
RESEARCH REPORTS AND NOTES

FINE DINING

Race in Prerevolution Cuban Cookbooks

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Abstract: This article treats pre-1959 Cuban cookbooks as interlocutors to see how the struggle to define Cuba's racial and national body can be found in efforts to characterize what goes into that body by setting a close textual analysis of the books alongside an account of their historical context. In examining recipes, visuals, and nonrecipe prose, this article explores how later authors attempt to represent Cuba as white and European by ignoring and trivializing the culinary contributions of nonwhite Cubans and particularly Afro-Cubans, a move that encounters resistance in the ongoing persistence and popularity of Afro-Cuban cuisine. As an interface between political economic processes and personal choice, the author argues that cookbooks act as a site for assertions of racial and national identity in which some authors embarked on a racial project to civilize the consumer by civilizing cuisine via the cookbook, thus illustrating social fissures, tensions, and contradictions that climaxed in the 1959 revolution.

Cuban American restaurant menus, recipe books, and Web sites aimed at introducing today's uninitiated to Cuban food proudly hail it as a blend of European, African, Native American, and Asian cuisines. Whether in solemn reminiscences, such as O'Higgins's *A Taste of Old Cuba* (1994), or in tongue-in-cheek quips from the *Three Guys in Miami* (Lindgren, Musibay, and Castillo 2004), the contributions of nonwhite Cubans to the country's cuisine are lauded. Even food writers on the island use similar language to praise the "fusion" quality of its cuisine (Cárdenas Alpízar 1994, 4). These writers easily slip between celebrating the diverse ethnic origins

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of Cuban food and extolling the racial and ethnic diversity of the Cuban people. The use of Cuban cuisine as a source of cultural metaphors and signifiers is hardly new. Early Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz selected *ajiaco* as the perfect illustration of *cubanidad*, or “Cuban identity.” A proper Cuban *ajiaco* is made by slowly boiling cuts of meat with starchy root vegetables. The stew is seasoned with a *sofrito*, a sauté of onions, garlic, peppers, cilantro, cumin, and oregano. By the time the dish is finally served over rice, the individual ingredients have combined so thoroughly that they are nearly indistinguishable. Thus goes the analogy (much critiqued for its essentialism by later scholars) that the slow blending over time of different cultural elements brought from Africa, Europe, and the Americas results in something new, with only lingering traces of what was before—a phenomenon Ortiz called “transculturation.” What is new is the intentionally celebratory tone in today’s cookbooks, a phenomenon dating to the years immediately following the 1959 revolution.

However, the focus of this article lies before all this, in the decades leading up to the revolution. Struggles over how to understand the racial and ethnic constitution of the Cuban people lie at the center of the Cuban nation. If the story that today’s Cuban food tells is one of triumphant fusion, blending, and hybridism, what stories did it tell before 1959? By considering food not only as a metaphor but also as an informant, we see that prerevolution foodways (i.e., the obtention and preparation of food as well as the beliefs and stories about that food) crystallize social relationships through both physical production and symbolic significance (linking many social groups through the labor preparation of the meal, the ingredients, and the cooking techniques employed). Even the ways in which cuisine is discussed speak to dynamics and expectations within society. Foodways, because they are popularly and universally practiced, allow us to see the complex interplay between the choices of individuals and groups and the outworkings of political and economic forces in history.

This article examines cuisine as cultural production from 1850 to 1959 in Cuba through one specific form: the cookbook. I argue that Cuban identity is constructed in and through the cookbook—riddled with contradictions and tensions that illustrate and complicate the relationships among political economy, symbolic significance, and individual expression. The multiple functions of the kind of cultural production that is a cookbook help elucidate numerous tensions about *cubanidad*, and in them we can trace the sorts of social tensions about Cuban identity that came to a head in the 1959 revolution: the island’s political and economic situation and orientation, the racial composition of Cuban identity, and the constitution and reproduction of classes. These functions include questions of cultural production as self-fashioning (i.e., the exertion of agency, creativity, and particularity, as well as the roles of art, nostalgia, and taste), as political (i.e., the

ideological expressions of nation making), and as economic (i.e., the commodification of practices and the extension of the capitalist world market).

Recent scholarship connects Caribbean foodways and food writing with efforts to define and mobilize national identity in light of geopolitical changes (see Derby 1998; Wilk 2006). Higman (1998, 77) argues that “the emergence of the cookbook marks a critical point in the development of any cuisine and that the specialization and ramification of texts has much to tell about the character of national, regional, and ethnic identities.” Because of the links Higman sees between text and identity, he demonstrates that by studying cookbooks, we can better understand the ways Caribbean identity has been constructed in response to social and political developments. Dawdy (2002) turns her gaze specifically to Cuba’s discourse about food to explore connections among cuisine, the Cuban peasantry, and national identity. She finds that a Cuban national cuisine, which she defines as a “countrywide system of food meaning and food production,” developed in the mid-nineteenth century and, in key revolutionary moments, became a “nationalist cuisine” (49).

