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You Eat What You Are: Food and Identity in the American South

Skyler T. Williams

A Thesis in the Field of Anthropology & Archaeology

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

May 2024

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Abstract

Food is a universal concept that connects numerous people around the world and is often what breaks the cultural barrier, creating a shared space of flavors that represent one's cultural identity. The American South is known for food that comes with connotations of comfort, spice, warmth, and represents the struggles of various groups of people including Blacks, Whites, and Native Americans. Using an ethnographic approach with a case study focusing on earlier family generations, this thesis seeks to identify and observe food practices that contribute to the overall personalization of the American South. Additionally, this thesis aims to highlight how American southern food contributes to the shaping of the American southern identity. Each chapter of this project will aim to highlight varying aspects that contribute to this topic.

To start, a literature review was conducted to highlight current information and scholarly works contributing to this topic in the anthropological space - presented in Chapter 1. Additionally, Chapter 1 is also an introduction to this project and presents an outline of project research to come. Chapter 2 showcases various foodways of the world and differing cultural relationships with food. Chapter 3 highlights American southern history and how the base of American southern food began. Chapter 4 presents various ways that media influences how we interact with foods and food information. Throughout, various critical analyses were conducted on differing media that highlight the global presentation of the American south and what it represents from both an outside and personal perspective. Furthermore, chapter 5 presents information from a series of

observations and interviews that were conducted with great aunts and friends to highlight how people perceive the role of American southern food. Through observations of traditional food practices, inclusion of specific ingredients and interviews discussing topics of American southern tradition, major findings revealed that personalization of the American South is rooted in experience. Results show that themes of environmental exposure, family, and tradition continue to influence and carry the southern dishes that the world knows today.

Frontispiece



Savannah, Georgia (April 16, 2022)

About the Author

Skyler Williams is a graduate of Syracuse University, with a bachelor's degree in psychology and a masters in anthropology from Harvard University. Born and raised in the Lowcountry of South Carolina, Skyler is a true southern American. Being a self-proclaimed foodie, Skyler values food as it relates to a culture and its people. Being able to explore a culture through food and taste flavors that she very seldom comes in contact with (if ever), makes that experience much more exciting! Her interest in food and food culture ultimately stems from her family. Growing up, Skyler's parents made sure that her and her sisters would at least try different foods, especially if it was something new. You never know you don't like a food until you try it. Having this mindset gave Skyler the independence and confidence to open herself to things that she was not used to (especially food), which taught her valuable lessons of acceptance and respect towards other people. Her father, who is a professional French-trained chef and her mother who has deeps roots in homemade southern cuisine, made her household a melting pot of flavors that she is extremely grateful for. Now, as a young adult, Skyler cherishes different foods and is always willing to try something new. It helps her learn about others, learn more about herself, and makes her want to share these experiences with others. Her background in psychology and anthropology worked together in creating this project that she is passionate about. Wanting to learn more about the cultural history of where she came from, this project aligns with her interests perfectly. She has been studying aspects of culture, history, and society for over four years and has traveled to various locations in both the United States and abroad. She wants to continue to travel and study in hopes of learning more about various cultures around the world.

Dedication

I dedicate this to my parents. Without their sacrifice, strength, and support, absolutely *none* of this would be possible. I owe them everything that I am. Forever grateful and thankful. *Always.*

Acknowledgments

I want to thank everyone who was involved in helping me on this surreal journey. This was 3+ years in the making and I owe everyone in my corner an incredible thanks. My family above all is my inspiration and connection to who I am as a person. They have kept me grounded and I would not be where I am today without them – my parents and my sisters. They have taught me patience, perspective, and have given me the inspiration and courage to do things I sometimes would not otherwise. Thank you to my extended family who participated in this project. They are the literal connector between me and my family's history. Without them, I would not know anything about the intricacies of my family's roots growing up – my Aunt Justine, Uncle Phil, and Aunt Verneta. A final special thanks goes to my closest and longtime friend John. Between our deep conversations and his out-of-pocket humor, he constantly continues to teach me self-acceptance, being proud of all my accomplishments and always keeps me on my toes.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

Food is a universal concept that connects numerous people around the world. For most, food is only ever consumed within the boundaries of the nation that they live in. However, food is a connector to different cultures and various global identities. Whether the adventurous traveler or the study abroad student, food is often what breaks the cultural barrier, creating a shared space of flavors that represent one's cultural identity. Food can reveal countless stories of both a group and an individual – family values, views, passions, migrations, etc. can accompany a dish or its ingredients (Almerico 2014). However, throughout this cultural exchange the origins of certain foods are often lost. Anthropologically, food has links to both the past and present in various ways – it has the power to introduce practices to people who would otherwise be unaware. Media also takes part in the role that food plays in its reach around the world. The exchange of food culture through media sparks interest and increases knowledge of our global history. Media has a direct impact on our food culture; it has roots in our relationships and should not be disregarded as just another form of capitalism (Goodman 2017). Food media also represents various economic and political issues of the current times.

Previous scholarship shows a variety of different ways in which food and media both have intersectional impacts on the human experience. Food is a connector; meaning that it can show similarities that we may have between each other – debunking stereotypes, furthering cultural connection and developing cultural creation. Furthermore, additional scholarship highlights the roots of America southern food in Africa and cultural practices

in matriarchal roles. Representations of these practices can be found in various media that we see today, influencing our interactions and relationships with food. As a result, scholars argue in favor of food alternatives to combat the increasing negative health effects associated with American southern food – raising questions about food availability and developing cultural capital.

Past scholarship highlights the versatility of food and the ways it can further our human experience. Food is one of the easiest ways to make a connection with someone; it can display a variety of identifying features that can represent one's race, gender, class, sexuality, culture, or political standings (Bradley 2016). Additionally, food and one's food choices can be more than just a basic everyday practice. Food displays links to cultural dynamics, background knowledge and debunks common stereotypes: "By examining the 'what', 'where', 'how' and 'why' of our food choices and food habits, we develop a better understanding of ourselves and others" (Almerico 2014, 1). Almerico compares feeding vs. eating; animals feed as a means of survival - to maintain life and grow in the wild. Humans eat – cooking, using utensils and following rules to properly consume those foods. This is unique to mankind and influences one's personal identity (Almerico 2014). Despite our differences, food is one of the single commonalities among us as people.

An exception to this trend is that food is only one form of cultural representation. However, it can also be a form of cultural creation. One can say that soul food has created a new culture centered around African American's use of both foreign and native ingredients to create an array of dishes (Whit 1999). Food also acts as a language that can be seen through the context of various foodways: "...foodways and language provide symbolic reflections of cultural difference... food and language are similarly embodied,

each pointing to social distinctions and aiding in the reproduction of political, economic and social hierarchies" (Chrzan and Brett 2017, 132). One's food culture aids in spreading knowledge of greater cultural concepts that many still rely on; raising questions about how food can be seen as a mechanism for ritual. Food within spiritual contexts varies between the actual food being sacred itself, or the process of preparing and eating that food being sacred (Mintz and DuBois 2002). Many use foods to continue traditional values within the sacred space.

Additionally, previous scholars highlight how food is a form of stereotyping, especially regarding the American South. Adrian Miller (2013) highlights how one might be able to change some of the negative narratives associated with it: "...soul food remains unknown to some, unfamiliar to many, and unappreciated by most...Soul food's not in immediate danger of becoming extinct, but it certainly faces the prospect of being needlessly obscure..." (Miller 2013, 14-15). Stereotyping continues to steer some away from trying soul food altogether. Similarly, Susan Puckett discusses the educational concept of soul food and argues to eliminate the negative connotations surrounding this cuisine: "Some view it as outdated, easily misconstrued, potentially divisive. But the greatest fear even for those who tout it, is that its longstanding greasy-spoon image will keep potential newcomers away" (Puckett 1997, 70). Food creates stereotypes depending on what it is and who eats it.

Other scholars highlight the African roots of soul food and its connections to women. Soul food has roots in matriarchal roles and is displayed through African women's actions and how they handled adversities during the slave trade. Women were known for their resilience and seen as one to hold families and communities together. They have

connotations of love, care, and the creation of emotional stability (Bower 2007). This role is highlighted through foods like greens, cornbread, and fried catfish, that were traditionally cooked by women. Charlie Packham highlights television as a 'kind of menu' within the modern age and states that our relationship with food has evolved from teaching people how to cook, to teaching people how to live. Food programs have an underlying sense of gendering towards audiences that subconsciously contribute to one's interpretation of being either masculine or feminine (Packham 2016). This subconscious gendering shapes one's personal identity and how one might express their identity to others.

Previous scholars also highlight influences of American southern food within Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. Ann Bower's collection of essays state that the history of soul food is 'more than just eating' and has shaped the food that we know today. It can express both social and economic conditions while representing nutritional and ecological struggles (Bower 2007). Similarly, American southern food has roots in social and political issues; taking a role in highlighting injustice and its lasting effects on cultural practices (Doty 2020). American southern food is interconnected with the politics of power and despite these issues, the American southern region maintains unity through its foods. We should consider foodways in the analysis of the American south because this food reveals a web of social relations and constant economic changes (Ferris 2014). Despite the south's changing population and evolutions in the food world, staple dishes and traditional American southern food retains a "stickiness" that keeps people coming back for more.

Additionally, previous scholars highlight media in our interactions with food. Goodman et. al (2017), discusses media's influence on how we interact and consume food information. These influences, both positive and negative, present ways that people are

impacted by the intake of new information. Food reflects truth and our understandings of food are deeply personal; each bite shows our location, political economy, and networks (Goodman et. al 2017). People are often a product of what they eat; our normal diets impact our emotional and physical health. However, we are also a product of what we see on screen. Other scholars argue in favor of food media, as it generates significant cultural capital. Food media has an immediate impact on the evolution of food: "...food media makes stars of the foodstuff themselves... they take on meanings far away from mere ingredients, recipes and dishes... food media is the sampling of other cultures through their food" (Bell & Valentine 1997, 6). Food media offers a look into the 'global kitchen' and constant developments in food knowledge. Craig Batty (2016) argues television and film as a form of storytelling and its effects on food culture interpretation to outside populations: "...we tell others not just who we are, but what we care about...food on screen... functions not only as an appealing aspect of visual storytelling, but... also embodies the character journey..." (Batty 2016, 27). Daily visual representations of food practices tell the bigger explicit story of one's personal life.

