fiction, through rumor and research.**

then shake his head in a dismissive manner, like I was too pathetic to bother with. He carried a gun for much of his life. A pair of brass knuckles hung on a nail over the toilet in the back bathroom. People from around the county treated him with a palpable deference. He'd been shot at least once, under his left arm on a snowy morning at the Maggodee Creek Bridge in December of 1930, and never told anyone about it. When his own children found out around 1985, he merely acknowledged the story as true and lifted his shirt to show the bullet hole. No explanation, no context. Grandpa Jack was the real thing.

When I visited, my grandfather would roust me in the mornings to feed the cows. I remember the silent truck cab in the darkness before dawn, the wheel wells mucked with red clay, straw, and tobacco. How I stood in the truck bed cutting the twine and pushing out the hay bales as he cruised through the fields, a funnel of cows lumbering in our wake. We didn't talk. This was terrifying, exhilarating stuff for a suburban kid like me, and I have to think that was his way of trying to communicate something to his grandson. He died when I was a teenager, and I regret that I never had an actual conversation with the man.

Instead I pieced together my grandfather's life, in fact and fiction, through rumor and research. He had a rich and violent past, and with his brothers formed the Bondurant Brothers, the infamous crew of moonshiners in Franklin County, Virginia, the "Moonshine Capital of the World." I learned that Bondurants have been living in that little corner of the Appalachian foothills since the early eighteenth century, eking out a subsistence living growing tobacco, raising a bit of cattle and corn, and making untaxed liquor.

I studied basic chemistry, learning the fundamentals of distillation. I toured legitimate distilleries, read all the books, newspapers, letters, memoirs, listened to the music. I rode four-wheelers through the woods to visit old still sites, the rusting remains of cooling coils, thumper kegs, mash boxes. I stood on the remains of Maggodee Creek Bridge, trying to approximate the exact spot where sheriff's deputies shot Grandpa Jack in the chest and my great uncle Forrest in the stomach. Both survived, and my father still remembers the way Uncle Forrest's stomach would bulge unnaturally when he ate, the food leaking through the perforated stomach lining. I sampled product. I holed up in my brother's West Virginia mountain house with a half-gallon jar of Franklin County white for three days, wandering the woods during the day, sitting in a pool of lamplight at night listening to the Carter Family sing murder ballads. I tried to get inside moonshine any way I could.

The result was the novel *The Wettest County in the World*, published in 2008, which became the movie *Lawless* in 2012. My family came to Los Angeles for the premiere, and my dad loved every minute of it, joking with Shia LaBeouf, the actor playing my grandpa Jack, taking selfies with Jessica Chastain, and working the crowd at the afterparty well after midnight. I was having lots of conference calls and meetings in Santa Monica with thirty-year-old guys wearing flannel

Men leave their still site with pieces of the still. Virginia Blue Ridge, ca. mid-20th century

OPPOSITE PAGE: Blue Ridge Institute & Museum of Ferrum College, Earl Palmer Collection

A moonshine still confiscated by the Internal Revenue Bureau, ca. 1920s

National Photo Company Collection/Library of Congress

shirts and flip-flops who wanted me to pitch them ideas for television shows. First-class flights, press junkets, my wife doing the backstroke in the rooftop pool of the W Hotel on Hollywood Boulevard. The world seemed like it was speeding up, and at times I felt a bit sick about it. I had cashed in on my family's past. I took something real, something true, and packaged it into a story. Now, I know enough about the history of moonshine to know that it's always been about money. Was this any different?

I also noticed a growing mainstream interest in moonshine. It began to appear in liquor stores as a sort of boutique whiskey, a way to experience this exotic, outlawed practice. Some say it was the recession that caused a few states, such as Tennessee, to relax their distilling regulations, creating an opening in the market for these faux moonshiners. About 50,000 cases of legal moonshine were sold in 2010, jumping to 250,000 in 2012. And the numbers keep rising. Ole Smoky Tennessee Moonshine, the top-performing brand, sells more than 300,000 cases each year, and the international market is just beginning to catch fire. Now corporate giants like Jim Beam and Jack Daniel's are marketing "white" whiskies. Package the story, feed the legend, make some money.

Last year, my first cousins Robert and Joey Bondurant, buoyed by the press and buzz surrounding the movie made from my book, renovated an old warehouse in Chase City, Virginia. They moved in a couple of stainless-steel stills, got the requisite permits, and started making legal whiskey. Bondurant Brothers Distillery hand grinds Hickory King corn, an heirloom sweet corn, all of it grown in Virginia. This is the same white corn my grandfather used in the 1930s. Their tag line: "Some Moonshine is legendary and some is made by legends, ours is both!" They use an old family recipe, and it's fair to say this is as close to the authentic article as you can get, legally. The real thing. I hope they succeed. I plan to order a bottle or two, if my local liquor store here in Oxford hasn't disappeared.

WHAT DOES MOONSHINE MEAN? I'm talking about the actual article, the condensed drops that gather in the coils and coalesce into a stream of clear, hot liquid. Spinning the lid on the jar, the heat on the back of the tongue, the loosening of the joints, the bones of your chest floating apart, watching the clouds race through the trees, the rush of feeling that comes with knowing that anything is possible in this life. Does moonshine have any inherent value or meaning? I've come to the conclusion that it is an existential object; its existence precedes its essence. We as a society have created its value and meaning, bound up in images of mountains and overalls and shotguns and the way a man wears his hat. I played my part in this fiction.

People write me all the time wanting to tell me stories of their family's moonshining past, their Southern roots, even to parse bits of Southern history, culture, recipes. I'm flattered and I try to answer them as best I can, but I am merely feeding an illusion. What I want to say is this: The person you think I am is a façade. I inhabit different worlds for the three to five years that it takes to write a novel. The last four years, I've been living (in my head) in the far northeastern corner of New York, in a fictional town where people work in supermax prisons and run snowmobiles across the frozen Canadian border with a million dollars of ecstasy strapped to their backs. I left that world of southern Virginia, the world of moonshine and dangerous, silent men like my grandfather, ten years ago.

But that's not true either. I was never really there. I was always the outsider, the kid from the suburbs visiting on the holidays, the one who talked differently, the one who didn't hunt. The young boy herded into the wire at midnight.

The Wettest County in the World wasn't about feeding the legend of the Bondurant Boys, or even feeding my growing family. It was a love letter shot into the darkness of the past. I know there will never be a reply.

