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Pimento Cheese and Podcasts: Producing and Consuming Stories about Food in the Contemporary U.S. South

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Pimento Cheese and Podcasts: Producing and Consuming Stories about Food in the Contemporary U.S. South

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies
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Abstract
Pimento Cheese and Podcasts: Producing and Consuming Stories about Food in the Contemporary U.S. South

By Katherine Rawson

This dissertation examines the relationship between food, cultural construction, and narratives. It asks: What work can food do as a subject for cultural production? What social and economic effects do stories about food have? How do they affect cultural identities and practices?

To answer these questions, this dissertation focuses on the Southern Foodways Alliance (SFA), a nonprofit organization that "documents, studies, and celebrates" food culture in the U.S. South. SFA members are from across the United States and hold a range of beliefs about "the South." They coalesce over the production and consumption of not only food, but also discourses about southern food. They are storytellers—creating films, oral histories, lectures, and essays. Since they have different goals and backgrounds, examining how they tell and circulate stories reveals strategies, tensions, and impacts of cultural production.

This dissertation explores the production and use of SFA oral histories, films, cookbooks, and events, based on interviews, participant observation, and media analysis. It considers sensory, intellectual, and social modes of knowledge production. This dissertation argues that presenting individuals' stories, particularly in social and sensory modes, encourages intellectual, emotional, and financial investment by audiences. This investment can, in turn, grow and maintain cultural practices, foster social and economic networks, and challenge perceived ideas of place and culture. However, this dissertation also reveals conflicts between wanting to produce celebratory stories and wanting to catalyze difficult discussions about cultural history and experience, especially in the contemporary U.S. South. It investigates the SFA's failures and successes as they attempt to use stories told by subjects in the food industry to simultaneously promote critical dialogue and support local businesses.

The SFA's role as an organization that tries to promote social discourse and culinary tourism is not unique. It is part of a trend that has important implications for how cultural organizations form communities and act ethically in a complex, globalized society. In a context where politics and economics are often intertwined, studying how and why a group produces media based around celebratory stories will allow scholars to better understand, and organizations to better navigate, cultural and commercial discourse.

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I cannot thank the staff of the Southern Foodways Alliance—Sara Camp Arnold, Amy Evans, Melissa Booth Hall, Mary Beth Lasseter, Julie Pickett, and John T. Edge—enough for their generosity, for opening their organization and filing cabinets to me, for giving me so much of their time, and for being so consistently intelligent, enthusiastic, and frank.

I am grateful to the many people who agreed to interviews with me and who, in addition to giving me their time and insight, filled me with coffee, smoked pork, and pie and sent me home with winter squash and frozen whole chickens. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the many presenters, cooks, participants, and volunteers at Southern Foodways Alliance events, who I worked with, talked with, and watched.

The Laney Graduate School and the Woodruff Library supported my research financially and through scholarly programs, and I am particularly thankful for the guidance of Professors Ivan Karp and Cory Kratz. Special thanks to Melissa Anderson, Mary Battle, Franky Abbott, Sarah Melton, Alan Pike, and Jesse Karlsberg for being amazing colleagues, editors, and friends. And, most of all, to Brandon Wicks.

Table of Contents

Figures

Introduction

In the 1980s, African American Ed Scott decided to be a catfish farmer in an all-white industry in Mississippi. Despite being rejected for loans and being blacklisted by white processors who wanted to maintain control of the industry, Scott found ways to build his business. He erected his own processing facility by touring and replicating white-owned plants; he fought for his rights in court and deftly negotiated federal contract laws to establish a customer base. His is a story about individual triumph against the odds and is a part of a genre of narratives about racism in Mississippi.

I learned about Ed Scott through the film *On Flavor* (2004), produced by an organization called the Southern Foodways Alliance (SFA). By telling the story of an individual catfish farmer struggling against systemic racial oppression, the SFA aims to facilitate thoughtful dialogue about culture and society through the perspective of food production. Scott's story exemplifies the type of stories the organization highlights and how it interacts with its subjects. Scott cooked catfish at the first Southern Foodways Alliance symposium in 1998, and the organization awarded him the Keeper of the Flame in 2001.[1]

The SFA's stories of Ed Scott, told in film, in essays, and at events, focus on the work

[1] While others remember Scott's fish fry at the first symposium, John T. Edge claims that one of his favorite memories of the SFA was giving Scott the Keeper of the Flame Award. He says, "We gave him that award in the church in Taylor and his whole family came. I remember the sense of pride Mr. Scott had in that: that the *University of Mississippi* conferred this honor on *him*." John T. Edge, interview by author, University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi, January 18, 2011.

of a black businessman and the importance of using personal ingenuity and negotiating legal, social, and economic structures to succeed in a hostile environment. These stories demonstrate the contextualized food culture education the SFA aims to create and share. Scott's story as told by the SFA confronts audiences with historical problems; however, it ultimately celebrates how Scott overcame these problems. Its plot and structure promote agency and investment. Like many SFA stories, Scott's primes audiences to come away with a view that allows for a hopeful South, despite troubling social, legal, and economic structures.

Audiences may come away from a story like Ed Scott's understanding the problems of systemic inequality in a longer civil rights struggle. Conversely, they may come away understanding, as Scott himself says, that if one works hard and fights for success, success is possible. Or, they may come away thinking only of Scott's delicious fried fish. Telling stories about food to influence and frame cultural concepts and behaviors raises questions about what cultural concepts and behaviors storytellers encourage and how audiences respond.

This dissertation, "Pimento Cheese and Podcasts: Producing and Consuming Stories about Food in the Contemporary U.S. South," examines how stories like Scott's are told and how they are used to shape cultural ideas and practices for a broad spectrum of players—audience members, food industry workers, media professionals. While people have told stories about food for millennia, the current proliferation of works that tells stories about food practices, from food movement publications like *Stories from a Slow Food Nation* to popular television shows like Anthony Boudain's *No Reservations*,

suggests that people are forging cultural identities through these representations.[2] This dissertation considers the nature of these productions, examining the relationship between food, cultural construction, and narratives. It explores the cultural work that food does in contemporary American culture.

I investigate how food is used to create culture and to mediate history and politics. I ask, *what work food can food do as a subject for cultural production*? In order to explore this question, this dissertation focuses on the relationship between food culture and forms of narrative—specifically, how stories about food are used to construct identities and communities around the contemporary U.S. South. I examine experiences of making and engaging with different forms of narrative and the effect of those experiences on how people understand and represent the U.S. South.

This dissertation is built around a detailed examination of a single case study, the Southern Foodways Alliance (SFA). The SFA is a non-profit organization housed at the University of Mississippi that "documents, studies, and celebrates the diverse food culture of the changing American South" by holding events and producing a range of media.[3] Founded in 1999, the organization has a staff of six and a membership of over one thousand people. The membership comes from three main groups: food industry workers, food culture workers, and interested eaters.

The SFA and its members have a significant presence in the production of southern food culture in the contemporary United States, influencing media and food producers. Further, the SFA is the focus of my dissertation because of its clear mission;

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[2] *Stories from a Slow Food Nation*, Slow Food USA, http://sfusa.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=stories_home, accessed May 6, 2013.
[3] "Mission Statement," Southern Foodways Alliance, http://southernfoodways.org/about/mission.html, accessed May 6, 2013.

the organization holds and acts based on a set of articulated beliefs in the power of discourses around food to shape culture. My research considers the implications and validity of its aims.

In order to better understand the cultural work that food can do through my study of the SFA, I ask three questions: First, what methods does the SFA use to engage with and produce food culture? Second, what are the assets and problems of these methods? And finally, does the SFA offer a model for using food to perform cultural work?

Background

Located at the intersection of food studies, narrative, memory, and sensory studies (ways of knowing), and southern studies, this dissertation is interdisciplinary in its scope, approach, and methodology. My work emerges from two distinct lines of food studies literature. The first is scholarship that explores how food practices build culture; the second is scholarship that examines how people attempt to influence food production and consumption.

What and how people consume and produce food is more than matters of nutrition or economics. Food practices carry social, cultural, and historical meaning. They impact social experiences and economies. Food acts as both instrument and symbol. As an instrument, it is used to create bonds through shared events, to facilitate social mobility through new food practices, to generate obligation or capital through forms of economic and cultural credit. As a symbol, it can signify a person's class, racial, ethnic, or gender identity, position within a community, or social network.[4] Often, food works in multiple

[4] Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Carole Counihan and Peggy Van Esterik, *Food and Culture: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

ways simultaneously, as Sidney Mintz demonstrates in the seminal *Sweetness and Power*—sugar production and consumption are part of a complex set of ideas and practices in the industrial revolution. Sugar is an economic, social, and physical fuel.[5] Other studies on topics ranging from tamale production to fad diets to KFC in China further demonstrate how cultural significance, personal identity, and everyday practice can be bound into a single food experience.[6]

My dissertation is particularly grounded in food studies scholarship that explores the interconnections between businesses, food practices, and constructions of cultural identity. This can range from the intricate social and economic exchanges of the world's largest fish market, as Theodore Bestor demonstrates in his deep ethnographic work *Tsukiji*, to the complex economic experience and social perception of black women selling fried chicken, as Psyche Williams-Forson discusses in her cultural analysis *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs*.[7] These works examine practices and cultural productions in order to better understand how people negotiate identity through food and how symbolic uses of food interact with practical uses. By attending to the history, physical space, and social interactions of vendors in Tsukiji, Bestor reveals the recursive construction of fish as Japanese cuisine and as a key commodity. By looking at representations of fried chicken and its production and sales by historical black women,

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[5] Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

[6] For example, Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Jun Jing, ed., *Feeding China's Little Emperor: Food Children, and Social Change* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000);Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Que Vivan Los Tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber, eds., *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspective on Women and Food* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

[7] Theodore C. Bestor, *Tsukiji: The Fish Market at the Center of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Psyche A. Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Williams-Forson reveals the complexity of stereotyping and experience in cultural production.

My dissertation looks at what it means when people create representations of food. In this case, food culture is not the by-product of culinary practices, not something for scholars to find and explicate, but is actively and intentionally constructed by the subjects. Because of my interest in intentional construction, I draw from bodies of scholarship invested in food as a site for ethical action about food production and consumption.[8] Much of this literature engages with environmental, health, and social justice interventions in food systems. Since this is the current social milieu of food culture in the United States, this literature forms both subject and theoretical background for my work. This scholarship develops key concepts for studying how people understand the ethical implications of eating and how narrative influences eating patterns. These works examine some of the strategies of teaching, telling stories, and promoting products and practices that people acting for clean, fair food undertake. They focus on opening dialogues and changing actions within current food systems.

My study draws on what other researchers have learned about how people understand and act in contemporary food culture, but my work also adds to this body of knowledge by looking at how food is employed in discourses that are not inherently about food systems. While food systems work as a significant part of the contemporary food culture scene across the United States, institutions and organizations are also using food to access and shape non-food issues. I hope, then, to bring attention to this previous

[8] For example, Warren James Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Carole Counihan and Psyche Williams Forson, *Taking Food Public: Redefining Foodways in a Changing World* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Joshua J. Frye and Michael Bruner, eds., *The Rhetoric of Food: Discourse, Materiality, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

work and to engage with the complex questions it raises. My research not only expands our understanding of how food culture functions, but, by taking an alternate and sometimes depoliticized point-of-entry, may also provide insights for people who are studying food systems and food justice scholars.

The sensory and social nature of food is central to how it manifests in cultural production. This project draws on theories of memory, narrative, and sensory experience as key elements of cultural production. My study takes up an intersection of two forms of knowledge—experiential knowledge and narrative construction. It looks at how these ways of knowing interact.

To some extent, my work relies on concepts from Michel De Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life*, which presents a creative tension between structural constraints (of places, of language, of time) and the needs and desires of individuals. De Certeau presents a theory of lived experience that allows for agency while being aware of powerful grids of law, tradition, and norms people move in. This negotiation of expectation and invention, along with an attention to human agency, frames my work.[9]

Sensory experience matters in cultural construction. As such, I draw on scholars who attend to lived experience in the context of meaning making—people who attend to things, to senses, to dwelling in the world. As Paul Stoller demonstrates in *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, extra-lingual communication is a central part of cultural experience.[10] Stoller argues for an anthropology that accounts for and is attuned to

[9] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
[10] Paul Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

sensory experience as a form of knowledge production and transmission. This is true not only in "other" places and societies, but also in ethnography at home.[11]

As I frame a sensory investigation in this project, I am interested in the embodied and integrated approaches to study that scholars like Tim Ingold, Daniel Miller, and Nadia Seremetakis employ. Seremetakis encourages and models work that focuses on the materiality of experience. This approach explores how sensory, embodied experience informs discourse, rejecting the notion of "reading" experience "*as if the dense and embodied communication between persons and things were only a quick exchange between surfaces*."[12] Ingold advocates an intersensory approach that attends to how people interact with their environments as whole and interdependent agents.[13] Like Seremetakis, Ingold posits an interactive relationship between sensory experience and cultural meaning, rather than a relationship in which cultural meaning is assigned to or "reads" sensory experience. Anthropologist Daniel Miller takes a similar approach to material culture, claiming that "by dwelling upon more mundane sensual and material qualities of the object, [scholars] are able to unpack the more subtle connections with cultural lives and values that are objectified through these forms, in part, because of the particular qualities they possess."[14] I argue that the SFA attempts this kind of "dwelling upon" as well, but my work turns the lens slightly, asking how we understand curated

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[11] Stoller, Kathryn Linn Geurts, and David Howes work to understand cultures with unfamiliar sensory expression. See Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993); Kathryn Linn Geurts, *The Culture and the Senses: Ways of Bodily Know in an African Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); and Paul Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

[12] Nadia Seremetakis, ed., *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1994), 134. Italics in original.

[13] Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[14] Daniel Miller, ed., *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9.

sensory experience.

While educational scholars have engaged with experiential learning as a model for decades, I found that exploring this form of learning through the perspectives of cultural critics has helped me to tease out the assets and problems of using food to do cultural work. I draw, also, from the work of media scholar Laura Marks and geographer Dolores Hayden, both of whom explore how people create sensory experiences that attempt to transmit knowledge and how people experience those creations. Marks uses sensory studies to understand film production and reception. In *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, she focuses on memory and experience—on screen and through audience interactions— and asks how people capture lost homes and "unrepresentable" senses (touch, smell, taste) in film.[15] One of her main goals is to "understand how meaning occurs in the body, and not only at the level of signs."[16] While Marks uses standard methods of studying cultural production, her attention shifts the analysis toward bodily experience—on camera and in the viewer's seat. Hayden's work, similarly, focuses on the producers of public history exhibits and their audiences, attending to the ways that different spaces are constructed for different sensory experiences and how those experiences inform investment in and understanding of urban history.[17]

Drawing on these scholars' work in my discussion of the impact of sensory experience on knowledge production in the SFA, I examine how different kinds of sensory experiences make meaning, through eating foods, inhabiting places, and viewing

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[15] Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), xvi, 20.
[16] Marks, xvii.
[17] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

multimedia productions. My work specifically explores how narrative interacts with sensory experience in the production of culture. Scholars have long understood that people make meaning from experience through stories and that stories shape how people interpret experiences. My research attempts to understand the telling of and listening to stories as an experience that produces culture not only in its content, but also in its form—in the ways people engage in producing and consuming stories.

Cultural theorist, critic, and video artist Mieke Bal's definition frames some key elements of narrative that I attend to in my dissertation. She says that narrative is made up of the text ("a story in a particular medium"), the story ("the content of that text" and "the fabula presented in a certain manner"), and the fabula ("a series of related events caused and experienced by actors").[18] For my research, the texts range from oral histories, films, and cookbooks to presentations and tours. The fabula are always incidents or events structured around food. The story—the "certain manner" in which the texts formats events and ideas—is my central unit of discussion.

Drawing on literature from a range of media studies (documentary film, oral history, and cookbooks) to biography studies and literary theory, I attend to how authorship and authority function in texts that are produced, almost always, by several people.[19] Scholars frame the development of authority in and through narrative in

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[18] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 5.

[19] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989). Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002); Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

different ways; however, they each explore the ways that the speaker, the listener, context, and the text itself influence meaning. Despite different narratologies, they share the understanding that stories use character and chronology to make meaning and, perhaps more significantly, that they are formed from the negotiation of these relationship between the teller and the audience, based on understandings of form, genre, and worldviews. These scholars attend to the detail of different modes of telling—about oneself, in interviews, through visual media. Building on this previous work, my dissertation takes up a comparative model: the SFA tells similar stories in different modes, so I aim to understand how these modes develop relationships in distinctive tellings and as they intersect and accrete.

As I think about how stories function, I am particularly drawn to the works of Anna Tsing and Kathleen Stewart, who consider how stories are produced and how they produce culture. Stewart's study of cultural poetics in Appalachia understands stories as part of lived experience, as tactics for explaining and facilitating social and material outcomes in the lives of the people she studies. Tsing's work similarly frames storytelling as a way to negotiate complex power dynamics with material and psychological effects. Tsing's *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* and Stewart's *A Space on the Side of the Road* attend to the stories told and to the production and reception of these stories—who is telling, who is listening, and the physical and social environment of these narrative constructions.[20]

One of the key forms and functions of stories in the SFA are as narratives of memory. Because storytelling in the SFA (like other food culture stories) functions, in

[20] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Kathleen Stewart, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an 'Other' America* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

large part, through the relationship between memory and cultural production, memory is a key concept in my research. In particular, I draw on ideas about cultural memory—how sharing memories in groups helps people define the past and the present.[21]

In *On Collective Memory*, for example, Maurice Halbwachs argues that people never remember in a vacuum; they always remember in the context of a social group and, frequently, at the direct bequest of members of the group. Further, sharing memories through narration creates both understandings of the past and social cohesion.[22] While memory gives meaning to the past, it also structures contemporary positions within groups. Moreover, memory—and in turn any understanding of the past in terms of memory—becomes constrained by culturally viable scripts. These are constraints on both content and narrative form (cultural notions of closure and plot as well as more fluid but no less powerful notions about heroes, romances, quests, and villains).[23]

According to Marita Sturken, "Cultural memory is a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history."[24] In *Tangled Memories*, she explores how memory is produced and reproduced at the intersection of individual and cultural stories about the past. Using films, memorial sculptures, and artifacts like the AIDS quilt, Sturken argues that cultural memories are not historical reproductions (or even representations) of the past; instead, they are forms that shape collective

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[21] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 4; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed., trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40; Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995);David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
[22] Halbwachs, 53, 182-183.
[23] Halbwachs, 43, 49. Although, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Waston explain in *Reading Autobiography*, people can "change the narrative or write back to the cultural stories that have scripted them as particular kinds of subject" (Smith 176).
[24] Sturken, 1.

understandings of the past. From that position, she argues, "We need to ask not whether a memory is true but rather what its telling reveals about how the past affects the present."[25]

In addition, Sturken argues that bodies become strange places of memorialization and forgetting as cultural signs that become, in some cases, disengaged from the people they belong to.[26] In *How Societies Remember,* Paul Connerton takes up this subject more fully in his explicit study of bodily social memory—the ways that cultures transmit memory through physical practices, particularly ritual practices. "We can," Connerton explains, "preserve the past deliberately without representing it explicitly in words and images."[27] Because food is so concretely multisensory, the relationship between sensory experience and memory is a key avenue for understanding the cultural work of food can do. My study explores the intersection of bodily and narrative remembrance and, specifically, how these forms of memory are structured and cultivated in the contemporary U.S. South.

Storytelling, memory, and the experience of a place are ideas that permeate discussions of the U.S. South. My work engages with ideas of "southern" as a cultural imaginary, the construction and maintenance of which has significant social and economic repercussions. The U.S. South has long been a geographically-based cultural construction. Grounded in the history of the imagined south, I take up contemporary constructions and uses of this identifier for people, place, ideology, and cuisine.

The cultural conceptions of the South that the SFA contends with have been constructed over a long period of time and arise mainly out of racialized political

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[25] Sturken, 2.
[26] Sturken 12.
[27] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72.

geographies. The South has often been defined by the Confederacy. Literary and cultural scholar Jennifer Greeson argues that sectionalism arising in even the late eighteenth century demonstrates a national discourse of North and South based most significantly on economic structures, particularly slavery.[28] The Lost Cause culture after the Civil War maintained sectional divides and gave rise to a powerful imagined, aggrieved white South. The race politics and *de jure* segregation of the southeastern United States became key characteristics of the South, characteristics to condemn or to fight for. While segregation and racism are national and local issues as well, during the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century, the South became the sectional poster-child of racism and inequality.[29] Images of the South have perpetuated and mutated plantation stereotypes—from mammies to belles to Gothic disarray. At the same time, in book sales, movies, home décor, and tourism, the romanticized and grotesque South has become a construction with significant economic impact.[30] This imagined South, while hardly monolithic, is constructed around an interest in the past as well as ideas about historical experiences of institutionalized racism.[31]

Scholars like Patricia Yaeger and Tara McPherson have provided frameworks for understanding literary writers who reimagine southern in this context.[32] Their work rises

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[28] Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).
[29] Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).
[30] Scott Romine, *The Real South: Southern Narrative in the Age of Cultural Reproduction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2008); Wanda Rushing, *Memphis and the Paradox of Place: Globalization in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Anthony J. Stanonis, ed., *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways, and Consumer Culture in the American South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).
[31] Even constructions of poor whiteness in the South are bound up with histories of race politics and often monoculture economics.
[32] Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

from the frameworks of historically understood southern culture but pushes against or repositions southern identities, attempting to make room for messier interpretations of race, class, and gender in the U.S. South. Scholars like Martyn Bone, with his postsouthern readings, and James Peacock and Wanda Rushing, exploring a hyper-capitalist globalizing south, also reinterpret how Souths can be imagined. [33]

My work continues to examine the ways that constructions of southernness respond to and shape contemporary economies and politics in the United States. It looks at two inter-connected phenomena: how people try to confront "problems" of southernness (experiences and perceptions of racism, inequality, ignorance) and how constructions of southernness are revised. In particular, it focuses on how people are actively framing the southern imaginary through food culture representations.