My research dovetails with this body of work by narrowly focusing on what a cookbook does. By setting a close reading of the symbolic in Cuban cookbooks from the mid-nineteenth century up to the 1959 revolution alongside a political economic and historical analysis—that is, by putting the texts in their contexts—I hope to do more than show how contests for political, economic, and cultural hegemony are embodied in one of the most mundane of human activities: eating. Specifically, I hope to show that by treating the cookbook as a primary document, by engaging it as an interlocutor, we can see struggles for hegemony even on the pages of the texts themselves.

THINKING ABOUT COOKBOOKS

Cookbooks, as documents whose sights are trained on food, offer a unique window into the daily practice of social production and reproduction. Because they are manuals directing human labor in the preparation of a substance that has practical and ritual significance, cookbooks straddle an interesting tension, problematizing both culture and a simplistic reading of the commodity. In looking for a way to concretize the effect of something so elusive as culture, Corrigan and Sayer (1985) have broadly linked cultural revolution to the development of the nation-state. Anderson (1991) has explicitly connected the creation of communities imagined through literacy as a concomitant effect of print capitalism. And so, social and political change can be described in cultural change. Sidney Mintz (1996) shows how the development of cuisines in the Caribbean and elsewhere is itself a sign of political and social change. This is true because

food is a site of cultural contention and self-articulation (e.g., agency and creativity), such as in questions of taste and social status, per Bourdieu (1984), in the invention of dishes, and (in slave societies where sustenance was scarce) as a vehicle of everyday forms of resistance—including “stealing” food (Mintz 1996, 36).

The consumption of food as conspicuous identity formation and as a way to police normalcy and discipline the body can be understood as a civilizing tool (Guthman and Dupois 2006; Harris 1985; Sahlins 1994). Moreover, the consumption of cookbooks is part of the civilizing process and critical to the maintenance and reproduction of class hierarchies through the display of literacy and expert knowledge (Appadurai 1988) and to the expansion of capitalist market logic in the commodification of culinary knowledge via print capitalism. Appadurai’s formulation underscores the importance of the shift from orality to literacy as well as the different ways of acquiring culinary skill represented in cookbooks, a new way knowledge is inscribed on the body. Cookbooks are not merely about knowledge or the circulation of commodities, however; they also operate in the realms of the imaginary and of memory. There is an inherent nostalgia to the recipe: it involves a remembering, a recapturing of an event that happened before. The imagined “iterability” of a recipe is its defining characteristic. The recipe qua recipe assumes that it has been made before and therefore can be made again in the present.

Cookbooks and the recipes in them may have different spatio-temporalities. Some attempt to awaken the past, to provide a means by which readers and eaters can access, for example, a childhood past that was lost because of postrevolutionary exile (see *Actividades Latino Americanas* 1964; Choo 2004) or a golden colonial era when ties to European cultures were still strong (see subsequent sections). Dishes in this way serve as paths to the past, and the salient quality is authenticity—they are judged by whether the recipes are the way “it used to be done,” on the basis of accurate reproduction of traditional dishes using the right ingredients or the right techniques. Other cookbooks showcase the present, for example, introducing Cuban food to a non-Cuban audience. In these cases, traditional techniques are not as important as gathering a representative sampling of typical dishes (see LaFray 1994). Unlike the former, these cookbooks do not trade on authentically Cuban authorship—they may be written by authors who claim no hereditary connection to the island. They may not be oriented on the traditional or the typical but instead attempt to shape a different future, creating new dishes (e.g., the “fusion” food trend) or reworking old ones to meet certain nutritional goals (e.g., low-fat, low-carbohydrate diets; see Raichlen 1998).

As we will see, the prerevolutionary cookbooks examined below interweave national and political identity, the production of use values and the circulation of commodities, and the creation and interpretation of sym-

bols and rituals. In general, the analysis of cookbooks and culinary production obviously lends itself to questions of gender. In Cuba, and for the purposes of this piece, it also lends itself to questions of race and ethnicity because, on the island, questions of culture and national identity inevitably (though not irreducibly) include questions about race and ethnicity. By focusing on nationality, race, and ethnicity—in what Appadurai (1998, 16) calls “gastroethnic images”—I hope to uncover identity constructions that are not entirely coincident with gender, though they may intersect with it. The glimpses these books afford do not fit neatly into a single political project. Rather, they reveal various competing national projects and various contradictions in Cuban society—a society that, at the time of the earliest cookbooks discussed subsequently, was moving from slavery toward independence.