And yet. The deep red clay of the roadcuts, the ripple of tobacco leaves in the afternoon. A stand of silent corn at night, the winking sliver of taut wire. The way an old woman invites you to come visit, the offer of four different kinds of cake and pie with coffee. The bowl of creamed corn bubbling in the skillet, my grandmother tossing in a heavy pinch of sugar. The sharp tang and burn of corn whiskey going down your gullet like a rusty knife. History reverberates like the tones of church bells in winter; you can't see it or even sense the direction but you can feel something coming back, an answer. The real thing. You're never ready for that. It's everything you were afraid to know, and everything you wanted to say.

Matt Bondurant is the author of the novels The Night Swimmer, The Wettest County in the World, *and* The Third Translation. *He teaches literature and writing at the University of Mississippi. He delivered a version of this article as a talk at the 2016 Southern Foodways Symposium.*

SOP IT DRY

OR, HOW TO MAKE COUNTRY BLACK GIRL MAGIC

BY REGINA N. BRADLEY

Jerry Siegel

I'M FROM ALBANY, GEORGIA.

I NEVER GET TIRED OF SAYING THAT.

More specifically, I'm from southside Albany on Hardup Road, a collection of farms, houses, and nothingness on the outskirts of town in Dougherty County. I'm from the road that strangers and classmates chuckled and asked me to repeat to make sure they heard me right. Yes, *hard up*. As in there are no streetlights. If you wave your hand in front of your face at night, you can't see it. Untamed tree limbs and two plantations flank either side. Hardup Road is close to the Flint River, but not too close. Roads with names like Calvary and Lonesome branch out from Hardup's sides. Hardup Road is connected to Newton Road, which, if you drive long enough, runs into Baker County. Back in the early 1900s (and probably later), that's where folks were dragged to their deaths for being too black or being in the wrong place at the wrong time. When we left Hardup Road to go into the city—whether for food, school, or church—we called it "going into town." When I finally learned to drive, the pinnacle of teenage life, my friends refused to come see me.

"It's too much gas money," they said.

"They're not your real friends, then," huffed my grandmother, whom I call Nana Boo. If gas money is the gauge, I had no friends at all.

Hardup Road is flat, bordered by sprawling grazing pastures, melon fields, and cornfields. The cornfields often flanked the back and immediate left side of our house, while the grazing fields went farther down the road to our right. The corn stalks stood tall and subtly swayed with a wisp of wind when I'd leave for school in the morning. By the time I got out of class, they'd be flat and brown. Lone strands of ripened corn silk floated over the windshield and disappeared into the sky as if to announce, "Harvest is done."

The fields turned up and turned over, often perfumed by the funk of lime at night and early in the morning. They kept me company when I waited on the bus or when I returned home from a date. I never appreciated how the fields comforted me, a military brat, who, before Albany, had never stayed in one place for longer than a few years. The harvest schedule was steady and permanent.

I embraced the particular strength of being a country girl. In particular, country black girl magic manifested in the kitchen as much as it happened during gatherings on the porch. Even though "them books" was my job—I was an honor student and a voracious reader—I would slink around the kitchen trying to catch a piece of gossip, munching on freshly roasted peanuts, swiping biscuits, and pinching off pieces of bacon on the stove. I realize now that I took the final product and the process for granted.

The historical and cultural roots of cooking in our family were always on display. But they were not annotated like in a textbook. Our family recorded our history in practice. My people would say, "My mama taught me how to make this." Our life in the country, adjacent to the cyclical fields that grew and died, offered

Denny Culbert

a quiet resilience and strength that I learned to love.

I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME

I asked Nana Boo about why she called hot water cornbread "jailhouse bread." I walked into the house on the sides of my feet. Pebbles from our then-unpaved driveway had flung themselves into my shoes as I shuffled toward the house. The smell of a hot iron skillet and a live electric current stung my nose at the door. This was pretty much common practice every day after school. I ate McDonald's once in a while. But most days, Nana floated through the kitchen, from the sink to the wooden island to the stove. "How was school?" she asked as she put on a master class in kitchen arts. She didn't expect that *I* would know how to handle a kitchen. "I didn't learn how to really cook until I got married," Nana said. I took notes. The kitchen wasn't her only space to navigate and be great. It was a complement to her career as an elementary school teacher. Nana didn't like folks messing around in her kitchen and upsetting the order of things. *Her* order of things. The kitchen was the brain of our house, the place for family talks and taunts. Our memories rose and settled with the pots and pans, around the kitchen bar.

She loved the stove most of all. Black, still shiny as the latest addition to the kitchen, it had a cycloptic red eye that stayed on until the stove turned off. The other eyes had specific duties. She cooked greens or cabbage in a big silver pot on the back left side. Nana fried everything on the front right eye. Nobody cleaned the surface but her. She used a special cream that she rubbed on and then scraped off with a razor. Her grease stayed under the stove, arranged in order, from solid Crisco to bacon fat, generations old

CORNBREAD SYMBOLIZED THE STRENGTH TO KEEP GOING.

from batch after batch of fried bacon. Bacon drip made the world go 'round.

"Can I help with the cornbread?" I asked.

Nana thrust her head toward the cabinet underneath the stove. "Get me some bacon drip."

I shuffled around the can of Crisco and reached for the gray can of bacon grease. I was careful not to tip the similarly colored fish oil can because I liked living—and the smell of fish made me queasy. I put the jar on the island and sat at the bar facing the kitchen. The cyclops eye burned bright red and awaited Nana's instructions. Nana made the jailhouse cornbread with water, cornmeal, salt, and bacon drip—"this much," she said, pinching the tip of her finger with her thumb.

"Nana? Why do you call it jailhouse cornbread?" A chuckle climbed over her back.

"That's what they called it in Leary," she said. Leary, Georgia, is about thirty minutes down Hardup Road. Uncle Charlie, my Nana's first cousin and adopted brother, lived there until his death in 2013. Cornstalks and tomato vines leaned against the side of his house. He grew greens and did masonry work in the back. Uncle Charlie always smelled like freshly cut wood and tomatoes and his smile made you want to smile in return. Most of our veggies came from him or the Harvey's, which was practically a farmer's market.

Nana's fingers thrummed the sides of the mixing bowl, guiding the thick cornmeal batter into the hot pan. "The folks who didn't have much and the folks in jail only got a bit of meal and water to eat."

Jailhouse cornbread was the food of unseen folks. The ones in the farthest part of the back kitchen; the ones who learned to whip something together out of necessity. Nana Boo and Paw Paw, my grandfather, said black folks made do with a little of nothing all of the time. The leftovers. I didn't understand it then. But I do now. Rural folks' poverty wasn't city folks' poverty. Cornbread was a staple because it was readily available. Just ground corn and a bit of water. Corn was sustenance. Cornbread symbolized the strength to keep going. Like Southern black folks, corn stalks grew in the most adverse and the most random places—lopsided, crooked and in the cracks of neglected pavement on the side of the road, or held up by the side of a house in rural southwest Georgia. The bacon drip in the skillet sizzled in agreement.

