



First Helpings

TAR HEEL TERROIR

HERE AT THE SFA, we try our best to cover the whole of the U.S. South. Our region begins on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and ends about midway across the massive expanse of Texas. Despite our efforts at geographic distribution, some places just seem to throw a lot of stories our way. If you know us well, you probably know that I'm referring to Louisiana. And Atlanta. And, in this issue, North Carolina. By the middle of this year, I'd heard so many good ideas for North Carolina stories that I decided to publish them all at once. They make up about half of this issue of Gravy, and I think there's something in there for everyone, from the marshes (and fried seafood) of Calabash to the mountains of Boone—where a native daughter lets us in on a bit of local trivia.

Full disclosure: I grew up in the Tar Heel State, where most of my family still lives. And I received my master's in folklore from UNC-Chapel Hill, my father's favorite school to cheer against. (Sorry, Dad. Maybe one day the Wake Forest Deacs will return to the glory of the Tim Duncan era.) So it's especially fun for me to help tell these stories. But after this issue, I might have to put North Carolina on the back burner for a while so that Gravy can probe the far corners of our region. If you've got tips, please send them my way: saracamp@southernfoodways.org. —Sara Camp Milam

Tip Number 57. Subscribe to our Gravy podcast on iTunes.

GRAVY BOOK CLUB

SFA staffers love to read. In this space, we share our favorites with you. I'll go first—look for recs from the rest of our team in future issues.—SCM



Favorite novel I've read this year—recommended by four SFA members.



We were proud to publish the work of our first postdoctoral fellow, Angela Jill Cooley.



I draw my own line at pig-uterus tacos—how about you?



EARLIER THIS YEAR, Gravy decided to excise the term “Capital of the World” from our vocabulary. Our reasoning: It's kind of a silly term, virtually always self-appointed and devoid of meaning outside of tourism literature. And how do you legitimize such a claim? With a festival? A billboard on the outskirts of town? A commemorative refrigerator magnet?

Our bold editorial decision was entirely internal. We didn't put it to paper, or communicate it to contributors, or even really expect an opportunity to enforce it. We were wrong.

The Capital of the World reared its head twice in this issue: in Emily Wallace's tale of two ham-loving Smithfields, and in Bessa Rodell's

appreciation of Calabash, North Carolina, and its famous fried seafood. And in both cases, it turned out to matter—to those places and their people, and therefore to the story. So, after that big talk, we let it slide.

Maybe we'll start reviewing “Capital of the World” usage on a case-by-case basis. Until then, here are some of the region's most colorful capitals, crowdsourced from the SFA's Twitter and Facebook followers. Do you agree with these designations?

1. Vardaman, Mississippi:
Sweet Potato Capital of the World
2. Athens, Texas:
Black-Eyed Pea Capital of the World
3. Salley, South Carolina:
Chitlin' Capital of the World
4. Ponchatoula, Louisiana:
Strawberry Capital of the World
5. Cordele, Georgia:
Watermelon Capital of the World

NOTE: We intentionally stayed out of the barbecue capital debate; we don't think it would be wise to choose sides there.

Featured Contributor GUSTAVO ARELLANO



MEET GUSTAVO ARELLANO, Gravy's first columnist. You may recognize him from previous issues of Gravy, or perhaps from the 2012 SFA Symposium on barbecue, where he talked

about barbacoa and cultural exchange between Mexico and the U.S. South. Gustavo is the editor of *OC Weekly* in Southern California, the author of *Taco USA*, and the titular Mexican of the syndicated column “Ask a Mexican!” His Gravy column, which begins in this issue, is “Good Ol' Chico.” (If you don't speak Spanish, that's Gustavo's cheeky reimagining of the Good Ol' Boy trope.)

GRAVY: You've spent most of your life in Orange County, California. Why are you so interested in the South?

GUSTAVO ARELLANO: I'm fascinated by the South because it reminds me so much

of my Mexican upbringing: not just the unique food, music, booze, and beautiful landscape and ladies, but how it lives up to Faulkner's adage about the past not even being past. In addition, both Southerners and Mexicans must bear the brunt of stereotypes and misunderstandings hurled at us by the rest of the country. We're brothers from another madre, and they're just jealous.

G: What's your favorite Southern food that you can't get in Orange County?

GA: Pimento cheese. OC's still too obsessed with Parmesan and goat cheese to get the real cheese religion!