Methods and Materials

My dissertation is a case study of the Southern Foodways Alliance, attending to its productions, practices, and ideas. I have chosen to focus this study on the texture and details of one group in order to work beyond generalizations, closely considering what is happening, how this work is functioning, and how people understand their roles. By narrowing my scope to one case, I am able to give a more nuanced answer to questions about cultural production, particularly in the U.S. South.

In doing so, I study processes as well as final products. I aim to work against "a tendency to assume that researcher interpretations somehow map onto meanings 'written

[33] Martyn Bone, *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); James L. Peacock, *Grounded Globalism: How the U.S. South Embraces the World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Rushing, *Memphis and the Paradox of Place*.

in' by the producers."[34] Instead, my dissertation is rooted in the power and promise of ethnography as described by anthropologist Sharon Macdonald:

> What an ethnography, especially one coupled with historical and political-economic analysis, can provide is a fuller account of the nature and complexities of production: of the disjunctions, disagreements, and 'surprise outcomes' involved in cultural productions. It can highlight what did not survive into the finished form as well as what did, and also some of the reasons for particular angles or gaps.[35]

My study draws on observations, interviews, published media, and archival materials. I conducted participant observation, in person and in online communities, with the SFA from 2008 to 2012.[36] I observed five symposia, two field trips, four Potlikker film events, a year of board meetings, an oral history workshop, and myriad other dinners, presentations, and lectures as a paying participant and as a volunteer. I interviewed fifty staff members, board members, general members, and oral history subjects. The audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews generally lasted two hours, though some were as short as thirty minutes and others as long as four hours. In terms of published materials, I worked with the SFA's forty short films, six anthologies, forty oral history projects, two

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[34] Sharon Macdonald, *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum* (New York: Berg, 2002), 8.
[35] Ibid.
[36] The idea of an alliance is important to how the SFA functions. Beyond beginning as an alliance and creating alliances with subjects and organizations, the SFA fosters professional alliances between chefs, farmers, scholars, and artists and personal alliances between people who become friends and partners. I want to highlight the alliances I formed while conducting my research. From the moment I suggested this project to the staff of the SFA, they gave me abundant access to archival materials, to productions and governance processes, and to people. I formed friendships with the staff especially—at one point a staff member said to me, in anthropological jest, that she feared I had "gone native." I also had the pleasure of conversations with many members of the SFA that moved between researcher-subject interactions and alliances, moments where we analyzed together.

That said, the person who creates the final product ends up with a great deal of power for shaping a story. My analysis is informed by hundreds of hours of discussion (recorded and not), of participation, and of observation and reading. Of course, it is also informed by my education and training, by my background, and by the space and conventions of the dissertation format. My hope is that this work accurately reflects some of the questions and complications that have occurred in the life of the SFA; at the same time, it is not definitive, and it is sorely restricted. As scholars often do, I have files full of subjects that emerged during my research, which are beyond the scope of this dissertation. I do, however, plan to tackle these subjects in my future work.

cookbooks, over forty issues of its newsletter, and its website. From the University of Mississippi special collections, the SFA office's collections, and the personal collections of people I interviewed, I collected and analyzed meeting minutes, organizational memos and correspondences, event planning and media production materials, and ephemera. For each chapter, I draw on aspects of this collection of data, considering final productions and organizational structures in the context of what their producers said about them, what the archive presented about how they were made, and what audiences said about them.

Organization of the Thesis

This study has five chapters. After setting up the goals of the organization, chapters two through five each examine mediums in which the group operates (oral history, film, events, and cookbooks). In the conclusion, I consider some of the complications presented by representing southern cultures through food-based presentations.

The first chapter examines the Southern Foodways Alliance's mission and activities over the past fifteen years. Against a backdrop of heritage and promotion, it looks at how the SFA tries to structure a progressive definition of southern foodways. This chapter sets the stage for understanding how the group aims to position its work and the parameters of its activities.

Chapters two and three take up the organization's oral history and film production, examining how these forms, which focus on people's stories and voices, structure knowledge. Chapter two examines how voice is structured in the SFA's oral histories in order to understand what kind of knowledge is produced and how power operates in this form of knowledge production; it attends to the complications of

producing and preserving culture through interview and first-person narrative. Chapter three examines how knowledge is produced in SFA films, looking at how the filmmaker, subjects, and medium influence the production of cultural knowledge. These chapters attend to the production process and the experience, for those involved in the production and use, of these two forms.

Chapter four turns to live presentations, looking at meals, lectures, and tours put on by the SFA. It examines how social and sensory experience influence knowledge production and cultural understanding.

Finally, Chapter five looks at cookbooks as an alternative form of defining culture and telling stories. It particularly focuses on how aspects of genre can inform affective constructions and can be employed to construct cultural definitions.

Significance

This study is significant for several fields of scholarly inquiry, in particular food studies, sensory studies, narrative studies, anthropology, and studies of the U.S. South. It examines how people refashion cultural histories and narratives to reflect progressive identities and to maintain and grow markets—and how those economic and ethical goals interact in the contemporary United States. In doing so, it provides insight into how the concept of "southern" continues to function and evolve in cultural economies and identities.

To the work that food studies scholars have done on fashioning identities through food practices and representations, I contribute knowledge about how narratives of food function in different mediums. My study examines the relationship between what is a sensory, experiential subject—food—and the meaning-making of narrative construction.

I consider how the economic, personal, and social pressures surrounding food practices impact the use of food as the framework for stories about culture.

Finally, my dissertation contributes to discussions about ways of knowing. It explores the relationship between sensory experience, storytelling, and definitions of culture. As more cultural and educational institutions turn to food as a way to present, teach, and explore culture, I hope this study will also provide insights into the successes and struggles of this kind of work. Organizations and institutions often turn to food because of its popular appeal and its promise of connection—because it seems like a way to get people into the door or into difficult conversations. My dissertation discusses the complexities of both these assumptions and of producing stories about food and with food as entrees into cultural understanding.

Chapter 1

Producing the SFA: Values, Activities, and Organizational History

"It's a great ethic where pimento cheese becomes our value system. It becomes a glass: you can look through pimento cheese to see our common shared humanity." These are the words of chef and restaurateur Linton Hopkins, president of the Southern Foodways Alliance from 2009 to 2012, to an enthusiastic group gathered for the organization's 2010 annual symposium in Oxford, Mississippi. While Hopkins's statement is hyperbolic, his rhetoric reflects and creates significant social fantasies.[37] This description of the organization's philosophy implies that food can reveal truths about experience, truths that come not from eating, but from narrative understanding.

Hopkins's statement reflects some of the fundamental approaches of the Southern Foodways Alliance. First, he celebrates the belief that a foodstuff can form a cultural value system. Then, he shifts his statement toward the function of the food: pimento cheese is not simply to be eaten but also to be used as way to reflect or create a sense of commonality. The "our" in his statement, left vague, can include the SFA and larger identity groups (like Americans, southerners, or humans). Despite its multiple and mixed metaphors, Hopkins's claim that food can do important cultural work is not unlike SFA director John T. Edge's explanation of the SFA's founding. Edge described a key

[37] By using the term "fantasy," I do not imply that his statement has no real world implications or does not respond to real world conditions, but rather I suggest that it functions in terms of cultural invention and desire.

conversation between himself and journalist and scholar John Egerton as they were first framing the organization.

> I came [to the University of Mississippi] thinking about race and working toward a better South. … These were kind of parallel tracks: I am working on food, I am working on race, but I realized that working on race overtly I couldn't get very far. Here comes [UM Chancellor] Robert Khayat to derail this process we set up.[38] Yet I could work toward those same goals through food. I remember Egerton talking about that too. He had gone to South Africa shortly after the first [SFA] symposium, and he came back frustrated by what he was not able to do, frustrated by various race-relations efforts he was part of. And I remember him saying, "maybe we can get to something through food."[39]

This chapter examines what the organization intends to do—how it understands the "something" that one can "get to," how it has defined a "value system," and how it fashions its role of shaping culture through food in the U.S. South.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the Southern Foodways Alliance. I present a history of the organization, its activities, and its current composition. Then I explore the organization's changing conception of its mission, looking at the organizations beginnings, its growth in the 2000s, and its current work and vision. This chapter frames some central issues the organization has grappled with and how its conceptualizations and practices have shifted over time. It provides key terms and ideas that I examine in subsequent chapters.

The Southern Foodways Alliance is a non-profit organization housed at the University of Mississippi in the Center for the Study of the South. The organization began with fifty founding members in 1999 after a successful conference in 1998. Under

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[38] Edge was part of a group in the late 1990s working on constructing a Civil Rights Movement monument on the University of Mississippi's campus. After a significant investment by students and faculty, the university administration rejected the proposed monument. In 2006, the university erected a monument dedicated to James Meredith, the first black student at the university who began under violent protest of segregationists.

[39] John T. Edge, interview by author, Oxford, Mississippi, January 18, 2011.

the leadership of John T. Edge, its staff, membership, production, and endowment has grown consistently for the past fourteen years. As of 2013, it has a staff of six and a membership of around one thousand.

The organization's stated mission is to "document, study, and celebrate the diverse food cultures of the changing American South."[40] The SFA records and tells both contemporary and historical stories about people and foods of the U.S. South. It tries to get people to think and talk about food culture, including difficult subjects, like the racism and inequality inherent in food culture in the U.S. South.[41] Its overall goal, though, is to get people critically engaged while maintaining a sense of play and joy.

The group primarily produces media and puts on events. Its media productions range from texts and films to oral histories and web-based materials. Its texts include anthologies, cookbooks, and a small magazine, and its online productions include a blog, culinary trails, oral history sites, streaming films, a mobile app, podcasts, and an active social media presence. The SFA also produces several events across the U.S. each year that involve meals, talks, and tours. It also gives awards and supports university classes. The organization occasionally makes exhibits, holds workshops, and its members volunteer to rebuild restaurants; however, it is not a museum (and does not have a material collection) or a social action group.

All of this work by the SFA produces a few main outcomes. First, it creates an archive of materials about food practices in and of the southeastern United States. Second, it fosters networks, producers, and consumers in the food and food culture

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[40] Southern Foodways Alliance, "SFA Mission," Southern Foodways Alliance website, http://www.southernfoodways.org/about/mission.html, accessed November 15, 2012.

[41] While the SFA has imagined definitions of "southern," the staff and board are adamant about including discussions of race, class, ethnicity, poverty, and inequality, which are part of the history of in the U.S. southeast and also part of its social and political present.

industries. Third, it provides exposure for restaurants, producers, and purveyors of food. Finally, and most significantly, in concert with these other outcomes, the organization works to shape discourse about southern culture and about food. The SFA produces work for audiences that include members and non-members; it serves its members and influences food culture, studies, and media for a larger public.

SFA's members include food industry professionals (chefs, farmers, cooking appliance executives, frommagiers); people in the food culture industry (food writers, food stylists, cookbook authors, photographers, activists, museum directors); scholars; and non-specialists who have an interest in food and culture. Despite some age, race, ethnic, and class diversity, the SFA's membership is overwhelmingly white, wealthy, and educated. The SFA's membership is geographically diverse, coming from as close as Greenwood, Mississippi and Atlanta, Georgia and from as far away as Brooklyn, New York, and Ann Arbor, Michigan. Members' relationships to cultural imaginaries of the U.S. South are not fixed either. Instead, the group coalesces over the consumption and discourse of southern food.

The History of a Mission

The SFA's mission statement has gone through several iterations. I frame my discussion of the organization's goals and activities since 1999 by examining how these statements signal shifts and developments within the SFA. I have divided this discussion into four parts: Founding, Beginnings, Development, and the SFA Today. "Founding" looks at the organization's formation and the construction of its first mission statement. "Beginnings" covers the organization's early work to 2004, as it developed an identity and a following. The development section looks at the organization between 2005 and

2009, as its governance, goals, and productions matured. Finally, "SFA Today" considers the organization from 2009 to 2012 and encompasses the time period I observed and studied the group. For each of these periods, I examine the organization's mission statement, its work, and some of the key moments in its development, drawing from interviews, conversations with members and staff, and archival materials.

Figure 1.1 SFA Mission Statements

1999	"Our mission is to celebrate, preserve, promote, and nurture the traditional and developing diverse food culture of the American South."
2000	"Our mission is to celebrate, preserve, and promote the diverse food cultures of the American South."
2006	"Our mission is to document and celebrate the diverse food cultures of the American South."
2009	"Our mission is to document, study, and celebrate the diverse food cultures of the changing American South"

Founding

"Our mission is to celebrate, preserve, promote, and nurture the traditional and developing diverse food culture of the American South." – 1999

The fifty founding members approved the first SFA mission statement in July 1999. After a brief history of the organization's founding, I survey key terms in the statement, looking at how it was understood at the founding and how it continues to shape the organization.

In 1998, John T. Edge, a former financial analyst and then graduate student at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, coordinated a southern foodways symposium. One hundred people, including many important figures in southern food culture at the time, came together to eat food prepared by famous chefs and catfish farmers and listen to stories about corn, chicken, and cooks and presentations about the impact of race, poverty, and religion on southern foodways. John Egerton

thought the event had enough momentum to finally make a southern food culture group work, especially if it could get institutional backing.

The Southern Foodways Alliance was the third attempt at a southern food organization in the 1990s. Many founding members were part of the earlier groups—the Society for the Revival and Preservation of Southern Food and the American Southern Food Institute. Current SFA literature and some founding members say that these two groups merged to form the basis of the Southern Foodways Alliance; however, the archival materials, early SFA materials, and other founding members suggest that those two groups, who were active in the mid-1990s, were no longer functioning by the time the SFA emerged. They each waned for a mixture of organizational, financial, personal, and cultural reasons (a long story for another time), just as the success of the SFA is contingent on multiple factors.

Edge and Egerton worked together over the year, and in July 1999, a group of fifty people, recruited by Edge and Egerton, had a two day retreat at the Southern Progress headquarters in Alabama (the organization that publishes *Southern Living*). The University of Mississippi housed and backed the new organization, which used money earned from the cookbook *A Gracious Plenty: Recipes and Recollections of the American South* (1999) for its start-up funding. The key factors for success at the SFA's founding were that the SFA had institutional backing from the University of Mississippi; it was run by a person who was, at the time, not well-known or powerful in the food culture world, but many of the founding members were; and it emerged at the turn of the century, when food culture in America was rising as a media focal point.[42]

[42] Southern Foodways Alliance, "Report of the Southern Foodways Alliance's Long-Range Planning Committee," 2002; Edge, interview; Nathalie Dupree, interview by author, Charleston, South Carolina,

At the first meeting in Alabama, the group approved a mission statement, which read: “Our mission is to celebrate, preserve, promote, and nurture the traditional and developing diverse food culture of the American South.” The language of this statement as well as its production set the stage for how the group would articulate and fashion its identity.

The very first word of the mission statement is “our.” Notably, early documents of the organization were more likely to include language about “the mission of the SFA” and talk about the organization in the third person than current documents; however, the first person plural was even then a significant linguistic framework for the SFA. A 1999 memorandum that was part of planning the organization begins each of the points with “we,” and in all of the early board meeting notes, people refer to the work of the organization using the first person plural. This reflects a notion of collective ownership in the organization, which is still clear in the language and attitude of members, board members, and staff today. The use of “our” in the SFA’s mission statement is an especially significant linguistic construction, considering that earlier attempts at southern food organizations failed, in part, because of clashing egos.

The “we” in the SFA is not to be taken without examination, however. At the beginning, "we" was a cultivated group of fifty people who were purposely racially and professionally diverse. As the organization has grown, “we” is still often considered the membership and the leadership, together; however, because of the focus and cost-of-entry for most SFA events, the people who comprise the group are overwhelmingly white,

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July 22, 2011; Marcie C. Ferris, interview by author, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, August 11, 2011; William Ferris, interview by author, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, August 12, 2011; Jessica Harris, interview by author, Atlanta, Georgia, October 8, 2011; Frank Stitt, interview by author, Birmingham, Alabama, August 22, 2011.

wealthy, and educated. Also, the meaning of "we" shifts, depending on who is speaking, because people have different definitions of who the SFA is. While "we" reflects a general investment that members and workers have in the organization as a collective, it also is—like the SFA's South—a changeable and undefined collective. At its best, this leads to an openness and feeling of broad ownership; at its worst, people interpret a variety of "us" and "them" scenarios or fail to take into account people who may not be considered or may not consider themselves "we." This is particularly significant given conceptions of a monolithic, white South and the organization's base in Mississippi.[43]

The SFA's mission has been defined by its verbs—these words guide its practices and are what members and organization staff and board members highlight when they discuss the mission of the organization.[44] The first verb in the mission statement, which has stayed in that position throughout the life of the organization, is "celebrate." The SFA interprets celebration in a few ways. It celebrates people by honoring them through awards and through representing them in written, filmed, photographed, and recorded biographies. It also celebrates southern food culture, promoting restaurants and purveyors, foods, and techniques through media and at events. Finally, it has a celebratory attitude.

The notes for the 1999 founders' meeting say that one of the most important values to the organization is being "deeply rooted in the belief that Southern food is the region's most positive and appealing symbol—the best we have to offer to our fellow Southerners, to the nation, and the world." The organization has maintained this belief

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[43] Several black members, particularly those outside the southeast, suggested that they were reticent to join the group initially because of its location and name, combined with long histories of racial oppression and violence in Mississippi and the U.S. South generally.

[44] They may also do this because the object of the SFA's work is in its name—the *Southern Foodways* Alliance.

that southern food deserves investment, respect, and celebration and that southern food culture can be a gateway for learning about life in the U.S. South. The organization tells mostly positive stories; its events, which include learning moments, are also large parties.

In addition to celebrating southern food culture, the SFA is also committed to its study. The relationship between celebrating—which is positive and often promotional—and study—which calls for critical engagement—is not simple. In some cases, the two facilitate one another. Pleasure invites people into critical engagement; knowing more about a subject increases people's pleasure of it. However, since the SFA is engaged with southern culture, there can be tension between these aspects. When the SFA focuses on a changing South, which it often represents as globalized and ambitious with a sense of the past and an investment in the future, celebration is easier. However, the SFA also tries to attend to historical and contemporary inequality in ways and times that are structured to honor and even delight. Balancing celebration and pleasure with a serious consideration of past and present ills can become difficult, as I discuss in later chapters.

The second word in the SFA's founding mission statement is "preserve." The letter inviting the founders said that the purpose of the organization was "to preserve and enhance the great food heritage of the South."[45] This idea reflected the goals of the founders of the SFA, as well as the two groups that preceded it. The idea of what this preservation meant was always a topic of debate, however. In a draft of the mission statement written in 1996 for the earlier group, the Society for the Revival and Preservation of Southern Food, Egerton puts brackets around the phrase "preserve past traditions" and lists three clarifying questions—"preserve our historical and cultural past?

[45] John Egerton, Founding Letter. See a copy at http://southernfoodways.org/about/history.html (accessed March 1, 2013).

Preserve our southern culinary heritage? Preserve our cultural past through southern foodways?"[46] These questions about preserving culture or history, preserving foodways, or preserving culture *through* foodways remained central in the formation of the SFA. What is being preserved and why becomes a central debate in the development of the organization. The negotiations that happen in the writing and editing of pre-SFA and early-SFA documents demonstrate these conflicts.[47]

At the founding, preserving food practices was a central goal. First, there was attention to teaching food production techniques and ingredients, and second, there was attention to collecting and maintaining existing materials from food culture. Three of the four initial projects were based on collection: a survey of resources, an annotated bibliography, and a catalog of already-extant oral histories. While these kinds of evaluations are a way to figure out the state of the field and its gaps, the projects also reflect an interest in archiving.

Finally, the 1999 SFA mission statement promised to "promote" and "nurture the traditional and developing diverse food culture of the American South." These two goals and actions—promotion and nurturing—are different from each other. Certainly, the early SFA saw promoting southern food culture as an important function. In 2013, southern food is a significant cuisine in American food culture. Southern cookbooks proliferate; restaurants from the U.S. South have a clear presence in the national food scene, and the volume of southern food coverage in media is significant. In part, this

[46] John Egerton, Editorial suggestions sent to Anne Taylor on a founding document for the Society for the Preservation of Southern Food (SPSF), May 20, 1996.