"How did you learn to cook it, Nana?"

"My mama, your Ma Mary, taught me."

"Will you teach me?"

"Sure."

"When you gonna let me in the kitchen to learn?"

"Let me pray about it and get back to you," she laughed.

Regina N. Bradley is assistant professor of African American literature at Armstrong State University in Savannah, Georgia. She delivered a version of this article as a talk at the 2016 Southern Foodways Symposium.

Natalie Nelson

SEARCHING FOR SOUL FOOD IN THE ONCE-CHOCOLATE CITY

DOES SOUTHERN STILL HAVE A PLACE AT THE DC TABLE?

by W. Ralph Eubanks

In spite of its location below the Mason-Dixon line, Washington, DC, does not feel especially Southern. I've always found Washington's elusive regional identity part of its charm. By the time I left my native Mississippi and crossed the Potomac River to call DC home, it was still in the midst of its Chocolate City period, which began in the mid-1970s. At that time, the African American population rested around 70 percent. The nickname derived from the 1975 Parliament album of the same name that featured the Capitol, Washington Monument, and Lincoln Memorial on its cover. I arrived five years after the record came out, but it was still a soundtrack for the city. Everyone I knew had a copy, whether on vinyl or cassette. Chocolate City also referenced DC's status as the nation's largest majority-black city (and with more African American elected officials than New York, Philadelphia, or Boston), a designation that we strutted proudly, echoing the funky beat of Bootsy Collins' bass line.

For the first time in almost sixty years, Washington's black population is now less than 50 percent. In a city whose foodways originate in Southern and African American sensibilities, I wondered what impact the population shift was having on the restaurant scene.

Washington attracted African Americans from the South—especially the Carolinas and Virginia—during the Great Migration of the twentieth century. Those migrants brought sweet potatoes, field peas, and cornbread to the kitchens and restaurants of the nation's capital. During the latter half of the twentieth century, Southern cuisine shared a table in DC alongside French, Vietnamese, and Ethiopian. Today, Southern food is overshadowed by the creative fusion of foods, whether it is Korean tacos or shrimp fritters in chili sauce.

Among fellow Southern expatriates in the 1980s, our culinary adventures included catching new-wave and punk acts at the

9:30 Club's old F Street location and eating late-night plates of lo mein in Chinatown to soak up all the beer we drank. We were too poor for the few power-dining establishments that existed at the time. The music of Talking Heads, Fugazi, X, and R.E.M. pushed us beyond our small-town upbringings. When we longed for something that tasted like home, we dug in at meat-and-threes: the long departed Whitlow's or Reeves Restaurant and Bakery, with its sweet potato pies.

Today, one place remains from my early years in the city—the Florida Avenue Grill. It's still located in the U Street corridor of DC near 14th St. NW, a neighborhood once known for the largest concentration of African American–owned businesses in the city

WHEN WE LONGED FOR SOMETHING THAT TASTED LIKE HOME, WE DUG IN AT MEAT-AND-THREES.

and now the center of a burgeoning restaurant district. Whereas the Florida Avenue Grill built its reputation on dishes like smothered fried pork chops in onion gravy and baked chicken with cornbread dressing, these new restaurants reflect the city's expanded palate. Today, even the Florida Avenue Grill has lightened up its menu offerings, influenced by an owner who previously operated vegetarian restaurants.

THIS PAST SUMMER, I was back in DC after teaching as a visiting professor in my home state of Mississippi. In Jackson, I'd become devoted to the meatloaf and tomato gravy—with sides of rutabagas and fried okra—at Bully's. Each time I ate there, I felt as if I had entered my grandmother's kitchen, and I wondered if I could still find places like Bully's in my adopted hometown. It didn't take long to realize that what passes for Southern food has been adapted to please a younger, whiter, and more affluent clientele. These are diners who expect Gruyère in their macaroni and cheese and believe that grits are only worth eating if you serve them with shrimp.

In recent years, several Southern-influenced, white-tablecloth restaurants have opened. Crisp, a few blocks from my house in the Eckington-Bloomingdale neighborhood near Howard University, fries Nashville-style hot chicken. In the Shaw neighborhood, Southern Efficiency, a whiskey bar whose name evokes John Kennedy's famous description of DC, pours mint juleps and old fashioneds. These restaurants and taverns have opened as the city's population has grown more affluent, and they cater to those tastes. Bourbon drinks are a mainstay on cocktail menus. Dishes like pork and grits or pimento cheese and crackers pay homage to the down-home fare that were once DC staples, but they have been updated now that the city's

Natalie Nelson

food culture stands on an international stage. A dish like pork and grits will have kimchi mixed in, a sure sign that this is not the old Chocolate City.

Although I have lived in DC for many years, I'm both a newcomer to the Eckington-Bloomingdale neighborhood and part of the forces of gentrification that are transforming the city. After our children went to college, my wife and I downsized from a house in upper Northwest DC. We were attracted to the restaurant scene that was beginning to rise up within walking distance of our new house. But now I wonder about the impact of my own evolving, eclectic taste in dining out. Am I knitting together the social fabric of the city, or tearing it apart?

For the young people who populate the city, dining out is just as popular as catching a show at the 9:30 Club. Hip, upscale options now include Filipino restaurant Bad Saint or the progressive tasting menu at Minibar, and I appreciate those dining choices. Yet I still feel a lost connection with the DC of my youth. In trying to find a bridge between Mississippi and DC this summer, I learned that soul food has not disappeared, but has undertaken a migration of its own: across the river to Anacostia and Prince George's County.

Big Fish Family Fish Fry in Anacostia

Photo courtesy of the author

THE ANACOSTIA RIVER, which separates the neighborhood of that name from the rest of DC, divides the city by race and class. Once you cross the Anacostia, there are few new construction sites and even fewer white faces. Strolling the neighborhood, I hear an amalgam of Virginia and North Carolina in the inflections of the words of people I encounter. I detect a palpable air of friendliness, too. Children ride bicycles with fishing poles and bait buckets attached to them, a scene that would fit in any riverside Southern city. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass purchased his Cedar Hill estate in the neighborhood in 1877. The view from Cedar Hill provides a panoramic view of the city. But since this is a predominately black neighborhood—which unfortunately, in the eyes of some, means unsafe—few tourists ever take in that vista.

