

New Orleans' Nourishing Networks: Foodways and Municipal Markets in the Nineteenth Century Global South

According to a *Daily Picayune* article published in 1859, a typical business day at the antebellum French Market in New Orleans began well before sunrise. The rhythmic thwack of meat cleavers echoed through the long, straight halls of the night market—audible above the exchange of gossip between pleasure seekers conversing over steaming cups of chicory coffee. At dawn's first light, the market swelled with customers seeking first-pick of vendors' wares: "servants with their basket, gentlemen enjoying an early smoke [...]; fine ladies out for an early walk; and good housewives who do their own marketing." A motley crew of vendors manned their retail spaces: "the Italian," "the Yankee," "the Indian [s]quaw," "the plantation negro," "the Frenchman" and "the Spanish Oysterman." Those vendors not fortunate enough to occupy stalls in the covered markets, clustered on street corners and cried out to passersby to purchase freshly caught oysters and steaming loaves of French bread. Food brings people together socially—binding community members together in the daily rituals of consumption.

My collection is composed of historic cookbooks and other literary sources that chronicle the complex history of Creole cuisine and the city of New Orleans. My collection was inspired by an internship at the Southern Food and Beverage Museum in New Orleans in 2009, which introduced me to the wonderful complexity of nineteenth century Creole culture. The works in my collection are intimately tied to my dissertation research on Southern foodways in the early years of American statehood as a means to study the creation of what would become known as "American" culture. I am particularly interested in contextualizing Southern foodways within the municipal markets of Southern port cities. These markets provided a centralized base through which most fresh foods passed before making their ways to the kitchens and tables of urban residents. My research demands an alternative understanding how Americans positioned themselves both within the local and international contexts of economy, trading in goods—including foodstuffs—sourced from around the world. Although these municipal markets were inevitably embedded in a broad international context, they were regulated by local governments, which shaped the ways in which foods took on meaning within key port cities. These regulations often bypassed national and international regulation, giving a dynamic, local quality to the relations between customers, vendors and government—one that lived outside of the bounds of the forming nation state. These relationships are reflective of the tendency of foodways to move not along national borders, but along different paths that render national borders much more fluid than previously imagined.

My dissertation is particularly attentive to food vendors—largely slaves and poor immigrants—who were rendered marginal by the state and are subsequently rendered negligible in our nation's history. A study of municipal markets reveals that the people marginalized in the nation state were not similarly excluded in local and global food networks. These individuals actually exercised considerable authority within the municipal markets of the South. Placing these typically marginalized people at the heart of my study—emphasizing their central role in the proliferation of regional Southern foodways in port cities—will alter our current understanding of cultural formation in the United States. The creation of American culture is best understood not as a purely national phenomenon, but one that is intimately connected to the local and global dynamics at play in Southern port cities—dynamics that food vendors and urban residents interacted with and shaped on a daily basis.

Some of the most dynamic sources available to historians interested in municipal markets and the people who frequented them take form in cookbooks and novels. Because food markets and food vendors were so important to daily life in the nineteenth century South (and particularly New Orleans), they were often referenced and detailed in numerous kinds of literature. I acquired the cookbooks on this list through some creative searches online and by combing the shelves of *Kitchen Witch Cookbooks* bookstore in the French Quarter. Although, I've found it quite challenging to find first editions of many of these works and have purchased some reprints. I've also had the opportunity to work with numerous historic Creole and New Orleanian cookbooks through The Historic New Orleans Collection, The Southern Food and Beverage Museum

Culinary Library, The Special Collections at Tulane University, and the Nadine Vorhoff Library at the Newcomb College Center for Research on Women. Some of my cookbooks are currently on display at the Southern Food and Beverage Museum or are housed in their library collection. I have a strong belief that these cookbooks should be shared with the broader public so that individuals have the opportunity to hold in their hands historic cookbooks that shaped the lives and foodways of generations of Americans.

Primary Sources:

Cable, George Washington. *The Granddissimes: a Story of Creole Life*. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1880.

Written by one of the most infamous authors of New Orleans-based literature, *The Granddissimes* is an exploration of the extravagance of Creole living in the nineteenth century and contains in its language numerous references to Creole foodways. For example, Cable describes the Veau-qui-tête restaurant, which in this story was situated on the corner of Jackson Square in the heart of the French Quarter. According to Cable's story, elite New Orleanians frequented this restaurant, enjoying the finest meats and drinks sourced from the French Market. Cable's work, gives clues as to how food moved from the market to restaurants in New Orleans, highlighting the role of the market as not only a source of foods for families, but for restaurants and other retailers as well. Each space of consumption, whether it be in the covered market, at a restaurant or at a dining room table, imposes meaning onto the preparation and consumption of foods. Literary descriptions of these spaces breathe life into the social and cultural context of food in Southern cities, indicating the meaning and role of food that is otherwise obscured in the historical record.