Interestingly, numerous scholars highlight how foodways of the urban south are representative of choice, consumption, and availability. These shared experiences between African American people are a part of the shared racial identity (Ewoodzie 2021). Varying food choices, their connections between race and class, and health/nutritional values include factors like access and availability. Thomason (2015) concludes that regularly consumed southern style cooking raises risk of heart disease and other related heart complications by 56%; the root of the problems being some of the main staples of American southern food (Thomason 2015). These aspects vary based on socioeconomic

status and location. Rural areas tend to have less variety, availability and accessibility to healthier foods versus larger cites. However, socioeconomic status plays a major role in the access to better foods.

As a result, various scholars have argued in favor of alternatives to soul food as a compromise to enjoying this cuisine, minus the increased negative health effects. Jennifer Bihm discusses "...healthy alternatives to traditional African American recipes packed with cholesterol, sodium, sugar and/or saturated fat (Bihm 2005, A10). Bihm discusses first-hand experience, stating that the evolution of soul food is a much-needed solution to an increasing health battle within the African American community. What does this mean for the American southern identity? Beth Latshaw (2009) states that "...black and white southerners are equally likely to think southern food is important in today's South...residence is less important...southern food might be important due to its connection to a cultural legacy and southern past" (Latshaw 2009, 124). People of the American South define/link their identity to food of the region. However, with the rise of soul food alternatives, one could say that there is a trajectory away from that [southern/soul food] which helps to define one's American southern identity. The population of African Americans increased by 88.7% since 2010 and totaled 46.9 million people in 2020 (Jones et. al 2021). This 'browning of America' contributes to the future of the American South, unknowingly. Population increases paired with the decrease of the elderly population serve as generational links to the past and its traditions: "This is in part an issue when dealing with the residues of past lifeways...there is no way to consult with individuals of a society" (Peres 2017, 430). Consequently, older generations struggle to keep up with changing food trends and the shortage of food knowledge of younger generations.

American southern food, in its evolution into soul food, has roots in the social, economic, and political regimes of black history and the Jim Crow Era within the deep south. Roots in slavery and racism across the American South are what gave most of the staple American southern food and soul food dishes their fame and glory, at the cost of millions of black people. This thesis will seek to identify and observe food practices that contribute to the overall personalization of American southern food and how that contributes to the shaping of the American southern identity. Situated amid previous studies, this thesis will contribute to the anthropology of food, the anthropology of media, and the anthropology of the American South by focusing on the longevity and resilience that accompanies American southern food. Some of the American South's most popular foods are found in places like the Lowcountry, Creole and Cajun regions of the United States. These regions shift the style of food into a more ethnic style, known as soul food. Analyzing soul food versus American southern food in general will aim to discover the identifying factors that distinguish the two. American southern food is already extremely popular; however, is also one of the main causes of various health issues for the African American community. High blood pressure, heart disease, strokes, and heart attacks are all at an increased risk for African American people and people who constantly consume foods with high saturated fat, salt, and carbs; all things found in soul food.

Food culture is represented globally both by a specific nation and a variety of countries. Numerous locations take its food influences from other neighboring countries, regions, or separate continents altogether. The United States is one of the most well-known countries that encompasses various food influences. Considered a "melting pot", the United States represents how different nationalities, cultural backgrounds and foods can create

unique flavors that many people love - the most common of these regions is the American South. The American South is known for foods that come with connotations of comfort, spices, and warmth. However, current literature fails to highlight the roots of American southern food in survival. Food of the American South represents struggles of various groups of people at that time – Blacks, Whites, Native American and others, to control their ways of life in New-South Cities and during the Civil Right Era (Ferris 2014). A significant influence within the creation of American southern food is rooted in the forced migration of various groups of people during the Antebellum period – a time of westward expansion and the separate developments of northern and southern economies.

Completing this project will highlight the various bridging factors that influence the overall American southern cuisine. This includes specific dishes, ingredients, and the history behind their creations. The research of this thesis will rely on various works including primary data and cultural artifacts. Various works will include both film and television, aiming to highlight American southern food cultural representation through forms of media. Primary data will be sourced through observations and interviews, aiming to highlight forms of cultural representation that food may bring into one's everyday life. Additionally, these primary sources will highlight the differences that vary from person to person (i.e., cooking styles, preparations, ingredients, etc.). Cultural artifacts will include written recipes or any documentation of the cultural food practices to be discussed/observed. Although not artifacts in the traditional sense, these are forms of food representation that are accompanied by an experience, which aids in teaching and learning about a food's history.

Current literature fails to highlight why the perception of American southern food is important. Currently, the terms “soul food” and “southern food” are used somewhat interchangeably. However, soul food seems to have a certain “stickiness” that most people enjoy, regardless of its history - Why? My thesis will pinpoint differences within soul food that make it distinctive from general food of the American South. This distinction is necessary because the perception of both concepts contributes to the overall American southern identity. Centrally, this thesis will answer two questions: (1) What food practices can be observed that contribute to the personalization of the American southern identity? and (2) How do people perceive the role of American southern food? Highlighting these points will further dissect the variety of ways that food continues to break cultural barriers.

This distinction involves looking into the history of soul food and its impacts both past and present on American society. Anthropologically, food, media and the American south have intersections that currently make it difficult to attribute specific factors to these umbrella terms. One cannot contribute or discuss the anthropology of American food, media, or the American South without discussing African and African American culture and cuisine. Questions continue to rise about the evolution of soul food. Based on current trends to find nutritional alternatives, one begins to wonder if the authenticity, traditions, and ingredients used in these dishes are at risk of becoming extinct. Consequently, what does this possible extinction mean for the American southern identity? Will *traditional* American southern food and soul food be lost due to the changes of the United States population? This project will aim to highlight how American southern food started, its current standings, and what it means for the future.

Throughout this project, each chapter will focus on different aspects of the American South and how they contribute to the development of one's personal American southern identity. Currently, chapter 1 serves as an introduction giving background into scholarly works regarding this topic, as well as a brief outline for the remainder of the project. Chapter 2 will focus on foodways of the world; highlighting the variety of ways that food can be both a form of cultural representation and cultural *creation.* Foodways are an easy way to connect with various cultures and learn about the history and development of some of the staple dishes that we see today. Chapter 3 will be centered around the American South - focusing on the roots of American southern food in various regions and its influence from various groups of people during the Antebellum Period. American southern food is heavily rooted in the African American experience – with particular emphasis on slavery and the rural South. Chapter 4 focusses on media and its influence on the food space that we have today. The new age development of film and television presenting various ways to display food and its processes, have made a significant impact on food culture and the way that we consume food information. Chapter 5 is where the case study information begins. A series of interviews and observations have been conducted with a great-aunt, aunt, and friend to determine one's personal connection to the American South and their version of the American southern identity. Continuing, a summary of their responses will be presented from the interviews that have taken place, to highlight their connections to the aforementioned topics along with any additional information that is relevant based on the conducted observations. Results, limitations, and conclusion will follow.

The following are some key terms that may be used throughout this project:

The African diaspora will refer to the transport of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean and into the New World (North America). The African diaspora references the entirety of the African journey to and from the Americas, as well as any stops to other countries in between (West Indies and South America). The African diaspora is important to note because it is the root of the African American experience, which greatly influences the food that we consume today.

American South will refer to all states located within the southeastern portion of the United States. This will include Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee. These states are within the closest proximity to the coast and have a more direct link to the migration and influences brought into the United States. Defining the American South will assist in identifying what foods may differ between each state, while remaining a part of the same region.

American southern food is an umbrella term used to describe all food within the American South. However, American southern food is extremely diverse and includes a variety of different cuisines that are influenced by the Cajun, Creole, and Lowcountry regions of the United States. These three regions have the largest influence on food within the American South.

The Cajun Region is located in the southernmost parts of Louisiana and New Orleans. This region encompasses a large amount of French-Canadian influence that mixes with general southern flavors. The Cajun region is known for flavors that are more robust, rustic, smoky and includes a lot of one-pot and meat-heavy (beef and pork) dishes.

The Creole Region is located only in Louisiana. This region has a heavy French and Spanish influence along with other European, African and Native American roots. A large portion of Creole heritage and language was lost due to forced assimilation in English and other forms of Americanization. Creole dishes are rich in sauces made with local herbs and tomatoes paired with various seafood.

Culture is defined as an abundance of customs, social instruction, arts, and achievements of a particular nation or group of people. Within the context of this project, culture will be used as an umbrella term to discuss various global and personal backgrounds. It will also be used to highlight the origins that contribute to the history and to one's own personalization of food in the American South.

Food Culture refers to the collective consumption/intake of food (and)or food information by a particular group of people, as well as any accompanying variables within that food space (i.e. ingredients, preparation, values, production, lifestyles, etc.) Within this context, food culture will be used to describe specific practices that one may participate in throughout their personalization of American southern food, as well represent global presentations of food practices. These practices may vary from person to person, group to group, nationality to nationality, culture to culture etc.

Forced migration will refer to the displacement of a population among various regions and parts of the world, including the United States. This will include African, Native American and South American people. In discussing this population movement, these groups of people have the largest influence when focusing on American southern food and the various transportation of spices and ingredients incorporated into its dishes.

Lowcountry will be used to refer to the coastline or coastal areas within South Carolina. This region is in direct contact with various ports in which countless enslaved people were brought to the United States. This region also has a significant influence in cuisine, with various seafood dishes and ingredients being migrated inland from the coast. The Lowcountry plays a crucial role in the foodways of the American South.

Soul food will be used to describe the traditional foods mainly prepared and represented by African American people living in the American South. Soul food began as food given to enslaved black people by their white owners on southern plantations during the Antebellum period. Its influences come from a mixture of West African, Native American, and Spanish people. Soul food is traditionally seen as 'comfort food' that contains bolder flavors and stronger spices.

Southern hospitality is a term used to describe the positive stereotype of the American South being friendly, warm, and welcoming towards visitors or outsiders. People within the American South have been associated with showing a level of kindness and providing a hospitable experience when inviting guests into their homes along with the general experience of being in the American South.

Chapter II.