Crispy fried whiting, fried chicken, and greens dominate the menus of Anacostia's carryout restaurants. Anacostia provided a place of refuge for me this summer, when a trip to Bully's back in Mississippi was not an option. As I sat on a park bench overlooking the Potomac, eating meatloaf, collard greens, and macaroni and cheese out of a Styrofoam tray, I felt as if I was home in the Deep South as well as in DC. In this part of DC that includes the most impoverished neighborhoods in the city, the majority of eating establishments offer take-out only. There are fewer than ten restaurants with table service.

Like the rest of the city, gentrification has arrived in Anacostia, but change here has been spurred by young black professionals rather than whites and is moving at a slower pace. Here, few upscale restaurants serve that market. Uniontown was the neighborhood's name when people began to settle there in 1854, and the food and drink at Uniontown Bar & Grill resembles what you might find at a pub on the other side of the Anacostia River. The menu offers fried catfish alongside the craft cocktails, a sign that this upscale place pays homage to Southern roots.

Just a few miles away, Prince George's County is home to the most affluent African American enclave in the country. Washington, DC, is divided into eight electoral wards, and Prince George's County is sometimes referred to as the "ninth ward," since many of its residents once lived in DC. Henry's Soul Café, once with several locations in DC—one on U Street and another in the heart of downtown that is soon to be cleared for redevelopment—moved there, and Keith and Son's in Seat Pleasant is also a mainstay. Henry's menu evokes the Carolinas, while Keith and Son's menu echoes the foods of the Deep South. Soul food is alive and well, but largely on the other side of the Anacostia River and just across the District line in Maryland.

South of Anacostia, at the National Harbor development in Prince George's County, you get a different picture. Among an assortment of fast-casual restaurants at this relatively new complex is Succotash, which offers dishes like collards, kimchi, and country ham from Korean American chef Edward Lee. Southern fusion has made its way here, across the District line, in a mixed-use development geared toward shoppers and tourists.

DC's evolving food landscape toes a blurry line between economic displacement and gentrification. Changing demographics aside, I'd like to see DC restaurants pay homage to the former Chocolate City. Some of the new Southernish spots do that already by offering mumbo sauce, a sticky reddish-orange condiment native to DC. Mumbo sauce, which is sweet and tangy, is as ubiquitous in some parts of the city—including Anacostia—as comeback dressing is in Jackson, Mississippi. It is a staple in DC carryouts and is often served with french fries or fried chicken wings. A few upscale restaurants now serve mumbo sauce on sandwiches or with fries, much like comeback is found in a range of Jackson dining spots.

DC is changing rapidly. With the exception of the Anacostia neighborhood, there are few places in the city that show the old Southern and Chocolate City vibes—with the food to match. As the city grows, I fear the steady stream of newcomers will think DC was always filled with gleaming dining spots and upscale retail. On the spot of the old 9:30 Club on F Street NW sits a J. Crew and Anthropologie, making it hard to believe that the location was once part of the city's alternative music and art scene. Sometimes change feels more like cultural erasure.

While I still love Southern food, like my fellow DC residents who live north of Anacostia, I often seek out innovation and a culinary shock of the new. I realize that I, too, have taken on the mindset that has come to dominate my city: My feet are in the South, but my head and palate, as Jesse Winchester once sang, are in the cool blue North.

W. Ralph Eubanks is the author of Ever is a Long Time *and* The House at the End of the Road. *He has just completed his time as the Eudora Welty Visiting Scholar in Southern Studies at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi.*

THE LANDSCAPE OF MY ANCESTORS

IN CONVERSATION WITH JONATHAN GREEN

Jonathan Green is an artist and a partner in the Lowcountry Rice Culture Project. A native of the South Carolina coast, near Beaufort, he now lives and paints in Charleston. At the Southern Foodways Symposium, Green spoke with poet Kevin Young about his grandfather's moonshining. The following is an excerpt from SFA oral historian Sara Wood's 2016 interview with Green.

Red Fish

Paintings by Jonathan Green, courtesy of the artist

My grandmother's name was Eloise Stewart Johnson. She raised me personally. She literally took me from my mother, and she said, "This is my child," and she raised me because she believed in the signs and the prophecy of what I would become. My grandmother and grandfather built their own home, and they built another structure next to it and it was used as a juke joint. She had her liquors license. She signed her name "E.S. Johnson," so people did not know she was a woman.

Anytime you look into my work and you see a simple A-frame house with a porch on it, that's my grandmother's house. It went through multiple changes over the years as the family grew. It got larger, you add a room here and you add a room there, and the color changed from time to time.

Our house was also a stop-off house. It was one of those places, because African Americans could not stay in motels and hotels. When guests came through, everyone had to give up their sleeping space, and we slept out in the yard or on the porch, most likely on the porch. The entire house would be offered to the guests that would stop through so they could get a bath, good meal, good night's sleep, and they would usually leave first thing the next morning.

[The nightclub] was called Sahan's Place. Many of the enslaved Africans were Muslims, and her name came from her Muslim culture. Black people remember and retain lots of names. They may not always know what it meant, but they can remember the sounds of it, and that's a way of holding on to their culture. So her nickname was "Sahan."

She probably opened in the late thirties, so she probably had it about fifteen, twenty years.

With my grandmother in the nightclub, I loved being there. She used to put me up on the bar. The earliest memory I had of being in the nightclub, this probably was about 195—I was born in '55, so it must have been around '58. I can remember her picking me up—only had my diaper on—putting me on the bar, putting a quarter shot in my hand, and pointed to the person. And I would walk on the bar. And the joy was that I did not spill a drop, because I had good balance, coordination, you know, from drawing and all that stuff. And I would take it over to them, put it down, and as I put it on the bar and when I heard the tap of it on the bar without spilling a drop,

I WOULD WALK ON THE BAR, TAKE THE QUARTER SHOT TO THE CUSTOMER, AND PUT IT DOWN WITHOUT SPILLING A DROP.

and they would put the coins in my hand. And I would fold my hand tightly, not to lose it or drop it, and walk back to my grandmother. She thought that was the greatest thing, so she had me working very early.

The interior of the bar was covered in newspaper. There was a belly-pot stove in the middle of the bar. I remember, seemingly for me as a kid, the most beautiful people, because people really took pride in dressing and grooming. I remember the smells, the smells of lilac and roses, and women would wash in flower water. They would put flower petals in the water. And also the smell of—I think it's called pomade. It's a hair oil. I was always fascinated with how people

groomed themselves, how women dressed and looked. I learned later about makeup and how women wore makeup, and about their relationships, their closeness with each other, with men.