[47] For example, the same document from the SPSF reads, "The only way to ensure that southern food does not die completely is to ensure that there are people who can still prepare it the way it should be prepared," to which Egerton says, "Don't necessarily like this sentence." The materials from *A Gracious Plenty* also include exchanges like this, as do materials from the American Southern Food Institute. There are also minutes from early SFA meetings where people argue over what preservation efforts should actually seek to preserve.

success is due to the networks of journalists, food producers, and restaurateurs that SFA has facilitated. However, in archival materials and interviews, people talked about the late twentieth-century southern food scene as much less appreciated.[48] The 2000s saw a marked increase in the public presence of food discourse and food culture in mainstream media and in various towns, cities, and neighborhoods. In the moment when popular food culture was about to explode, the SFA was formed. In 1999, the term "promote" was in part aimed at a general promotion of a cuisine and the promotion of particular constructions of the south. While this cultural intent has remained, much of the organization's promotion now seems to fit into the concept of "nurture" put forward in the original mission statement. The SFA has come to be a significant driver in promoting certain food practices, often through promoting specific business, creating networks of supplies and knowledge, and helping grow local and niche economies through media and direct exposure. The Delta Tamale Trail and Apalachicola oysters, which I discuss briefly in chapter two and the conclusion, are good examples of this.

The descriptors "traditional and developing" are important for understanding how the SFA was trying to position itself within food culture in the U.S. South. I speak to this more in chapter five when I examine the organization's cookbooks; however, the key point here is that the organization wants to preserve both traditional and emerging forms of food culture. Defining (and promoting and celebrating) cuisines based on ideas of "tradition" is a fundamental aspect of how people understand food cultures. Cuisines are

[48] The Food Network debuted in 1993, but it didn't take off until between 1998 and 2002 (depending on how one measures things). As David Kamp explores in *The United States of Arugula* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006), the American culinary scene has been growing and evolving for a while, and food as a lifestyle point is not new. The study of food culture has a long history, and even in its current social and political constructions easily has precedents in the 1960s and 1970s (and can, like most things, be traced back much further). Neither Slow Food, the Southern Foodways Alliance, nor even the illustrious Alice Waters herself can take credit for beginning this movement.

most often authenticated by *ideas* of historical cooking or eating patterns; they emerge from discourses and representations as much as they do from practices. In southern cuisine, those representations are based on ideas of tradition that emerge alongside other southern identifiers, many in the post-Civil War and post-Reconstruction era. What is different about the SFA is that it included "developing" food culture as well. This inclusion frames the organization against cultural stasis or an idealized past and makes room for multiple visions of food culture in the American South.[49] It is important to acknowledge the desire to define both "traditional" and "developing" foods as southern because this broadness allows for a wide range of people and foods, sometimes in combination (like Chinese five-spice boiled peanuts); however it can also be a source of tension on occasion because resources are finite. For example, this most often comes up as a debate between focusing on home cooking and focusing on high-end chefs, who often create modern or international riffs on more traditional fare. (Though these arguments were more of a problem in the earlier years of the organization, they still arise occasionally.

The 1999 mission statement also claims that promoting "diverse" food culture is a founding principle of the SFA. Edge and Egerton selected the founders with the intention of having a diverse organization, and the founding documents paint a picture of an idealized membership coming from different backgrounds: "traditional and nouvelle cooks and diners, up-scale and down-home devotees, meat-eaters and vegetarians, drinkers and abstainers, growers and processors, the hedonists and the health-conscious,

[49] In 2000, following this ideology, the SFA pluralizes "culture" in its mission statement.

women and men, whites and blacks and other ethnic groups, one and all."[50] Couched largely in terms of food production and consumption, with a nod to race, gender, and ethnicity, this list showcases a range of diversity forms—by cooking style, class, career, and ethics and politics—and it reflects the lasting intention to think of diversity in many ways. As food culture has become more publicly politicized, this wide net has become even more important, since views on food production and consumption are held deeply and diversely. Despite this investment in a diversity of people, it is important to acknowledge that the SFA, from its inception, has been largely white, educated, and wealthy, in part because of the cost of its events and its position as a cultural heritage organization housed at the University of Mississippi. Nevertheless, the SFA sees a direct connection between diverse food cultures and human diversity. It approaches diversity in food practices as a way of increasing the human diversity of the organization and teaching and promoting a culturally diverse South.

The SFA focuses on "food culture of the American South." It is easy to take this for granted as a focal point; however, its phrasing is significant. First, the organization does not say it studies "southern food culture." Instead it chooses "of" to link "South" with "food." This connection is made clear in the organization's approach to defining "South," broadly, as a cultural construction that is experienced in the lives and representations of many people. Choosing "of" instead of the adjectival form "southern" makes more room for food not necessarily coded "southern" and for people who are associated with, through family histories or interests, rather than living in the U.S. South. There is opportunity for a wider range of foods and people to be subjects and

[50] Southern Foodways Alliance, "Talking points toward the launch of a Southern foodways alliance," memo, July 1999.

interlocutors in the organization, which has worked to maintain geographic diversity in its board and its productions. “Of” also allows the SFA to embrace the many regions that make up the section of the U.S. called the South. Its work looks at foods of the Delta, the Gulf, Appalachia, the Low Country, and the Piedmont. It also looks at food cultures within areas of different states—eastern North Carolina, western Kentucky, Cajun country—and in cities and specific small places, like Houston, Louisville, Apalachicola, East Biloxi, and Bowen’s Island.

The SFA does not put forth explicit definitions of “southern”; however, its work aims to influence cultural constructions of the U.S. South, working within and against a bevy of tropes. The SFA wants to deconstruct many popular constructions of South, but not all of them; some it repackages for use. It reifies agricultural traditions and social traditions of hospitality, while critiquing a monolithic white South through a constant representation of a multiracial and multicultural cuisine and populations. For example, in essays in *Cornbread Nation*, at lectures, and at dinners, it tells and retells a story of greens and potlikker as a food of poverty that is to be revered as a manifestation of southern adaptation and innovation. Further, it presents variations—collard greens with a Mexican twist from Atlanta chef Eddie Hernandez and sweet potato greens by way of West African immigrants in Houston and African American women farmers in Mound Bayou, Mississippi. The SFA has a commitment to helping people navigate cultural critiques, recognizing inequality in food production and consumption, while fostering affection and investment in constructions of South(s).

SFA audiences, members, and organizers have myriad stakes in the southern imaginary. For personal, social, and financial reasons, it is a concept that retains value,

and because it continues to hold power, the SFA works to adapt and complicate its meaning. This is a tricky endeavor because the SFA's explicit goal is "racial reconciliation" and yet it is an "advocate for economic and cultural heritage development."[51] It is a preservation organization in an atmosphere where heritage is sometimes used as code for perpetuating histories of oppression. Rampantly anti-Paula Deen, the staff is invested in a southern foodways that is not monolithic, not for whites only, not the reign of grandmas, and not necessarily nice.

The SFA often defines "southern" through presenting people as cooks, as film and oral history subjects, and as the focus of stories told orally and in text. This is not the same as having people define themselves as southern, and, in fact, not all of the southern food culture workers they represent would fit this label. For example, in 2009, David Chang, who is from New York and does not identify as southern at all, was chosen to cook at an SFA event because of his avid interest in country hams. Conversely, the "Chinese Southern Belles" (Natalie and Margaret Keng), who guided SFA members through a meal on Atlanta's Buford Highway, actively frame themselves as southern. The SFA believes people can opt-in to a southern identity, but it acknowledges that history and geography can also define southernness. While it presents an unbounded South, it also draws upon sectional histories of the Confederacy and Jim Crow legislation. Histories of racial oppression are central to how it defines the development and meaning of southern foodways. At the same time, it engages with Appalachia, the Delta, the Chesapeake, the Piedmont, and the Gulf Coast as regions within the U.S. South informed by specific ecologies and economies. Moreover, much of its work is about the movement

[51] "Talking points toward the launch of a Southern foodways alliance," memo.

of people into the southeastern United States and away from it, from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first.

Emerging in 1999, the Southern Foodways Alliance is embedded in a world where southern food has been defined through cookbooks, in popular culture, and in restaurants. It did not create or define southern food culture; however, the SFA has worked to promote a specific definition of it. Foods that the SFA present as southern include bourbon, Vietnamese-spiced crawfish, boiled peanuts, tamales, barbecue, sno-balls, fried chicken, caviar, grass-fed beef, buttermilk, rice, and boudin. Some of these foods are expected (fried chicken, barbecue, boiled peanuts); others might be might be unexpected (Vietnamese crawfish, sno-balls, tamales). Some seem locale-specific (boudin), while others don't seem to be tied to geography (grass-fed beef, caviar). The inclusion of such a wide range of foods is possible because the SFA defines southern food by unwritten criteria of terroir, time, and recognition. The foods it categorizes as southern usually do use ingredients or methods historically represented as southern. These representations usually emerge from agricultural geographies—reflecting the foods that have been raised and have thrived in areas defined as southern—and from cultural geographies, reflecting the eating habits of people who live or have lived in a particular area.[52] For example, okra, greens, sweet potatoes, cornmeal, corn liquor, and catfish are foods that are defined as southern because of their history of being grown and eaten in the southern United States, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

[52] The Southern Foodways Alliance is interested in foods and food practices that are tied to particular locations, but its framework is not about eating locally. It has a deep commitment to connecting food to place. While it encourages eating foods in a place, a kind of culinary state of mind that favors the local, they don't necessarily encourage people to only eat food from the land nearby. It is more interested in the local heritage of a food than the provenance of its ingredients. The SFA is also interested in where ingredients come from. However, this is often presented in terms of production history rather than agricultural integrity.

Additionally, certain methods like barbecuing, deep-frying, and stewing have a history of practice in the southern United States, although they are techniques used in many cuisines. The SFA also defines food that is produced in the southeastern United States as southern even if it doesn't have a particularly classic southern representation, like caviar or grass-fed beef.

Particularly in the early years of the SFA, people argued over how to define southern food. While debates in the boardroom over who "made" southern food have subsided as the organization has grown and developed a history of positions, the debate has moved outward. Arguments over stories of cultural exchange—who lays claim to particular foods—happen at a few levels in the organization now. These debates happen in front of audiences (as in a 2002 debate over the African or European origins of fried chicken that happened during a question-and-answer portion of an SFA panel), in texts, and in individual discussions. The very existence of these debates is significant for the Southern Foodways Alliance's construction of the South, because the SFA wants to promote a constructed South where identity is malleable and where many voices are heard.[53]

The last important term is "food culture." The SFA is not, and has never been, an organization that studies food first. Instead, the practices and the discourse I encountered in interviews, texts, and events focused on people and on how people's engagement with food can facilitate knowledge about place, society, and experience. Food culture is broad, but it forces the discussion toward context rather than foodstuffs. While the SFA may be

[53] For the most part, members describe the SFA as having openness to argument and criticism. Of course, the conversation is never fully open. Part of what maintains the discourse is that it is influenced by ideas about hospitality and also governed by ideas about social decorum within a group with certain parameters of entry (though theoretically open to all).

interested in representations of southern food, it is more interested in representations of southern people and culture.

Overall, the founding mission statement presents an overview of the SFA that reflects more conservative notions of cultural production. While the organization was combining "traditional and developing," people with more traditional interpretations of southern cuisine were central to its founding, since their names and reputations gave the fledgling organization weight. At the time the SFA wrote this statement, the staff and board were still sorting out what exactly the SFA would do—what would be included in "food culture of the American South" and what it would mean to preserve, promote, nurture, and celebrate that culture.

Beginnings (2000-2004)

"Our mission is to celebrate, teach, preserve, and promote the diverse food cultures of the American South." – 2000

The SFA mission statement was altered when the first set of bylaws were passed in February 2000. The revised statement no longer included "nurture" as an action and "traditional and developing" as descriptors, and it added "teach" to the verbs and aimed to promote "food cultures" instead of "culture." These shifts reflect an already-developing sense of the organization. In 2004, the organization added a new kind of statement—a vision statement, which addresses their social goals of equality and reconciliation. This addition, in concert with the changes made in 2000, clarify the organization's stance toward culture in the U.S. South and its philosophies about cultural history.

Early SFA newsletters, minutes, and memos are full of what one might expect from a fledgling organization: discussions about what the purpose of the organization

should be, what it should do, and how it is going to be run. In a 2001 "Letter from the President," printed in the organization's newsletter, SFA president Toni Tipton-Martin, an African American cookbook author and food writer, says, "We realized, however, that while the 50 founding members did an excellent job of establishing the overall theme and direction for the organization, the details… were left to the board to flesh out." She goes on to describe how, after developing policies and procedures for operating, the board turned to defining member service. To explain how the board interpreted the SFA's mission, she lists the elements of that mission (celebrate, teach, promote, preserve) with coordinating activities of the SFA.

In her letter, Tipton-Martin ties "Celebrate" to the symposium and the newsletter; field trips, an online "virtual foodways library," community outreach, and student involvement at events fulfilled the "teach" mandate. The SFA "preserved" food culture through the oral histories and "promoted" it through the website and a compendium SFA publication (*Cornbread Nation*). Yet, these correlations fail to reveal the cross-purpose functioning of many of these endeavors or the range of activities the early SFA tested. SFA organizers co-sponsored festivals, collected community cookbooks, held food contests, acted as research consultants, and proposed radio shows. They did much of their promotion and education through their events. Rather than a checklist, the mission statement verbs became guideposts in the constant conversations around what the SFA should do. Initially, the SFA had three main areas of activity: holding events, collecting materials, and working to become media producers. Those aspects have continued; however, the failure rate of initiatives is much lower today, and the reach is much wider.

2002 was a breakout year for the SFA. People in the organization often attribute

this success to the barbecue symposium; however, the SFA did three other central things that year as well. First, it published the first *Cornbread Nation* anthology. Second, it launched its first documentary project—a collection of essays, photography, and oral histories with Tennessee barbecue pitmasters, which I discuss in chapter two. Finally, it conducted an organizational assessment that set the stage to focus and grow the organization.

Brought to the board in February 2002, the assessment presented a positive state-of-the-organization and posed a series of questions about the SFA's mission, activities, and governance, which have influenced the organization's operation ever since. These questions centered on the SFA's relationship to the Center for the Study of Southern Culture (CSSC), what projects the SFA would undertake, what kind of organization it was, and what the membership should look like.

The first of these questions was pertinent, as the Center for the Study of Southern Culture led to the success of the SFA—a detail which discomforted some who wished the organization could be more independent. However, because of the space and institutional backing provided by the CSSC, the fledgling SFA had material and human resources without having to raise funds for those costs.[54] Yet, the organization's relationship to the Center for the Study of Southern Culture has implications beyond funding in terms of staffing and its approach to cultural production. Until 2007, all of the SFA staff had been graduate students in the Southern Studies program at the University of Mississippi. These staff members had an education that framed the U.S. South and approaches to it in critical ways while maintaining the importance of "southern" as a category significant in cultural

[54] Even in 2012, when the group was well funded and well established, the board and staff decided that trying to buy, furnish, and maintain its own space was simply not worth the costs involved.

study of the United States and the world.[55] Because of the organization's academic ties, it was also more interested in education—particularly humanities education—than the organizations that came before it, which, emerging from the culinary scene, often foregrounded cooking as a key activity. The CSSC's investment in race, class, gender, and ethnicity as central topics of examination and in documentary recording and storytelling as key methods continue to permeate the SFA.

The 2002 report lists several kinds of organizations the SFA could be: a membership organization, a professional organization, a grassroots organization, an activist service-oriented organization, and/or a catalyst for boosting and blending the energies of others. Today, members and staff describe it as many of these, and one can see elements of these different organizational constructions in their work. Because of this, the SFA has sometimes struggled with where to pour their energies.[56]

As a professional organization, the SFA creates networks of food producers and food culture producers. This kind of networking has two main outcomes. The first is that many chefs, restaurateurs, and food producers form personal relationships. This can lead to a sense of camaraderie between people who would otherwise be competitors—as in the case of Charleston chefs Mike Lata and Sean Brock—or to official groups of food producers who work together on food and social initiatives, like the Fatback Collective or annual dinner with southeastern chefs.[57] These professionals share business advice, stresses and joys, and often a bottle of bourbon. The second outcome is that people enter

[55] Even in the years since 2007, the organization has hired people who come from southern studies backgrounds and have academic ties.
[56] This can be seen in the SFA's response to Katrina and the levees breaking in New Orleans, which I discuss below.
[57] This came up in many ways in almost every interview I conducted. These particular examples come from interviews with Melissa Booth Hall, Ann Cashion, Scott Jones, Frank Stitt, Jerry Slater, and Nick Pihakis.

into business relationships. Chefs buy meat from farmers or bacon curers; journalists write about whiskey makers. The organization fosters a network of suppliers and producers who invest in and promote one another. The SFA is an interesting case of a professional organization because its constituents do not have the same profession. Having people who work in food but in very different ways—as farmers, chefs, writers, etc.—has allowed the SFA to facilitate and inspire more complex relationships and undertakings by their members, "boosting and blending the energies of others."[58]

The SFA has a more complicated response to being a service or activist organization. The organization has taken two approaches to this kind of work. Members and staff have done service projects themselves, helping rebuild restaurants and raising money for hunger programs; however, the organization is more likely to support, promote, and facilitate other groups through press, mobilizing its networks, and encouraging its members to support particular groups.[59] The SFA often acts as a facilitator. It does this with a variety of food-based organizations, artists, and entrepreneurs, connecting people with audiences and resources but often not providing funding or project labor themselves.

Who the membership is and should be, in terms of volume and demographics, has been a question in the SFA for fifteen years, and may always be. In the early years, the discussion was often about numbers and diversity. How many people should be a part of the organization? The SFA is not a wide-open group; it requires members to pay annual

[58] "Report of the Southern Foodways Alliance Long Range Planning Committee."
[59] For example, in 2010, the West Holmes Community Development Organization (WHCDO) received the John Egerton Prize from the SFA, which includes five thousand dollars; however, at a quarterly meeting, a board member brought up that the WHCDO needed significantly more money for equipment. Instead of becoming fundraisers on behalf of this other organization or providing direct funding, the SFA board decided that facilitating a campaign with the WHCDO, telling its story in a variety of venues (political and popular), would be a better fit for the SFA.

dues or to work for membership. In considering its size, the organization asks two questions: what are membership benefits, and how will the organization be funded? The SFA has always negotiated the relationship between membership size and event size, since the events cap out at lower numbers than the membership. More fundamentally, despite the fact that only a small percentage of its annual income is membership dues, board members have consistently debated whether membership costs invest people in the organization or whether they exclude people. These discussions have implications for the second and more prevalent discussion about who the membership is: how can the organization increase geographical, racial, and class diversity?

The vision statement, added in 2004, reflects the initial aims of the organization and presents a central struggle for it: how to encourage diversity and reconciliation. It reads, "We set a common table where black and white, rich and poor—all who gather—may consider our history and our future in a spirit of reconciliation." The first SFA conference focused on the concept of "the welcome table," the idea of hospitality based in shared eating. The vision statement is an outward claim of the desire for diversity and the belief that gathering around food and food concepts can be a path to reconciliation. Moreover, this statement frames the organization as a meeting space and a space for thoughtful interaction. The goals of diversity and reconciliation have similar roots (in racism and systemic inequality in the U.S. South), but they are not the same. The first goal, of diversity, is about making sure people are welcomed into the organization and that a range of beliefs, positions, and identities are represented. The second goal, for reconciliation, is about addressing past and present wrongs and trying to atone for and forgive them. Since the SFA's founding, staff, board, and members have debated how

(and if) food can function as a catalyst for reconciliation. They also debate whether this should be a goal and purpose of the organization, and if so, what it would look like. While few people question the good of diversity as a goal, the "how" has been raised over and over for fifteen years.

From the beginning, the organization saw programming as one way to cultivate diversity and work toward racial reconciliation. In choosing topics for the 2001 and 2002 symposia, the board talked about what it means to engage with serious subjects—like the role of race in food culture and southern culture—in their events and productions. SFA President Tipton-Martin expressed concern that it might be too early to have race as a central theme for events. Instead she urged, "we ought to bring in food as an icon and all the wonderfulness about the South before we knock people over the head." Board member Ann Abadie said, if "we are doing race, ethnicity, gender, we shouldn't expect *Southern Living* to come."[60] Yet the discussion then turned to the ways in which race was "always a topic" of the symposium.

In 2004, the SFA did plan their programming explicitly around race—the theme was food and civil rights. They invited civil rights activists to discuss the role of food in civil rights, and they discussed how food practices fed and responded to segregation and systemic inequality at the symposium and field trip and in media productions. 2004 is considered another seminal year in the growth of the organization, which people often attribute to its events. While in 2004, the SFA produced their first documentary film, the programming is central to how the activities of that year shaped the organization. As in the case with other transformative SFA experiences, the organization simultaneously holds up this moment as central and says it will not be repeated. For many highly

[60] Southern Foodways Alliance, board meeting minutes, 2001.

engaged, long-term members, the year typifies an ideal SFA. People who went on the field trip to Birmingham said that it allowed them to have conversations about racial history and current racial problems in places in the U.S. South that they didn't know how to have before. However, Edge talked about the field trip as highly problematic, full of missteps that thwarted rather than encouraged reconciliation.[61] Often SFA audiences desire and even have transformative experiences, and it is the event producers that have questions about the parameters and meaning of the exchange between the audiences and subjects.