THE TEXTS AND THEIR CONTEXTS

The cookbooks analyzed herein range from 1857 to 1956, a century that spans the final decades of slavery, independence from Spain, and the social changes and stratifications that set the scene for Cuba’s 1959 revolution. For Cubans on and off the island, no event, not even the 1895 War of Independence, exerts greater influence than the 1959 revolution—a revolution partially motivated by the need to address racial inequality. The sociocultural rupture it caused continues to the present: the exilic experience and the socialist experiment—each and in response to the other—stand in continuity with and in contrast to earlier Cuban history. The social and economic history of Cuba has left its mark even on the pages of its cookbooks. Though most of these were published in Spanish and in Cuba, several were in English, one was printed in the United States, and all together compose the majority of the corpus of pre-1959 Cuban cookbooks available publicly in the United States (i.e., not in the private collections of individuals). They were authored by esteemed chefs, food and health experts, and society matrons—categories that also serve as useful shorthand for organizing the books. The following is an overview of the sources, after which I focus on three general areas within the texts—recipes, visuals, and nonrecipe prose—before moving to closing remarks that tease apart some of the complex relationships among the cultural production of cuisine, the political and economic history of Cuba, and the ways that people make meanings in how they eat.

The first three texts are a selection of mid-nineteenth century cookbooks: José Legran’s *Nuevo manual del cocinero cubano y español* from 1857 (hereafter *Cocinero cubano*), Juan Cabrisas’s *Nuevo manual de la cocinera catalana y cubana* from 1858 (hereafter *Cocinera catalana*), and Enrique Langarika’s *El cocinero de los enfermos, convalecientes y desganados, manual de cocina cubana* (hereafter *El cocinero de los enfermos*) from 1862. Legran’s *Cocinero*

cubano, comprising about five hundred recipes (including soups, stews, sautés, vegetables, and pastries), is “written for the people and in their language” but, to ensure high quality and as an appeal to authority, all the recipes “have been tested by persons knowledgeable about the subject” (7). Its author gives some context but does not stray from the subject (recipes that are “intelligible for all”), because such digressions are “for academic dissertations” (7). Cabrisas’s *Cocinera catalana* appeared the following year and is very similar to Legran’s in size and scope, although it focuses more on meat dishes (including tortoise, lamprey, and frog). He begins his work with an essay on hygiene (for chefs, as well as for kitchens and cooking utensils) and tips on spices. *El cocinero de los enfermos* (Langarika 1862) is much smaller and written to mothers and caregivers who tend the sick as an accompaniment to other medical care (viii, v–vii).

In 1903, José E. Triay published his *Manual del cocinero criollo* (hereafter *Cocinero criollo*). This post-independence cookbook became a standard that later texts would draw upon (see Las Madrinas 1956, 11). Triay’s introduction is much longer and contains commentary on cleaning, working with ingredients, and the connection between culture and cuisine. Even the book’s title distinguishes it from earlier texts. Whereas Legran and Cabrisas wrote for the Cuban and Spanish or Catalonian and Cuban cook, this work is for the criollo. Throughout Latin America, independence from Spain came from criollo (those born in the New World of Old World extraction) rebellion against *peninsulares* (those from Europe, living in the Americas), so the assertion of criollo identity stands in marked contrast with an earlier Spanish or Catalonian identity. It can be read as a sign that Cuba’s national cuisine flared into a nationalist cuisine when foodways served as a way to signal Cuba’s distinct, non-European identity.

Cuba’s independence from Spain is one of two major transitions that occurred in the period covered by the early, “classic” texts; the other is the abolition of slavery in 1880 (followed by a six-year “guardianship” transition phase). Slavery had persisted in Cuba much longer than in the rest of the Caribbean, though sugar plantation slavery had also arrived later than in Anglophone or Francophone colonies—it did so only after the British occupation of Havana and the transition to a more capitalistic mode of production marked by the 1789 Spanish decree finally permitting free trade in slaves (Mintz 1961, 583–585). The independence movement that swept the island in the latter half of the nineteenth century had to contend with Cuba’s two-tiered racial system, one that was divided into white and *de raza*, which included both *negros* and *pardos* (mulattos), a system unique in the Caribbean (see Helg 1995). White convictions about Afro-Cubans’ inferiority persisted and led to attempts to whiten the Cuban population through immigration from Europe and the Canary Islands, and with the importation of Chinese indentured labor. The presence of this growing

Chinese community left its imprint through the use of more vegetables in Cuban cookery and in so-called *chino-latino* restaurants in U.S. cities.

By the 1930s, cookery took a turn to more scientific (and pseudoscientific) constructions. The foremost example of this is Dr. Ambrosio González del Valle's *La Comida Diaria* from 1933. González's book focuses on the proper care of the (female) body and on reproduction (hence a strong interest in how vitamins aid lactation and prevent sterility). Balanced food portions and nutritional information, along with pages of charts, accompany discussions of Cuba's climate and available ingredients to educate "mothers or those responsible [*encargadas*, the feminine form] for guiding the nutrition of the family" (1933, 1). By calling his recipes *formulas*, not the common term *recetas*, González invokes scientific authority in keeping with the era's progress-oriented sciences (including nutrition, fitness, eugenics, and race science). The new dietary regimen he introduces and the system of knowledge on which it is based seek to discipline the Cuban body, both as individuals and corporately.