There was a door that led with a narrow screened-in walkway that led to the house, and that was her way to get to the house, bring food, get to the house for whatever reason. My grandmother was always very clever; she had it elevated. She had a walkway from the nightclub to the house.

My mother would [carry food from the house to the club], and my aunts and whomever was around. My grandmother used that walkway to stash her cash, to check on what's going on in the house, see what's cooking, so she could let people know. She never ever believed in serving alcohol without having food.

My grandfather was probably one of the finest moonshiners in Beaufort County. Black people and white people would come to this nightclub for moonshine. You know, alcohol never discriminates. I would remember her always saying, "Have you eaten?" to the people that were ordering moonshine or beer. She would also have prepared pigs' feet and pickled eggs and pickled okra, and she would have breads there available, always a big pot of soup. People would eat and feel great, and they would stay longer and buy more liquor. We had a big soup most often, with rice in it, with vegetables in it, with meat in it, but it was always one big dish, one bowl.

[In 1959, when Hurricane Gracie hit South Carolina,] the home was not destroyed; only the nightclub. So I'm sure to her, that was a token of, "You need to move on with your life, do something else." And I think when that happened, she was probably in her forties.

I WENT TO THE ART INSTITUTE and first enrolled as a student-at-large in the fashion department, spent a half day in the fashion department. The fumes from the painting and the linseed oils from the painting department—I would never have enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago as an art, painting, and drawing student. I would have been too intimidated for that. But enrolling as a fashion design student allowed me access to that department, and I just followed my nose, and it led me up to the third floor and I never left. It was so natural when I sat down with pencil and paper and started drawing.

I was not thinking of being an African American artist. I did not think so much about feeling the need to portray my own culture and community. All I thought of was the incredible variety of artwork around me and that I wanted to fit in there somewhere.

Also I was very cognizant of the lack of imagery of people that looked like me, but it wasn't a complaint. I was just aware of it, and I think a part of that was being a security guard at the museum. So I kind of made a self-imposed mission to be the person to help change that, and that's all I thought of. I didn't compare myself to anyone.

When I travel down Highway 17 and Highway 21, and I look out at the marshes and where those were once rice fields, I can almost see in the far, far distance my relatives working in the rice fields or just being the only seemingly black people on the planet, because it's such a huge expansive landscape of flatness, and you can see forever, seemingly. I know that I'm looking at the very same pictorial landscape, skyscape, waterscape, that my ancestors three hundred years looked at.

People need to be aware of the fact that when they come to the most beautiful, idyllic city in America—Charleston—how this city happened. The city was founded in 1640, and the earliest known rice planting was probably around 1670. That lasted well up into the Civil War with hundreds of thousands, millions of people working for hundreds of years, dying at very, very early ages, a culture of people that weren't even considered humans. But the infrastructure and work they did so that we can live this lifestyle and culture that we have today is astronomical. Not to know that, I think, is a disservice to *any* human being living in this area, in this environment, and that's the importance of it, so that we can have more conversations and dialogues about our history honestly, rather than having dialogues about myths.

The Reception

I think the most important role that art has is visual, but also beyond the visual is the audacity to ask the question, "What if?" What if we were brought here like Europeans were brought here? What if we had an opportunity to be a part of, to share, and to enjoy the wealth of the culture, not to be sidelined or neglected or passed over? What if the beauty of African culture and the humanity of African culture was synonymous to Europe from the onset of America? What if we could have all come together on this land and appreciate the Native Indians of this land? What if we could have all just come together and appreciated the different cultures and been able to work together and to love together? And we would have created what we are inching to, which is a completely new civilization and culture of people.

THE HARKERS ISLAND WATERMEN

A FADING TRADITION THRIVES IN NEW HANDS

by Keia Mastrianni

A COLORFUL OIL PAINTING HANGS NEAR THE FRONT DOOR INSIDE fisherman Eddie Willis' second-story home on Harkers Island, North Carolina. It was a Christmas gift from his wife, Alison. In the foreground is Willis' mother, Dora, seated on a bench with his then-two-year-old daughter, Maggie. Behind them, Willis, in a white tee and black bib overalls, pulls the heads off shrimp. The key figure, though, is Alberto Morales, hat on backwards, head down like Willis, lost in the mundane pleasure of fish-house work. Morales is Willis' fishing partner. Willis calls him "the other me." On any given day, it is hard to find one without the other.

Photos by Keia Mastrianni

Morales is always the first to arrive at the fish house, a set of coral and teal buildings tucked in a curve on Island Road. He calls Willis upon arrival. "I'll be there in twenty minutes," goes Eddie's morning refrain. He closes his flip phone, slips on a pair of well-worn boat shoes, and rushes out the door.

By the time Willis, a fourth-generation fisherman, arrives, Morales and his wife, Heather, have boxed up soft-shell crabs inside the roadside fish market. Morales wears faded black jeans, tucked into a pair of muck boots. At forty-four years old, he still looks boyish, except for a chin-strap beard that connects to a barely-there goatee. When he smiles, his silver-lined teeth glint in the morning light.

Morales grew up 2,500 miles from Harkers Island in El Bellote, a fishing community in the southern Mexican state of Tabasco. His mother left him to be raised by his *abuela,* Maria. His alcohol-addled father refused to claim him as his son, though they lived and worked in the same coastal town. Morales did not start school until he was eight years old. Instead, he helped his grandmother craft brooms from the stems of coconut leaves to sell. At ten, he joined his uncles on the water. He married at seventeen, and joined a fishing crew at twenty to support his children—daughter Isidra and sons Jesus Eduardo and Ivis. Morales' first wife eventually left for the United States, leaving him to care for the

ABOVE: Eddie Willis prepares a shrimp delivery; OPPOSITE PAGE: Alberto Morales transports nets and poles

MASON AND MORALES DEVELOPED CARIÑO—DEEP AFFECTION—FOR EACH OTHER. THEY SPENT THE NEXT THIRTEEN YEARS TOGETHER, FLOUNDER-FISHING OFF THE COAST FOR WEEKS AT A TIME, AND SHRIMPING THE WARM WATERS OF SOUTH CAROLINA'S LOWCOUNTRY.

children alone. He did not hear from her for seven years.

Though work on the fishing boats was steady, money was scarce. In the 1990s, an average week yielded the equivalent of $50. With fishing on the decline in Mexico, Morales' haul decreased. He cites pollution as the main factor. Industry privatization and expanded competition contributed, too. Morales decided to come to the US.