The questions about the organization's activities, its money, and its cultural stance in the early period of the SFA continued to develop in the years that followed; however, the work that was done in these beginning years laid the foundation for actions—not just values—that the SFA would continue.

Development (2005-2008)

"Our mission is to document and celebrate the diverse food cultures of the American South."
– 2006

In 2006, the SFA shifted its mission statement, removing "teach," "preserve," and "promote" and adding in "document." Around this time, the SFA became more recognized and invested as an organization that documented food culture in the U.S. South. In 2005, the organization created its full-time oral historian position. With this, the group was producing more oral history, and it had more films coming out. The SFA also began developing a mission-based financial strategy. Two outcomes of this are

[61] For example, the group went to a Willie King blues festival, which is usually attended primarily by African Americans. They had a chef make food and sell it for five dollars a plate; however, Edge said that the food they were making was too expensive and not right for the moment, despite the fact that it was steeped in southern food tradition. In general, he felt that the group was disconnected from the audience who were not SFA members.

formalization of the SFA's approach to corporate partnerships (including establishing relationships with many of their current sponsors) and the development of certain revenue-generating practices, like the annual auction at Blackberry Farms, which raised $20,000 in the first year and brings in over $100,000 per year now.

At the center of these changes was a series of events that disrupted and then recentered the organization. In 2005, Katrina hit the Gulf Coast; through natural and man-made disasters, it left the area in the wake of destruction. The SFA had gone to New Orleans for the field trip only two months before the hurricane. When the disaster happened, the group wanted to respond because of its active membership there, the city's culinary history, and because field trip participants felt a particular connection to the place. In the aftermath of Katrina, the organization did two things: First, it returned to New Orleans to conduct oral histories with people whom they had interacted with during the field trip. This activity set a precedent for conducting oral histories in field trip locations, which I discuss in chapters two and four.[62] Second, the group helped rebuild Willie Mae's Scotch House, a fried chicken restaurant in New Orleans.

Raising money, supplying labor every weekend for almost a year, and working with the architectural non-profit Heritage Conservation Network, the SFA set out to restore an iconic restaurant. The organization was successful in the rebuild; however, it took more resources than the organization expected, and the outcomes were more complicated economically, socially, and interpersonally than staff, the board, and members had anticipated. While almost everyone I spoke with said that the SFA's rebuilding of Willie Mae's was significant, they also thought that it was not the best use of resources and should not be repeated. This was not simply about the total cost, but also

[62] Since these post-Katrina interviews, oral histories have been conducted before the field trips take place.

about kinds of resources that were expended in the effort. The undertaking helped staff and the board come to important understandings about how the SFA interacts with and intervenes in food culture the U.S. South and to better understand the organizations strength in storytelling and weakness in construction.

Through these and other experiences, the SFA realized that its forte was gathering and sharing people's stories—and also that this work was valuable in its own right and as a way to support the material efforts of local groups and businesses. The history of some people, places, and practices were almost lost to Katrina's storms. While the SFA maintained its commitment to preservation and promotion, the group decided to focus its efforts on creating documentation to reach those goals. The organization concluded that its strongest skills were in education and documentation, a decision reflected in the changes made to the mission statement in 2006.

Changing the mission statement from "preserve" and "promote" to "document" reflects the organization's changing understanding of what it could and should do. The SFA records (or documents) food culture through writing, film, oral history, and photography. This work serves two purposes: it creates an archive for researchers and also creates materials to present to audiences. The SFA documents current and historical practices and experiences, attending to personal and collective stories and creating twentieth and twenty-first-century histories, which I discuss further in chapters two and three. The series of 2007 productions are outcomes of this shift toward documentary. In that year, the SFA established the several culinary trail websites and began Potlikker film screenings.

During this time, the organization continued to take up questions of ethics and the

role of reconciliation. The goal of funding the organization with ethical donor models was an important focal point and success for the SFA during these years. It added many new sponsors and also decided it was not willing to have sponsors whose ethics the board or staff questioned, and they were not willing to have sponsors who wanted to influence the organization's productions. Much of this was about how to "promote" without losing the integrity of the educational mission. This took time to implement but ultimately led to more freedom in the group's oral history projects. The SFA also managed to build up a strong enough financial portfolio during this time, through good governance and finding the right sponsors, so it did not have to compromise its values or integrity to stay afloat. The SFA's financial success reflects successful programming, attention from the media, and a growing popular interest in food culture. By the end of 2008, the organization was planning further ahead for events, conducting more documentary work, and growing financially and in terms of recognition.

SFA Today (2009-2013)

"Our mission is to document, study, and celebrate the diverse food cultures of the changing American South" – 2009

In 2009, the SFA added "study" and "changing" to its mission statement. Then in 2011, it merged its vision statement into the mission statement and added a longer values statement. The idea of the "changing American South" is reflected in the organization's work around shifting demographics and interests in the U.S. South and food culture, including the impact of contemporary Latino, Asian, and African immigrants and a rising emphasis on ethical and environmental food production practices. The organization has always been interested in a broad evolution of southern foodways; however, the attention to contemporary and emerging food practices signals that the SFA is interested in a

forward-looking agenda as much as it is interested in the past.

In addition, adding "study" to the statement reveals the organization's investments in scholarly practices and attitudes, some of which I discussed earlier with its connection to the CSSC and to its educational missions. The SFA has been investing in its scholarly programs—developing courses, funding a post-doc and professorship, investing in and promoting graduate student scholarship, holding workshops for students from a variety of colleges and university, hosting lectures and, in 2013, an academic conference, and publishing an edited academic collection on southern food studies.

However, the verb "study" is not strictly about academics. It also expresses a commitment to thoughtful and invested approaches to food and food culture and a sometimes-critical stance toward their subject matter. A love of learning is a central part of the SFA's identity. Time and again, members told me they came to the SFA for education and to "geek out." The SFA quotes, time and again, on its website and in promotional material a statement from journalist Colby Kummer, originally published in the *Atlantic*, saying that the SFA is "this country's most intellectually engaged (and probably most engaging) food society."[63] Practicing and showcasing thoughtful, in-depth research from scholars, journalists, and lay people and seeing food production as an intellectual as well as physical labor is a central tenant of the SFA.

The Vision Statement, developed in 2011, is a clear delineation of how the group envisions itself now and for the future. The Vision Statement is long (over a thousand words) compared to the mission statement and is divided into nine main claims. The first three claims correspond with the verbs in the organization's mission statement. The final

[63] Colby Kummer, "Sweet Home Louisiana," *Atlantic Magazine*, October 2005. See "SFA Mission," http://southernfoodways.org/about/mission.html for one example of the SFA's use of this quote.

six frame the ethos of the organization and some of its major operating considerations.

The first claim is: "We give voice." The following that follows explains the philosophy behind the SFA's documentary work: choosing "the unsung" as subjects, sharing stories through recordings and events, and investing in/encouraging investment in subjects. (I discuss this more in chapters two and three.) The SFA goes on to say, "We tell honest and sometimes difficult stories about our region," and then interprets this claim, saying, "We embrace Southern history, the realities of the Southern present, and the opportunities for Southern futures. In other words, we don't flinch from talking about race, class, religion, gender, and all the other biggies."

This statement makes several interesting rhetorical moves. In some ways, the explanation backpedals on its assertion. To "embrace Southern history" could be interpreted as expected heritage rhetoric; however, it could also be read as bringing practices of historical interpretation to bear on concepts of "southern." Instead of boosterism, this phrase may suggest an "honest and sometimes difficult" approach to a history, which the SFA later says is "complicated and peculiar" (a phrase which itself elides assessment and details, but does acknowledge problems). The promise to embrace "the realities of the Southern present" seems more critical and is a significant claim given the histories of southern fantasy that food culture is often wrapped up in.[64] The claim to see and embrace "opportunities for Southern futures" is optimistic; however, the next line is even more interesting. "In other words" is a bit misleading and makes parallel two approaches that may or may not be aligned. To say, "we don't flinch" positions "talking about race, class, religion, gender" as punches. In this structure, race, class, religion, and

[64] Anthony J. Stanonis, ed. *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways, and Consumer Culture in the American South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

gender are not subjects to broach; yet, the organization will broach them. Then, there is a turn of phrase that, if one goes with the metaphor of flinching, seems to pull the punch—"all the other biggies." Framing these contemporary problems as a laundry list and diminutizing "biggies" suggests that the subjects are not actually that significant. The ways that this claim pushes and pulls against a critical position demonstrates how the organization finds itself shadowboxing as it attempts to understand how its many audiences will receive its work and how it can effectively structure its voice.

Next, the SFA affirms that it is an academic institution, which directly correlates to the idea of studying. The statement says, "academic rigor underscores our work." The explanations for this claim are about its work with the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and its commitment to producing work of public consumption. This is reflected in practices of making texts, audio, and video available online open-access and in archives at the university library, as the SFA asserts in its statement and I discuss in the following chapters. Surprisingly, the statement of values does not address a general investment in education or principles of knowledge production, which undergird the next element of the statement.

This third claim gets at the heart of my questions about the organization: "we deliver pleasures that are substantive and contextual." This claim points to the commitment to pairing experiences (particularly culinary ones) with context and the SFA's desire to host many, "sometimes conflicting" positions. I discuss these propositions and their implications and outcomes in chapter four.

The fourth claim is that the organization is collaborative, that it works with other organizations, promotes and embraces diversity, is geographically inclusive, and "trust[s]

the locals." The SFA's collaboration works in three ways: inter-institutional collaboration, collaboration between people within the organization, and collaboration between the SFA and its subjects. Discussing participant and geographic diversity under "collaboration" indicates that the organization thinks of inclusion and diversity as active rather than passive traits. Instead of seeing its work as a collection of materials, it aspires for a range of voices. This is one of the issues that I discuss later: how the SFA understands its work as a relationship between subjects and audiences.

The fifth claim made by the Vision Statement is that the organization will "provide a rewarding experience." The first two points under this claim are expected: it supports and encourages its workers and membership. The last is more interesting: "We curate a joyful community. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement ideal of the 'Beloved Community,' we foster a South where all are welcome and all are valued." What is interesting here is not that it promotes a joyful experience or that it looks to the civil rights movement as a template, but that the SFA purposefully ties "rewarding" to both pleasure and to ethical right. This intersection is another key issue in my discussions in chapter four about the relationship between pleasure and cultural study in SFA events, as I examine different kinds of "good" in the SFA.

This consideration leads into the next claim, which is: "we work toward the greater good." The SFA interprets this as volunteering, leveraging their strengths to support others, respecting the environment, and believing the "pastured pork and local collard should not be the province of wealthy patrons and gourmet fetishists." This last claim—that it "believes" in affordable clean, fair food is the only claim in their value statement that does not easily (or clearly to me) translate into their practices.

Values seven and eight directly attend to the organization's governance practices—the staff and board are "good financial stewards" and "operate on the up and up." While these principles may seem like standard claims, the nuances of its explanations are significant in understanding the organization's relationship to contemporary food cultural, academia, and non-profits. The SFA believes in paying non-profit employees comparable wages to for-profit enterprises and "runs [its] organization with entrepreneurial zeal." Its practices reflect beliefs in entrepreneurial businesses as forces for good. While it is a non-profit, the staff and board bring a strong respect for business sense to the organization's work and the work of its subjects. The SFA also believes in paying people for what they do—this ranges from the workers the organization hires to the people it highlights. At the same time, the group is adamant that its attentions are not for sale but, rather, are egalitarian and collaborative.

The final entry in their list of values may be more significant than it seems. It proclaims: "we are offbeat." After saying it does not do things as other organizations may do them, the entry lists three characteristics that centralize its attitude: a belief in not taking one's self too seriously, being irreverent, and valuing funk, with nods to the moniker of the "Banana Pudding Republic," a bacon-tree the staff crafted, and staying in a haunted jailhouse. This sense of play is a central concept that I explore because it is closely related to one of the avenues food opens up, which is a sense of welcome and the promise of a lightness that allows people to enter into difficult conversations. One of my central questions is how the group negotiates this invitation to participate in a sense of play and wonder and the "complicated and peculiar history" it "acknowledge[s]," "thoughtfully and oftentimes critically," as the final lines of the values statement claim.

Conclusion

The SFA's values, presented in its mission, vision, and values statements, frame how the organization does its work. These statements set up the organization's aims, and by doing so, establish some of the key criteria I examine as I explore its media practices in the next four chapters. The principles and tensions that are most significant to SFA productions involve preservation, celebration, and critical examination; economic development and honest, difficult conversation; and a commitment to diversity.

The principle of preservation raises questions about what and whose history is being created, kept, and shared. The combination of celebration and critical examination raises questions about how to balance thought-provoking work and pleasure and also how to honor subjects while attempting to draw out imperfect and even unpleasant realities. These issues are especially complicated in the context of defining "southern" and attempting to promote reconciliation in and through the U.S. South.

The question of economic development and honest conversation is a different kind of intersection. Despite my early expectation that these simultaneous goals would produce mostly tension, I found that they actually generated both avenues for social exchange and difficulties, as I discuss in the next chapters. The fact that the SFA deals with two types of values—social and economic—and understands them to be interlocking is a vital component of its philosophy that leads to questions about the relationship between livelihoods and lives in documentary work, the presentation of subjects, and the development of networks.

The question of diversity is perhaps the central question of the SFA. It is at the heart of its project to expand understanding of southern food and culture and to create

relationships between people who are from different backgrounds, based on the idea that this kind of open engagement fosters greater understanding, equality, acceptance, and richness in life experience. The question is never if diversity is good, but how to interpret that calling and how to facilitate that experience in ways that are productive and honest for all parties. This raises questions about who its members, subjects, and workers are, about how to involve more voices, and, of equal importance, how to give those voices space for their own narratives, which may or may not fall into recognized patterns of experience. It also has to deal with how to facilitate not only speech, but listening—how to engage audiences with people they do not know and with ideas that may press against their own experience. In the next four chapters, I examine how these principles and tensions in the organization's mission and activities manifest in SFA productions.

Chapter 2

"We Give Voice": Intention and Connection in SFA Oral History

> Is it mediated? Yes. Is it exactly what they meant to say? I don't know. Is it necessarily going to be changed because it has gone through my head? Yes. Is my thinking about these stories different than what it was when I did them? Yes. Does it mean that it is manipulated in my head? Yes. All that shit. We don't have to go back through three decades of post-modern theory. Still I feel like… There is this phrase I keep coming back to: I eat food because I love food. And I cook food because I love food. But I write about food because I love people. And this is a really important distinction for me. 'Calling' is not the right word, but what really inspires me is people's stories and trying to relay them to the world.[65]

This statement from food writer and SFA oral historian Francis Lam is a complex expression of the lived experience of retelling people's stories. On the one hand, Lam completely agrees to accept the fundamental flaws and uncertainties of language and interactions as posited by "three decades of post-modern theory"; on the other, he "still feel[s]." In this conversation, Lam moves directly from an intellectual gloss about how oral histories malfunction to an affective argument, which centralizes both his experience and his subjects'. His work, he says, is not about food, but about making and fostering connections between people. He believes that despite its slippages, oral history is valuable and disseminates important knowledge about human experience. In this chapter, I try to reconcile the intentions and actual practices of oral history as a way of learning "people's stories and trying to relay them to the world."[66]

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[65] Francis Lam, interview by author, New York, New York, June 8, 2011.
[66] Lam, interview.

Building from the SFA's goals as a cultural institution, which I discussed in chapter one, I now investigate how the organization attempts to define culture through collecting and telling stories. The SFA documents the lives and practices of people who produce food in or of the U.S. South—"fried chicken cooks, barbecue pitmasters, bartenders, ham curers, and row crop farmers."[67] Their subjects come from across the southeastern United States as well as places like Chicago and California. As of 2012, the SFA had conducted over 500 interviews, produced over forty oral history projects, and made over thirty films.

In chapter one, I discussed the meaning of "document" in the SFA's mission statement. The organization uses this term on its website, in its values statement, and in its discourse. In the introduction to documentary production on its website, the SFA says it aims to "preserve" southern food cultures and also to "connect" audiences to people who work with food in the U.S. South: "we collect stories and present portraits." The use of the words "stories" and "portraits" suggests that the SFA's work is focused on understanding and representing individuals. Its aims are specific—to encourage cultural tourism and create primary source collections—and more abstract—to facilitate "experiential learning" and "give back."[68] The specific and the conceptual fit together in the SFA's goals, providing concrete actions for the ideals of its mission. However, the simultaneous aims of creating collections, promoting tourism, fostering relationships, and teaching about culture and history in the U.S. South sometimes produce tension.

Several practices constitute the SFA's efforts to "document" southern foodways. The organization aggregates research (scholarly, journalistic, culinary) about food practices in

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[67] SFA Home Page, http://southernfoodways.org/index.html, accessed April 8, 2012.
[68] Southern Foodways Alliance, "Introduction: SFA Documentary Projects," http://southernfoodways.org/documentary/index.html, accessed June 25, 2013. Organization documents, from meeting minutes to full-color brochures, echo these claims.

and of the U.S. South, which it presents in events, through programmed speakers, and in SFA-produced books, blogs, magazines, and bibliographies.[69]Through events, bibliographies, and texts, the organization also keeps a record of emerging work on contemporary southern foodways. Much of the work in SFA publications and events is collected and edited rather than commissioned. The SFA curates these works for the public and its membership. However, its main documentary efforts are producing oral histories and film records of food practices.

I begin my study with oral histories because of the organization's ongoing commitment to the form and because oral histories are a common practice for cultural preservation and education. Drawing on interviews, observation, and SFA media, this chapter examines what it means to use oral history to represent culture. It asks how the SFA defines and structures oral histories and, in turn, how these oral histories function to define identities and shape practices.

Scholarly Background

The SFA's oral history program is committed to collecting and presenting individual stories from subjects. In order to understand this commitment, I position the SFA's oral history activities within discussions about the work stories do, the purposes and philosophies behind oral history, and the practices and methods of doing oral history. Oral history includes a range of practices and disciplines; this chapter examines the use of recorded interviews to collect personal and collective stories, which are then presented to the public. In particular, I am interested in democratization and diversity in how the SFA uses oral histories as documentary practice.

[69] The SFA draws on people writing or speaking about themselves, people writing or speaking about subjects they have interviewed or interacted with, and people writing about traditions accessible only through archival materials. The tone ranges from academic to colloquial to journalistic.

People have long used interviews to create and present records of others' experiences in order to preserve and study culture. Beginning with folklore practices, particularly around the WPA Writers' Project in the U.S., the concept of collecting the stories of everyday people in order to create a democratic record gained currency.[70]The scholarly field of oral history grew in the mid-twentieth century out of a desire to democratize access to history and to expand who was considered an acceptable subject and authority on historical experience.[71] Oral history invited people in the academy into discourse with people outside of it, promising to add voices to the record and provide new perspectives on events and ideas. Part of oral history's promise has been to record the things that matter to everyday people, stories that move away from top-down historical narratives.[72] Oral history allowed subjects to discuss topics that would previously have been considered private or not appropriate for scholarly or public attention.[73] Oral historians saw the public as not only an audience, but also as a source for knowledge, expanding what counts as evidence and as authority.[74] It promised to add voices to the record and provide texture to understandings of events and ideas.

Oral history, today, is used in a variety of ways by different groups—scholars conduct and rely on oral histories for research, while cultural institutions rely on them document and preserve practices and valued perspectives and to add texture to exhibits

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[70] Ann Banks, "Introduction," *First Person America* (New York: Norton, 1991).
[71] Alistair Thompson, "Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 34, no. 1 (2007): 49-70.
[72] See Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, rev. 2nd ed. (New York: The Greenwood Publishing Group, 1991); Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd eds. (New York: Routledge, 2006) ; Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991); Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
[73] Hilda Kean, "People, Historians, and Public History: Demystifying the Process of History Making," *The Public Historian* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 33; Jill Liddington, "What Is Public History? Publics and Their Pasts, Meanings and Practices," Special issue, *Women's Narratives of Resistance*, *Oral History* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 83- 93.
[74] Kean, 33.

and presentations.[75] Because of the SFA's approach to oral history, I want to focus on what historian Lynn Abrams calls the "reminiscence and community model," which means that, once collected, stories are processed for public consumption as opposed to analyzed as evidence for research.[76] Oral histories produced by cultural institutions in this way have two main purposes—to create a record and to promote audience engagement with the practices, ideas, and identities they showcase. By leaving this collection for posterity, oral historians shape what researchers may find and, in that way, make history as well as preserve it.[77] Further, the form often fosters intimacy between the audience and subject.[78] As these records are edited for audiences, they are often "explicitly seeking an empathetic response … and encouraging interactivity."[79] Because of its narrative structure and reliance on emotional weight and personal exchange, organizers often see oral history as a way to "grab the attention and maintain the interest" of the audience.[80] This use is underpinned by the idea that the details of oral history can influence how people interpret larger cultural concepts or events and that adding diverse voices to the record changes what is remembered and understood, creating a more democratic engagement.