Less extreme in their scientific language but nevertheless encyclopedic in their scope are *Delicias de la mesa* (1949) by María A. Reyes Gavilán y Moenck and *La cocina y el hogar* (1943) by Dolores Alfonso y Rodríguez. Alfonso (who, like González, asserts her qualifications by using the title *Doctor*) starts with a "Very Important Note" to "read the recipes carefully before beginning . . . the slightest change will result in a recipe not working" (6). Unlike nineteenth-century texts, which present their recipes in narrative or paragraph form, Alfonso's recipes are formatted with separate lists of carefully measured ingredients, precise cooking times and temperatures, and even portion information. Some editions include photographs of dishes. Alfonso's recipes range from the stews, sautés, vegetable dishes, and pastries seen in earlier cookbooks to more modern cakes, salads, and cookies.

The final assemblage of prerevolution cookbooks is the compilations of elite women in Cuban society. In 1926, Berta Crespo y Setién wrote *Arte de bien guisar* with the stated goal of gathering the best and most varied recipes but only using ingredients that are accessible in Cuba. Hers is the earliest Cuban cookbook written by a woman that I could find—the first entrant in a field that previously was exclusively male. In addition to Cuban cuisine, she has other Latin American recipes, such as arepas *colombianas* and Mexican *sopa de tortilla*, as well as European dishes such as gnocchi. In an appendix, she includes numerous menus (for each day of the month and special occasions, like banquets) that combine recipes with drink recommendations.

Although Crespo demonstrates a cosmopolitan sensibility through her recipe and drink choices, the internationality of the audience is even more evident in Blanche Zacharie Baralt's 1931 *Gastronomic Secrets of the Tropics*.

Though published in Havana, the fact that it is in English attests to Baralt's intended readership. She takes her reader through an introduction of the origins and basic ingredients of Cuban food because "the cuisine of a country is one of its psychological aspects, an accumulation of slow growth, almost a synthesis of its civilization" (8). Though it contains fewer recipes than the encyclopedic cookbooks mentioned previously, *Gastro-nomic Secrets* attempts to give a representative exhibition of Cuban cuisine for an unfamiliar audience, naming dishes and ingredients in Spanish, and following with an English translation and explanation of the origin of the term.

It is unclear, however, whether Baralt expected the majority of her English-reading audience to reside outside of Cuba. There was a sizable English-speaking expatriate community in Cuba—sizable enough that, in 1931, a group of American women compiled *Matahambre Dishes, as used in 1930 by the Women of Minas de Matahambre Cuba*. This is the only pre-1959 cookbook printed outside of Cuba (in Springfield, Massachusetts). The recipes are traditional American cuisine (e.g., potatoes au gratin, brown beef stew with dumplings), with a few Cuban additions like yucca fritters (note the anglicized spelling, from the Spanish *yuca*), *carnero estofado* (written in Spanish immediately below the English title: "Lamb Stew"), and *arroz con pollo* (chicken cooked in rice). Each recipe is followed by the name of the contributor or creator of the recipe—for example, the *arroz con pollo* comes from José E. Triay's 1903 cookbook. *Matahambre Dishes* also ushers in a new element in Cuban cookbooks: the advertisement. At the end of the recipes follow several pages filled with advertisements in English for services and stores located exclusively in Cuba (this alone signals where the book was intended to sell).

As time passed, cookbooks written by elite Cuban women evolved. The Marquesa de Sevigne published *El arte de la buena mesa* in 1946, employing a pseudonym borrowed from the original Marquesa de Sevigne, itself a pseudonym for Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, a seventeenth-century French writer best known for her letters and witty sayings. The anonymous (but presumably female) author of *Buena mesa* thus invokes a tradition of female scholarship merely by using the name. Like *Matahambre Dishes*, *Buena mesa* contains advertisements, this time interspersed among the recipes. It describes proper table settings in meticulous detail (with accompanying photographs) and offers direction on how to throw dinner parties. Informative essays, such as a mythical description of the origins of tea (8) and *la dietética en la salud* (about nutrition, weight loss, and health), are followed by recipes (often appended *a la parisiense*, *a la florentina*, *a la rusa*) that range from main dishes to soups, salads, desserts, and drinks.

The culmination of the high-society cookbook genre was *¿Gusta, usted? ¿Cómo cocinan los cubanos? Lo mejor y lo clásico de la cocina cubana*. This was a compilation by women belonging to country clubs in Costales and San

Martín, published in 1956. The volume is a treasure trove of recipes and social commentary, assembled just three years before Fidel Castro established his government in Havana. The writers compiled the book as a philanthropic exercise to raise money and support for a hospital. Like *Buena mesa* (1946), there are advertisements throughout the book. And like *Matahambre Dishes* (1931), the recipes bear the names of their contributors—a list that reads like a social register for that decade. For example, the *Pecan Pie por Mrs. Joseph Butler, Havana Women's Club* was submitted by Carmen Meredith Butler, the wife of the director of Esso Standard Oil and a member of no fewer than five social clubs (Anglo-American Havana Directory of Cuba 1960). The recipes putatively hail from around the globe (including, e.g., *Ensalada Polynesian Delight*). *Gusta, usted?* also features many essays on cookery from dozens of authors, including the ambassador of Spain, the wife of the ambassador of Japan, the Conde de Foxá, and academic essays including one by Fernando Ortiz entitled “La Cocina Afrocubana.”