"I knew if I came here, that I could support my kids in ways that I just couldn't in Mexico," says Morales. He wanted his children to earn an education, an opportunity that escaped him. His ex-wife's brother helped him make the risky and expensive journey across the border in 1997.

With the help of a *coyote*, Morales crossed the Rio Grande into Texas, then continued to Beaufort, North Carolina, a twenty-mile drive west of Harkers Island. He took a job at a plywood factory. He eventually traded jobs with a cousin who worked the water and couldn't handle being seasick. So began Morales' life on Core Sound. P.D. Mason was his boss, a native fisherman from the old guard of Harkers Island watermen, and a mentor to Willis. Morales slept on Mason's boat. They built trust in each other, and Mason invited Morales to stay in his home while he secured a mobile home for his guest.

In the mornings, Mason would gently wake Morales at 6 a.m. Breakfast beckoned: a plate of over-easy eggs with cheese and fried sausage. The two men developed *cariño*—deep affection—for each other, says Morales. They spent the next thirteen years together, flounder-fishing off the coasts of Virginia and New York for weeks at a time, and shrimping the warm waters of South Carolina's lowcountry. They always split the proceeds.

Mason, who never had a son, lavished a father's love on his fishing companion. Morales admits to drinking heavily during his early years in the United States. Mason chastised him, checked in on him, and asked him to go fishing instead. Morales finally divulged his family history.

Mason's words still resonate for Morales: "Leave all that in the past," he said. "You have a father here now."

After church on Sundays, the two would head out on the water. "In Mexico, you do what you see on the water," says Morales. "But with P.D., he was always preparing me for the next step."

Morales gained a waterman's education typically reserved for Harkers Island natives. Mason taught Morales how to drive the boat, showed him how to locate fish, and helped him secure a commercial fishing license. Mason eventually fell ill, unable to work the water. Four years ago, on Mason's recommendation, Morales went to work for Willis.

For a fisherman who has watched the traditions of his father and grandfather slowly fade into a lost art, Willis takes Morales' partnership to heart. "Alberto, my heart and soul," says Willis. "We've never had a cross word, no quarrel."

AT THREE O'CLOCK on a Tuesday afternoon, it's time to stick poles. The Coree Indians were the first to use this ancient method of impoundment fishing in Core Sound. Fishermen cut young saplings from the maritime forests for pound stakes, which they stick into the sea floor. The poles are the framework for an elaborate series of nets. Fish unwittingly swim into the nets, sealing their fate. Willis turns to his cohort and says, "Let's do this, 'Berto."

Morales and Willis work in tandem while a reluctant young helper maneuvers the boat. A generator-powered pump jet churns incessantly. Morales grabs a stake from a pile and props it on the edge of the skiff. Willis sticks the pump jet into the bottom of the sound

Morales empties the crab pots

Willis pulls crab pots from the waters of Back Sound

with a long aluminum pole while Morales, stake in hand, waits for the nod. Without hesitation, they make the hand-off. Morales takes the jet out of Willis' hands, and Willis grabs the pound stake. The pole slides with ease into the sea floor. They repeat this along the "Great Wall," the name Willis coined for the massive configuration of poles that spans 2,300 yards across the water. In three hours' time, Morales' white oyster gloves are soaked and grayed from soil and seawater. Willis' T-shirt collar sags with sweat.

"What I've learned from P.D. and Eddie are things I would have never thought of learning, things that the locals don't even know," says Morales. "I know where the crabs are, and that when the half-moon rises, it's time for shrimp."

The Willises have supported Morales' path to citizenship, which he's been working on for the last three years.

"Alberto has come to be a lifelong friend and family member. He knows what I'm going to do before I do it, and I know what he's going to do," says Willis. On Harkers Island, a tight-knit community that holds fast to its traditions, Morales might have once been thought an outsider. Not now. "When I quit, this is all his," says Willis.

Like the waters of Core Sound, the tide inevitably shifts. Morales has already recruited his son, Jesus Eduardo, to come work at the fish house. When the time comes, he will pass on the tradition to the next generation of Southern watermen.

Keia Mastrianni is a writer based in Shelby, North Carolina. Find her Harkers Island oral history project for the SFA online at southernfoodways.org. Translation by Victoria Bouloubasis.

CORN-FED *and Beyond:*

RECIPES FROM THE 2016 SOUTHERN FOODWAYS SYMPOSIUM

The 2016 Southern Foodways Symposium in our hometown of Oxford, Mississippi, explored the corn-fed South and examined corn as symbol, sustenance, and problem. During Symposium weekend, more than a dozen chefs (and one envelope-pushing bartender) took the humble cob as their muse and riffed on corn in every way imaginable, from the pre-Columbian to the postmodern. We asked a few of them to share their recipes so that you can recreate the Symposium's greatest hits in your home kitchen. (Note: Because no one can live on corn alone, we've included a few cob-free crowd-pleasers.).

Gravy *thanks SFA Nathalie Dupree Graduate Fellow Kevin Mitchell for testing the recipes for cornbread madeleines, crispy cornmeal mush, okra stew, and spiced sweet potato cookies. Mitchell, a graduate student in Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi, is a chef and former instructor at the Culinary Institute of Charleston.*

CORNBREAD MADELEINES

by **JEAN-PAUL BOURGEOIS**

DURING MY SOPHOMORE YEAR OF CULINARY SCHOOL, I visited a friend in Birmingham over a break. That was the first time I tasted Frank Stitt's cooking. He was doing cornbread madeleines as part of his bread service at Highlands Bar & Grill. They really stood out to me. I know this is controversial to some, but the cornbread I grew up with had sugar—it wasn't a sugary dish necessarily, but it had a sweetness to it. As soon as I tasted Stitt's cornbread madeleines, I knew one day I was going to put them on my menu. When I was growing up, we served cornbread with warm cane syrup and butter, so I serve these madeleines the same way. My recipe is different from Stitt's, but it still reminds me of those madeleines at Highlands. Note that this recipe only works well in madeleine pans.

Jean-Paul Bourgeois is executive chef at Blue Smoke in Manhattan, New York. Born and raised in Thibodaux, Louisiana, he is a graduate of the John Folse Culinary Institute at Nicholls State University.

Melissa Hom

Makes approximately 40 madeleines

INGREDIENTS

1 ½ cups coarse cornmeal, such as Anson Mills
1 ½ cups fine cornmeal, such as Anson Mills
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
3 tsp. kosher salt
¼ cup white granulated sugar
2 ½ cups buttermilk
2 whole eggs
4 ½ ounces (9 Tbsp.) butter, melted
Nonstick cooking spray

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

Combine all dry ingredients until thoroughly mixed.

In separate bowl, melt butter and combine with buttermilk.