Foodways of the World

Previous scholarship shows a variety of different ways in which food has intersectional impacts on the human experience. Food is a connector, meaning that it can show similarities that we may have between each other – debunking stereotypes, furthering cultural connection and developing cultural creation. Food can reveal countless stories of both a group and an individual – family values, views, passions, migrations, etc. can accompany a dish or its ingredients (Almerico 2014). Food also helps to promote global learning outside of the traditional classroom setting, constantly sparking new ways people can further learn about the world. Food culture is represented globally both by a specific nation and a variety of countries. It is often a reliable way to break cultural barriers without verbal language: "Food choices tell stories of families, migrations, assimilation, resistance, changes over time, and personal as well as group identity" (Almerico 2014, 1). Across the globe, there are countless cultures with differing food styles, some similar to others and others having complete degrees of separation.

Mark Wahlqvist defines food culture as something that "arises out of the place of a people's origin… shaped by resources…by belief and information… by ethnicity… technology… colonization; and by health status and health care" (Wahlqvist 2007, 2). Food culture is a timeline of history, showing the past and present effect of the land and its people, making it an effective way to promote global learning outside of the ordinary classroom. Food culture highlights differences, but also represents ways of life and how

the food that one eats can affect one's quality of life. Various diets (the word 'diet' in this case meaning one's lifestyle food choices, not specific foods eaten to lose weight) are also representative of the food that is produced around them. For example, Asian food consists of large amounts of seafood, vegetables, and rice; being that most Asian countries are islandic or close to large bodies of water, necessary for rice farming and fishing. Hispanic/Latin American foods consist of large amounts corn, meats and grains, based on many South American countries having large crop fields and farmland, used for harvesting and animal raising. However, quality of life or lifestyle varies between both. The food grown in these regions (and others) are direct pathways to one's connection between food and the outside world.

In their article "Food and Identity: Food studies, cultural and personal identity", Almerico (2014) describes a study conducted in the region of Naples, Italy, aiming to study the food habits of people who follow the Mediterranean diet. The Mediterranean diet is inspired by the people and traditions of southern Italy and Spain. This diet consists of fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, herbs, and fish. Almerico's highlight of this diet in their article represents an aspect of social studies that many people do not really talk about - perception. One's food choices have a direct connection to the way they are perceived by other people. Results of Almerico's study showed that people who actively followed the Mediterranean diet were seen as more practical, likable, and attractive versus someone who ate fast food. Everyone has their own standards for health and beauty; however, a big portion of those standards are rooted in the foods that we eat. People use food to express various emotions – happiness, sorrow, sickness, significance, and even status; with sayings

like “easy as pie”, “rolling in dough”, or “bone to pick”. Food varies in the many ways that it can be used to expand global learning and acceptance.

For many, food and drinks are often one of the key factors that make up one’s leisure time or tourist experience. In recent years, increases in food markets and the popularity of diverse food cultures continue to highlight the versatility of food and the ways it can further our human experience: “Food is important from a whole series of perspectives: political, economic, social/cultural, technological and environmental, all of which come together when we consume” (Beer 2008, 154). The past decade has brought about increases in food culture and global education in multiple aspects of the food market (i.e. ingredients, preparation, consumption, etc.). Popularity in diversity and personal identity has sparked a new age of confidence in displaying foods from one’s culture. This, along with the major technological influence (social media, news, film, television, etc.) has made food culture and learning about food culture, the new trend. Furthermore, most travel and leisure experiences are centered around either heavily populated metropolitan areas, or tropical paradisiac destinations. Both being an epicenter for new food experiences: “I think [the foodie trend] is driven by the fact that a lot of millennials are moving to urban areas, seeking more cultural, social experiences… It’s convenient to dine out, especially when you live in a metropolitan area” (Fredrickson 2016, 1).



Figure 1. Benefits of Culinary Tourism

Nunes (2023) How culinary tourism can effect a local economy

Food provides a way for people to interact with each other and with the location itself, in various ways (as seen through the diagram above). Especially while traveling, food gives people a chance to experience local cuisines and connect with the area around them – gaining a deeper understanding and appreciation for the people of the area, their traditions, and their ways of life. This form of inclusion also opens new opportunities for travelers to meet new people and discover just how diverse food can be: “The producers of craft foods are not only the white, upwardly mobile, educated chefs found in major tourist

destinations; they are farmers, winemakers, shrimpers, and restaurant owners of a variety of races and ethnicities who rely on the production of craft food products for their livelihoods" (Byrd 2021, 9). Tourism through food has become one of the main ways to boost a country's economy (both local and domestic) and has become a significant promotion for sustainable tourism. Not only does this encourage people to continue their customs and traditions, but locally sourced ingredients highlight agriculture and helps to reduce the country's carbon footprint (harmful gases released into the atmosphere).



Figure 2. Food Culture Biosphere

Kwik (2008) The relationships between people in a community and their food culture

The diagram above represents the subunits of food and food culture within a global biosphere. Food has various aspects that are intertwined in multiple ways of our lives, forming food "culture". Food culture itself can be scaled up or down to represent both an individual or entire communities and larger groups across the globe. When looking at the diagram, the community aspect is completely relied on by the "human-made environment". Aspects of this environment can include food habits, lifestyle and socioeconomic status; forming a community through food that contributes to the overall food culture of the world. This means that people have the ability to take the knowledge given through family and personal experience about one's food and food culture, and expand that knowledge to the broader foodways of the world.

However, most fail to realize the significance of the ingredients that make up the food and drinks that they consume. Culturally, food and ingredients have roots in a nation's history, upbringing, and creation. In this case, what makes the dish or the ingredients more unique is the country/nation's creativity in making something that is new or different for most people around the world. Although many places may produce or have (roughly) the same ingredients available, it shows the location's personal identity when those same ingredients are used to create something unique to that place: "While discovering completely new foods in a foreign country is amazing, so is trying a food you've eaten many times before and finding a completely new flavor in it" (Miller & Peek 2016, 1). These varying perspectives on food can help spread both cultural knowledge and awareness that might otherwise be unrecognized. Food's versatility is one of the bases of the human experience, being that we consume food as a means of survival. However, over time, food

has elevated into a more complex way of life, making it one of the easiest ways to connect with someone.

Food displays a variety of identifying features that can represent one's race, gender, class, sexuality, culture, or political standings (Bradley 2016). Additionally, food and one's food choices can be more than just a basic everyday practice. Food is, more often than not, a way to highlight cultural dynamics between each other. Humans analyze food – where it comes from, and create various ways for how to eat it. In this case, food showcases similarities and differences that can help us better understand each other and our human experience. This is unique to mankind and influences one's personal identity (Almerico 2014). Despite our many differences, food is one of the single commonalities between us as people.

When exploring common ground through food, the American South is one of the prime representations of this concept. The American South is a region of the United States that is widely known for its savory and comfort foods. For many black people living in the American South, food is a form of love and an act of kindness; consuming food together is an event that represents more than just eating: "Soul food represents Black...it is the conversation... love... people coming together and bonding over a shared history..." (Hurt 2012). Highlighted foods of the American South include collard greens, fried chicken and macaroni and cheese. These staple foods come with the shared history of black America: slavery, racism, and discrimination – and represent sociological ideologies, togetherness, and bonding. Often, food is a just one of the physical representations of the shared history of black people in America. This shared history is not only a constant reminder of past

lifestyles, but also a connector to the history of how these dishes continue to span generations.

One might have heard the saying: food is an experience. It is about how that food makes you feel, the wave of flavors that come with it and each mouthful sparking a different emotion as you take a bite. Hearing this phrase often made me wonder if people were over exaggerating about food sometimes, or if I was genuinely missing something while I was eating. Now, in my adulthood, I understand that food is quite literally *an experience.* As humans everything that we interact with is an experience – a learning process between human and environment:

> "Our personal health becomes, to a large extent, a result of our comestible choices…How we feel can influence what we seek. When we are unhappy, we crave comfort and comfort food…dishes for celebration, refections for reflection and a potluck for a new acquaintance. What we eat determines our gut microbiome which in turn affects our health and how we feel. Our existence is a food-based microcosm of personal physics" (Fenster 2016, 1).

One's personal health is the byproduct of our DNA and our environment. How we view the world is the collection of how we interact with it – the people we meet, the places we go, the things we see, the things we do and the foods we eat – all have intersections within one's personal identity.

In his film *Soul Food Junkies*, Byron Hurt focusses on trying to find key factors that keep the people of the American South (especially the black community) so strong-willed about consuming staple dishes of the south, despite the health risks that they can cause over time. One could say that people who continue to consume these foods are a direct representation of cravings for the 'experience' created by the connection between humans and environment. Food is an establishment of a family tradition, the conversation, the love, and representation of black people's relationship to food (Hurt, 2012). Soul food

and American southern food is what makes up a huge part of the African American identity. With roots in the African diaspora experience, soul food/American southern food has become popular culture; evolving what the definition of these terms can mean: “Soul food comes from the heart; it comes from the soul. You eat what makes you feel good…that’s soul food” (Donnie Northern; from Hurt 2012).

An exception to this trend, however, is that food is only one form of cultural representation. It can also be a form of cultural creation. Food solidifies a person’s customs, beliefs, and values, but can also extend those beliefs into generations to come. The course of time reveals constant shifts and changes within the development of food, culture, and tradition. With every new generation comes ideas that further extend the ideologies of that culture or create a new way of thinking that is added to the roster of cultural discovery/knowledge. Dishes span lifetimes - continuing to impact generations and intersect with humans’ adaptive response to their environment. One can say that soul food has created a culture centered around African American’s use of both foreign and native ingredients to create an array of dishes (Whit 1999). Soul food is a blend of African, European, Spanish, and Native American influence shared through hardships of the African forced migration experience. This is a clear example of how it is the environment that we live in that determines how we interact with the rest of the world. Culturally, food is not normally seen in the constructive sense, but has developed a sense of autonomy. Unintentionally, food sparks creativity and curiosity – we as humans have a natural curiosity that makes us want to find and enjoy things that we like. Dishes, in this sense, are direct examples of the curiosity and originality that have grown and outlasted centuries.