Afro-Cuban support of, participation in, and military leadership of the War(s) of Independence were key to victory and were recognized not only through abolition but also through the universal male suffrage that characterized the Republic of Cuba from its beginning. However, fears of black uprisings lingered, culminating in the violent repression of the 1912 “race war” in Oriente Province, the island’s most racially mixed region (and the closest to Haiti), an area long been associated with disorder or revolutionary fervor (Pérez 1995, 91). By the time of the 1931 census (the first administered by Cuba and not by the United States), the discourse on cubanidad had expanded (Pérez 1984, 151). Eugenics and a race science discourse bolstered by scientific arguments declared the innate inferiority of Afro-Cubans. This contended with a simultaneous nationalist movement that represented Cuba as a mestizo country with a Cuban “race” in which everyone shared some African ancestry and in which African cultural influences were as vital as those from Europe—a movement in which Fernando Ortiz’s research was paramount (see De la Fuente 2001).

RECIPES

The center of any cookbook is the recipe. In this section, I particularly want to keep in mind the difference in status between recipe and mere ingredient. Writers of cookbooks have the task of deciding what falls under the category of recipe and of finding ways (via language and layout) to signal text as recipe. In all the cookbooks examined here, this is with a title followed by either a paragraph containing the ingredients and cooking instructions or a list of ingredients and then instructions. At first, these were merely paragraphs of nearly narrative prose, but by the 1930s, the format had evolved into the more familiar presentation of a separate list

of ingredients followed by step-by-step instructions with precise time and temperature specifications. Over time, the recipes considered sufficiently archetypal of Cuban cuisine to be put in “Cuban” cookbooks evolved. Though there is a remarkable stability in the continuity of specific recipes across time, there is a notable difference in which recipes were included in the books. We see this specifically as we follow the presence (and absence) of recipes marked as Afro-Cuban by name or by ingredients—(e.g., those including *viandas*—starchy root vegetables such as ñame (yam), *boniato* (sweet potato), malanga, yucca, and potatoes, which, in addition to plantains, had served as the staple foods for Cuba’s slaves.

Recipes for *quimbombó* (okra) and *fufú* (originally a West African dish, made by mashing boiled ñame with a mortar and pestle, but in Cuba expanded to include any of the *viandas*) feature prominently in the classic nineteenth-century texts and in those written by twentieth-century food experts but barely appear in the books written by Cuban elite women (both native and expatriate). In *Cocinero cubano* (1857), Legran includes dishes like *ñame a lo guajiro*, *malanga a la criolla*, a salad *ñame en ensalada*, and even a dessert *pudín de malanga*. One year later, *Cocinera catalana* (1858) also contains *pudín de ñame* and *pudín de malanga*, and distinguishes between *fufú de malanga y platanó* and *fufú criollo* (which is made from ñame). *El cocinero de los enfermos* (1862) adds another *fufú* recipe to *Cocinera catalana*’s list: *fufú de villaclara*, which adds toasted peanuts to ñame. Even Triay’s *Cocinero criollo* (1903) features three *fufú* recipes: *fufú* (malanga and plantains), *fufú criollo* (ñame and plantain with sesame seeds), and *fufú de tierra adentro* (substituting peanuts for sesame seeds). Though *Cocinero criollo* and *Cocinera catalana* give different ingredients for *fufú criollo*, more noteworthy than their disagreement is that they each have multiple *fufú* recipes.

For later texts, *boniato*, malanga, plantain, and ñame cease to be treated as stand-alone recipes. When they appear, it is at the level of ingredients. As the twentieth century progresses, malanga or ñame no longer appear in the titles of recipes; they are relegated to being one out of many ingredients—only mentioned in *ajiaco* in Sevigne (1946), for example. With the passing of time, the breadth of recipes in twentieth-century elite texts reestablishes the island’s cuisine as oriented firmly toward Europe, not Africa. *Arte de bien guisar* (1926) straddles the old and the new—it does contain two *fufú* recipes, but it focuses on European dishes like *codornices trufadas* (truffled quails) and *soufflés de gallina en cajita* (hen soufflé). The cookbooks that follow prominently exhibit dishes designated as from Europe. The differentiation between recipe and mere ingredient attempts to obscure the presence of (especially) Afro-Cubans.