In separate bowl, whisk eggs and combine all wet ingredients.

Gently fold buttermilk mixture into dry ingredients until thoroughly combined.

Lightly spray madeleine molds with nonstick spray.

Fill each mold ¾ of the way with batter.

Bake for approximately 10 minutes or until madeleines are golden brown and edges are crispy.

Set aside mold tray to cool, then remove madeleines.

Serve with melted butter and warm cane syrup.

CRISPY CORNMEAL MUSH

by **CASSIDEE DABNEY**

WHEN I LEARNED ABOUT POLENTA IN CULINARY SCHOOL, I remember telling my dad about it. He said, "Oh, that's just cornmeal mush." He used to fry cornmeal mush and coat it in a pepper jam.

For the Symposium, I thought it would be fun to garnish the dish with hazelnuts and mint. Peppers and dill are companion plants—they grow next to each other in our garden at Blackberry Farm. They're actually just a few feet from the Hickory King corn and hazelnut orchard. I tend to incorporate flavors common to some Indian cuisines in my recipes, ever since my internship at an Indian restaurant in Germany. I wanted this recipe to be creamy and satisfying, without getting so heavy that people can't button their pants.

Originally a physical anthropology major at the University of Arkansas, Cassidee Dabney graduated from the New England Culinary Institute. She took the position of sous chef at Blackberry Farm in 2010 and was appointed executive chef in 2015.

Brandall Atkinson

EDITOR'S NOTE:
This is a graduate-level project for the home cook, and the recipe yields enough for a crowd. Try it! Dabney recommends starting the night before for perfect cornmeal mush. You may substitute store-bought pepper jelly for the pickled pepper jam. If you forgot to put up your own pickled ramps last spring (oh, shoot!), you can purchase a jar from a number of sources, such as Blackberry Farm or Farmer's Daughter.

PICKLED PEPPER JAM

Makes 3 cups

- **1 cup water**
- **1 cup sugar**
- **1 cup white wine vinegar**
- **1 pint sliced lunch box pepper rings**
- **1 tsp. Aleppo or cayenne pepper**
- **¼ cup pickled ramp liquid**

Add everything except ramp liquid into to a non-reactive pan. Reduce to a thin, light amber syrup (think the same consistency as simple syrup). Stir in pickled ramp liquid. Set aside and let cool.

DILL YOGURT

Makes 2 cups

- **1 cup yogurt**
- **1 cup crème fraiche or sour cream**
- **½ cup gently packed dill, stems removed**
- **3 whole pickled ramps**
- **Salt to taste**

Purée the dill, yogurt, and ramps in a blender or food processor for about one minute. The yogurt will be thin and green. Add the crème fraiche and blend until just incorporated. This will thicken the mixture, but do not overmix. Season with salt to taste. Refrigerate for at least two hours.

CORNMEAL MUSH

- **3 cups polenta or cornmeal**
- **4 ½ cups vegetable stock**
- **4 ½ cups milk**
- **4 ½ Tbsp. butter**
- **3 tsp. salt**
- **Vegetable oil**
- **Chopped fresh mint leaves, chopped hazlenuts, and corn nuts for garnishing**

Line an 11x17" baking dish or pan with oiled parchment paper.

In a saucepan, bring the vegetable stock, butter, milk, and salt to a boil. Add the polenta slowly and whisk constantly to avoid lumps. Cook over medium heat until the polenta becomes tender, about 20 minutes. Pour the cornmeal mush onto the prepared baking pan and spread evenly. The mush will be about one to one-and-a-half inches high. Cover with plastic wrap to prevent a crust from forming. Refrigerate overnight. The next day, remove plastic wrap and cut sheet of polenta into desired cube size.

In a pot or home fryer, heat vegetable oil to 350 degrees. Working in batches, fry the cubed mush for about one minute or until golden brown and crispy. Toss fried mush cubes with your desired amount of chopped mint, chopped hazelnuts, sliced pickled ramps, and corn nuts. Toss everything with pepper jelly to coat lightly.

Serve immediately with the dill yogurt on the side or plated beneath the cornmeal.

SQUASH CASSEROLE

by **DORA CHARLES**

SOUTHERNERS KNOW THAT SQUASH CASSEROLE—CREAMY, with a crunchy, cheesy topping—is a big thing. I usually make the topping from crushed Ritz crackers and canned fried onions. For the Symposium, I only used crushed crackers. My recipe calls for cheddar cheese, but for the Symposium I doubled up with mozzarella and cheddar in equal amounts. Maybe that's why it was such a hit.

Dora Charles grew up in Savannah, Georgia, where she began cooking alongside her grandmother at age seven. For twenty years, she led the kitchen of The Lady and Sons. Reprinted by permission from A Real Southern Cook in her Savannah Kitchen *by Dora Charles (Rux Martin Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015).*

Brandall Atkinson

Serves 4–6

INGREDIENTS

- **2 pounds crookneck squash, cut into ½-inch-thick slices**
- **1 pound zucchini, cut into ½-inch-thick slices**
- **¾ stick (6 Tbsp.) butter**
- **1 large onion, chopped**
- **1 large green bell pepper, chopped**
- **½ large orange bell pepper, chopped**
- **1 (8-ounce) container sour cream**
- **1 ½ cups shredded cheddar cheese**
- **Dora's Savannah Seasoning, to taste (see below)**
- **1 cup crushed crackers**
- **½ cup fried onions, crushed**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Put the squash slices in a large saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook just until the squash is tender, a few minutes. Drain well and when it cools a little, squeeze the squash dry and set aside. Tip: Squash holds a lot of water, so squeeze it well to ensure the casserole isn't watery.

Melt 4 tablespoons of the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and bell peppers and cook until soft, six to seven minutes.

Scrape the onion and peppers into a large bowl. Add the yellow squash, zucchini, sour cream, cheese, and seasoning. Put the squash mixture into a 9x7" or 8x8" casserole dish.

Melt the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter. In a small bowl, combine the cracker crumbs and fried onions with the melted butter and mix well.
Spread the cracker mixture over the casserole and bake until golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes. Serve hot or warm.

DORA'S SAVANNAH SEASONING

- **⅓ cup Lawry's seasoned salt**
- **¼ cup salt**
- **2 scant Tbsp. granulated garlic or garlic powder**
- **1 Tbsp. black pepper**

In a small bowl, mix everything together thoroughly. Makes about 2/3 cup. Store seasoning in a tightly sealed glass jar. It will last for about three months.

