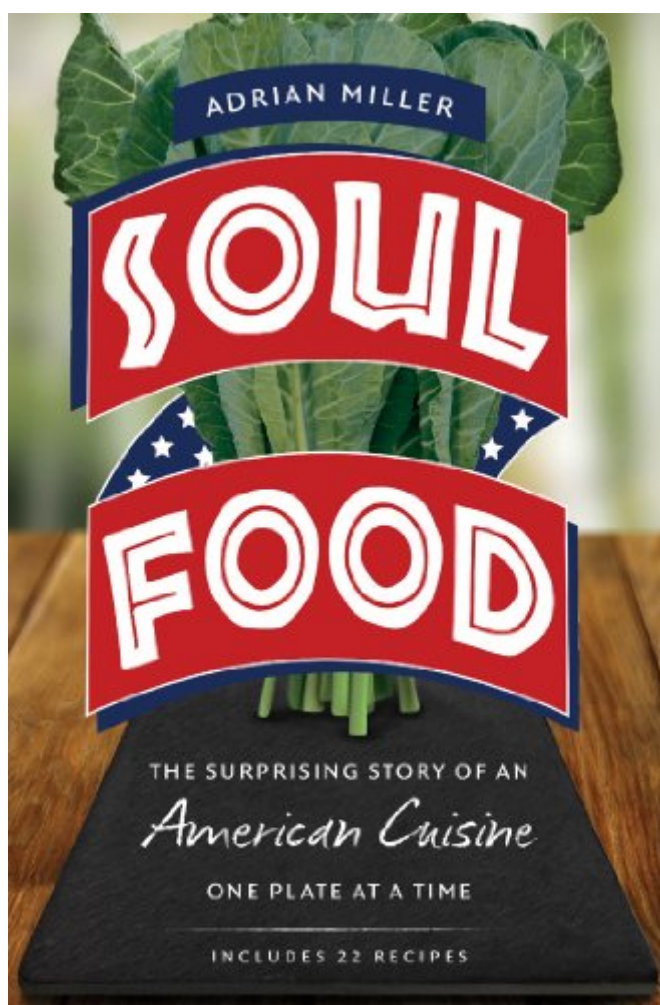


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Soul Food: The Surprising Story Of An American Cuisine, One Plate At A Time



Synopsis

2014 James Beard Foundation Book Award, Reference and Scholarship Honor Book for Nonfiction, Black Caucus of the American Library Association In this insightful and eclectic history, Adrian Miller delves into the influences, ingredients, and innovations that make up the soul food tradition. Focusing each chapter on the culinary and social history of one dish--such as fried chicken, chitlins, yams, greens, and "red drinks"--Miller uncovers how it got on the soul food plate and what it means for African American culture and identity. Miller argues that the story is more complex and surprising than commonly thought. Four centuries in the making, and fusing European, Native American, and West African cuisines, soul food--in all its fried, pork-infused, and sugary glory--is but one aspect of African American culinary heritage. Miller discusses how soul food has become incorporated into American culture and explores its connections to identity politics, bad health raps, and healthier alternatives. This refreshing look at one of America's most celebrated, mythologized, and maligned cuisines is enriched by spirited sidebars, photographs, and twenty-two recipes.

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Customer Reviews

This book takes us down a tour of American history via a previously un-trammeled path and as a result provides fascinating insights far beyond its primary focus on American soul food. By thoroughly exploring the history and derivations of the cuisine that has come to be known today as soul food, the author takes us into the life and culture of American black slavery, the interactions between whites and blacks over that history, and some little-discussed aspects of what it means to be black in today's America. Yes, you'll get a great deal of information about the food, along with example recipes of each major type. But far more than that, you'll come away with a greatly increased understanding of American history and culture. Along the way, you'll learn some fascinating tidbits, such as why the color of your cornmeal matters (and why it is different in different parts of the country) and why red-colored drinks are a cliché in the African-American community. Highly recommended!