However, these methods have limits. A more democratic engagement is not always less hegemonic. As Patricia Ewick and Susan Sibley note in their essay

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[75] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1995): 48-50.
[76] Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 15.
[77] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).
[78] Tammy S. Gordon, *Private History in Public: Exhibition and the Setting of Everyday Life* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2010), 37.
[79] Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, "Making Histories: Introduction," in *The Oral History Reader*, 337.
[80] Marjorie Shostak, "'What the Wind Won't Take Away': The Genesis of *Nisa – The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*," in *The Oral History Reader*, 388.

"Subversive Stories and Hegemonic Tales: Toward a Sociology of Narrative," while stories can reveal truths and unsettle power, they can also reinforce oppressive power structures. This happens, in part, because of the very social nature of story construction—stories rely on tropes and structures of audience expectation. While this does not preclude creating transcendent or disruptive stories, it does mean that the conditions of storytelling change the nature of the story told and can reproduce power inequalities.[81]

Furthermore, the power dynamics in some kinds of oral histories manifest tendencies to gloss or glow. When people create oral histories of businesses, scholars warn about subjects' candor and willingness to speak about aspects that are anti-promotional.[82] In the same vein, when people conduct oral histories where both parties are in a community or organization together, scholars warn about oral historians' unwillingness to ask questions that might make subjects uncomfortable or show them in a less than favorable light.[83] This problem, which oral historian Linda Shopes identifies as a "celebratory impulse," is compounded in settings where the oral histories are used to promote economic development within communities.[84] As oral histories move from recordings to public presentations, they engage in a range of practices that prepare the work to speak to specific audiences and advance particular goals. What was originally a dialog between the interviewer and subject often turns into a one-sided claim: an oral historian writes a biography, or an organizer presents an excerpt. This may "falsify the

[81] Patricia Ewick and Susan Sibley, "Subversive Stories and Hegemonic Tales: Toward a Sociology of Narrative," *Law and Society Review* 29, no. 2 (1995): 197-226.
[82] Carl Ryant, "Oral History and Business History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 2 (September 1988): 560-566.
[83] Linda Shopes, "Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2, (September 2002): 588-598.
[84] Shopes, 591.

nature of both memory and the oral history interview."[85] The promises and possible problems of oral history, then, lie in three key aspects of their production: as the product of an interview, as the product of individual testimony, and as a processed public narrative.

Interviews involve a collective engagement and production. The interview is not a simple exchange of words. It is embedded in complex power dynamics that involve perceptions of self over time, intersubjectivity between the oral historian and the subject, and the conventions of social discourse. Formulating experience and knowledge in response to questions, and often in narrative form, is subject to social cues that signal what stories are acceptable to tell, how a story should be structured, and how people—the two specific people in the interview, who may have a range of relationships—should interact.[86] In addition, listening skills shape the experience and production of the interview as much as speaking.[87] Differences and affinities in personal experience and ideology can shape not only what the subject will say, but also what and how the oral historian speaks and acts.[88] The oral historian's speech and actions, then, shape the outcomes of the interview as much as the subject's, though the latter is often represented as the person telling the story. Finally, oral history, like other forms of testimony, can empower speakers as well as audiences. At the same time, however, talking is not the ideal form for all subjects, and some subjects may not want to speak to certain oral historians or audiences.

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[85] Charles Hardy III, "Authoring in Sound: Aural History, Radio and the Digital Revolution," in *The Oral History Reader*, 399.
[86] Abrams, 48, 50, 61, 109.
[87] Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," in *The Oral History Reader*, 132.
[88] Valerie Vow, "Do I like them Too Much?: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice Versa,"), 55-67.

Oral history draws on knowledge that subjects gather from their lives—this includes stories about their experiences, things they have learned, and their interpretations. This knowledge is usually expressed as narrative.[89] According to oral history scholar Alessando Portelli, this means that oral histories "tell us less about *events* than about their *meaning*."[90] At the same time, as with other biographical constructions, there is an expectation that one will learn something reliable about how things are and/or about what happened in the past. While audiences often understand that autobiographical and biographical narratives are about "subjective 'truth' rather than 'fact,'" they still expect a level of verifiability.[91] The subject of an oral history has a stake in the audience accepting his or her interpretation of events; however, he or she (as well as the oral historian) must also be mindful of the evidence (or other memories or histories) that audiences carry with them.

Oral history does not end at recording. To be presented to the public, oral histories go through a process of interpretation. The interpretive apparatuses that are applied to recorded stories range from transcription to audio editing to narratives written by oral historians. While scholars have debated how acts of transcription affect oral history, a secondary set of debates has proliferated as changes in technology have led to a much wider range of forms in which to present these materials. All processing, even just organizing a collection of audio recordings and making them available, changes the context and influences the meaning of oral history materials.[92] The people processing oral

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[89] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader*, 35.
[90] Portelli, 36.
[91] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 30; Phillip Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989), 22.
[92] Ellen D. Swain, "Oral History in the Archives: Its Documentary Role in the Twenty First Century," *Oral History Reader*, 349.

histories have to keep in mind audience and subject expectations and desires, as well as their own. In final productions, these desires sometimes conflict—oral historians interpret claims differently from subjects; audiences expect continuity that the oral historian may or may not impose; and/or oral historians and audiences understand subject's stories against their own backgrounds.[93] Processing oral histories for audiences can highlight the texture of and surprises that arise from focusing on individual experience; at the same time, however, this processing can shape oral history stories so that they become part of expected narratives.

Overall, the practice of oral history desires and aspires to more diverse and democratic forms of knowledge production; however, those who make and use oral histories must also recognize the complications inherent in relying on storytelling to produce this more diverse knowledge. In this chapter, I examine how tensions between the promises and problems of oral history are manifested in its practice by the SFA. In particular, I ask: How does the production of oral history create moments of connection and exchange that promote diverse and democratic knowledge production? Where in the process are the hopes or expectations of openness, variety, texture, and connection thwarted? I examine how particular moments in the SFA's process of doing oral history—from the selection of oral historians and oral history subjects to the public presentation of oral history stories in magazines, on websites, and at events—shape audiences' understandings of and connections to the food cultures, local experiences, and individual and social knowledges that these oral histories claims to represent.

Doing Oral History in the SFA

[93] Shostak, 388-389; Katherine Borland, "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretative Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," 311.

The SFA has engaged in oral history efforts since 2002, when then-students Amy Evans, Joe York, and April Grayson, funded by a grant from the National Pork Board, recorded interviews, took photographs, and wrote short observational essays at twenty-eight barbecue restaurants in Memphis and western Tennessee. This original project set the stage for the SFA's future oral history work, which has focused on specific regions (like western Tennessee, the Delta, New Orleans) and specific food practices (barbecue, tamales, shrimping). Further, these projects have continued to focus on people who produce food for a living, as opposed to home cooks.

Although there has been continuity in the subjects of the SFA's oral history projects, its practices have shifted over time. While the first project used black-and-white photography (fig. 2.1), mainly of places, the organization has overwhelmingly chosen color photography and images of people (fig. 2.2). This choice reflects the organization's commitment to the contemporary and evolving nature of southern foodways, visually arguing for vivid rather than nostalgic depictions of food producers.

Figure 2.1 Little Pigs Bar-B-Q, photograph by Amy Evans, 2002.

Figure 2.2 Hallie Streater at Greenwood Farmers' Market, photograph by Amy Evans, 2011.

In addition to changing documentary styles, the funding structure of these projects has shifted. Initially, oral history projects were largely sponsored. While not all of the sponsors requested specific projects, the organization chose to take on projects that reflected the interests of donors. For example, with funds from Jim and Nick's Barbecue, the SFA started the Barbecue Trail. As the organization's general funding has increased, however, it has chosen projects with less attention to donor interests, resulting in oral histories on less well-known foods like snowballs and jackame (a New Orleans pasta dish), for example. Beginning in the spring of 2005 in New Orleans, the SFA also started linking field trips to oral history projects, which have now ranged from Buford Highway restaurateurs in Atlanta to Louisville bartenders. Finally, as the organization's oral history program has developed, it has also hired more oral historians and held oral history training programs.

SFA oral historians choose subjects; conduct interviews, process them, and present the results on SFA websites; create texts from those interviews; and present on and sometimes introduce oral history subjects at SFA events. In each of these stages, social and material structures as well as a range of participants' decisions and actions

influence the construction of the SFA's oral history collection and, in turn, how the organization constructs its representation of southern food and southern culture. In this chapter, I focus on just one of the SFA's many projects: the Southern Boudin Trail. While the example of the Southern Boudin Trail demonstrates many of the forms of oral histories that the SFA produces and key issues that the group faces, because of the range of the SFA's work, the Southern Boudin Trail is not necessarily representative. Therefore, as I discuss the organization's philosophies and interpretations of its practices, I will bring in examples from other projects that provide significant insights or contrasts when appropriate.

Boudin is a south Louisiana sausage made with pork and rice. From 2006 to 2009, the SFA interviewed and photographed forty-one people who made and sold boudin, produced ingredients for boudin, or maintained boudin culture. These materials set the stage for a website, a traveling exhibit, and a field trip. They were also used to produce writing for two SFA publications, *Gravy* and *Cornbread Nation*. Different stages in this project show how the intentions of the oral historians and subjects shape the stories that are told. At the same time, the Southern Boudin Trail illustrates the power of different mediums to shape narratives.

Choosing Subjects

The SFA develops oral history projects that reflect unique or historic local food practices or people whose lives or businesses include stories or contexts that illuminate significant social developments in the South.[94] Sometimes, donors work with the SFA to

[94] Because of the SFA's themed programming schedule, their documentary projects reflect the annual theme. In 2012, the theme was the "Cultivated South," and the group conducted a series of farmers' market

develop and fund projects. The Boudin Project (along with the Gumbo Trail) was sponsored by Tabasco, in the wake of Katrina, with the hope of promoting tourism in south Louisiana.

Staff oral historian Amy Evans and contract oral historian Sara Roahen conducted the bulk of the oral histories for the Boudin Trail.[95] SFA oral historians have three methods of finding subjects. They find them in researching for the project or know of them before the project begins; they find them on location; or they find them through word-of-mouth from other subjects. Evans and Roahen began with a few names of people to interview; however, they also drove around and talked to people, making further connections in south Louisiana. Evans found sausage-maker John Saucier by following a series of hand-painted signs. This "on the ground" method of finding subjects often produces a wider range of participants because it draws on the knowledge of local people and the experience of localized discovery. By talking with locals, oral historians learn about people who may not be part of written records or who may not have as public a presence.

"On the ground" methods of identifying subjects rely on being in a place. As I discuss further in chapter four, the SFA strongly supports the power and significance of localized and experiential knowledge. By moving through places and looking to discover people, SFA oral historians expand the record by chance, though the subject must have a public presence. For these methods to work, oral historians must feel like they can drive up, walk in, and start a conversation with locals. On the one hand, this approach requires

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oral histories. Event locations also drive their oral histories. For example, the Louisville Barroom Culture project coincided with a 2008 field trip to Louisville, Kentucky.

[95] Assistant director Mary Beth Lasseter conducted a few interviews that Evans and Roahen were not available to do. In general, the SFA has a staff oral historian as well as contract oral historians, who are usually journalists or students.

and reflects a spirit of engagement and openness on the part or researchers; on the other, in order to begin working in this way, oral historians must first have some amount of confidence that they will be allowed in.

This requirement can introduce two types of tension into the record. First, oral historians may choose places based on how welcome they feel (though the personal and structural experiences of the subject and the oral historian will influence practices of greeting and hospitality). Because researcher-subject interactions and attitudes are based on a range of experiences and are structurally inflected by race and class, the practice of identifying subjects while on location may constrain who makes a "good" SFA oral historian (who can and is willing to go places) and also what kinds of places researchers choose to visit (how spaces are presented and understood as open or closed).[96] Second, subjects must allow oral historians into their spaces. Clearly, this is the first step in a personal exchange, which is based in trust; however, this expectation of openness may, again, complicate and constrain who is willing to be a part of the oral history process.[97]

When the Boudin Trail project began, Roahen was interested in interviewing people who held a range of perspectives on boudin culture—folktales collectors, librarians, people who remembered local boucherie gatherings, and now defunct processors; however, the staff asked her to hold off on those interviews in favor of

[96] Given that I don't know the possibilities for any given project, it is hard for me to assess how this functions. The record seems to be diverse in terms of race and class, and none of the oral historians mentioned any forms of assessment—they went to strip mall places and followed hand-painted signs. However, oral historians' choices to enter places are structured by ideas of race and class, as well as by markers of "authenticity." In Appendix A, I discuss how race, in particular, has functioned in the SFA's oral history work.

[97] Some potential subjects have turned down interviews, which oral historians attribute to fears of or antipathy toward outsider involvement, among other reasons.

interviewing people who were currently operating businesses.[98] The SFA's reasoning here was that it was better to focus on places that people could visit. Despite the SFA's desires to collect stories as cultural history, cultural tourism was central to how the organization understood the use of these interviews.[99]

What is more, the people interviewed were overwhelmingly white men, despite the fact that many of these men credit women in their lives with teaching them sausage-making. If the story collection processes were only about creating an archive, about saving stories of boudin, then the oral historians would also have interviewed other participants (like more women and perhaps also generally older people). However, the project is also meant to support these practices through promoting local businesses. As can be seen in the case of boudin, these two different goals—tourism and cultural knowledge production—sometimes conflict.

Though the SFA strives for diverse representation in terms of the food practices and the demographics of the people it interviews, it chooses subjects almost entirely from the workforce involved in the food practice the project covers. For the boudin project, the oral historians talked mainly to professional boudin makers and to rice and hog farmers and processors. What this demonstrates is that the project topic can narrow the range of people who get interviewed, as some practices and jobs are gendered and raced. The SFA's choice of subjects frames much of what ends up being collected in oral

[98] She did not end up conducting many of those non-business interviews; however, the Southern Boudin Trail is abnormal compared to other SFA projects because it does include five non-industry interviews—with a home cook, a journalist, a folklorist, a librarian, and a leader of a cultural organization.
[99] Historical and cultural stories still emerged in the interviews; however, it was culture and history framed by people who make a living from boudin.

histories.[100] Pressures of time, breadth, and use affect whose voices the SFA preserves and favor people who are currently working in food industries, which, in turn, shapes the stories and cultural constructions the SFA distributes. This fact becomes particularly clear as one explores what happens when the story collection begins.

During the collection of oral histories, the SFA oral historians and subjects have in-person, recorded conversations that usually last between thirty minutes and two hours. The oral historian generally conducts the interview at the subjects' place of work, and, many times, the interview includes interruptions by customers or other work duties. In addition to the recorded interview, the oral historians often tour the establishment, taking photos and sometimes hearing stories that do not get recorded (though they do take

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[100] The Biloxi Ethnic Shrimping Community project demonstrates some other implications of these practices. In particular, it shows how focusing on a specific industry can constrain who is represented in the record. In 2008, oral historian Francis Lam was commissioned to collect oral histories from people who worked with the shrimping industry in Biloxi, Mississippi. Now a food writer, Lam has been a community organizer, working primarily with African Americans in Biloxi after Katrina in 2005 and 2006. He returned to Biloxi for the 2008 oral history project, using referrals and cold calls to people from ethnic groups important to the story of the Biloxi shrimping industry (mainly Vietnamese, Croatian, and French). He interviewed ten people from different parts of the industry, including shrimpers and processors who were currently working and also retired. Afterward, Lam said that the project was subject to conflicting representations of the seafood industry. For example, none of the interviews are with African Americans. He explained:

> I heard a lot of conflicting stories about the role of African Americans in the fishing and shrimping industry. Most people have said to me that they weren't really a huge part of that industry, but when I was doing the post-Katrina work, the organization I was working with was primarily black. Almost all my contacts were black folks. Some of them said that African Americans were laborers, and it was a big part of the workforce. There was no black ownership as far as I understand, but they were part of the labor force. So I don't know the facts here. Then I talked to people who said, 'they weren't really there. We were neighbors, but we didn't work together.' I didn't have a sense of the reality and didn't know how to find that through oral history. Working with a sample size of ten people, I didn't know how to really reflect reality.

Lam's experience here demonstrates how trying to construct a narrative through a set of interviews can lead to an uneven record, especially when the oral historian is not a subject expert (which is almost always the case with SFA oral histories). Lam's interviews include a great deal of information about the different ethnic groups in Biloxi's past and present seafood industry; however, Lam recognized that his collection of conversations might have significant gaps. Because oral history subjects speak primarily from their experiential knowledge base, their jobs have not included knowing the history of working conditions and arrangements in the entire industry. Instead, the oral history conversation aims to illuminate and find out about those conditions and arrangements in an individualized and textured way. Also, the SFA's projects are constrained by time and by volume because of organizational structures (money and labor) and because of audience expectations.

notes).[101] The conversations are open-ended, but the oral historian guides them with questions.

While the oral historians ask similar questions about their subjects' recipes, lives, and businesses and about histories, definitions, and memories of boudin, their conversational styles emerge in the record as distinctive as their subjects'. Evans, for example, asks longer questions and often records longer answers, encouraging people to speak freely and expand on stories. Roahen is a fan of follow-up questions and interjections, creating transcripts that read as active conversations. SFA association director Mary Beth Lasseter, who conducted a few interviews for the project, seems the most scripted, making the transcripts of her interviews feel linear and almost written. There is a distinct tempo to the conversations that each interviewer has with her subjects, which is shaped by the particularities of both parties involved.

In addition to differences in style and organization, the content of these interviews ranges widely. Boudin-maker John Saucier discusses historical experiences of farming and boucherie, while Bubba Frey includes discussions of cultural history and contemporary and historical boudin businesses along with his own narrative about moving from farmer to grocer to sausage maker. This is not uncommon as the interviews of each oral historian move between descriptions of processes, personal stories, and information about businesses, products, practices, and everyday life.

[101] In addition to the recorded interview, SFA oral historians also photograph their subjects. These photographs usually include portraits, photographs of the location where the interview takes place, photographs of food, and often photos of the production process—rolling tamales, shucking oysters, shoveling coals, etc. These images provide illustration for the information provided in conversation, depicting the place, practice, and person under consideration. At the same time, the photographs are taken for future use and aim to be aesthetically pleasing. The portraits, in particular, try to capture and represent people in ways that are beautiful. Pictures showing subjects involved in the practices of their trades both capture the physical presence of people and, often, aestheticize it.

The range of what constitutes an acceptable story is, from the perspective of the SFA oral historian, almost boundless.[102] Still, the SFA's oral historians typically have topics they would like the subjects to talk about. These are often about the founding of their businesses, how their subjects make particular products (a blood sausage, a sauce, a pie), and how they learned to make said product. Oral historians usually ask about subjects' current practices and the pressures of the industry (though it is not often phrased this way—they might ask about challenges, about sourcing, about regulation).[103] The respondents, in turn, are usually candid about what they do and the challenges of their work.

The SFA's oral historians also ask about the histories of the particular practices they are tasked with documenting; their subjects answer those questions by telling personal stories and sharing cultural knowledge and family or local histories.[104] The oral historian concentrates on the experiences of these individual purveyors but also understands them as providing information about more general cultural practices. As with many SFA projects, the goal of the boudin oral histories was to get a detailed portrait of the history, technique, and culture of a particular food. This means understanding how people talk about boudin's origins, the details of making it, local variations and preferences, changes over time, and the meanings that are attached to the world from which the place-based food emerges.

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[102] For example, in Evans interview with Martin Sawyer, they talk about a cruise he went on with his family for vacation.

[103] For the Southern Boudin Trail, these discussions were about red boudin, a blood sausage that is highly regulated, and about choosing whether to use traditional ingredients like offal and other odd cuts based on consumer taste and availability.

[104] Roahen provided insight on this in discussing one of her boudin interviews, which she thought had not gone well. The subject, Ted Legnon, had not really opened up; however, when she started putting the oral histories together on the website, she realized he filled out aspects of the story, particularly technical points about boudin making that others had not gotten into and also gave a unique history of the local salt mines.

Processing and Producing

After recording interviews, the SFA's oral historians send them to a transcription service and then edit the transcriptions for accuracy before submitting them, the recording, and all of the photographs to the archive.[105] The oral historian or a staff member then processes the materials for publication. Each oral historian edits the same source materials—an audio recorded interview and photography—in different ways for different audience experiences. The SFA then presents its completed oral histories in three ways: online, in derivative print works, and at events. Each of these formats influences how SFA oral histories about food shape culture and food practices. In what follows, I examine SFA websites, which include the most original content (through transcripts and audio) and have the widest audience, and essays, in which oral historians have edited and interpreted interviews. Finally, I end with live SFA events, which invite subjects to speak again under different conditions.