The Christian Woman's Exchange of New Orleans, Louisiana, ed. *The Creole Cookery Book*.
New Orleans: T.H. Thomason, Printer, 1885.

The Creole Cookery Book and Lafcadio Hearn's *La Cuisine Creole* were both published in 1885 in preparation for the World's Fair held in New Orleans that year. These two works are considered the first published Creole cookbooks and therefore played an important role in codifying Creole foodways and defining the components of Creole food for a broader American audience. The city of New Orleans experienced a considerable amount of ethnic tension in the late nineteenth century, with Americans, French Creoles and other ethnic communities living in distinct neighborhoods of the city. The authors of this cookbook were likely descendants of American migrants who started moving into the city in great numbers after the Civil War. This cookbook is ripe with racial and ethnic references, and takes a stance that the secrets of Creole cuisine should be shared with the masses. This cookbook was published in the heyday of the municipal market system in New Orleans, which held a virtual monopoly over the local food distribution scene. The ingredients featured in this cookbook were likely acquired from the local neighborhood markets of the city, and therefore gives us interesting insight into the foodways of the Crescent City.

Eustis, Célestine. *Cooking in old Créole Days: La Cuisine Créole à l'Usage des Petits Menages*.
New York: R.H. Russell, 1903.

Eustis' cookbook is an interesting testament to the legacy of French colonial history in the New Orleans because it is published in both French and English. The first section is *Cooking in old Creole Days*, which gives its introduction, recipe titles, and recipes in English. The second portion of the cookbook, *La Cuisine Créole à L'Usage des Petits Ménages* is entirely in French. However, both sections begin with the same recipe: "Gombo Filé." It is important to note that gumbo filé, characterized by the use of ground sassafras leaves as a thickener, is an iconic New Orleans dish. Unlike fish stews and gumbos with a roux base – a French culinary tradition – stews thickened with a sassafras base, or filé, were born out of native Louisiana culinary practices practiced by local Indians.

La Cuisine Creole: A Collection of Culinary Recipes from Leading Chefs and noted Creole Housewives, who have made New Orleans Famous for its Cuisine.
New York: Will H. Coleman, 1885.¹

Along with *The Creole Cookery Book*, Lafcadio Hearn's *La Cuisine Creole* is one of the first published Creole cookbooks that played a crucial role in proliferating knowledge about Creole food culture to a broader American Audiences. This cookbook was published with the intent of appealing to broader American audiences and contains in its pages recipes from the city of New Orleans as well as other regions in the United States. This is an important work to the overarching theme of this reading list, as the recipes featured in this book were made popular during an era in which New Orleans' municipal markets were thriving. The ingredients listed in its pages were likely readily available at the various municipal markets in the city.

The Picayune's Creole Cook Book, Second edition. New Orleans, Louisiana:

¹ Lafcadio Hearn published *La Cuisine Creole* anonymously in 1885.

The Picayune, 1901.

The Picayune's Creole Cook Book, Sixth edition. New Orleans, Louisiana:
The Picayune, 1922.

The Picayune's Creole Cook Book is a fascinating cultural artifact because it was published in many editions and a study of the sometimes minute and often times overt changes reveal the ways in which *The Picayune Publishing Company* was re-conceptualizing Creole culture for broader American audiences. The original edition of this cookbook contained introductory essays that were very important in the myth making of Creole culinary history: one that fell into the genre of many cookbooks in the United States at the time that overlooked the significant contributions of black vendors and cooks to American foodways. The crafting of Creole food histories like the one seen in this cookbook reveal the ways in which blacks and poor immigrants were often left out of the major narratives of American cultural formation. This reading list seeks to identify the instances in which these individuals were rendered marginal, and also strives to re-orient our understanding of the paramount role that market vendors played in shaping Southern foodways. It is also important to note that the Creole food history given in the first and second editions of the cookbook was removed in latter versions of the cookbook. In terms of material culture, it is also interesting to note that the second edition of the cookbook was published as a bound hardcover copy after readers complained that the first edition was not sturdy enough to withstand the conditions of a home kitchen.

Saxon, Lyle. *Fabulous New Orleans*. New York; London: The Century Co., 1928.

Scott, Natalie C. *200 Years of New Orleans Cooking*. New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, Inc., 1931.

