



RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

FOOD JOURNALISM IN A MULTICULTURAL AMERICA

by Michael Twitty

This piece was commissioned at the 2016 Rivendell Congregation, an SFA- and Soul Summit-hosted event at Rivendell Writers' Colony in Sewanee, Tennessee, which addressed racism and difference in food writing. This call-to-change, written for the food media, also serves as a thoughtful challenge for consumers.

THE FOOD MEDIA WORLD searches its soul. It grapples with how to navigate identity and class politics; race, gender, and sexuality constructs; and intersectional complications.

Some see these challenges as superfluous to food writing. Others are hungry to address them. With issues of socio-political tone, nomenclature, and cultural power guiding national conversations, this is a good time to work toward greater diversity and inclusion.

Editors, producers, and writers must dismantle practices that further divide white and non-white. Appropriation, the dirty word of the day, is only part of the problem. While the term is often dismissed as a symptom of perceived victimhood, leading to flash-points and inadequate framing, appropriation is a problem to be countered. In this multicultural food-scape, how we write matters. How we read counts, too.



Recruit writers of color and writers who represent underserved communities, especially when publishing stories about those communities. Cast a light on classic food traditions relayed by writers who are often pigeonholed into limited spaces based on ethnicity or class.



Introduce readers to expert voices within a culture. First locate master cooks and scholars who have been recognized as

authorities in their own communities, especially when doing on-the-ground research. Community scholars aren't all degreed, but they represent a wealth of knowledge. Identify published sources within the community. Don't assume that only outside experts and translators can lead.



Foster cross-cultural dialogue by inviting writers of different backgrounds to work together on the same story. Lora Smith and Tunde Wey, part of my cohort at Rivendell, co-authored a piece for *NPR* about dining in Appalachia that blended their distinct yet overlapping points of view. Pieces like theirs create learning opportunities that honor all voices inside and outside a cultural aggregate.



Let's cease asking, "Where are all the [fill-in-the-blank] chefs?" They are here, and many would appreciate being interviewed and amplified. Culinarians of various backgrounds work in myriad

spaces, from private homes, to catering businesses, to pop-ups, not just in executive roles.



Immigrant cooks and their children have more to share than their "boat narratives." Immigrant stories are about more than struggle. Until you know how a chef self-identifies or locates their identity, assume nothing, except that they embody a place in American culture and its inherent diversity. The same goes for people who grew up in underprivileged or socially oppressed environments. Interview them as people, not as archetypes.



Embrace stories about foods or practices that aren't filtered through a mainstream point of view. Interpreting other cultures through popular American values (read: white, hetero, male) often misses the originating community's point. Find out how people in that community think about the food or practice and incorporate their take into the story.

CELEBRATE
DON'T "DISCOVER"

Aren't we tired of Columbusing yet? Let's build excitement around communities that celebrate their own traditions, ingredients, techniques, and styles, rather than "swagger jacking" centuries-old practices. It's OK to highlight chefs from outside a community, but it's misleading to only offer outsiders a platform to represent that cuisine or culture. Writers should not compare chefs in communities of color with white chefs doing the same culinary repertoire unless they are willing to report on both.

GO BIG

As *Gravy* readers know, food writing is more than what's served for dinner. Writers must continue to tackle issues that impact the larger picture of food in a given locale. Food and wealth disparities, food access, gentrification, and police overreach can and often do impact a community's food culture.