The interviews from the boudin project, like every oral history interview the SFA conducts, are online and open access.[106] The oral histories are organized by project—Florida's Forgotten Coast, Atlanta's Buford Highway, Woodson Ridge Farms—and by state or are navigable through an embedded map program. The boudin project is part of a set of "Trail" sites (the Southern Gumbo Trail, the Southern Barbecue Trail, the Mississippi Delta Tamale Trail, the Southern Boudin Trail) that are separate websites,

[105] The transcription service is based in Maryland, and Evans discussed how, especially with boudin transcripts, the transcripts would come back with errors based on subjects' accents and the transcriber's lack of local southern Louisiana knowledge. The archive includes both a hard drive that the SFA keeps and materials at the University of Mississippi Special Collections.

[106] One interview is archived only at the library because the subject did not want it online. The SFA also makes oral history materials available through their free mobile application, SFA Stories, which delivers oral histories through a geographical interface. In 2012, the website and the mobile app won IACP awards for food media. According to Google analytics, the SFA's website, which logs a few hundred users a day, has the overwhelming majority of its traffic on the oral history pages.

connected to the organization's main site. The more in-depth Trails have introductory essays, recipes, and interviews from a wider range of places and are explicitly aimed at culinary tourism.

By using the term "Trail," the SFA suggests that users might travel. It could call the sites "projects," "histories," or "archives." Instead, it chose a common tourism trade word. In describing the trails, the SFA says it "believes that our oral history and film work spurs cultural and culinary tourists to hit the road. Such travel catalyzes economic development in the communities we document." The Tamale Trail, which focuses on the Mississippi Delta, has been written up in a variety of online and print outlets. For example, Mississippi's Creative Economy, a partnership between the Mississippi Development Authority and the Mississippi Arts Commission, wrote on its website, "the trail, which is featured on SFA's website, gives the history and locations of existing and former tamale joints in hopes of luring tourists by the history—and the taste—of a sometimes forgotten indulgence that is still made fresh daily in locations throughout the region."[107] In addition, the Mississippi Delta Tourism Association and others have highlighted the tour as a significant economic driver of travel to the area.[108]

The introductory page for the Boudin Trail focuses on the experience of eating boudin. It begins with a quote from famed food writer Calvin Trillin about the small geographical boundaries of boudin (98% eaten in Louisiana, he says). Below this quote, history professor and boudin expert Bob Carriker defines and traces the history of boudin in a brief essay. With a tongue-in-cheek turn of phrase and a folksy tenor, Carriker's

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[107] Mississippi's Creative Economy, "Tamale Trail," http://mscreativeeconomy.com/tamale.php, accessed March 22, 2012.
[108] Mississippi Delta Tourism Association, "The Mississippi Tamale Trail," http://www.visitthedelta.com/vp/638.aspx?url=/explore_our_region/trip_ideas/tamale-trail.aspx, accessed March 22, 2012).

introduction provides basic information about the cultural history and meaning of the sausage within a framework of heritage and local flavor. Despite having a bibliography, the introduction does not use an academic tone or include much scholarly information. Instead, it proclaims that understanding boudin culture happens when one experiences it. This introduction, then, is a tourist-focused text and makes no mention of the oral histories, focusing instead on the product and experience.

The main website's oral history map, the SFA app, and the Trail websites reflect an interest not only in the geography of the subjects, but also in encouraging people to go to these locations. The mapping tool even color-codes places by whether or not they are open to the public. Users can also enter a departure and destination point to receive a customized map plotting the oral history subjects along their route. Through the mobile app and Broadcastr, users can look up and listen to oral histories as they travel. Users can further build an itinerary with each point linking to an oral history or navigate the site though the oral history page, where all of the interviews are accessible in alphabetical order and include contact information for the business.

The SFA website says, "Lots of folks talk about culinary tourism, but very few do the fieldwork necessary. That's what we do, fieldwork – oral histories and films that document the lives of our region's vernacular cooks." The organization sees its work as contextualizing and legitimizing a relationship between traveling eaters and people providing food. The SFA argues that culinary tourism supports its subjects, but also that the organization's work authenticates culinary tourism and SFA subjects. This means that the stories in the documentary films and oral histories should inform how and what tourists eat, providing a cultural authentication. In turn, this seal-of-approval (not for the

food, but for the cultural experience) ideally supports the cultural practitioners through increased business.

Despite the website and Trails' attention to encouraging tourism, the individual interview pages are focused on subjects as people worthy of attention and sources of cultural knowledge. Each interview page has an audio slideshow, a text excerpt from the oral history, and a link to a full PDF transcript.[109] It also includes a brief description of the subject, an introductory quote from the text. The range of access points on a single page—reading direct quotes from the subject, listening, viewing—invite users into the subject's stories. It also includes a brief description of the subject, an introductory quote from the text.

Ted Legnon's interview page, part of the Boudin Trail project, is an example of how SFA oral history web pages are configured and produced. To access Legnon's interview, one clicks on "Legnon's Boucherie," the name of his business. There is an audio slideshow with a smiling portrait of Legnon under a play button. During the two-minute recording, Legnon, in a south Louisiana accent, gives basic information about himself and his business, talks about the history of boudin as a poor person's food likely developed by enslaved people, and then tells about his family's butchering events when he was younger. The sound is edited to screen out the interviewers' questions and interjections so that users hear only Legnon's voice. While he talks, photos scroll—portraits of Legnon, pictures of his business, stages of sausage making and eating, and still-life images of sausage, ingredients, foodstuffs, and items in the business (like a ceramic pig and a clean, steel mixer). Below this is contact information for Legnon's

[109] Some of the earlier pages do not have audio slideshows, though they include photographs and audio samples.

Boucherie and a pull quote from Legnon about one part of his customer base: oilfield salesmen who buy sausage in bulk to give to their customers. Finally, the paragraph describing Legnon discusses his family's recipe, his shop, and his sales.

Below this information is an edited transcript of Legnon's oral history interview. For the excerpts on SFA web pages, the oral historians generally cut down and sometimes reorder the transcripts, framing specific aspects of the culinary practice or elements of the person's life and work. Legnon's interview excerpt includes a litany of questions about making boudin and the boudin industry. Though his answers to questions in the full transcript are generally short, the edited text version of the interview is almost clipped, hinting at but not divulging the details of his work, the boudin business, and local history.[110] In the full transcript of the interview, Legnon expounds on these aspects, discussing his father's work in the salt mines, shifting histories of boudin making, and how Walmart relates to in his business. The edited excerpts show the words of the oral historians and subjects, in dialogue; however, they only include major points and what the oral historian thought was the key information, leaving out most of the interview, which users can access fully through a linked PDF.

Though highly edited, the transcripts and audio emphasize subjects' voices and present them as authorities from which to learn about specific foodways and industries. The lack of contextual information by other writers or scholars reinforces the centrality and authority of the subjects. While the photographs include food photography, they are

[110] Conversely, John Saucier's edited transcript has long passages full of detail and reflects aspects of the full transcript. Saucier is an engaging speaker who speaks at length and tells stories; he is more likely to talk about his personal experiences and to tell anecdotes, whereas Legnon is more likely to describe aspects of his work and industry and to answer questions succinctly. The oral historians have, thusly, edited the transcripts with an eye to keeping variations in tone and narrative structure.

overwhelmingly pictures of food processes and portraits of people and places. Contact information may allow users to visit the subjects' establishments or order from them; however, the pages center on subjects' reflections on their food practices, experiences, and knowledge. While the choice of subjects and aspects of navigation and site design reflect an interest in promoting culinary tourism, the individual pages foreground the subject's voice, not simply what he or she talked about.

In addition to processing the interviews for the archive and display online, the oral historians also edit these materials and write stories from them for a range of other publications. SFA oral historians publish in the SFA magazine *Gravy* and *Cornbread Nation* anthologies and in non-SFA media, like *Gourmet*, *Oxford American*, or *Garden and Gun*. These pieces are condensed further than the website and are often twice told stories, framing the subjects within the experience of the oral historian. I want to look in particular at two publications created from boudin project interviews: the first is a short excerpt published in the organization's small magazine *Gravy*, and the second is a longer essay, which first appeared in *Garden and Gun* and was reprinted in *Cornbread Nation*.

The Summer 2011 issue of *Gravy* included "A Philosophy of Boudin," "as told to Sara Roahen by Bubba Frey, August 2007."[111] The "As Told To" articles, regular features of *Gravy*, are short, edited versions of an oral history the SFA has conducted. They are a way to highlight new and old oral histories that are pertinent to current events and SFA initiatives. The issue came out just before their Cajun Country field trip (which I discuss in the next chapter) and also in conjunction with the expansion of their magazine distribution to several New Orleans restaurants. The article has a black-and-white portrait

[111] Sara Roahen and Bubba Frey, "The Philosophy of Boudin, as Told to Sara Roahen," *Gravy* 40 (Summer 2011), 10-12.

of Frey in a t-shirt, ball cap askew, sitting on a wooden bench on his store's front porch. It is a page and half, whereas Frey's oral history is forty-six pages. The words are all Frey's; however, the construction of the story is Roahen's.

He then talks for two paragraphs about acquiring the store and transforming it to a meat shop. He decided to go into the grocery business because his rice and crawfish farming equipment became obsolete, and then, with the rise of supermarkets, the grocer, too, became obsolete. So he started making and selling tasso, boudin, and other meat products. The next two paragraphs are about making boudin. He learned from his great-uncle. Again invoking change, he says, "Here at the store, I am making it almost identically to the way my uncle was making it. Now I don't put the internal organs in it for the simple fact that that generation is all dead and gone now." This is an interesting claim given that the internal organs are a central part of the boucherie tradition that boudin emerged from. However, his reasoning is based on the shifting tastes of his customer base. The final paragraph discusses area boudin makers, relaying the story of Johnson's, a now closed boudin maker in Eunice, where people used to line up once a week. If customers were lucky, and it wasn't sold out, would buy boudin, and they would hear the news and gossip of the Eunice while they waited.

The thematic claims of this piece are about historical and current practices and their shifts over time, particularly in shopping and eating. The piece does not describe boudin or its food history, aspects that are a large part of the initial interview. It does reflect Frey's discursive interest in following tradition and change in this area of Louisiana, in food traditions in particular. Change is framed as a given rather than a loss, despite a sense of respect of what is understood as historic or traditional. While this

excerpt includes material that was all chosen for the online excerpt, it is even shorter, and the speech patterns have been cleaned up (removing phrases like "least greasiest"). The presentation in *Gravy* doesn't reveal that this story is a condensed edit of a long interview or that the text emerged vocally over the course of conversation.

Roahen article, "Adventures of a Boudin Junkie," is an examples of how oral histories are reworked into essays by the oral historians for larger audiences.[112] Published in *Garden and Gun*, a lifestyle magazine that presents the South as chic and progressive, by aestheticizing and playing up the traditional aspects of its cultural and material history, Roahen's essay piece tells about the cultural history and life of boudin. It draws on oral histories she conducted for the SFA; however, it is structured as her personal narrative, favoring and relying on her voice and interpretations rather than the voices of her subjects. In her narrative, Roahen distills into about five pages much of the information about the production process and culture of boudin from her forty interviews, each of which is about forty pages long. She frames the information in her essay using her firsthand relationship to boudin—her experiences in boudin store parking lots and local restaurants—and punctuates it with three figures from the project—Bubba Frey, Rocky Sonnier, and Beverly Giardelli. The article turns the project, which would take hours to explore, into a readable short essay. It is Roahen's voice, but it tells the story of boudin makers and eaters in Acadiana.

While written publication of oral histories filter the subjects' stories through the voice of the oral historian, a quite different dynamic occurs at live SFA events, where

[112] Sara Roahen, "Adventures of a Boudin Junkie," *Garden and Gun*, March/February 2009, http://gardenandgun.com/article/adventures-boudin-junkie (accessed November 13, 2011).

oral historians re-interview subjects in front of an audience.[113] The organization is responsible for choosing the setting and subject based on his or her oral history, which means that those who are chosen have a story the SFA wants to retell specifically or are dynamic speakers or both; however, once in front of the group, the subject can control the conversation.[114] At the June 2010 field trip, the organizers scheduled Bubba Frey to be interviewed in front of participants at a boudin lunch at his store. Sara Roahen asked one question, or maybe two, before Frey took the stage entirely and simply talked. He gave a rollicking storytelling lecture that included centuries of social and culinary history, family recollections, and explanations of business practices. He talked about German sausage making back to the thirteenth century, about sourcing his ingredients from Sam's, and

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[113] In the fourth chapter, I examine how storytelling works at SFA events; however, here I want to examine how the SFA specially uses their oral histories in constructing event presentations. In addition to the re-interview, the SFA has an oral historian present subjects' stories and draw on subjects to do talks and conduct tours. They also sometimes conduct original (unrecorded) interviews at events.

For example, at the 2010 symposium, Francis Lam spoke about the Biloxi shrimping community oral history project he conducted. He began by talking about how hard Katrina hit East Biloxi and then told a story about each of his subjects, using portraits of them to guide the talk. At one point, he teared up. He said that he started crying because he hadn't really spent a lot of time thinking about those relationships in the few years between the interviews and the symposium presentation and that what the subjects gave was such a gift; he felt that their generosity and his connection to them was just emotionally overwhelming. Many members said his talk was part of the best programming they had seen at the SFA. They felt impacted by Lam's telling and also felt that his discussion of his work and the lives of the oral history subjects taught them about a place they had not known. Yet, when Lam talked about the response to his presentation, he addressed the discomforting paradox of the audience loving his talk and the stories, but not translating that pleasure into an investment in the subjects:

> It is weird. … A lot of people enjoyed and appreciated the presentation, which I am glad for, and it was really wonderful to hear people express that to me personally, but it is like people saying "good job." There were not a lot of people saying, "hey, I really want to go down there," or "do you know what it's like there now?" Not that I would expect, not that this was an expected response, but it wasn't like there was anyone saying, "is there room there to go and help out," or "is there something I can do?" There just wasn't a lot of conversation along the lines of "how can I connect with this place?" I can't say that is disappointing because it wasn't something I would have necessarily expected, but that would have been really wonderful and validating in a different way.

[114] Of course, the dynamics of these presentations range widely. While I have seen several oral history subject light up a room and in presentations billed as interviews become the sole speaker, I have also watched people who were not comfortable be reinterviewed. That summer, in Atlanta, I watched a reinterview that was the opposite of Frey's. It was clear that the interview had been fascinating, but that the subject was not comfortable retelling the stories or even talking in front of a large group of people. The power dynamic of public speaking and a recorded private conversation is markedly different, so some oral history subjects bloom in the situation and shape their own story while others are not at ease in front of many people.

about boucherie in his childhood. He interacted with the audience instead of his interviewer, playing to them. While the content of his stories did not vary wildly from his oral history, the construction and feeling of his narrative did. This was a public performance instead of a conversation, and as such, Frey had most of the control over what and how stories were told. One of the outcomes of this talk was that he sold out of everything handmade in his store, from tasso to fig preserves. While Frey's talk was not a pitch, it authenticated his wares; the audience bought his goods with the belief that his knowledgeable discourse and history of practice would manifest in his sausages and pickles.

The various final products of the Boudin Trail—the website, essays in *Gravy* and *Garden and Gun*, and interviews/talks by subjects at live events—demonstrate how different intentions shape stories and how voicing becomes layered in different ways in SFA materials. While the oral historians influence in conversation is considerable, it is bounded by the subject's expressions. At the same time, the choice of subjects and, even more importantly, choices about how to edit and present those subjects' narratives—especially on the website and in written texts—shapes what a broad audience hears and understands about that culture.

SFA Oral History Philosophy

To examine how the organization interprets its purposes and practices, I begin not with the Boudin Trail in particular, but with how the organization understands the function of oral history projects like the Boudin Trail. Members and staff repeatedly say that the SFA's oral histories are central to the organization's work. While most say that the events draw people in, they feel the oral history and film initiatives are the cultural

and intellectual underpinning of the organization. They see the oral history projects in terms of giving a voice to people, collecting stories, and promoting southern food practices.[115]

SFA members and staff do not necessarily privilege one function over another or even separate them. Instead, they see each of these aspects as important parts of a single body of work. In interviews I conducted, members would talk about the importance of "saving" these stories; then later, they would say this work facilitated culinary tourism or informed sales, and, at another point, they would talk about how oral history work honors people committed to food production and culture in the U.S. South. While these intentions are sometimes mentioned together, most often they come up separately, as facets of different conversations.

When describing the mission of the SFA and their investment in it, people in the group almost always talk about the importance of "recording," "collecting," and "saving" stories. Members say that the SFA's documentary projects are important because they collect cultural materials that might otherwise be lost. These members often have a stake in the cultural identities they feel are associated with these stories. The idea of heritage, as complicated and contested, is central to the work of the SFA. Heritage is not simply about a personal connection, family lineage, or ethnic identity, but also about an imagined South that fluctuates between an ideal vision, a sellable vision, and a critical vision. All along this spectrum, members believe the SFA oral history initiatives define a culture.

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[115] Linton Hopkins and SFA presidents before him have also asserted that the organization's oral history work is the core of the organization, thus membership dues should support the organization's documentary projects (which they do). Following this, Hopkins was instrumental in bringing about a PBS/NPR model of SFA financing that frames financial support in terms of valuing, supporting, and being assured of quality programming.

Members see the SFA's work as defining a South, creating a record they want to support, shape, or identify with.[116] The oral histories are diverse in race, ethnicity, and social status, forming an idealized construction of the South, which attends to the influence various ethnic groups and working class people have on the formation of cuisine.[117] By leaving this collection for posterity, the SFA shapes the materials that future researchers will have to draw on.[118] In part, the SFA's ideas about oral history reflect its democratic ideals of privileging individuals' experiences and empowering all people. The organization seems to agree with Jacques Derrida that "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory."[119]

Archive creation is one of the strategies the organization employs to fulfill its goals of reframing "southern" into a multicultural and progressive construct in terms of food and social practices. Further, the organization sees that, as Derrida says, "effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation."[120] The SFA invites anyone to create and contribute oral histories; it also encourages and facilitates of the creation of oral history in college classrooms. The oral histories are available, open access, on the SFA website. Moreover, the organization understands its position that the archive should be constructed and shared openly not only as a strategy to gather material

[116] Even as the organization has difficulty achieving a more diverse membership, these oral histories can represent a desired diversity.
[117] Their collection may not be representative in the U.S. South. The SFA does not claim to be representative; however, they are also an important public institution shaping conceptions of southern food—a role they do claim. This raises some important questions about the relationship between representativeness and collecting individual stories. Even if the claim is against being representative, these stories often *become* representative in their presentation and packaging.
[118] Tammy S. Gordon, *Private History in Public: Exhibition and the Settings of Everyday Life* (New York: Alta Mira Press, 2010); Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
[119] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4.
[120] Ibid.

and garner attention, but also as a reflection of ideals of access that open up opportunity, voice, and power widely to users.

This focus on the accessibility of the archive has to do, in part, with the SFA's interest in making historical and cultural information available to future researchers as well. During my interviews, members and staff often articulated a time divide in their explanation of the SFA's work—the events are for now, and the documentary work is for later.[121] This is a false divide since contemporary presentation of this work is central to the organization; however, it illuminates an important way that oral history holds cultural authority. Members and staff posited that the SFA's oral histories are important because an unknown researcher (a scholar, journalist, chef, or family member) in the future will use them to understand food practices or local cultures. This veneration of projected, unknowable users validates the SFA's investment in documentary projects, and, in turn, the projects validate the group's position as an educational institution.[122]

SFA staff and members believe the organization's oral histories have staying power and see them as a legacy, an outcome members think is as important as the organization's ability to facilitate interpersonal connection.[123] SFA managing editor Sara Camp Arnold put it this way:

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[121] While later in this chapter, I explore how that distinction is disrupted in the intersection of live events and documentary practices, I am interested now in understanding why members articulate this now-later discourse.

[122] As food studies continues to grow, this archive will likely be a valuable asset. Food scholars often sift through fragments looking for this kind of work—recordings of what can seem like mundane activities or the stories of people who were not famous and frequently not active players in historic events. Making sausage or selling ice are rarely sites of traditional historical interest, so these stories generally come through advertisements, as notes, or in fiction. Having an interview or video where someone discusses these practices with an interviewer who cares about the details and experience adds to the larger historical record.

[123] Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 16.

> I don't think a ton of people know [the oral histories] are there … but at the same time they are also being preserved in the Ole Miss library. John T and I were comparing that to various WPA projects. Take, for example, the WPA slave narratives. I doubt that many white people were interested in that when it was happening, but now people use them all the time for research. We were also talking about FSA photography. Even if you don't know the name Marion Post Walcott or Dorthea Lange, you have seen their photos, and they are so iconic. It's not to say that we are necessarily going become that, but you don't know.[124]

As members and staff of the organization understand it, the SFA oral history projects are about creating an archive that has the possibility to affect how future generations understand the South and its foodways.