Food also acts as a language that can be seen through the context of various foodways: "...foodways and language provide symbolic reflections of cultural difference... food and language are similarly embodied, each pointing to social distinctions and aiding in the reproduction of political, economic and social hierarchies" (Chrzan and Brett 2017, 132). One's food culture aids in spreading knowledge of greater cultural concepts that many still rely on; raising questions about how food can be seen as a mechanism for ritual. Food within spiritual contexts varies between the actual food being sacred itself, or the process of preparing and eating that food being sacred (Mintz and DuBois 2002). Many use foods to continue traditional values within the sacred space. Rituals and organized culture surrounding food are also reflective moments in the role that food can play in the human experience: "...food rituals can be controlled and shaped by the organization to specifically influence employee perceptions of organizational culture...food rituals can be perceived as a deliberate effort to create a constructive culture..." (Plester 2015, 251). Food rituals are a means of cultural creation that are infused with layers of meanings that further explore the relationship that we have with food.

Food Rituals

Globally, food serves as a connector for people and cultures in various ways. Some view it as a means to an end – a necessity only required to survive. However, others view food as customizable and aim to create food dishes to serve as a variable in their pursuit of happiness. It is interesting to see the variability and versatility that food has based on the location/region in which that food is prominent. Often, one tends to forget just how distinguishable and personal food can be in one's everyday life. The following portion of this project discusses some food rituals that take place around the world. Culturally, there

are a variety of foods that are seen as ‘different’ due to their preparation methods or use of specific ingredients altogether. But it is with this versatility that food is able to fascinate - with its ability to determine how a population can survive, while also preserving a sense of self-worth and cultural value.



Figure 3. Century Egg

Best Ever Food Review Show (2010) Outside and cross-section of a Century Egg

Generationally, food rituals are a way to preserve culture and sustain traditions over lifetimes. Here are some examples of how people around the world continue to preserve heritage and culture through food. First - The Century Egg (also known as the thousand-year-old egg) is a food that is native to Taiwan (pictured above). Chicken, quail, or duck eggs are preserved in variations of salt, clay, ash, quicklime and rice hulls (protective covers on grains of rice) for 4-5 weeks to several months (Side 2010). In which time the yolk of the egg turns green and the white of the egg turns an opaque brown. Traditionally eaten with either congee (rice porridge) or tofu with sweet soy sauce, century eggs are a representation of Taiwan’s history; with this preservation process being a way to store food

without refrigeration (necessary during earlier periods of the country's history). To this day, this traditional process is continuing to be passed from generation to generation.

Located in the southwestern part of Africa, live the Himba people. The Himba people live in the country of Namibia and are known to be the last nomadic people of Africa. Africa is known for its harsh heat and dry lands, but the Himba people have managed to make use of these variables. This remote tribe consumes what are called Mopane worms (pictured below); Mopane worms are like caterpillars and are consumed by the Himba people as a source of protein and energy (Side 2010). These worms are first collected from trees, then boiled, fried and eaten with porridge. They can also be sundried as a means of preservation. Mopane worms are just one of the many ways that Himba people can live off their land. This food represents ingenuity and resourcefulness that make it possible to journey across the desert plains of the African savanna.



Figure 4. Mopane Worms

Best Ever Food Review Show (2010) Dried Mopane Worms

Subsequently, other food rituals focus more on the spirituality behind consuming a specific food versus the food itself. For example, the Newar people located within the Himalayan Mountains of Nepal, take pride in and follow Buddhist customs and beliefs (Side 2010). One of the main beliefs of Buddhist culture is the sacrality of all life, no matter how big or how small; meaning that they do not harm any living creature whatsoever. The Newar people survive on foods grown within the mountains but also consume yak as their main source of protein - to do this, Newar people recruit outside villagers (who are not Buddhist) to take on the task of hunting these animals (Side 2010). Buddhist beliefs also follow the rituals of using every part of any animal that can be spared. Newar people eat various parts of the yak for food including the stomach, liver, heart and muscle tissues to make various jerkies, while other parts like the intestines, fat layers, and even yak blood are used in making sausages and other forms of cooking like stews and soups (Side 2010). Consuming various animal parts (especially blood) is believed to have various health benefits including strengthening your immune system and helping with asthma (since the altitude in the mountains is very high). Dehydrating and processing foods to make jerkies are also resourceful ways to preserve meats without refrigeration.

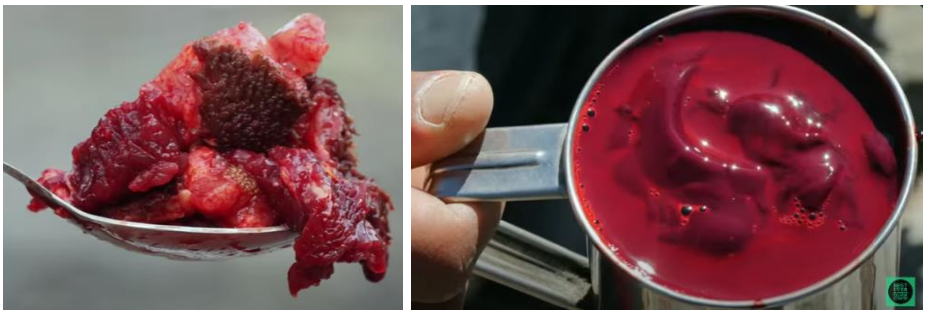


Figure 5. Yak blood (right) and Yak Stew (left)

Best Ever Food Review Show (2010) Dishes made from yak by the Newar people



Figure 6. Mad Honey

Best Ever Food Review Show (2010) Normal Honey versus Mad Honey

Additionally, parts of Nepal (with Tibetan and Indian influence) take part in a ritual to access what is known as “mad honey”. Mad honey is produced by bees who feed on certain plants growing along the Himalayan mountains. These bees create a darker more bitter tasting honey than what we would see in stores today and is taken in ritual by the Newar people because it has physiological and psychological effects on the human body; Living in the harsh cold climate with less oxygen than most, it is said that this honey helps to provide a relaxation effect that helps villagers survive (Side 2010).

No matter the location or climate, people around the world can survive off their environment in some way. What makes us unique but also similar is one’s sense of self identity and diversity based on consumed foods of their environment. This is a true representation of cultural diversity. However, in the case of the American South, this form of cultural diversity comes with its hardships. Previous scholars highlight how food is a form of stereotyping, especially regarding the American South. Adrian Miller (2013) highlights how one might be able to change some of the negative narratives associated with

it. Generally, soul food is untouched by a large population due to its health connotations; it is not in danger of extinction, but more in danger of becoming obscure (Miller 2013). With connotations of high fat, cholesterol, and calories, soul food continues to have a large populational hold on many people in the American South. Stereotypes associated with soul food lie in black history, the enslavement of African people, and the economic sustainability of specific foods given to save money at the time.

Similarly, Susan Puckett discusses the educational concept of soul food and argues to eliminate the negative connotations surrounding this cuisine: “Some view it as outdated, easily misconstrued, potentially divisive. But the greatest fear even for those who tout it, is that its longstanding greasy-spoon image will keep potential newcomers away” (Puckett 1997, 70). Food creates stereotypes depending on what it is and who eats it. Food culture is defined as a network of institutions that involve practices, beliefs and attitudes surrounding one’s intake of food - including production, distribution and consumption (Andersen & Wirtanen 2018). The American South is known for having a particularly large food culture. Within this food culture, lies a multitude of ideas, beliefs, and skills that have lasted generations. To fully understand food of the American South, one must first understand American southern history.

There is a saying: “History is written by the victor”. Meaning, that what we know today is only a piece of what occurred during our world’s history. It is completely biased. There is no way for us to know every detail that occurred during a specific time. However, it is up to those who want to learn of the past and its details, to educate others of the truth. It is only then that we complete a set of our history’s puzzle. The history of the American South is made up of many variables: food, politics, socialism, economics, etc. However,

the backbone of the American South is heavily rooted in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the transport of goods and services across the Atlantic Ocean. The Antebellum Period (a time between 1812 and 1860 – after the War of 1812 but before the Civil War in 1861) was a time of slavery and integration of ideologies and influences on the people of the Americas. During this time, various crops, spices, and goods were exchanged between Europe and the Americas that inevitably economically diversified the North American southern region. With influences from Native Americans, Africans, Spanish and Europeans, people of color who were forced to migrate into the Americas developed various ways to cook and preserve the foods that were given. These preservation and cooking methods evolved into the foods and cooking styles that we know today.

Chapter III.

The American South

The American South is home to many influences; some more widely known than others. Aspects of the American South, specifically food, take influence from various cultures and locations both near and far. The United States is known as a 'melting pot' meaning that the United States is a hub for cultural diversity – both for food and people. Similarly, the phrase 'There is an African hand in the pot' is also used to describe diversity in the United States. This phrase suggests that a significant portion of food diversity in the United States is rooted in African people and without that 'hand', current food culture would be vastly different. Additionally, American southern food also has influences from Native American, Spanish, African, and European cultures introduced during slavery and the Antebellum Period. These cultures combine to form various flavors, food practices, and methods that have developed into the dishes that we see today.

To understand the foods of the American South, one must first understand the history and cultural practices that gave these foods traction. American southern food is significantly rooted in the African American experience during the Antebellum Period – times of slavery, discrimination, segregation, and racism in the southern United States. During this time in the 1830s, slavery existed in numerous forms and in various locations: small towns, large cities, in homes, on fields, as well as in transportation and industries. It is widely known that enslaved persons were considered property – because of the color of their skin. People of color, specifically Africans who were transported across the Atlantic Ocean, were forced to share their life with white counterparts and were constantly taken advantage of. The livelihood of people of color consisted of many restrictions, limitations,

and quality control of goods and services (if any) that were provided to them. Over the years these standards have come to have a major influence on the current southern American way of life; specifically food and proper nutrition.

Before the Antebellum Period, many African men, women, and children underwent forced migration across the Atlantic Ocean; this was known as the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The Transatlantic Slave Trade lasted from 1501 to 1867 and was a time of suffering for millions of African people. David Eltis, in his *Brief Overview of the Transatlantic Slave Trade,* puts into perspective just how many people crossed the ocean during that time, making it one of the largest long-distance movements of people in history:

> "…nearly four Africans had crossed the Atlantic for every European… and about four out of every five females… slavery and the slave trade were linchpins of the process… labor from Africa formed the basis of the exploitation of the gold and agricultural resources of the export sectors of the Americas" (Eltis 2007, 1).

During this time Africans were used to man growing plantations that were filled with tobacco, cotton, sugar cane and other textile products. Additionally, this African labor was sought out after the decline of Amerindians (American Indians) in the 1500s, and the demand for labor to grow various crops and agriculture was still needed.