Defining "soul food" is a task that others have attempted; yet a precise definition remains elusive. Author and "soul foodie" Adrian Miller meticulously and lovingly researches the complex history and traditions of this uniquely American cuisine. Miller compares and contrasts soul food with southern and down home cooking. He does this through planning a hypothetical, traditional soul food meal and then dedicating an entire chapter to each of its components. With this method, Miller weaves African American culinary history from West Africa, the Atlantic slave trade, the antebellum era, post Civil War poverty across the South, Jim Crow, the Great Migration, the Civil Rights era, to modern attempts to revive soul food. Other ethnic foods have found a niche in the American fast food and medium food markets (think Olive Garden, Applebees as "medium"). Yet soul food remains largely regulated to homes, church dinners, and small, local restaurants. Miller's last chapter is appropriately titled, "Whither Soul Food?" as he explores the future of soul food. Yes, there are recipes at the conclusion of each chapter! This is an excellent history book with flavor. I recommend this for book clubs for adults and teens, as the meetings could include sharing of recipes from the book.

I'm fascinated by foodways. The first Thanksgiving dinner I prepared was for my nieces and nephews while their parents were away. I was 22 and had never cooked a turkey, much less an entire dinner. I worked in a DC restaurant and asked the cooks what I should make for sides. That's when I first heard about macaroni and cheese being a "must-have" dish for Thanksgiving. It never appeared on any of my family's feast tables. Mac and cheese was always an end-of-the-month

budget stretching dish at our house. Greens too. My Southern mother would make a pot of greens and a pot of white beans with skillet cornbread as a budget-stretcher meal, never a celebration meal. If my dad was eating with us, he would get a pickled pig's foot to eat along with the greens and beans. Over the years after talking with friends and comparing our family's food traditions, I learned there are similarities and differences in white and black southern foodways. In "Soul Food" culinary historian Adrian Miller explores the origins the foods that make up the quintessential soul food plate: greens, mac and cheese, fried chicken, beans, yams, corn bread and few more. It's a fascinating history of the Soul gastronomy. Back to mac and cheese -- originally a European dish made with costly and exotic ingredients introduced to Americans by Thomas Jefferson which became a luxury food of the wealthy white plantation table, prepared by enslaved people. As time went on, the ingredients for the dish became readily available commodities that were often included in the "poor boxes" distributed during the holiday season. This year, I'm going to make some mac and cheese, using one of the recipes in "Soul Food" for my multicultural family's Thanksgiving feast, in honor of all the history that Adrian Miller chronicles, in honor of a shared culinary heritage, and in honor of the enduring struggle for social justice that has been played out in our changing foodways.

Adrian Miller has written the book I always wanted to write. Built on a foundation of excellent research, he adeptly peeks into the nooks and crannies of kitchens throughout history and all over the world. In so doing, he had honored my favorite cuisine with candor, punctuated by his beguiling sense of humor. From "Sunday cluck" to "motherless greens," to "liquid soul," he covers all the bases (or should I say pots, pans and dishes). The book was a pleasure to read and I look forward to referring to it often and cooking his recipes time and again in future.

I collect cookbooks and have a "passion" for cookbook that also deliver a message or have a story. This book does both, and does them well. I was impressed by the cover first of all because it catches the eye. I love to display my cookbooks on a bakers rack in my kitchen, so the dual purpose is perfect for me. This book is well written; you will not regret purchasing.

A well researched read complete with recipes. Anyone interested in the history of soul food needs to buy this book. It's evident the author loves his subject. My only disappointment was that the book wasn't longer!

Miller's writing has inspired my own writing. It's well researched and he finds a great balance

between history and interjecting his own family experience and his voice. I see myself using it as a reference book, cook book, and something to reread for pleasure.

Adrian Miller speaks from personal experience about soul food. And his research into the origins reveals delightful nuggets you'll share with friends. Besides knowledge and entertainment, he gives you recipes, which you'll also want to share with friends and family. Such a good deal.

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