Delicias de la mesa (1949) may seem to counter the trend. It, like the texts from the nineteenth century, has multiple *fufú* recipes (four) and recipes like *ñame salcochado* (boiled and served with a garlic sauce) and *malanga*

frita (fried). *Delicias* was a popular book—the 1949 edition was the eleventh, suggesting a first edition published more than a decade before and most likely much earlier than that. Furthermore, unlike the books written by Cuban matrons, *Delicias de la mesa* is written to a popular audience and does not fit into the elite project of Europeanization. But it appears, not only from the number of editions, that *Delicias* was commercially successful—as Dawdy (2002) also found, the cooking Cuban public had a greater taste for viandas than the island’s elites might have liked.

VISUALS

All but the earliest cookbooks include a wide array of visuals accompanying their text, running from the design of the front cover to photographs of dishes to advertisements to diagrams to decorative vignettes. In Triay’s *Cocinero criollo* (1903), the cover illustration incorporates several motifs of cubanidad that allow browsers some sense of what to expect inside the book (fig. 1). Although, a century later, the cover is faded and browned, the original bright colors are still visible: the word *manual* mim-



Figure 1 Front cover from José Triay's 1903 *Manual del cocinero criollo*, a postindependence cookbook that later texts would draw upon

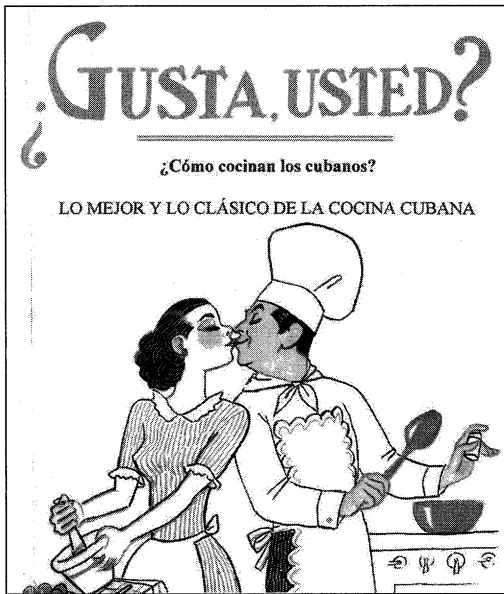
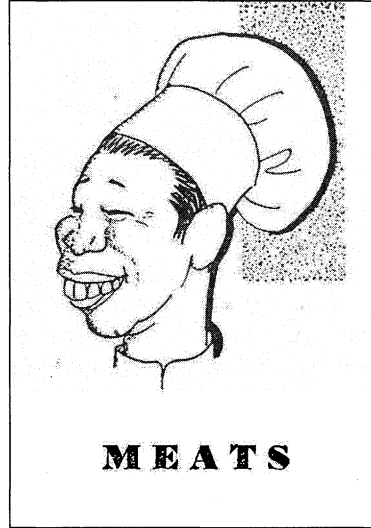


Figure 2 Front cover from the high-society cookbook *Gusta, usted?*

ics the blue, white, and red of the new Cuban flag in playful lettering. But the cover's focus is the Cuban woman in her kitchen. As she stirs a pan on the stove, she faces the reader, directly meeting her gaze. Strewn on the table before her and hanging behind her are various raw materials, emblems of the tropics: fish, bananas, papaya, pineapple, passion fruit, and guava. This is an idealized (elite) image of Cuban domesticity—a fair-skinned woman with long, dark hair pulled back. Fifty years later, *Gusta, usted?* (1956) also incorporates images of domesticity on its cover (fig. 2). This time, there are no tropical fruits scattered across a table. Instead, a white man and woman are content to ignore the reader, embracing and cooking—domestic felicity. The cover art for *Gusta, usted?* is signed by Conrado Walter Massaguer. Massaguer (1889–1965) was a Cuban artist whose work graced early-twentieth-century postcards, two cookbooks reviewed here, and numerous English-language advertisements commissioned by the 1930s Cuban Tourist Commission. His work was internationally recognizable and positions *Gusta, usted?* as a prime exemplar of Cuba for consumption by an educated, cosmopolitan, well-traveled audience.

As noted previously, Cuban cookbooks from the 1930s onward feature advertisements alongside their recipes. In *Matahambre Dishes* (1931), these ads for Cuban businesses are exclusively text and written in English, often boasting of the best domestic *and* imported goods. *Buena mesa's* (1946) ads are intended for a Spanish-speaking Cuban audience. In addition to



Figures 3 & 4 Illustrations from *Gastronomic Secrets* that show the stereotypical ways in which authors represented nonwhites in the pages of their cookbooks

text descriptions, the latter also include images of people and the goods they are trying to sell—again, usually luxury goods like wine, fine china, or exclusive wedding gowns. A full-page ad for Viña Pomal (a Spanish Rioja), for example, shows a man pouring a glass. All the characters in the ads (presumably the idealized consumers or users of the products) are fair skinned.