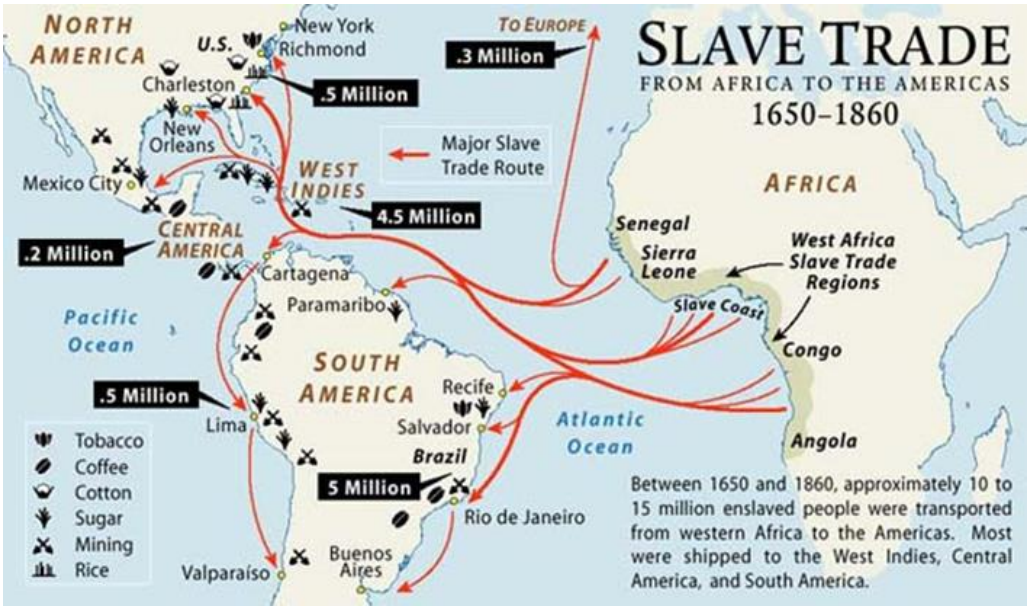


Figure 7. Map of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Mappenstance (2014) Slave trade routes from Africa to the Americas

Slaves were brought and dispersed in many areas across the Atlantic including the West Indies, Central America, and South America; as shown in the map above. During this time, various types of food were transported to and from different areas within the trade – okra, rice, and peas were some of those staples:

> "These crops found their way into American foodways and became part of the ingredients found in the earliest cook books…many of these crops growing on the island of Jamaica… Black-eyed peas were first brought to the New World as food for slaves… African cooking came together to produce the unique cuisine of New Orleans" (Holloway 2006, 1).

Both black and white people contributed to the creation of the developed foodways in America. Southern cuisine is a cultural experience, and influence throughout the transatlantic trade involved both black and white parties. However, current black food has

heavy roots in African style cooking (due to the slave trade) that carried itself into the Antebellum South:

> "Soul food itself goes back to days when plantation owners gave slaves discarded animal parts…Blacks took this throwaway and added a touch of African culinary techniques to create tasty dishes... greens were first recorded in 1887… and black-eyed peas were first brought to Jamaica from Africa in 1674. They later arrived in North America in 1738. All these African foods contributed to the great diversity in American cuisine" (Holloway 2006, 1).

The Transatlantic Slave Trade and Antebellum Period have some overlap in the trade's final years. The slave trade lasted from 1501 to 1867, and the Antebellum Period lasted from 1815 to 1861. During the Antebellum Period in the south there was a large expansion in agriculture; the plantation system could be seen as an informal factory system since there was a lower level of industrialization present. The Antebellum regime was focused mostly on capitalization and profit, disregarding the livelihoods of the slave labor that ran it. Wealth was based on the number of slaves and the amount of land you had – which created a political system of hierarchy and social power: "…the capitalization of labor control, was also responsible for the calamitous fact that the ante-bellum planters were involved in a cut-throat competition in buying labor and in selling produce" (Phillips 1910, 40). Although there was a spike in the agricultural sector and an influx of new crops coming in and out of the slave system, Phillips argues that the plantation and slavery systems negatively impacted the economy and socialism in the long term. Crop production was seen as profitable only if the prices of those crops were high enough – making them sustainable for continuous inclusion in the dishes that developed over the centuries.

Many dishes eaten in the present day within the United States are a continuation of food traditions created during slavery. When referencing enslavement in the rural south, the most common form thought of is slavery that occurred on plantations. Apart from

planting and harvesting various crops, a large amount of enslavement was also domestic. These domestic slaves, known as "house servants", oversaw various household chores and processes - including laundry, cleaning, and preparing meals. Communication about necessary food responsibilities, the number of guests expected, and menus were announced several days in advance:

> "The kitchen staff produced the major daily meal along with breakfast and a later evening tea or supper…cook any meals for any invalids in the household, as the sick were thought to need special foods… they handled the firewood, slops and served all meals" (Sorensen 2020).

However, meals that were served by the enslaved were often different from what the enslaved ate themselves.

The lives of enslaved men and women were shaped mentally, physically, and psychologically by slaveholders. Slaves were often underfed and malnourished but were made to have the opposite appearance when being sold. In their book *What the Slaves Ate: Recollections of African American Foods and Foodways from the Slave Narratives*, Covey and Eisnach describe slavery as an investment and described the deception of being properly nourished:

> "The economic investment represented by the slave population was the primary reason why they were provided care and food. Owners linked adequate food to the health of their slaves…slaves were at least given the appearance of being well-fed. Some owners would take measures to give the illusion of their slaves being well fed just before they were sold at the slave market…the old mistress would take meat skins and grease the mouths of the slave children to make it appear she had given them meat to eat" (Covey & Eisnach 2009, 11).

Food was primarily given to slaves as rations - one scheduled mealtime where they would receive an amount of food made to last the entire week. However, since slavery was such an economic backbone, the health, viability, and reliability of slaves was very important: "Even though there is recorded concern expressed by slaveholders for the well-being of

their slaves, for the most part the health condition of slaves was of economic concern for plantations owners" (Covey & Eisnach 2009, 11). Covey and Eisnach continue to highlight that the amount of food given was only enough to survive and primarily consisted of boiled corn meal (called mush) and a small amount of protein (usually bacon) placed on large wooden trays that sat on the ground. Additionally, since slaves were heavily looked at as commodities, the assessment of their individual abilities and capabilities was often linked to emotional or aesthetic reactions versus characteristics that were seen as disabling (Boster 2013).



Figure 8. African Heritage Diet Pyramid

Oldways Preservation and Exchange Trust (2011) Guide to healthy eating

The figure above is known as the African Heritage Diet Pyramid; a depiction of the types of food that should be consumed and how often, for African Americans. With this pyramid in mind, slavery during the Antebellum Period did not provide the necessary foods that were needed and only progressively got worse the further down south you went. Additionally, the diet of slaves needed to consist of many calories, to make up for the calories lost during the day working the fields or other physically intense jobs. Consequently, most of the methods used to cook were frying; breading fish and meat in cornmeal and mixing meats into vegetables (Bower 2007).

Areas like Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi were home to more than half a million enslaved laborers and soon coined the phrase "to be sold down the river", referring to forced migration into the Deep South to grow cotton (Kennedy and Cohen 2013). During the 1800s, many parts of the land within the county were already heavily occupied by Native Americans. However, slavery was such a lucrative economic process that many slave owners of higher economic status began trying to expand their land into larger areas of the region. This would not only take land away from the Native Americans, but also deter many middle-class white people from being able to purchase that same land: "…by the end of the 1830s, the land brutally stolen from Native Americans and sold cheaply to white settlers was no longer readily available in the older slave states, and land prices became too expensive for many people and lower middling-class whites to purchase" (Merritt 2017, 3). Slavery in the Antebellum Period quickly became widely known as a "rich man's game".

Native Americans played a very influential role in the entirety of southern cuisine. Staples of the southern diet including corn and certain fruits originated in Native American

culture; used to make a number of consumables from cornbread and grits to liquors and moonshine (Malcom 1966). The adoption of Native American ingredients into the southern diet, also came with the adoption of its practices in the food space. For example, during the process of killing livestock or game, the entirety of the animal was used. It was very common to consume organ meat like the liver, brain, and intestines, and leave hardly any food waste. This practice can still be seen today in American southern food with dishes like hog head cheese, chitterlings, and gizzards; additionally, byproducts of the animals were used in other domestic ways – fat was used to make soap for bathing and lard was used in more cooking (Hudson 1976). Additionally, Native American cooking techniques included roasting foods over an open flame and fire pits, which later evolved into the barbeque process that we use today.

West African influence on foods of the American South is very significant as well. The traditional African diet is supplemented with meats and grains derived from hunting native game and harvesting foods within the area, similar to Native Americans. Seasons and the geographical region, naturally, have impacts on what is available to consume. At the time, Africa was well traversed in rice, having various rice species make up a significant portion of dishes. Many foods that are staples in southern cuisine and soul food were produced domestically and are eaten in the African savanna or the topics of the West Indies and Central Africa. These foods included things like pigeon peas, black-eyed peas, okra, and sorghum (a grain used to feed livestock) (Hall 2007). With many influences in American southern cuisine, it is behooving to understand how these processes impact personal experience and personal identity. Byron Hurt, a documentarian and filmmaker, highlights this same sentiment by looking back on growing up in the American South and

how his past, along with the past of his parents, impacted the future for himself and his family along the way. His film *Soul Food Junkies* places emphasis on the stereotypes of the American South and how American southern food traditions shape the way that people view the United States. By reviewing his film, a better understanding of one's personal experience in the American South is achieved – highlighting what it truly means to be black in America.

The Soul Revolution:

Soul Food Junkies: An Analysis

Byron Hurt is an award-winning writer, author, lecturer, and documentary filmmaker who focusses on activism, gender, race, and class in American culture. His primary focus centers around highlighting and breaking stereotypes within the African American community. One of his most popularized works, *Soul Food Junkies*, presents the various ways that food is a major form of representation for people in the black community living in the southern United States. In this film, Hurt discusses growing up in the American South and how that influenced his, along with his family's food intakes. At the start of the film, Hurt discusses how over the years his father falls ill and passes away. During the time before his passing, Hurt's father refuses to give up traditional soul food dishes that were high in fat, cholesterol, and calories; despite these foods being heavy contributors to the initial decline of his health. As a result, Hurt became curious as to why soul food was/is so difficult to give up (despite its health risks), especially in the black community.