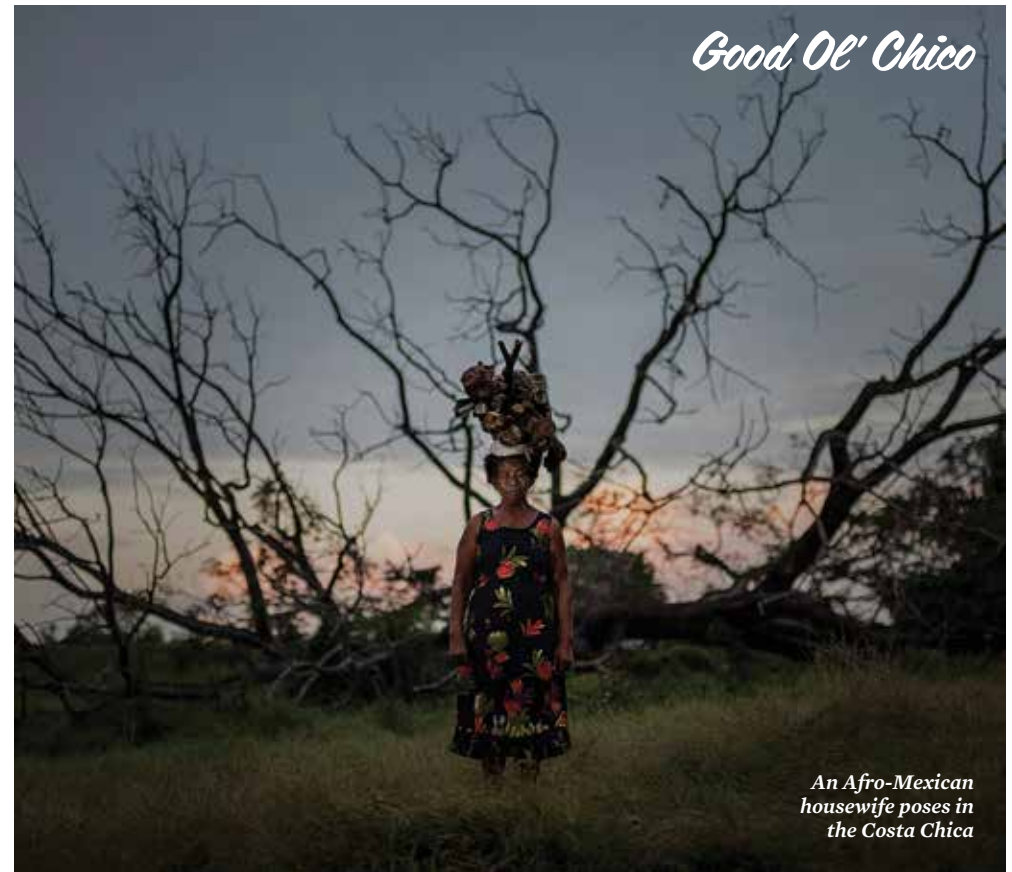
Michael Twitty, a 2014 Smith Symposium Fellow, and 2016 TED Fellow, writes at the award-winning blog, Afroculinaria. His book The Cooking Gene, will be published in August by HarperCollins.

DITCH THE
DRAMA

Conflict sells and generates clicks. But stories that amplify culinary justice and partnerships can benefit many. Multiple examples of cooperation, understanding, and community empowerment risk being buried. Consider Sapelo Island, Georgia, where the search for Southern heirloom ingredients, such as ribbon cane syrup, is empowering both scholars and the Gullah-Geechee community.

WATCH OUT FOR
"AUTHENTICITY"

Lukewarm attempts at authenticity do not bode well for any of us, especially when outsiders write about other cultures. For example, it can be insulting when audiences are instructed on how to "authentically" prepare and enjoy traditional foods that have been around for centuries (and often readily available in the United States for generations)—when the teacher is a self-proclaimed expert not from that community. 🍷



An Afro-Mexican housewife poses in the Costa Chica

MORE THAN MERE MEXICANS

THREE MEXICAN DIASPORAS IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

by Gustavo Arellano

GROWING UP, I DIDN'T consider myself Mexican, or American, or even Mexican-American. My cultures were *cargaderense*, *jerezano*, and *zacatecano*, hyper-regional identities referring to my parent's home village (El Cargadero) and municipality (Jerez) in the Mexican state of Zacatecas. Over a century of

migration from those areas to my hometown of Anaheim, California, resulted in a community of thousands where our definition of "Mexican" differed from what Americans knew. We didn't like mariachi; we preferred *tamborazo*, Mexican brass bands. We didn't wear sombreros; we liked *tejanas*, our name for Stetsons (it translates

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