In fact, nonwhite Cubans appear visually only in one place in prerevolution cookbooks: as decorative vignettes. At the beginning of chapters, many authors have placed simple playful drawings of figures drinking from straws, holding wooden spoons, reading cookbooks, or wearing chef's hats. The tenor of these sketches is usually gentle caricature, intended to bring levity and humor. In *Gastronomic Secrets* (1931), Baralt takes special care to thank the two well-known Cuban artists whose work graces her pages: Conrado W. Massaguer and Federico Edelmann. The first page after her introduction shows a phenotypically black woman shopping for vegetables, her corpulent body draped within a blouse and flowing skirt as she examines the merchandise (fig. 3). Pages later, *Gastronomic Secrets* opens its "Meats" section with a sketch of an Asian man with an overstated smile and protruding front teeth, wearing a chef's cap (fig. 4). Twenty years later, *Gusta, usted?* (1956) also prominently incorporates decorative vignettes. In introducing the chapter on *maíz* (corn), each of the letters is festooned by the bust of a chef. Two are Asian men with



Figure 5 *Decorative vignettes from Las Madrinas' 1956 cookbook Gusta, usted?*

wide grins and slit eyes. Next to the *I* is the head of a black man. His face, shown in profile, is so distorted as to appear simian, with engorged lips and a receding forehead (fig. 5).

The visuals in these books situate them as coming from whites to a white audience. All the characters with whom the reader is to identify are white (e.g., the figures in advertisements, the characters on the front covers). Nonwhite Cubans are only comical decorations (and rare, at that), rendered quaint and benign—never potential customers of products or users of the cookbooks. This “folklorizing” is but one tactic used, unconsciously or explicitly, by the white elites to mediate the unavoidable visual presence of nonwhite Cubans on the island, mitigating the threat their physical bodies posed to the myth of a white, European Cuba.

NONRECIPE TEXT

The nostalgia intrinsic to the function of recipes coincides with a historical sensibility that seems to pervade these cookbooks as a whole. Origins and etymologies of all kinds are important to the writers (and, presumably, to readers). Legran (1857, 17), in describing *Ajiaco de Tierra Adentro*, calls for “salt, *ají* [a kind of pepper], and garlic sautéed in lard” and adds, “the name *ajiaco* derives from this.” *Cocinera catalana* (1858) appeals to the two affinities Cabrisas expects his readers to have. The “fan of the country of good wine” should rest easy knowing that the book does not lack instructions for how to prepare *escudella* (a Catalonian meat stew) and *alioli* (mayonnaise) (23). “If, on the contrary,” he writes, “your affinity is for the country of sugar, you will find various ways to make *Ajiaco*, *Boniato*, *Maíz*, *Plátanos*, *Mondongo Criollo* [tripe] and other dishes according to the New World style” (23–24).

By the time of *Gastronomic Secrets* (1931), the quest for European origins had expanded. Baralt explains that though the cuisine of Cuba is “directly derived from Spain, its mother country,” it has also been “modified and refined” by new ingredients and Cuba’s climate with an additional “French touch imported from Santo Domingo”—the thousands of white

French settlers who moved to Cuba after the “negro upheaval” (the Haitian revolution) (9n1). She makes no mention of nonwhites coming from Haiti or how their influence affected Cuban cuisine. Near the very end of her introduction, after discussing the contributions of European cuisines and the importance of rice (“We eat almost as much of it as Orientals do” [12]), Baralt does add one sentence about African influences. “Africa” she writes, “has yielded several contributions to West Indian foods, noteworthy okra, known as *quimbombó*. Southerners will probably enjoy it more than the inhabitants of the northern States” (13). Note her omission of ñame, arguably more important both in its caloric contribution and in its presence in dishes, and that the one African influence she does mention has to be connected to the United States as a referent—it cannot stand on its own.

Of all the cookbooks, the one with the most nonrecipe text is *Gusta, usted?*. This includes marginalia and essays acting as a combination of history and travel literature. *Gusta, usted?* takes its reader on a culinary journey through various civilizations. For example, as incongruous marginalia to cocktail recipes, it includes the comment, “To China, which enjoyed a great civilization, we owe a great part of the development of our cuisine. The gold road [Silk Road] of Samarqand, crossed by many European caravans in search of jewels and spices, returned with fabulous stories of the marvelous dishes eaten in Cathay” (45). In another prose section, Conde Agustín de Foxá asserts that the greatest culinary cultures were those of France and China (598).¹

Gusta, usted? most clearly displays the racial contradictions in Cuba. On the one hand, it tries to position Cuba in relationship to Europe and to significant global powers following World War II. Underlying this is a pervasive U.S. presence. But the book does not know how to deal with Africa’s legacy. After the exaggerated stereotypical sketches, it includes a serious essay written by Cuba’s chief (white) authority on Afro-Cuban culture, Fernando Ortiz. In an explanatory essay entitled *Recetas de antaño* (or “Recipes of Yesteryear”), one of the book’s compilers writes that the origin of Cuban cuisine is in Spain but goes on to explore the ways French and Italian styles have had their influence. Regarding the African influence, she writes in one dismissive sentence, “After reading Don Fernando Ortiz, nothing more remains to be said” (325).