Hurt begins by giving some backstory into his life growing up in the Jim Crow south of Milledgeville, Georgia (Jim Crow lasted from 1877-1965 and was a time of segregation and discrimination in the American South). Hurt retells stories of how he and

his sister would take road trips with their parents driving to and from New York each year. Hurt and his sister would stay up the night before and help their mom prepare their meals for the trip; fried chicken, fish and pork chops were some of their main road trip staples. Along the road, Hurt describes the various routes they would take based on the Green Book his parents used. The Green Book, formally known as *The Negro Motorist Green Book* or *The Negro Traveler's Green Book,* was a guidebook published annually specifically made for African American travelers during the Jim Crow era. These books would list hotels, restaurants, gas stations and other areas that would serve African Americans or other non-white people. During this time, Green Books were known as the "bible" for black travel and were scarcely known outside of the black community. The highlight of Green Books within the context of Hurt's film adds perspective to the ways Hurt and his family were forced to make specific choices based on their environment, especially food. Along the road, the best foods during their travels were always served to white people, which left little quality food for non-white people.

Hurt proceeds to discuss the origins and developments of soul food over the decades. Traditional ways of making the more famous dishes that we know today are rooted in slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Jessica Harris, an African American historian, discusses the concept of slavery and the slave trade, as having a multitude of intersections in society, including politics and the economy:

> "Slavery may have been racially based, but it was an economic proposition. It was not economic to put those people in a ship and have them die; so, you had to feed them enough of what they would eat to survive the voyage, and the voyage was beyond horrific. Basically, the enslaved would be fed corn, rice or yams, depending on their place of origin... the hand of the African in the pot, transformed the taste of the pot" (Dr. Jessica Harris; from Hurt 2012).

The Transatlantic Slave Trade was one of three major trades that took place between the 16th- 19th centuries. These three trades collectively were known as the triangular trade – the 1st trade brought wine, weapons, and textiles from Europe to Africa. The 2nd trade took enslaved people from Africa to the Americas. The 3rd trade brought sugar and coffee from the Americas to Europe. Economically, the Transatlantic Slave Trade boomed and brought large profits to the Americas; however, at the cost of millions of lives. Hurt's film highlights discussions from various African American historians that talk about the ways that slave traders would *need* to keep slaves alive to further profit: "What the Savvy slave trader did was study their cargo and their culture. "What do these people normally eat?" ...and the best they could do was produce that in the cheapest form possible" (Dr. Frederick Douglas; from Hurt 2012). The more slaves died, the more money traders would lose – optimizing maximum space, time, and energy to make the most money, was all traders cared about.

Hurt then proceeds to discuss these relations within the present day. In the modern age, the connection to food that is within the black community is rooted in the slave trade. Having to scavenge, survive, and create meals from scraps and leftovers is what helped develop our connections and admiration of the dishes that we have today. It is no secret that the black community is centered around food. Within his documentary, Hurt highlights how food within the black community represents conversation and love. Food is our connection to a shared history (Hurt 2012). When looked at from an outside perspective, the American South has connotations of generosity, kindness, and warmth towards others. This 'southern hospitality' is what draws a lot of people to this region of the United States. However, Hurt continues by voicing that with this "hospitality" comes social pressure:

> "Growing up, my father warned my sister and me to always accept a plate of food when you're down south, even if you're not hungry. He said folks in the south would be offended if you didn't accept their food... I really didn't want to reject their southern hospitality... I stopped eating red meat and pork years ago, but the social pressure got the better of me" (Hurt 2012).

This comes from a point in Hurt's film referencing when he attended a tailgating event at a football game. While Hurt was walking around, he was invited to a table where a 'boil' (a large hodgepodge of foods mixed together in one pot) was being prepared. The main meats inside the boil were both pork and beef. Hurt (who no longer eats beef and pork for health reasons) is pressured into eating it, despite having refused it three times. Although the people who offered it were friendly and welcoming, they could not take no for an answer. It is only after the event (during Hurt's narration of the scene) that we find out that he felt pressured in that moment.

To many black Americans living in the southern United States, food itself is an event and soul food is about being present and living in the moment: "...we don't think about high blood pressure or anything down the line. We focus on the here and now. We're here together so let's come together at the table and let's eat. Let's enjoy right now" (Portia Jones; from Hurt 2012). One could appreciate this sentiment and argue its harmlessness for what it is – that "living in the moment" mindset is often sought out by many, but only ever achieved by few. The African American community is prideful in their sense of togetherness, community, and bonding. However, one could also argue that this rose-colored sentiment is also selfish in its disregard for the well-being of others (children growing up in these families who are unable to make that decision for themselves). It is this same sentiment that holds the black community in the unhealthy food space that it is

in. One should not feel pressured to eat and should be able to make their own eating choices without fear of judgment.

As previously mentioned, there are consequences to consuming large amounts of soul food over long periods of time, especially in the black community. Major African American health issues include obesity, hypertension, heart disease and diabetes. All of which can be linked back to soul food cooking. Similarly, Hurt reveals that his father passed away due to complications with these same issues. In the years before his passing, Hurt's father was overweight and had various pain points in his decreasing health. However, Hurt then reveals that even with these health diagnoses, his father refused to give up eating soul food. Confused after his father's passing, Hurt tried to understand why his father made this decision, but to no avail. Hurt then revealed that Elijah Mohammed had a major influence within the black community during this time. Mohammed was a religious leader of the black separatist movement in the United States known as the Nation of Islam (Black Muslims). In his book, *How to Eat to Live,* Mohammed discusses his philosophies on how to eat healthily on a budget; given the humbling economic conditions of African Americans.

It was with this information that Hurt made the decision to change his own eating habits and to help his family do the same. Currently, Hurt and his family still like to enjoy the homemade dishes that they grew up with, but are able to make them a lot healthier - substituting starches for vegetables, healthy oils over butters, and limiting sugars in desserts. The film concludes with Hurt's revelation that the consumption of soul food and so many people's inability to stop consuming it regardless of the increasing health risks, is because soul food is comfort food: "Soul food is a repository for our history and our

dreams...it's a memory of comfort..." (Macheala Angela Davis; from Hurt 2012). This 'addiction' is hard to change because generationally, soul food is ingrained. It is a habit - and like all habits, they are hard to break. However, another huge contributor to the way that we consume food and food information is through the media that presents it. Hurt's documentary, for example, is a representation of how American southern food is represented through a form of media (i.e. film). Media of all types (television, social media, film, news, etc.) create both a way to express nuances and the intricacies of a cultural food, as well as create a shared space of food education.

Chapter IV.

Media's Influence in the Food Space

Media and technology are both advanced in this modern age. Showcasing cultural diversity and personal identity has also seen a surge over the past few years. Media's influence in the food space has created and continues to shape the ways in which we interact with the rest of the world. When it comes to American southern food, various media forms, specifically television, have created an ideology of what it means to be a part of the American South. Globally, representation of the south comes with connotations of comfort, a place for relaxation, friendly people, and heavily spiced foods. However, what is globally seen is often not what is true to people who live in that area. Personal experiences are just that – personal. One's personalization of the American South and what it means to be a part of it, changes based on various elements like experience, livelihood, and overall interactions with the rest of the world.

The new wave of digital technology and the discovery of media influence has significantly altered aspects of the human experience - especially food. Publicizing cultural diversity and one's personal identity, creates a space where various food cultures can be shared. This digital age and media influence also allows people to learn about various cultures, identities, foods, and experiences without ever leaving home. Additionally, people have created a space where learning about food culture has influenced others to partake in the same pastime. Peri Bradley, in his book *Food, Media, and contemporary culture: the edible image,* discusses how today's food culture has evolved into ways of profit, but also bring awareness to how media's influence in the food space has altered our sense of reality when consuming. Food media has created an edible image and represents

an articulation of desire and narratives around how we are supposed to consume food (Bradley 2016). In the case of the American South, questions arise as to whether the reputation of this region created by people outside of it, are viewed the same by people of that region itself.

However, one could argue that although media has a significant impact in the way we consume food culture, it could also be said that media has created a stronger sense of individualism and has further divided people of the world. Over the years, our relationship between food and media has increased, but has also shown increasing intersections in other aspects of cultural and societal life. The way that we consume food culture and information is a direct effect of the forms of media that we have: film, television, social media, news, etc. With the endless number of possibilities that media creates, people have developed a space where learning about one's food culture is the current trend. In *Media and Food Industries: The New Politics of Food,* Michelle Phillipov highlights the topic of food television specifically, and how current forms of media have created a form of 'lifestyle branding' and 'commodified idyllsim' (meaning to suggest a mood of peace and contentment). However, this raises questions about the effects of the way food media represents a specific cuisine globally, versus how people of that culture view their own cuisine. In this current age of highlighting personal identity and cultural authenticity, it is curious to see the accuracy of global representation in the space of one's personal identity.

The ways that one can gather information and learn about a specific culture, their food, traditions, values, and ideals, all have partial roots in media. Media helps to stomach (no pun intended) the large amount of information that is readily available around the world, without formal educational pursuits. People can educate themselves through

YouTube videos, social media platforms, news outlets, film/television, etc., creating a digital age of food culture. Food politics has become a prevalent feature in popular media due to the intense interest in food; this includes cookbooks, advertising, social media and film (Phillipov 2017). Media has brought to the world the intricacies of food entertainment, but at the expense of livelihood and personal narratives. In their book *Food and Social Media: You are what you tweet*, Signe Rousseau discusses the downsides to media's influence in the food space. Media has brought major changes to the internet, but also exploits the underlying challenges, controversies, and adaptations that come with food entertainment - history is learned but can also be polarizing with the formation of exclusivity versus democracy, professionalism versus amateurism, and business versus pleasure (Rousseau 2012).