OKRA STEW

by **EDOUARDO JORDAN**

THIS DISH HIGHLIGHTS SOUTHERN CUISINE'S TRANSITION from Africa to America. I was influenced by gumbo—I like a dark roux—but wanted to do something different. I settled on okra and tomatoes. At Salare, we do our take on the traditional Ethiopian spice mix, Berbere. Our version is not as hot, so it became a workhorse spice for us. Serve with a grain, such as rice or cornbread for a warm, satisfying meal.

Serves 12–16

INGREDIENTS

- **3 medium-sized onions, diced**
- **1–2 ounces olive oil**
- **5 garlic gloves, sliced thin**
- **3 (28-ounce) cans San Marzano tomatoes, crushed**
- **2 tablespoons Berbere spice mix (see below)**
- **3 pounds okra, sliced into rings (may use frozen)**
- **Finely ground African bird's eye chili, to taste (or substitute ½ scotch bonnet pepper or 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper)**
- **Salt, to taste**
- **Aged sherry vinegar, to taste**

In a large pot, sauté onions in oil on medium heat.

Add garlic and continue to sweat ingredients for five minutes on medium heat. Stir frequently to avoid browning.

Add Berbere spice mix. As soon as you smell the spices, add tomatoes and cook on medium for 30 minutes. Stir to avoid sticking.

Add okra and cook until tender.

Season pot with salt and vinegar to taste. For more heat, add more cayenne.

Spoon over rice or serve with cornbread.

Brandall Atkinson

SALARE'S BERBERE MIX

Berbere is a traditional Ethiopian paste or spice mix made from garlic, cayenne pepper, coriander, and other spices, often used in stews. It is usually quite spicy; Salare's version is mellower.

- **3 tsp. garlic powder**
- **1 Tbsp. black pepper**
- **4 ½ tsp. cardamom, ground or pod**
- **2 tsp. true cinnamon**
- **1 ½ tsp. chili flakes**
- **1 Tbsp. white sesame seeds**
- **4 ½ tsp. onion powder**
- **3 tsp. coriander**
- **3 tsp. fenugreek seed**

Blend all ingredients in a spice grinder. Pass through a fine sieve. Store in a tightly sealed container in a cool, dry place.

SPICED SWEET POTATO COOKIE

by EDOUARDO JORDAN

GINGERBREAD COOKIES INSPIRED THIS RECIPE. I LIKE soft-batch cookies with a crispy edge and chewy middle. These are spicy. We didn't want to shy away from full flavor. At Salare, we include ground madrone bark, foraged from trees in the Northwest. It can present like cinnamon and it's almost chocolaty, but it's hard to find. I've left it out here, but if you track it down, add a tablespoon.

Edouardo Jordan is executive chef and owner of Salare in Seattle. He was born and raised in St. Petersburg, Florida, and later attended Le Cordon Bleu in Orlando. His next effort, Junebaby, will focus on Southern cuisine and is slated to open in Seattle in 2017.

Brandall Atkinson

SPICY SWEET POTATO PURÉE

- **3 medium-sized red sweet potatoes**
- **2 ounces honey**
- **1 ½ tsp. cayenne**
- **2 Tbsp. grapeseed or vegetable oil**

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Peel and quarter potatoes.

Toss potatoes with honey, cayenne, and oil. Cover with foil.

Place potatoes on baking sheet and roast in oven until tender throughout, about 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Let cool completely, then purée in a food processor.

SWEET POTATO COOKIES

Makes approximately 3 dozen cookies

- **24 ounces (3 cups) white sugar**
- **24 ounces (3 cups) brown sugar**
- **20 ounces (5 sticks) butter, softened**
- **24 ounces (3 cups) sweet potato puree (see above)**
- **2 Tbsp. fresh ginger, minced**
- **4 eggs**
- **2 tsp. vanilla extract**
- **30 ounces (3 ¾ cups) all-purpose low-gluten or cake flour**
- **1 tsp. salt**
- **2 tsp. baking soda**
- **2 tsp. cinnamon**
- **1 ½ tsp. cayenne**
- **1 tsp. allspice**
- **2 tsp. cardamom, freshly ground**
- **1 nutmeg, freshly grated**

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

In a standing mixer, cream together both sugars with butter using the paddle attachment. Mix until light and fluffy.

Beat in eggs one at a time.

Add sweet potato purée, vanilla, and grated ginger, and mix until well combined.

In a separate bowl, whisk together flour, salt, baking soda, and spices.

Add dry ingredients to the wet, mixing until just combined. Do not over mix.

Using a #20 ice cream scoop (approximately 2 tablespoons) or a spoon, place cookie dough balls on to nonstick baking pan or baking pan lined with parchment paper, leaving space between cookies. Sprinkle each cookie with raw sugar.

Bake at 325 degrees for 16-18 minutes.

CORNFIELD COLLINS

by **MILES MACQUARRIE**

THIS DRINK WAS INSPIRED BY THE CORN HUSKER'S luncheon at the 2016 Fall Symposium, cooked by Steven Satterfield of Miller Union. Mint and corn make a lovely combination, and they both mix well with gin and lemon. I used Bristow Gin from Cathead Distillery as a nod to the SFA's Mississippi home. I wanted this drink to be light and interesting while keeping corn as the focal ingredient. This riff on the Tom Collins might even become your new go-to.

Miles Macquarrie is co-owner and bar manager of Kimball House in Decatur, Georgia. He is a three-time James Beard Award semifinalist for best bar program.

Brandall Atkinson

Makes 1 cocktail

INGREDIENTS

1½ ounces gin, such as Bristow
½ ounce lemon juice, freshly squeezed and strained
½ ounce mint syrup (see below)
¼ ounce lemon vinegar (see below)
3 ounces corncob tea (see below)

Shake, then strain into an iced Collins glass. Garnish with a sprig of mint.

CORNCOB TEA

Corncob tea is also lovely by itself. I recommend adding a touch of sorghum or honey, a little lemon juice, and salt.

Remove kernels from 3-4 corncobs and save for another use.

Place cobs in a large stockpot and cover with water.

Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer.

Simmer for one hour.

Strain off the fresh corn tea.

Set aside to cool.

Store leftover tea in refrigerator.

MINT SYRUP

Blanche 5 to 7 mint sprigs for about 15 seconds in boiling water.

Immediately shock mint leaves in a bowl of icy water.

In blender, add leaves and simple syrup. Puree for one minute.

Strain syrup through a fine sieve or chinois strainer.

Keep bottled in refrigerator up to two weeks.

LEMON VINEGAR

Mix equal parts lemon juice, sugarcane syrup, and Champagne vinegar.

GRAVY

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Southern Foodways Alliance

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

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

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