The SFA also frames their oral history work as a celebration of individuals. The organization's statement of values begins with: "1. We give voice," and under that statement, the first sentence is, "We sing the unsung."[125] The SFA wants to "shine a light" on people who may be overlooked in the understanding and celebration of food culture and southern culture. At the center of this work is the interview, which privileges individuals speaking about themselves and their practices.

In the observations, surveys, and interviews I conducted and evaluated, audiences overwhelmingly expressed the belief that they hear the subjects' voices in oral histories. Despite the fact that the editorial work shapes the stories that are told, audiences discuss these stories as if they belong to and are created by the subjects, rather than oral historians or editors. Only in cases where the authorial voice of the oral historian is significant, as in Roahen's *Garden and Gun* essay, do people attach authorship to the documenter. The organization and the oral historians want people to believe they are being connected with the subjects. The purpose is to tell someone else's story, and Evans,

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[124] Sara Camp Arnold, interview by author, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, August 14, 2011.
[125] Southern Foodways Alliance, "Values," http://southernfoodways.org/about/mission.html, accessed 6/8/12.

among others, lamented moments when the attention was shifted onto the oral historians as storytellers, rather than the subjects.

In accordance with the tendency to minimize their role in the authorship of oral histories, SFA oral historians frame their work as listening. Instead of seeing the conversational exchange as subjects answering questions, oral historians define their work as facilitating the subject in speaking and attending to that speech. Staff oral historian Amy Evans framed these values at the first annual SFA oral history workshop in 2011. While many of the students wanted to use oral history to answer analytical questions in their scholarship, Evans focused on the role of being an attentive and engaged listener. She believes that people gain insight into others' experiences and how they frame them by listening. She does admit that the oral history subject may move around or avoid certain topics, leaving them out of the record. For Evans, though, listening to and respecting the subject is at the center of gathering stories and takes precedent over having a complete account of particular issues. Francis Lam echoes Evans's characterization of the role of the oral historian as a listener in a conversation, saying that while "there were certain things I definitely wanted people to touch on—just for a sense of continuity between interviews," the interviews he conducted were "conversational": "I would walk in with a list of half a dozen questions and not be stressed out if I didn't get to four of them."[126]

Roahen and Lam, who are also journalists, both explain this approach to listening by making a distinction between journalism and documentary work. They say that in journalism writers come with ideas about the story they are getting and about what they

[126] Lam, interview.

are going to say, but the best oral history work is done when the oral historian just wants to hear the subject's stories, allowing people the space to talk. The practice, they argue, is not in pursuit of a particular story or truth so much as it is in pursuit of how people understand and talk about themselves and their practices.[127]

Further, SFA oral historians believe they are obligated to their subjects. They are bound by a variety of pressures beyond building a full historical record and rarely engage in critically with claims their subjects' make or avoid. Overall, they express an ethical imperative to do the right thing with their subjects' stories, which includes a concern about how to present these stories to the public. For example, Roahen asks, "What is our responsibility to these people beyond getting their story down?"[128] This is a question that many others put on the table as we discussed the SFA's documentary practices. Roahen explains,

> I think first, we just want to get stories recorded that might not otherwise be told. That's the first thing. But then, when I first started doing oral histories, things were really manageable and so, I don't even know how to say this, it seemed enough to get the stories recorded and onto the web. That seemed like enough, but then if I was going to use them in my own work, great; if not okay, at least we have them. That was enough, period. But as time has gone on and Amy and the

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[127] Sara Roahen, in my interview with her, defined good oral history practices by critiquing an interview she recently conducted:

> What I like most about doing oral history work is listening to stories without my ego involved, without an eye on turning it into something as a writer. …
> I had this oral history with a woman last week in Galiano, down towards Grand Isle. I am starting a new project called Down the Bayou that will document the fishing culture down toward Grand Isle that is in danger after Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill. She was at the top of my list because she is an 82-year-old woman who hosts private get-togethers in this kind of restaurant she runs. But it just so happened that I also got an assignment to write about her for the *Oxford American*. I could have done the piece without having interviewed her first, but I thought, "this dovetails nicely."
> And I am not happy with the interview I got at all. I am so disappointed. I can tell that I was thinking about myself and what I wanted to write and what I wanted to know for my article. We talked for an hour and a half, and I got a lot of good information, but… So you asked what I think of. On my good days, I think about purely listening to this person and trying to get this person to tell his or her story. On the days that aren't so good, I am on a fishing expedition. I am really disappointed that happened with her.

[128] Roahen, interview.

> SFA have gotten a lot more recognition for their work, we have added oral historians to the fold, there are more stories we want to tell, and people are starting to notice, including the oral history subjects, now we are starting to feel like we could do more. And what is our responsibility to these people beyond getting their story down?
>
> I feel a little bit guilty every time I leave because I feel like I have gained a lot for myself and for the organization, and people have given me their time and a lot of times really personal information, and then never see me or hear from me again—that's not true, I write thank you letters and send photos—but I am not entirely comfortable with the uneven exchange. And I think that we feel that in general as an organization. It's one of our goals to do more follow-up and to help subjects leverage exposure they get from us if they want to. I am not sure exactly how that is going to happen, but that would make me happy. The way it is now I even sometimes feel shy to go back to a business. I just sort of feel like I have pilfered something, like it is all about my gain. And that not what it is supposed to be about. And that's not what it is about at the core, but I think it can look like that and feel like that.[129]

Roahen's obligation to her subject's shapes her feelings about and interpretation of the oral history exchange. Her fear is that while she makes personal connections at the time of her interviews, the exchange of knowledge is unequal and weighted toward the historian. One solution is to help subjects use the public presentation of this knowledge and experience (produced by the SFA) to promote their business.[130] The SFA helps subjects use the public presentation of this knowledge and experience (produced by the SFA) to improve sales and generally increase the visibility of knowledge about their businesses. This framework highlights the importance of oral history as a way to form connections between customers and businesspeople (or sometimes between people in parallel or intersecting industries). However, this is not the main framework that SFA audiences recognize—instead they generally see the stories as being about personal and cultural connection.

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[129] Roahen, interview.

[130] This involves two main parts: helping subjects to "leverage exposure if they want to" and to deal with the aftermath of becoming a sensation. I discuss these initiatives more in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Conclusions

The Boudin Trail and other SFA oral history projects reveal that the human connections formed through oral histories, which are often at the core of people's desire to hear and read these works, can also complicate their use as a means for understanding a culture or even a person. The SFA's oral history program focuses on people as the source food practices and culture, and the framework of the oral history interview centralizes an individual's story and their contribution to the record. The oral history program preserves and presents discourse about everyday practices, providing texture to the record through individual detail and sensory context through photography and audio recordings. SFA oral histories validate and celebrate subjects and also complicate cultural narratives. A project like the Boudin Trail is intended to create, present, and preserve cultural knowledge, to expand the diversity of voices and experiences included in narratives, and, at the same time, to foster networks of commerce and human interaction.

The SFA's documentary work preserves the discourse of workers, artisans, and entrepreneurs.[131] The subjects are primarily experts by experience—people who learned their craft and sometimes the history or science of it through practice. They are also primarily people who make a living from practicing their crafts. As mainly small-scale commercial producers, they have and share a few key kinds of knowledge: of their practices, of their products, and of their locales (including local culture and consumer identities). The subjects of SFA oral histories range widely in their class, education, race, location, and political persuasion, but they generally share an investment in their work as food producers.

[131] These three categories—worker, artisan, and entrepreneur—are neither fully exclusive nor shared.

Rarely trained in cultural studies, the people the SFA interviews usually also share an interest in their products and in the communities they serve. As such, their understandings of and perspectives on local culture and what they do are particularly inflected by fealty to their customer base and an attachment to their practices. This means that they can provide and are invested in local information and materials; however, it also means that they are less likely to be critical of the place they live and work in or their own practices. This occurs, in part, because those interviewed are often making a living in food industries. However, because of their positions as workers and owners, the SFA's oral history subjects do demonstrate the burdens of physical labor and psychological stress involved in maintaining a profitable practice. As such, they also share stories of supply chains, regulation, working conditions, and market pressures that are not usually told in popular representations of foodways or other cultural practices.

Both the positive stories and narratives of hardships that SFA oral history subjects tell are framed by the practice of oral historians asking subjects to articulate what they do. This practice of asking subjects for immediate discursive reflection has a range of outcomes in SFA oral histories, in part, because subjects have a range of media and public speaking experience. For some, the chance to reflect on and speak about their work is transformative. In this way, oral history interviews can allow people who may not have previously had a chance to think about and express their ideas about their work an opportunity to do so. This is a process can enrich subjects' work experiences, and Wilson, North Carolina barbecue pitmaster Ed Mitchell is a good example of this. While his personal history in sales and management before becoming a pitmaster prepared him to frame his work for an audience, the experience of doing an oral history with the SFA,

of having someone ask him questions and being given the time and space to formulate answers, restructured how he considered and approached his work. While his personal history in sales and management before becoming a pitmaster prepared him to frame his work for an audience, the experience of doing an oral history with the SFA, of having someone ask him questions and being given the time and space to formulate answers, restructured how he considered and approached his work, shifting his work toward a public discourse and engagement beyond his own business (and at the same time, being good for business).

Yet the oral history process also means that subjects are expected to be able to articulate the practice, history, and meaning of what they do. Some subjects have more knowledge than others, and some are better storytellers or are more comfortable talking, as the contrast of Ted Legnon and Bubba Frey demonstrates. This does not mean that the food production of good storytellers is more significant or better than their more taciturn colleagues. Yet, in the process of making subjects authorities, SFA oral history interviews reveal gaps in discursive practices, which may privilege people who speak well in the record. Oral history conversations contextualize food practices, but they also forces people to use language to share knowledge that is often extralingual.

Interview methods are, furthermore, complicated and influenced by social hierarchies, by which questions get asked and which do not, and, in the SFA's case, also by the kinds of work and people the organization wants to showcase. Goals of knowledge production sometimes align and sometimes conflict with the SFA's desire to celebrate and promote subjects. What is more, oral history as a method and genre offers opportunities to complicate or disrupt existing narratives about culture and history. For

example, having people who would not identify as part of civil rights movements or white supremacist movements talk about their experiences can provide different access points for understanding how people adapt to and interpret the societies they are part of. In terms of food production and culture, these stories often disrupt ideas about capital formation, demonstrating the range of ways that people come into business, understand customers, and see the relationship between consumers and producers—disruptions that can be important for understand how culture, as well as food, is produced.

While the SFA expresses (and I believe holds) a commitment to telling complicated and difficult stories about conflict and inequality in the U.S. South, this goal often runs up against its simultaneous desire to promote southern foodways and the businesses that practice them. Framing a positive, productive subject and addressing issues of racism and economic inequality at the same time is not an easy endeavor. Given its strong investment in subjects, the SFA is, therefore, more likely to elide rather than unpack difficult issues. In some ways, this can reflect the intentions of the subject, which is one of the complex ethical questions that arises from the SFA's work: if you have ask someone to speak on record about their life, what is your obligation to support, protect, or even promote them? Or conversely, what rights would the documenters have to use a person's own words to engage in a critique of that person's practices, beliefs, business, social system, or locale?[132]

In an effort to deal with this and other pressing questions of ethics and responsibility, SFA oral historians frame their work as collecting and presenting rather

[132]In some ways, the answers to these questions rely on how the projects are presented to the speakers. In my dissertation research, people knew that their statements would be examined and discussed by a scholar. Often this can be seen in the kind of discourse we engaged in, for example, the quote from Francis Lam that begins this chapter suggests him negotiating my position.

than constructing critical texts. They create a safe space for subjects and, because they want to maintain the food practices they are documenting, they use oral histories to promote their subjects. This means that, overall, the SFA produces stories that, although they may include struggle, are generally positive and rarely dwell on negative, disquieting, or critical aspects of southern culture. While it would be easy to attribute the lack of critical or negative stories in the SFA record to the promotional intentions of the organization, this is not completely the case. The omission of uncomfortable topics, like racist inequality, from the SFA's oral history record also results, in part, from tensions, both between and within subjects and interviewers, to simultaneously recognize and move past troubling histories.

For example, New Orleans bartender Martin Sawyer's 2005 interview with Amy Evans includes several moments in which he is clearly negotiating space to not speak about or to speak around racism. According to Evans, the interview went well, and she still uses it in presentations about the work of the SFA. To be sure, it is varied and rich in anecdote; however, there is one moment in the transcript that demonstrates how conflicting desires between and within subjects and interviewers can shape the records they produce. At the end of the interview, Evans asks about segregated bars, which Sawyer begins to describe, but then says:

> [Martin Sawyer:] … But going back to that, if I go back to that, I could talk [for] two or three weeks [about] things of that nature, you know what I mean. But it's bygone, and I don't want to deal with it. Don't want to talk too much about it. [Short pause] You have any other questions?
>
> A[my] E[vans]: No. We've covered an awful lot, and I sure appreciate you giving me your time on your day off. Unless there's something that you want to add or a final

thought.[133]

In this exchange, Sawyer makes a clear decision not to speak about racism and segregation in southern bar culture, to keep his thoughts about this subject out of the record. While readers can analyze and discuss the content and implications of Sawyer's response, his actual statements effectively close the conversation.[134]

Responses like Sawyer's to questions about complicated histories of racism and inequality in southern foodways are common in the SFA's oral histories. When asked directly about experiences of prejudice, people—Anglo, European American, African American, Asian American, Latino—tend to admit that it is or has been a problem, but they often respond that they either don't want to talk about it or that they, luckily, do not have personal experience with it. They might also respond that it was an issue in other places or at other times, but not for them in the places where they work or are from. Subjects often leave negative experiences off the record like this or gloss over them quickly. This response emerges from a number of factors—including the relationship between the oral historian and subject, the subject's understanding of acceptable public discourse, the subject's emotional desires, and, sometimes, his or her interest in positivity as a way of promoting his or her life or businesses.

The SFA frequently takes exchanges between two people—the subject and the SFA documenter—and transforms them into works for a larger audience. The website, for example, allows anyone to access the oral history subjects, their voices, images, and full-transcripts. If audiences are interested, it also encourages and helps them plot a visit to

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[133] Amy Evans, interview with Martin Sawyer, Bartenders of New Orleans, Southern Foodways Alliance, 2005, http://www.southernfoodways.org/documentary/oh/bartenders/martin_sawyer.shtml, accessed May 30, 2011.

[134] For the interview, it seemed conversation specific. Sawyer continued the interview, telling a few more stories, though Evans signaled it was acceptable for it to end.

the places where these subjects work. Moreover, because they include many interviews, the SFA's oral history websites allow people to compare different perspectives and get, through a mosaic, a more complete understanding of food practices and communities across the southeast. Through the audio and images, audiences can more fully and sensorily engage with subjects. However, the SFA's oral history work is often presented without much context on the website, and the edited sections, which are what most users see, are chosen and framed by the oral historians, who shape the pieces as they think appropriate for SFA's audiences.

Still, the form of the oral history transcript retains many stories, keeps stops and meanderings, and is textured and raw in a way that more edited materials (including essays and the films I discuss in the next chapter) are not. The rote, the unexpected, and the negotiated are all there—in forty pages of typed conversation—for audiences to read. However, very few people will likely ever read the work this way. While transcripts are helpful for researchers, most users engage with the oral history work in a more processed form on websites, in published texts, and at events. The website is an interesting mix of processed oral histories that still reveal the conversational form of the oral history. As staff of the SFA is fond of saying, the seams show. In the published texts and presentations, the work is the more streamlined—framing unexpected claims or removing them.

These articles are in a form that may invest readers who would not read an entire oral history transcript; however, the distillation process of the oral historian may be at the expense of the particular stories that subjects tell and the positions they take. The story that the oral historian tells may be the story the subject would tell if he or she crafted a

story rather than sat for an interview. Direct quoting is one strategy that oral historians employ in an attempt to remain faithful to the stories that their subjects tell. Though quoting subjects can complicate or disrupt an author's intention, the selected quotes are chosen and framed for the story the oral historian is telling.

The costs and benefits of editing and transforming interviews into retold, published stories are not simple. The subjects may be upset to have their lives or positions simplified; conversely, subjects may like how they are portrayed, even as (and sometimes because) the published story glosses over complications in the narratives that they tell to interviewers. Moreover, the audience may come away from a processed and repackaged oral history interview with misapprehensions about a situation or person. While many audiences like hearing stories that they can easily and comfortably process (this is part of why one would turn an interview into a narrative essay), smoothing out complexity can have negative repercussions in trying to understand culture, social groups, and individual decisions.

When retold by oral historians, the subjects' oral histories are narratively framed so that they are accessible to audiences—stories have a clear arc and aims that make them consumable and easy for members of the audience to retell again to others. However, the audience members, who were not at the interview, sometimes connect with the oral historian more readily than with the subject. At the point of dissemination, the oral historians mostly choose the story that is told, and their voices are often the strongest. On the one hand, this means that subjects are represented by invested speakers and writers who often have a good sense of their audience; on the other hand, subjects have released their likeness and often voice to another person. People who work for the SFA are

making a set of decisions about other people's voices, and they recognize and attempt to mitigate the effects of this inevitable process. While the SFA may shape stories on behalf of subjects with the intent of honoring them, promoting their work, and telling about their experiences, those intentions themselves are complex and sometimes conflicting. The stories that ultimately get told may or may not reflect how subjects perceive themselves or want to be represented.

The SFA staff and oral historians takes the ambiguities and promises of telling these stories *right* seriously. They are committed to their subjects. I would argue they love them, and I would also acknowledge how difficult it is to tell the stories of other people, maybe especially of those we love. At the same time, part of loving and wanting to tell these stories is creating a larger network of knowledge—exposing an audience to these subjects, inspiring others to go to these places and invest, financially and emotionally, in them. These different pressures of intent manifest themselves in who is chosen as a subject, in the kinds of conversations that take place, and in how stories are presented on the website and in other mediums.

How do we ultimately understand the relationship between "giving voice" and telling stories? These two acts are not necessarily the same thing. One can give voice by turning attention to material or one can give voice by allowing someone the chance to speak. While the SFA's oral histories seem to rely on giving people the chance to speak—actually recording their voices—the intentions and outcomes of oral history productions seem to be more about representation, about giving attention to a particular practice or person by crafting a story from the subject's voice. This can be a significant and effective strategy since, as former SFA board member and anthropologist Makale

Faber Cullen explains, having people speak for themselves in public is not always the best way to give them representation. For example, she notes that asking a dishwasher, who is not experienced with or doesn't like public speaking, to present at a symposium may not be an especially fair or productive way to give that person voice.[135] Public speaking is a skill that does not necessarily correlate with a person's knowledge or insight. In this way, the semi-private speaking of oral history can be an important part of collecting and presenting stories of a range of people.

Using people's voices to tell stories is a powerful and emotive tool. At the same time, recording discourse as a way of saving and representing culture forces actions and contexts into speech and requires a particular way of expressing knowledge that may not reflect how it is used. In the next chapter, I look at a different method of documentary work that the SFA engages in, exploring the assets and limitations of edited film as a way of telling subjects' stories.

[135] Makale Faber-Cullen, interview by author, Brooklyn, New York, June 10, 2011.

Chapter 3

Food Production, Knowledge Production, and Film Production in the Southern Foodways Alliance

> "I don't want to be in it. I don't want my voice to be in it."
>
> "I have to do this weird thing. I have to take someone else's story and try to use their voice to retell it."
>
> "This is going to sound like it is straight out of some marketing copy or something, but I do think that a lot of people who had a strong voice inside of them, but didn't know what to do, have found their voice in this organization. I am sure there are a lot of people I could name, and tell you about to illustrate that point. And really that is true for me."[136]

These three quotes from SFA filmmaker Joe York reveal the complicated relationship between voice and the authority of telling in SFA documentary film. In the first statement, he expresses his desire for the film to be completely structured around the subject, a desire that goes against modes of reflexive documentary.[137] The second statement reveals how complicated this is: the subject, who has lived the story and has the voice, is not the person who constructs the representation. Instead, York works with quoted sound and image to tell a story about that person. And in the last statement, York presents the process of editing as a mode of personal expression that he values.

In part, these different expectations and understandings of voice reveal some of

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[136] Joe York, interview by author, October 21, 2011, Oxford, Mississippi.

[137] York's voice does show up in his films. He structured the 2012 shirt, feature-length *Pride and Joy* around the conceit of his own travels. However, the focal point of the film is still not his relationship with people or his editorial choices, though the structure of *Pride and Joy* explores these topics much more than any of his other short films that I examine in this chapter.

the complications of SFA documentary filmmaking. They raise questions about where authority lies in these works. These questions are particularly pertinent to the SFA as an organization aimed at (re)defining southern imaginaries; they must be asked in a context where who gets to tell the story of places, people, and experiences is a central and historical contest of power and identity.

Building from the SFA's documentary initiative goals, which I discussed in previous chapters, I investigate how the organization attempts to define culture through documentary film. The SFA's forty short films, all but a few made by Joe York, cover a range of food producers and practices, drawing on videorecorded observation and interaction. While these films use interviews and privilege people talking about themselves, they also present non-discursive knowledge-making. In this chapter, I consider how SFA films are made (including looking at the many different actors who make them) and some of their uses and impacts. My analysis draws on interviews with York and other SFA members, on the films themselves, and on my observation of several film screenings. In particular, I explore how Joe York's films capture stories, honor subjects, promote sales, and construct southern food culture. In doing so, I pay close attention to the types of knowledge about food and culture these films present and who is constructing that knowledge.