Nostalgia for a more elegant, luxurious New Orleans is a major theme in *200 Years of New Orleans Cooking*. This cookbook is an interesting example of a white author collaborating with a black cook to publish New Orleans-style recipes. The introductory pages are filled with racialized language that speaks to the social inequalities present in New Orleans in the opening decades of the twentieth century. This cookbook is interesting to analyze for the relationship that is depicted between Scott and the woman she hired as a cook. In addition to shedding light on the racial prejudices apparent in New Orleans' foodways, this cookbook also contains numerous recipes that, like many Creole cookbooks, speak to the ethnically diverse culinary traditions present in Creole cuisine.

LaBarre, Delia, ed. *The New Orleans of Lafcadio Hearn: Illustrated Sketches from the Daily City Item*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007.

This wonderful compendium of Lafcadio Hearn's rough sketches for a daily paper in New Orleans, *the Daily City Item*, contain scores of caricatures of the diverse body of New Orleans residents who frequented the infamous city markets of New Orleans' in the nineteenth century. Conceptions of nineteenth century race, gender, and ethnicity are apparent in his vivid, yet simple sketches, which exaggerated the physical characteristics of market-goers and vendors who are often depicted carrying their food wares to and from market. As a non-native of the city, Hearn's perspective on New Orleans Creole society provides an interesting viewpoint on the stereotypes and prejudices at play in this bastion of Southern-Caribbean culture.

Roahen, Sara. *Gumbo Tales: Finding My Place at the New Orleans Table*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

Roahen is one of New Orleans most beloved foodies and her commitment to learning the intricate history and tradition behind Creole cuisine is respected throughout the city's culinary inner circles. Her "love letter to New Orleans" is captured within the beautifully written pages of *Gumbo Tales*, which explore her integration and assimilation into the very-much alive historic traditions of New Orleans. Her description of impromptu events such as street-side crawfish boils and Mardi Gras parade routes are testament to the long history of food and ritual in New Orleans.

The Works Progress Administration. *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945.

Lyle Saxon, author of *Fabulous New Orleans*, was the major compiler of the folktales published in this volume. This work is important to understanding the proliferation of knowledge of New Orleans' Creole culture among the larger American public. One cannot help but consider the processes through which these anecdotes, jokes and folktales were gathered, selected, and modified for publication. This work sheds light on what Saxon and his collaborators believed to be a compelling representation of Louisiana culture to broader American audiences. This source also gives us an interesting view on the world of municipal markets in New Orleans. Saxon compiled street vendor cries for goods such as blackberries, corn, and snap peas. He attempts to notate the inflection of their voices and accents through the use of dashes and capitalized letters. For example, "Cantal-ope-ah!" (28) Transcriptions like the one above bring into sharp relief the need to contemplate and explore sensory experiences of the nineteenth century marketplace. How did people see, hear, smell, touch and taste the foodways of municipal markets? What did vendor cries sound like to passerby? What did fresh-cut cantaloupe smell like in the hot and humid mornings of New Orleans and how did this affect the ways in which city residents experienced the market? Last but not least, how did these sensory experiences inform the racial, ethnic, and gendered connotations that market cultures held for community members?

The Works Progress Administration. *New Orleans City Guide*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938.

New Orleans City Guide is another book compiled by the Works Progress Administration that sheds light on a broader American audience's perceptions of New Orleans culture. The work attempts to tell a history of the Crescent city, braiding into its narrative moments of myth making that render the city an "exotic" destination – a piece of the Caribbean in America. This work has many references to the Creole culture of New Orleans and the ways in which race, ethnicity and gender are intertwined in Southern foodways. The most recent reprint of *New Orleans City Guide* (Garrett County Press, 2009) contains an excellent intro by historian, Lawrence N. Powell.

Reizenstein, Baron Ludwig von. *The Mysteries of New Orleans*, trans. and ed. Steven Rowan. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

Originally published in the nineteenth century in German, this novel is known for its vivid depiction of New Orleans society including the elaborate rituals of consumption. Reizenstein's work contains vivid depictions of nineteenth century market vendors, providing insights into how German, and eventually American audiences were introduced to the more mythical and exotic aspects of Creole culture. Overall, Reizenstein's work adds literary texture to the often black and white, two-dimensional images seen in New Orleans' newspapers and cookbooks. His work, like many cultural representations of urban spaces in the US South, emphasizes ethnic and racial distinction, complicating our understanding of the market as a shared social space by featuring instances of social discordance where ethnic, racial, and socio-economic distinction created conflict.

Secondary Sources:

Brown, Eleanor, and Bob Brown. *Culinary America: Cookbooks Published in the Cities and Towns of the United States of America during the years from 1860 through 1960*. New York: Roving Eye Press, 1961.