Ortiz, in his essay, sees the indelible influence of Afro-Cubans in their contributions through both labor and culture. He examines, through a systematic linguistic analysis of the names of ingredients and dishes, how food and drinks are connected to Africa. According to Ortiz, many culinary words are actually mixtures of both Spanish and African languages.

1. North American cuisine, he said, was the “most innocent”—“hygienic but not palatable” (598).

He uses a curious word for such blends: *mulata*. For example, he writes, “*Cañandongá* is a blended term [literally *voz mulata*]” by which various kinds of sugar were distinguished, and in which the root “*Indonga* means ‘from Angola’” (672). He goes on to explain that *congri* (pink beans cooked with rice, commonly eaten in Oriente Province) comes from Haiti, where pink beans are called *congó* and where rice is called *riz* (from the French). Whereas other cookbook writers try to show how Cuban food was shaped by the Old World, Ortiz turns the idea around, writing of the contributions to African cookery that have come from the Americas—namely in products like maíz and yucca. By way of contrast, other writers do not point out the New World origins of the potato and tomato even as they are giving supposedly European recipes that use them.

Because of his background in Afro-Cuban religions, Ortiz pays close attention to the links between those religious traditions, their African heritage, and the foods eaten by practitioners in Cuba in his day. *Ilá*—a quimbombó soup—is “the food of *Changó*” (675). Not using milk and eggs is a trait of African cuisine and this, he says, is the reason he thinks they are not used in Afro-Cuban religions: “If eggs are used in any santería dishes, this is because of criollo transculturation that has whitened the rites” (677). Much criticism has been made of the essentialist views of culture inherent in Ortiz’s concept of transculturation. The intellectual movement of which he was a part had to defend Cuba from eugenicist judgments and, to do so, embarked on an intentional task of rehabilitating Afro-Cuban contributions to the “Cuban race.” The discourse of *mestizaje*, however, camouflages and discredits claims of political and economic inequality by shunting questions of race to the domain of cultural production.

CONCLUSION

In the cookbooks’ recipes, visuals, and nonrecipe text, we see that the struggle to define Cuba’s racial body mirrored attempts to designate and characterize the food that goes into that body. Multiple racial projects are evident within the pages of early Cuban cookbooks. But by silencing, ignoring, trivializing, and mocking nonwhite Cubans and their culinary traditions, the writers of nearly every cookbook from 1900 to 1959 endeavor to position Cuba as principally European and white. And yet a popular cookbook in multiple editions by the end of the 1940s contains several sections devoted to Afro-Cuban dishes. This tension arises from contests between the way Cubans ate and the way they thought about eating. As cookery and cuisine are about more than personal taste and tradition, food writing and cookbooks serve as a locus for assertions of national and racial identity and, in so doing, are not neutral.

This sheds light on the discourse of race and ethnicity found in contemporary Cuban cookbooks. Though writers on and off the island ex-

press different views on the revolution, they proffer similar accounts for the origins of Cuban cookery. Defenders of the revolution applaud diversity because solving the race problem was a goal of the revolution from the beginning (a problem Castro has since claimed to have solved). As for anti-Castro Cuban exiles, they have to deal with the way the crumbling of “Old Cuba” at the end of the 1950s has been attributed, in part, to racial inequality. To undercut that argument, they paint a different picture of Cuba’s racial past by treating it as idyllic. By understanding cookbooks as more than simple instruction manuals, we see that the stories and histories they tell articulate a vision of Cuba’s past that has political and economic resonance.

Cookbooks assume a literate population with sufficient discretionary income to invest in texts that commodify knowledge. In this way, they are linked to the expansion of capitalism, based on the production of ever more commodities for consumption. One of the revolution’s best-known accomplishments has been to raise Cuba’s literacy rate to nearly 100 percent. One area for further research might be to explore the ways increased literacy shaped the production and presentation of culinary knowledge in Cuba after 1959. The consumers of prerevolution cookbooks participated in a kind of elite knowledge/skill acquisition—one gained, in part, through books rather than through oral communication. Yet in elite Cuban houses, much of the cooking was still done by Afro-Cuban women. To paraphrase Sidney Mintz, Afro-Cuban women *created* Cuban cuisine (1996, 36). And so, the prerevolution move to assert a European genesis for Cuban cuisine is an attempt to wrest it from the hands that made it—cookbooks in this way attempt to civilize cuisine rather than the more familiar trajectory whereby the consumption of certain cuisines civilizes the consumer. As a folklore of the elite, cookbooks serve to mythologize the origins of the cultural production of cuisine. This has ramifications for how we study food, not just as metaphor or symbol, but as a site of struggles for hegemony and for how Cubans, on and off the island, account for their past and understand what it means to be Cuban.

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