Food has always been a form of personal identity and a resource for distinguishing differences between countries, values, and ideologies. More recently however, this same form of food language, has developed into a communication of technologies and commodification across the span of the internet: "…food as a resource for identity construction and distinction in industrialized countries seems to have coincided with the advent of the internet and the rise of new technologies for sharing information and for interacting across space" (Tovares and Gordon 2020, 87). Within this age of the internet and social media, it is easier now than it has ever been to access all sorts of information about food and food culture, making this one of the biggest positives of media's influence in the food space. However, the way that a culture's food is viewed by others outside of that culture can have lasting effects on that cultural identity. In the case of the American South, southern cuisine is often represented by comfort foods – things like macaroni and

cheese, fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy etc. The southern region also comes with connotations of spices, warmth, and the people of the American South are viewed as more welcoming and relaxed, compared to other regions in the United States. Do these traits, given to the south by outsiders, align with how people of the American South view themselves? What questions does this raise about one's personal identity (in the south) or the general cultural identity of the American South?

Globally, American southern food is seen as a true representation of regional pride. Numerous foods like potato salad, cornbread, biscuits and gravy, shrimp and grits, etc. have become poster children for presenting American southern food to the world. One can say that this food is a direct reflection of the love that southern people have for their region: "It shows respect toward their ancestors and pride in their heritage. Part of the reason outsiders love it so much is because of the love that goes into making it. Not only does it taste good, but a real southern meal shines with southern hospitality" (Kaiserman 2015, 1). With influences from Africans, Europeans, Spanish and Native Americans, American southern food is a cultural collision that has placed itself onto the global food map. Talk shows, movies, television, eating shows, travel, etc. have promoted American southern food to be one of the most popular cuisines for people to try. It has never been so cool to show off what and where you are eating.

The south is marketed as somewhat of a safe haven when it comes to food. Connotations of southern food are intertwined with the thought of good home-style cooking; something you *know* is going to be good – true comfort food. However, food itself is cyclical and constantly rotates between combinations of different flavors and ingredients. Over the past 60 years, there has been a 'mainstreaming' of the American South and

gaining access to foods, recipes, and cultural history is easier than ever. John T. Edge, in his book *The Potlikker Papers: A Food History of the Modern South,* highlights this exact sentiment of the south becoming somewhat mainstream in its availability to the rest of the world. Interviewed by Maria Godoy and Scott Simon, Edge states: "…for the longest time, we [the American South] were an exotic place and we were exotic people, outside the American mainstream…it changes the food…The South…has changed more briskly than any other region of our nation" (Godoy and Simon 2017, 1).

Although American southern food is popular in this right, there is a vast majority of people that are turned away from southern food due to its health concerns. People who live in the American South have been criticized for having various health issues like hypertension, heart disease, and high rates of obesity, especially among the African American population: "Eating southern has been criticized and demonized as unhealthy because people who live in the region have some of the highest rates of chronic illness in the United States" (Pucciarelli 2020, Abstract). Additionally, these health complications are largely due to the *long-term* consumption of the American southern diet. Most of these foods contain high amounts of salt, sugar and fat, and a large population of people living in the American South are older adults (65+) that are set in their narratives about how they consume these foods. Smith et. al in their paper "Aging and eating in the United States," highlights attempts to control salt intake, but are unsuccessful due to the difficultly of changes in taste perceptions that accompany aging: "Salt is a highly contested food component for older adults in the rural southern United States…salt has been a key element in the survival of agrarian populations… older adults' ability to taste and distinguish between intensities of salt gradually decline by age 60…" (Smith et. Al 2006, 189-191). In

this case, one may find many of the older population consuming a larger amount of food additives to compensate for the decline.

It is important to note that the origins of American southern food are not only vast and intricate, but is popularized by various forms of media. Stephen Satterfield, a food writer and enthusiast, created a show called *High on the Hog* that follows his journey exploring the lives of African Americans and their personal connections to the foods of their family and traditions. This show follows the food paths of the Atlantic Slave Trade and the Great Migration (a massive movement of Black Americans from the rural South to the urban North during the 20th century) - backtracking the footsteps of African ancestors that helped to define, create, and shape the New World. Highlighting and analyzing this show presents a mainstream way in which the American South is represented; showing how outsiders can view and learn about American southern culture.

Savoring the World:
High on the Hog – A Review

High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America (in its entirety) is a Netflix original television show highlighting the roots of American southern cuisine. Hosted by Stephen Satterfield, an African American food writer, producer, and entrepreneur, this show talks about exploring the American food culture (specifically in the south) while highlighting the cultivation of black foods that make up those dishes. This show, as of 2023, has two seasons each with four one-hour-long episodes. Each episode focuses on a different theme that makes up a significant part of African American culture, and how those themes influenced the rest of the United States. Satterfield travels to

locations across the American South and outside of the US that have made significant impacts in the foodways of the world.

The entirety of the first season focused on the concept of roots and freedom; the path from it, to it, and what that means for future generations going forward. Within this genre of freedom were pinpointed discussions of specific ingredients like rice and okra. These ingredients were some of the first to make the journey across the Atlantic with the enslaved. With it, these ingredients came with the cooking techniques and preservation methods of African and European people. Initially, Satterfield begins his journey in Benin, West Africa where he meets Dr. Jessica B. Harris. Together they explore Dantokpa (a large open market) and discuss what it means to be a part of the African culture, witnessing the hustle and bustle of everyday life while also seeing the 'connectors' (okra, yams, and rice) of the traditional life before the voyage into the New World.

Satterfield then travels to Charleston, South Carolina where he focuses on *Carolina gold* – rice. This journey takes him to the Sea Islands off the coast of the state and opens discussions about community and survival together: "The struggle of being black in America is rooted in the struggle to belong…" (Satterfield 2021). By witnessing the process of butchering and cooking a hog (to be shared with the entire community), Satterfield learns what it means to truly be a part of a community and how living off the land is a way to pay respect and homage to one's ancestors. Typically done once a year for survival through the winter months, elders use that time to gather in a communal space, congregate, and spend time together through food. Congruently, the staple of *Carolina gold* is one of the foods that continues to keep the foodways of the American South afloat. Glenn Roberts, head of the Hansen Mills rice company (located in Columbia, South Carolina),

prides himself on keeping the process of harvesting and using rice in traditional ways: by not monetizing the seed and supplying it to communities who need it. Roberts does not process the grain and runs this company by paying homage and acknowledgment to its roots: "…no one was good at farming rice here until Africans showed up…*Carolina gold* is the legacy of slavery and it would not be here without slavery…it's inescapable… it represents the horrors of slavery" (Roberts; from Satterfield 2021).

Satterfield continues by moving to Texas where the theme for the remaining episodes focus on freedom and the journey across the southern states into the Midwest during the 1800s. The representation of being black in America changes from state to state, with each location showcasing their version of what it means to be a part of the African American community. Texas highlights cowboys and the roots of traveling during the times before and after slavery. The term 'cowboy' is quite literal in its definition and roots (also based in slavery). Black boys would be sent to tend to cow that were on farms – thus turning them into literal 'cow-boys'. However, over time, the duties of cowboys expanded to include a much wider range of responsibilities that focused on survival and community. Black cowboys were prominent in the old west, however, not represented by Hollywood in this right. Anthony Bruno and his family's legacy, cowboys for the Trail Boss North-Eastern Trail Riders (America's first cowboys), helped develop America by herding more than 5,000,000 cattle out of Texas in the mid-1800s.

Places like Texas and the origin of the cowboy developed numerous cooking techniques including barbequing. Living in the Midwest away from towns were vast deserts and marshlands across the state. This made the art of being able to cook over an open campfire and the utilization of animals, more unique and essential. Cowboys learned to

survive on every part of an animal so that nothing goes to waste: "…cowboy stew… kidneys, marrow gut, heart… basically organs from the cows…they didn't want anything to go to waste, so they used every part of everything… this is what was available…" (Bruno; from Satterfield 2021). However, the evolution of the food itself and its techniques do not change the food's history: "…if cowboys represent freedom, independence and American spirit, they [Anthony and the North-Eastern Trail Riders] reminded me that black folks were always a part of it" (Satterfield, 2021).

Over the course of the show, Satterfield continues to run into the ongoing theme of 'the kitchen'; representing a place of comfortability and a safe space for black people, especially black women. The kitchen, although a place of work and servitude, was a space of knowledge and control; it is where they [black women] felt the most confident in what they did for others. Their food is what made others happy and gave them the reputation of being able to make great homemade food. With this comfortability came dishes used to represent times of freedom and greater life, later represented in the annual celebration of Juneteenth. Juneteenth (June 19th) is celebrated as the official end of slavery in the United States. During Juneteenth, staple desserts like apple pie and red velvet cake (made with beets to give it that red color instead of food dye) symbolize bloodshed prior to emancipation – for people who are not able to experience the freedom that African Americans have today.

This show represents what it truly means to be black in America. American southern food is just one aspect of the black experience that has shaped the nation that we know today. The United States has the nickname 'the melting pot' because it is often common knowledge that the United States is known for its cultural diversity and various

influences. However, there is also reference in the phrase ‘African hand in the pot’ making it known that there was significant influence of African/black culture in what it means to be an American. Having this documentary on a mainstream platform like Netflix, makes it possible for the world to see what it is like to be a part of the American South – both as a black or non-black person. Our collective experiences as humans in this modern day is a direct representation of the sacrifice of Black, White, Native American, and Spanish people.

The show concludes with Satterfield walking along the beach of the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of South Carolina. He narrates, saying that the Atlantic represents the heart of the nation, the foundation, the journey, and the birthplace of the New World. Satterfield, throughout the entirety of the show, makes references to how his intention in developing this show was a way for him to better understand himself and his personal identity. To pay homage to his ancestral history, Satterfield raised questions on the perspective of one’s personal identity in the American South and how we can learn from one another. To answer many of history’s biggest questions, one must first understand the smaller variables that make up the ‘big picture’ – in doing so, it is only then that we are better able to learn from each other about the past, present, and future going forward.

Chapter V.

Personal Identity: Diaries of the American South

One's personalization of the American South can be attributed to many things – it is essentially how one chooses or is forced to interact with their surrounding environment. This includes the people one chooses to surround themselves with, the decisions one chooses to make, or how one chooses to react to certain situations. Throughout the interviews and observations conducted, responses received highlighted various experiences and issues that shaped their perspective on being black in the American South. Underlying themes include socioeconomic status, family values, and environment of upbringing. Together, participants were able to elucidate their past, present, and what that means for their future and the future of their loved ones.