Brundage, William Fitzhugh, ed. *Where these Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Glymph, Thavolia. *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

Glymph's work explores the power dynamics at play between white mistresses and slaves within the plantation household. She draws much needed attention to the volatile relations between free and enslaved persons within the shadow of the "Great House." Above all, her work demands that we reconsider the stereotype of the genteel Southern woman perpetuated in postbellum American literature and film. Her archival evidence suggests that white Southern women could be among the most violent slave owners and often had capricious relationships with their slaves. One of the goals of my reading list is to extend Glymph's analysis of the gendered and racialized aspects of power within the plantation household out into the public sphere, and specifically the public market place. A reading of culinary literature (both published and unpublished) reveals that the municipal market was one of the only spaces in which

blacks and poor whites (who were typically marginalized by the state) held a relative amount of power and influence over the foodways of the US South.

Hancock, David. *Oceans of Wine: Madeira and the Emergence of American Trade and Taste*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

In *Oceans of Wine*, David Hancock deploys network theory – the idea that humans are connected to one another through a mélange of local and global interactions that ultimately level out power dynamics between big entities such as governments and small entities like the individual citizens – to analyze the growth of madeira wine economy and culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Through extensive archival research and a creative analysis of shipping records and cultural artifacts, Hancock weaves together a comprehensive history that equally weighs the influences of imperial powers such as Great Britain with backwoods merchants on the proliferation and development of consumer preferences and behavior. His work informs the overarching goal of this reading list to reexamine the power dynamics at play in the formation of American culture through an exploration of Southern foodways in the nineteenth century. His use of network theory renders possible an exploration of both the local and global food networks forged within the municipal market place and provides a framework through which to study the autonomy exercised by blacks and poor whites in this social space.

Harris, Jessica B. *Beyond Gumbo: Creole Fusion Food from the Atlantic Rim*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003.

Harris' cookbook, *Beyond Gumbo*, contains within its pages both academic essays and recipes of some of the most infamous Creole dishes of the Atlantic World. Her book merits a spot on this reading list because Harris is successful at straddling the line between academic and popular publications. She legitimizes her passion for Creole food through her academic exploration of the history and development of dishes like gumbo and jambalaya and then enables her readers to *experience* these foods with their own senses by providing them with a guide to recreate said dishes. Harris' book is also important to the overall goal of this reading list because she provides a detailed account of the evolution of the word, "creole" and the many contradicting, overlapping, and coexisting definitions of this word in the Atlantic World. This term is testament to the complexity of Atlantic food cultures and is a constant reminder that we need to tread carefully in our generalizations of Southern foodways on the Atlantic rim.

Smith, Mark M. *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Smith's work provides us with the methodological tools to begin to assess the sensory experiences of market-goers in the nineteenth century South. He is one of the most innovative historians studying historical senses and urges us to consider the importance and central role that senses played in shaping human experiences and culture, in general. One of Smith's major goals is to debunk the hierarchy of senses that places sight above other senses. Because this reading list focuses on foodways, we are able to place taste at the center of our sensorial study—analyzing descriptions of taste in cookbooks, folklore and other cultural forms to better understand the ways in which taste is associated with food experiences and food culture.

Theophano, Janet. *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Theophano's *Eat My Words* is perhaps one of the most influential secondary sources on this reading list because she provides a roadmap to interpreting historic cookbooks and finding a greater meaning in the dog-eared, broth-stained, and scribbled-on pages of both published and unpublished cookbooks. She notes that "[d]espite or perhaps because of their ordinariness, because cooking is so basic to and so entangled in daily life, cookbooks have thus served women as meditations, memoirs, diaries, journals, scrapbooks, and guides." (6) Many of the cookbooks listed in the primary source section of this bibliography contain in their text and imagery references to the municipal market place and its importance to quotidian food practices of Southerners. They not only reference the marketplace, but also the vendors, who were often slave women, that played essential roles in feeding the city. Cookbooks, therefore, are a dynamic lens through which to explore the municipal market (and the food cultures that emanated from the market into the surrounding city streets, restaurants, and family kitchens).

Tucker, Susan, ed. *New Orleans Cuisine: 14 Signature Dishes and Their Histories*. The University Press of Mississippi, 2009.

Famous Crescent Club Recipes. New Orleans: Standard Coffee Company, 1900.

How Brer Rabbit Found His Home and His Personal Recipes for Creole Desserts & Candies. New Orleans: Penick & Ford Ltd., c. 1900.

Mayo, H.M. *Mme. Begué and her Recipes: Old Creole Cookery*. Southern Pacific Co., Sunset Route Passenger Dept., c. 1900.

Pritchard Stanford, Mrs. Martha. *The Old and New Cook Book*. New Orleans: Searoy & Peaff, Ltd., Printers, 1904.

The Sorcery of Seasoning: Culinary Transformations Southern Style. New Orleans, Southern Pine Service Association, c. 1900.