When seeing the representation of the American South from an outside perspective, it is only curious to see the perspective of someone from the inside – someone who was born, raised and lives in the American South. Ideally, having these perspectives will provide a more balanced insight into what it means to be a part of this southern culture and how that shapes one's personal identity. It is easier to view concepts of community, food and connection on screen; however, to truly be included in these concepts provides a greater sense of self, understanding, and adds to one's personalization of the human experience. Furthermore, when faced with questions of personal identity, all is subjective. Perspectives shift and evolve based on numerous factors like age, socioeconomic status, education, and interpersonal relationships with family, friends, or oneself. Additionally, outlooks can also change based on media that is consumed throughout life: news, social media, film/television, etc.

To gain these perspectives on personal identity and personal connection, interviews were conducted with various family members and friends discussing their insights about growing up and experiencing the American South first-hand. These interviews were between family members of older age (90 and 70 years old) and those of friends (27 years old), giving the feedback received more inclusive, balanced, and gives an opportunity to pinpoint possible perspective changes based on age and generational gaps. Throughout all interviews conducted, there were themes of connection, tradition, change, and quality that were highlighted the most. Generationally, what is represented as soul food or black food has changed significantly over the course of a few decades for various reasons; the number one being the cost of living and situational differences between northern and southern states.

For my great aunt (90 years old), living in the south did not provide the necessities that she needed to take care of herself and her family, which is why she chose to leave the south and move to Philadelphia, then New Jersey in 1961. From her perspective southern food is relatively the same as it is in other places, but the quality of the food changes as new generations come: "We have the same tastes…collard greens, black eyed peas, corn, okra, tomato…foods like that take time. You don't see people taking the time to cook the way they used to. Everything is so rushed…" (Fredrick, 2023). Furthermore, this modern age of fusion style foods make it harder to continue to make southern dishes traditionally – in turn, slowly taking away American southern tradition: "Fusion foods, vegan options, vegetarian options…It takes away from soul food because things are prepared differently…it depends on what you want to eat and it depends on the person" (Fredrick, 2023). Fredrick continues by ultimately stating that her perspective on the way southern

food has changed and her views on quality, are mostly indifferent. Southern food is subjective and how or what you choose to eat is up to you.

Similarly, views on tradition being lost generationally was a running theme between all participants. My very close and long-time friend (27 years old) gave his views on how traditions and food culture in the American South is heavily weighted in your environment and who you surround yourself with:

> "My dad's side is more county-food oriented and my mom's side has more Charleston roots with seafood… her [his mother's mother] big thing was for everyone to know how to cook whether you are male or female…it gave me more of a curiosity towards foods and then I would want to eat it more often, so I wanted to know how to make it…Living in the time that we are in now, we are more conscious… I think though that there has been lots of change…" (Green II, 2023).

Everyone is different and what shapes someone's ideals depend on how you were raised and what was taught not only at an early age, but in adulthood as well. Everyone's human experience is just a compilation of how we react to situations, people, and circumstances. Green's black perspective on American southern food is centered around the connection to land and the connections that black people have towards each other:

> "I've listened to my dad's parents and what they had access to…my granddad [his dad's dad] was a sharecropper… he stayed on the land of his employer…in lieu of a break from work he would offer him a meal… they would eat the best cuts of the pig and give them what they did not want to eat. They grew up making things out of the leftovers" (Green II, 2023).

Interestingly, one could agree that with the new age of media and lack of quality time to prepare foods, traditional ways to prepare southern dishes are slowly being phased out, especially when it comes to younger generations. However, not everyone from the older generation agrees that it is younger generations that are causing these losses. During my aunt's interview (70 years old), she mentioned how her upbringing was roughly the

same as her other siblings within the family and yet she scarcely likes to cook or knows how to prepare some of her favorite dishes: “It really does depend on the person and what their interests are; it’s also about whether you choose to learn these things, and you will not realize how important they are to you until later” (Guess, 2023). Her response highlights how it is not just about older generations teaching younger ones, but it is about younger generations being ready to receive what is trying to be passed on. Traditional practices lost through generations should not be placed solely on the shoulders of the younger generations. A portion of what is being lost stops at the generations who have no interest in moving it forward. For example, my aunt and my mother (her sister) have roughly a 20-year age gap between the two of them. Needless to say, their upbringing was different based on various factors, mainly socioeconomic status and living environment. Over the span of 20 years, the overall state of the world and economy has had time to change, presenting better opportunities for everyone. Therefore, it is significant to say there were numerous variables that shaped them both individually and together as a family, just based on time itself.

The themes of generational change, family, and togetherness are what strike as the most important across all responses. One’s personalization of the American South relies on what matters most to that person. However, it is important to note that even though responses are all subjective, they all intertwine in a specific way. Without hearing each other’s responses, all participants mentioned family values, traditions lost through generations, and the challenges of change as a society and as black people. Meaning that no matter the nuanced differences of how one might have grown up or how one chooses to live their life now, there is an unspoken commonality that affects us all.

The future of the American South:

Limitations and Conclusion

No project is perfect and therefore, could always have room for improvement in both quality and quantity of research. Based on the data collected from the previously mentioned participants, responses placed heavy emphasis on the value of family, tradition and overall exposure to the people, places, and food processes of the American South. What makes someone a part of American southern culture is not just being born and raised in it, but one's overall connection and reaction to what is exposed to them. If we have learned anything thus far, it is that personalization and perspective on the American South is just that – personal. How you choose to interpret the south, whether it be through its food, culture, society, or overall lifestyle, it is all subjective. For people living both inside and outside of the south, American southern culture is inviting, welcoming and filled with connotations of love, connection, and tradition.

However, there are a few limitations that can be identified for this project. Firstly, it is difficult to determine *generalities* of the American South based on a just few individuals. As previously mentioned, the American South both globally and domestically has a positive connotation when it comes to food (as seen through the *High on the Hog, Soul Food Junkies,* and the diaries of the American South). However, there is no way to determine if southern food's reputation is positive for *all* people. To somewhat combat this for future studies, it would make for more significant results if there was a larger number of participants to have interviews or observation time with. In this case, we would be able to see if there is more of a general consensus with how the American South is perceived. Similarly, I recognize that there is the possibility of participant response bias, being that

the participants who were interviewed were extended family and close friends. Although there is no right or wrong answer in one's perception of the American South, all participants were people that I knew personally and knew the topic of this project beforehand. Therefore, responses given may have been more positive or more negative than if they were given to someone they did not know.

Secondly, perspectives on the American South vary not only from person to person generally, but can also vary based on factors like age, race, and gender. Participants in this study were all African American. Not saying that this is a bad thing; however, all responses were coming from people of color which we know have differing personal experiences and connections to the American South, versus someone who is not a person of color. This is also a form of participant response bias. All responses are from a black perspective, which we know is significantly different based on the American South being rooted in the black experience. For future research it would be beneficial to include participants of various races and backgrounds. We have already established that the south has roots in European, Native American and African culture. It would prove more significant results to include responses from a variety of people. Additionally, having participants vary in age makes the responses somewhat skewed. All participants varied in age (65+, 75+, and 27 years old). Having these age differences is good, being that there is a variety of responses based on times of exposure to things like societal factors, or other environmental influences. However, these age gaps can have the opposite effect: highlighting different upbringings, lifestyles, and experiences makes it somewhat difficult to pinpoint commonalities between them.

So, what does this mean going forward? Well, if anything is to be taken away from this project, it is that there is still so much to discover about personal identity in the context of both a culture and as just human beings. What makes us individuals and what shapes how we interact with the world is heavily intertwined in various things and is often rooted in things that we do not necessarily think about daily. What I hope to have achieved by conducting this research and completing this project, is to show a more in depth understanding about the American South both from a personal and global perspective. The American South plays a significant part in our world's history and one of the backbones of the American South are black people. Hopefully, this project was able to uncover nuances and intersections that many did not realize helped shape America. This research hopefully brings to light some of the diversity that is within the field of cultural and food anthropology. This project has shown just how intricate perspectives can be in piecing together global history and ancestral culture.

To summarize, this project touched on various aspects of the human experience that make up the American southern culture that we are familiar with today. To begin, this project focused on the overall generalities of food culture and what it means to have a food culture. Globally, food culture varies from population to population and is based on current location and availability of resources. Various cultures create and develop foods that are sustainable for where they live and what they have access to. Following, the start of American southern food culture is highlighted by the African American journey. The Atlantic Slave Trade, on route from Europe to Africa and the Americas, gave access to various foods, herbs, spices and cooking styles while relocating an entire population of people. During this time, preservation methods, food processes, and overall forced

adaptation, help to developed and shape some of the southern dish staples that we know today. Additionally, the American South is also rooted in stereotypes and connotations that make it difficult to both blend in and stand out. Byron Hurt, in his documentary *Soul Food Junkies,* discussed how the African American experience continues to have various effects on people who either visit or live in the region. Both the American South and American southern food come with connotations of warmth and hospitality, but are often overlooked by the various health concerns that can arise from eating these foods for long periods of time.

This project proceeded by presenting ways that media has had an exponential effect on the way the one experiences and learns food information. By highlighting a popular Netflix show, *High on the Hog*, one is able to see the American southern perspective from an outside view. The show focusses on themes of community, family, adversity and comfortability rooted in the intense African American experience. In comparison, it is hard to determine an entire cultural dynamic based on just the global perspective. Therefore, in order to achieve a more balanced and well-rounded outlook, interviews and observations were used to highlight a more personal take on the American South, from people who were born, raised, and are still living there. From this research, themes surrounding family, environment, and willingness between generations, were presented as variables in what can personalize one's experience in the American South.

Overall, I hope that this project sparks further interest in the realms of cultural and food anthropology. These fields have so much more diversity and historical inclusion to be shared, other than what is highlighted here (i.e. language). Witnessing the dynamics and range of just how widespread this topic can be, makes the need for further research more

necessary. It is only then that we can take this information and use it to better understand ourselves in the current moment, how it affects our past, and what it means for our future.

The One Piece is real!

Appendix I.

Additional Images

Here are some Thanksgiving (2023) foods that were served at my house!



Sweet potato (top left), gravy (top right) and roasted duck (bottom)



Macaroni and Cheese (bottom) and Stuffing (top)



Collard Greens



Rutabagas with smoked turkey neck



Deviled eggs with bacon



Apple pie

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