Scholarly Background.

In 1933, when he coined the phrase "documentary," filmmaker John Grierson defined it as "the creative treatment of actuality." Documentary is a method of practice that uses technology to record "the particular, physical real."[138] At the same time,

[138] John Corner, *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996,3.

documentary is produced through the creative process of editing—choosing when to record, putting recordings together in a particular order, taking elements out—in order to convey an experience. Documentary scholars have long debated how "truth" and "reality" function in the production, reception, and meaning of documentary films.[139] I am interested in a related concept: how these films construct and position knowledge. As such, I ask: What kinds of knowledge can documentary films convey, and how do they transmit this knowledge? In order to answer these questions about the SFA's films, I draw on three aspects of knowledge production in documentary film: structures of knowledge; situated and sensory knowledge; and relationships of authority in knowledge construction.

Both scholarly and popular discourses have long perpetuated the idea that documentaries are educational, so much so that scholars raise questions about the genre's response to the pressure of ever-increasing demands for entertainment.[140] Documentary involves recording, creating, and sharing knowledge. As film scholar Bill Nichols explains, "Documentary convention spawns an epistephilia. It posits an organizing agency that possesses information and knowledge, a text that conveys it, and a subject who will gain it."[141] Nichols's statement puts the spotlight on one of the documentary's main impulses: to teach its audience about its subject. As such, scholars often classify and

[139] For example, see Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (New York: Wallflower, 2005); Brian Winston, *Lies, Damned Lies, and Documentaries* (London: British Film Institute, 2000).
[140] Corner 24, Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991),108-109.
[141] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 31.

analyze documentary films based on structures of knowledge-making.[142] For my purposes here, three central frameworks of classification (from Nichols, John Corner, and David MacDougall) are important for understanding the key ways knowledge is constructed in documentary scholarship.

In *Representing Reality*, Nichols names four categories of documentary that continue to be used widely: expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive. These categories are based on how a film's materials are organized, including filming and presentation.[143] Expository films are often structured around "epistemic knowledge." They have a clear set of claims and often use visual materials and even subjects' speech as evidence for discourse, maintaining the authority of the narrator.[144] They are often glossed as films with voice-of-God narration, but can include a range of different practices and positions (like Michael Moore's 2002 film *Bowling for Columbine*).

Observational films, conversely, rely on editing rather than on narrated speech. Observational films begin with recording a subject and rely on access and attention to what the subject is doing. The filmmaker then edits the film into a form that maintains the immediacy of watching the live subject, while being structured to point out and depict particular details or experiences. Observational films structure knowledge based on the idea of accessing and inferring knowledge from seeing the details of others' lives presented in a particular frame and order.[145]

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[142] Many scholars use different classifications to different ends in order to explore aspects of film productions.
[143] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 32.
[144] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 35-27. By "narrator," I don't necessarily mean the speaking-voice of the film. Rather, I mean the perspective of the film's construction, which may also not be the filmmaker's (i.e. science education films, which may or may not reflect the perspective of the people who directed or edited them).
[145] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 42-43.

Interactive films are different in that they shift authority and knowledge production to the discourse of subjects. These subjects' voices, often presented through interviews, guide the claims of the film. Interactive documentaries, the, rely on "situated knowledge" that is articulated rather than observed. The interview process (as I discussed in chapter two) is a complex power dynamic, made more complicated by filming, editing, and choosing visual materials to go along with subjects' claims.[146] Finally, reflexive documentaries are films that represent the filmmaker as part of the story. The audience's knowledge is central to these films; they are produced so that the audience is aware of the filmmaker's position, use of the camera, and editing and the ways that these choices come together to create the particular form and content of knowledge in the film. Reflexive films aim to change how the audience engages with the film by "remov[ing] the encrustations of habit" and unveiling the filmmaker's knowledge-production process.[147]

Each of these four kinds of documentary film approaches knowledge differently: constructed by the filmmaker as objective, constructed by watching subjects' action, constructed by subjects' speech, or constructed to have the audience attend to filmmaker constructing the film. While these modes often employ different filming and editing techniques, it is the structure of knowledge in each mode, rather than specific techniques, that categorize them. In addition, films can, and often do, blur these lines or rely on more than one structure of knowledge at the same time.

Rather than separating types of films, then, Corner classifies elements of visual and verbal presentation. He defines the types of images used in films as reactive

[146] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 53-56.
[147] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 67.

observationalism, proactive observationalism, illustrative, and associative. Observationalism, he explains, refers to simply watching. "Reactive" means watching without much intervention, while "proactive" is watching in a way where the filmmaker can negotiate the space and time of the scene more. Proactive observationalism allows for a greater range of shots and framing. "Illustrative" means using footage to illustrate—having the visual material confirm or display what is being said. Finally, "associative" means using materials to make claims that are not necessarily about the primary content but, rather, are about visual rhetoric. This is accomplished through using particular images with certain connotations or through juxtaposition or other editing choices. Associative images are not about the explicit content of the film; rather, they are about the audience's symbolic understanding or affective experiences.[148] Archival footage is often used for both illustrative and associative purposes, backing up speaker testimony or narrator claims with images. This creates emotional and physical knowledge of verbal claims.[149]

In addition to classifying the visual and verbal elements of documentaries, Corner discusses three types of speech in films: overheard exchange, testimony, and expositional mode. "Overheard exchange" is speech the filmmaker records that is part of the world where the filming occurs but is not directed at the audience. "Testimony" is usually elicited by the filmmaker in interviews or other modes of presentation. Finally, "expositional speech" is narration that is provided by an outside speaker to describe or explain what is happening or meant in a film.[150]

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[148] Corner, 28-29.
[149] Janna Jones, "Confronting the Past in the Archival Film and the Contemporary Documentary," *The Moving Image* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2004), 1-21.
[150] Corner, 29-30.

The image and speech types that Corner defines are not necessarily connected to a particular type of film, but rather are used across films for different purposes (and in different kinds of films with different frequency). These types of visual and speech acts structure knowledge production through content, form, and affect and draw upon different kinds of authority to structure that knowledge. One can watch the same action or hear the same words in each of these forms, but each form imparts and invokes knowledge, and the power-base of that knowledge, in different ways.

Filmmaker and anthropologist David MacDougall provides yet another way to understand the kinds of knowledge produced in documentary film. In doing so, he draws on anthropological classifications of "*descriptive knowledge* (the factual domain), *structural knowledge* (the domain of relations), and *explanatory knowledge* (the domain of theory)." He adds to this "*affective knowledge*," which he defines as "the domain of experience" and explains is a significant aspect of film.[151] MacDougall explains the difference between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance. "Knowledge by description" is produced by someone telling about things; "knowledge by acquaintance" is produced through engagement and sensory experience. What MacDougall points out is that film allows for "re-creating knowledge by acquaintance."[152] It can allow people to access mediated experience directly.

MacDougall's interest in the bodily experience of film reflects a central understanding of how films produce knowledge.[153] Beyond the visual, sound is one of the central components of film. By sound, I do not mean speech (although speech is

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[151] David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, ed. Lucien Taylor (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 81.
[152] MacDougall, 78.
[153] Corner and Nichols also discuss the bodily experience of films; however, MacDougall's discussion is the most relevant and useful for my purposes here.

included), but a whole range of sounds—from ambient noise to voices to music. Sound, along with images, is the technology that builds the experience of film.[154] In addition to providing information, it elicits physical and emotional responses. Music, which has been part of cinema as long as words, adds a layer of knowledge in documentary film and is often used to shape a scene. Instead of constructing knowledge at the point of filming, sound constructs knowledge at the level of editing, which in subject-oriented films can be an important distinction.

Laura Marks engages with sensory experience in film beyond sight and sound, theorizing approximated sensory experience. She discusses haptic images, which carry texture, movement, and proximity, and images that suggest taste and smell. She argues that haptic images can provide a way of knowing others—an intersubjective experience.[155] Through angles, close-ups, and use of sound, filmmakers can share embodied perception, creating a sense of identification and/or desire in the audience.[156] This kind of production provides a "tactile epistemology."[157] To riff on Trinh T. Minh-ha (who also engages in highly sensory filming and editing), this kind of film work "speaks nearby," meaning that it allows people (producers and viewers) to access knowledge elliptically, with the understanding that a one-to-one experience is impossible because of a range of social and technological mediations.[158]

In addition to what and how knowledge is produced in documentary film, I am interested in *who* authorizes that knowledge. This is different from (though not unrelated

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[154] Smell-o-vision, though tested, was only a dream.
[155] Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 152.
[156] Marks,183-190.
[157] Marks, 191.
[158] Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Reassemblage* (1982; New York: Women Make Movies, 2007), DVD.

to) asking who the author of a film is. The specific question at hand is: who controls or operates moments of knowledge production in film, and how does one understand the ways in which that knowledge is negotiated by those involved and understood by audiences?

Grierson's oft-cited definition of documentary—"creative treatment of reality"—implies that the filmmaker is the key authority in documentary film. Nichols frequently analogizes documentary film to fiction, and, by extension (often without even a note), likewise sees the filmmaker as author. Despite the constraints of filming "real life," Nichols argues that the filmmaker is still the person who makes decisions about who and what is filmed, how the camera is held, what is included and excluded, what is used and added, and how it is ordered. However, Roland Barthes's critical mandate in "Death of the Author" (particularly coupled with his claims about the slipperiness of images) has taught us that other powers are at play.[159] In documentary film, the subjects, audiences, and even technologies interact to shape the film.

Relationships with subjects are, therefore, a central point of interest in documentary film discourse. The power relationships between the person filming and the person being filmed are myriad. Nichols, along with other scholars, see the relationship as fundamentally unequal because the filmmakers control the technology and the editing process—they hold the trump card.[160] These scholars argue that while filmmakers can cede power to subjects, the former are fundamentally more powerful. This kind of relationship is evident, for example, in some testimony-based films.

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[159]Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday, 1977).
[160] See Nichols, *Representing Reality*, and Winston.

However, other scholars disagree, seeing the relationship between subject and filmmaker as more complex. For example, Kate Nash, drawing on Foucaultian ideas of negotiated power, argues that subjects and filmmakers continually work out power dynamics during filming, and that films are constructed based on mutable, mutual relationships.[161] Similarly, David MacDougall talks about the ways that subjects can impress and possess a film and, ultimately, shape how people understand a cultural practice or identity. Because of this, film subjects not only allow filming to take place, but in some cases, they control the message.[162] I explore then, how and why some subjects exert more control over this process, or, perhaps, how subjects exert different kinds of control and how that can manifest in films and their reception.

Documentary film has long been associated with creating and distributing knowledge, drawing on a range of ways to authorize that knowledge, including illustration, testimony, and mediated first-person experience. Documentary filmmakers create and use image and sound to elicit a range of human responses that structure knowledge—through external authorities and through the authority of personal experience. Moreover, because documentary film is often made with three key players—filmmaker, subject, and audience—knowledge is produced and authorized not simply in the shooting, making, or watching of the film, but in the interaction of all three. In light of these discussions, I examine how the SFA is producing knowledge in and through its films.[163] In particular, I examine the range of knowledge that these films present and how these different kinds of knowledge interact to create a representation.

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[161]Kate Nash, "Exploring Power and Trust in Documentary: A Study of Tom Zubrycki's Molly and Mobarak," *Studies in Documentary Film* 4, no. 1(2010): 21-33.
[162] MacDougall, 158-63. MacDougall recognizes that this does not always happen.
[163] In the next chapter I focus more on the reception of films at SFA events.

SFA Films

SFA films are documentaries, structured around single subjects, which combine interview, observational, and archival footage and sound. Joe York, a white man from Alabama, has made many of these films for the SFA since 2003, when he was a twenty-five-year-old southern studies graduate student at the University of Mississippi. Over the past decade, York has learned by practice, making films for the University of Mississippi and by commission for SFA.

When it commissions a film, the SFA usually assigns York specific people or places to cover, and the final product is a short (5 minutes to an hour), edited film. His process involves going on location and filming a combination of observational scenes and an interview. The shoots can last from a few hours to days, depending on the project. York processes his footage in standard ways—using scene-based index cards and a filing system in Final Cut. In addition to using the footage he shoots himself, he sometimes adds archival footage and external music. The films then go through revision and, when finished, usually debut at an SFA event. Finally, the completed films are put onto DVDs and are available through the SFA's website, the University of Mississippi's Center for Documentary, and the video sharing site Vimeo. They are also screened for groups at Potlikkers and others events. The final cut of the SFA's films are archived in Special Collections at the J.D. Williams Library at The University of Mississippi.[164]

York's films for the SFA range widely in tone and style. Films like *Working the Miles* (2006) are mostly observational. Films like *Dial S for Sausage* (2006) are framed around interviews but rely on archival footage to create tone and rhythm; whereas films

[164] The films are only available in their complete edited version. The un-edited footage and project files are not archived.

like *Phat Tai* (2010) and *Cud* (2009) use archival footage to illustrate the specific histories of immigration and agriculture that the subjects discuss.

Despite this diversity of tone and style, the SFA's films are all focused on food production. They cover restaurants and farms, fishermen and processors, local events and artisan producers, among other subjects. The films focus on small enterprises, which are presented as non-corporate (although some of them have wide distribution). Almost all of the films are profiles, primarily of individuals but sometimes of places and practices as well. Instead of telling an overarching story or arguing a position, they usually introduce a person or practice. Half of the films, focus on one individual; a quarter focus on a restaurant, and the final quarter focus on a food practice (i.e. hunting squirrels, local groups making chicken stew or mutton or cochon de lait). Some of York's films, like *Hot Chicken* (2006) and *To Live and Die in Avoyelles Parish* (2011)are ensemble documentaries, where different people are interviewed on a subject and their interviews are edited together, but most, like *Seed Saving* (2003), *Marsaw* (2005), and *Cud* (2009), focus on a single person.

Knowledge Production in Three Films

SFA films rely on and promote many kinds of knowledge—culinary, cultural, and business knowledge; expository, experiential, and affective knowledge. To do this, they edit together the voices of subjects, recorded images, and sounds of practices. The subjects talk about their knowledge of techniques, histories, and cultures and physically demonstrate their practices. They give audiences access to places and to hands-on knowledge that they might not otherwise have a chance to see. SFA films introduce audiences to new people and provide viewers an opportunity to learn about a topic, but

they allow viewers to become invested in the subject as a person and a food producer. The subjects, filmmaker (York), and technologies of filmmaking form complex relationships that shape the knowledge constructed in and conveyed by each film. This process of making and disseminating knowledge, then, reflects the agency of those involved, as well as a variety of structural avenues and limitations. In order to better understand how knowledge is produced in SFA films, I turn now to a detailed examination of three specific films: *Marsaw* (2005), *Cud* (2009), and *To Live and Die in Avoyelles Parrish* (2011).

Cud and *Marsaw* each focus on one subject—Georgia grass-fed beef farmer Will Harris in *Cud* and New Orleans bartender Martin Sawyer in *Marsaw*. *Avoyelles* focuses the practice of roasting pigs in south Louisiana and was well-received. *Cud*, about an owner-entrepreneur, is considered a "successful" SFA film, with high distribution and popular audience response. *Marsaw*, an earlier film, is less successful and one of the few SFA films about workers rather than owner-operators (meaning that owners in SFA films often physically labor, but have a different relationship to capital and to their businesses). I have chosen these films because they demonstrate the range of relationships and construction styles the SFA uses and because they each present different types of knowledge production, to different ends.

Marsaw

African American bartender Martin Sawyer worked in New Orleans bars and restaurants for over fifty years, beginning in the 1940s. In 2005, the SFA awarded him the Keeper of the Flame Award, Amy Evans conducted an oral history with him, and Joe York made the film *Marsaw* about him. Combining archival footage, footage of Sawyer

making drinks, and footage of York interviewing Sawyer, the twenty-four minute film is divided into vignettes that alternate between anecdotes and drink-mixing lessons.

After an introduction that includes archival footage of New Orleans set to jazz, the first section of the film, entitled "Hey Professor," shows Sawyer telling a story. Seated, in a red shirt, facing the camera, he recalls being startled one day by someone calling out his nickname, "Professor," while he was carrying groceries on his bike. The unexpected greeting cost him a dozen eggs, and he was only making a dollar at the time. The idea of Sawyer as "professor" is central to how the film functions; he not only teaches audiences about drinks, but also shares a range of historical, social, and professional knowledge throughout *Marsaw*. Moreover, the film focuses on Sawyer's education—his literacy, his training as a bartender, and his experiential knowledge, developed through decades of service. In other anecdotal sections, he talks about reading, the racial geography of bars in New Orleans, the Mississippi flood of 1927, and his philosophy on bartending.

This range of expository knowledge echoes the kind of work the SFA does in their oral history projects, which comes as no surprise. York is interviewing Sawyer, but the only evidence of the interviewer's presence comes at the end in the form of title panels with questions. Despite the range of stories Sawyer tells, his authority lies in his age and experience rather than in the sense that he is "an expert" when it comes to social and historical subjects. This occurs because of Sawyer's style of storytelling and because of the editing of the film, both of which meander. Though there is some archival footage from the flood of 1927, the majority of the shots show Sawyer simply speaking to the camera, again reflecting the modes of attending to subjects' voices in oral history.

While *Marsaw* is heavily edited, with archival images, cuts, and music, it does not have a clear organization. The editing of the stories often seems in media res, and it is not clear how the audience is supposed to interpret them. What knowledge are audiences supposed to take away from the "professor" vignettes? How should they react to the story of the big tipper who committed suicide? What conclusions should audiences draw from Sawyer's discussions of dancing for white audiences or developing a commercial-spirit-based cocktail recipe? Questions about how to understand and use the information presented in the film persist throughout its viewing but are never fully answered or resolved within the film itself. As such, the viewer is left with an unclear sense of how to understand Sawyer at the end of the film.

The stories that Sawyer tells throughout the film seem to move between him as an agent for desegregation, as a person bound by segregation, as a sharp bartender, and as a constrained service worker. If this were simply a recording of an interview, it would almost seem clearer—the viewer would understand the non-sequitor nature of conversation, particularly in interviews where the respondent is asked a range of questions. However, because of the ways in which the interview is edited and presented, the audience of *Marsaw* has little of information about how the conversation unfolded. Sawyer's narratives of his experiences are disconnected and sandwiched between vintage footage and drink directions.

The drink-mixing portions of the film include archival footage, footage of Sawyer mixing a drink with written instructions superimposed on the screen, and footage of Sawyer talking about how to make drinks and their histories—including the Marsaw, which Sawyer created. These sections resemble a cooking tutorial, with instructions and a

visual guide, Sawyer, showing the viewer a step-by-step process (with cuts between each step). These recipe sections have only music and ambient sound, not words. They are followed by a content section, where Sawyer gives a cultural history, based on his professional knowledge, of the drink he has just made.

In between the anecdotes and recipes, York includes archival footage of New Orleans and the mid-twentieth century cocktail scene, which make visual claims about drinks and New Orleans history. The use of this archival footage simultaneously draws upon and reinforces a fantasy of 1950s/1960s cocktail culture that effaces histories of institutional segregation and sexism that were so much a part of that culture and time. Repeatedly, images of white cocktail drinkers, white bartenders, and white politicians are inter-spliced with contemporary footage of Sawyer, who is the African American, talking about mid-century New Orleans (including problems of segregation) or, in uniform, preparing drinks. In this way, Sawyer's voice is undermined somewhat by the construction of the film. Sawyer, the storyteller and the protagonist of *Marsaw*, competes for authority in the film with idealized images of segregated spaces.[165] Sawyer's claims are not borne out or refuted by the use of archival footage, which means that York's choice of archival images neither corroborates nor negates the subject's voice. Instead, the film's message is unclear, presenting multiple ideas and ways of knowing—historical footage, instructions, memories—but giving the viewer no clear editorial framework for reading, assessing, or assimilating that knowledge.

Marsaw has numerous interesting stories and engages with significant

[165] An especially odd editing decision means that Martin Sawyer's name is not mentioned until the end of the film. The film is a portrait; yet, until a title card at the end, the audience does not know the name of the bartender, which seems to, again, replicate problematic race and class structures that the SFA aims to breakdown.

experiences in the twentieth century South. However, it is unclear who is telling the story—Sawyer tells stories but does not control the film; York has combined many elements but doesn't seem to be telling a story. It seems the SFA wanted a film about a person whose work in the service industry is significant and whose historical position speaks to race, geography, and food in New Orleans and the U.S. South. Martin Sawyer is "the unsung," someone who has not achieved celebrity for his work but can contribute to understanding life in New Orleans during this specific time. However, any narrative intent is unfortunately undermined by the use of archival footage and disjunctive vignettes.

While the complex nature of Sawyer's positions and his range of different kinds of knowledge and experience could form a captivating film, the stories are not ordered to provide an overarching narrative of his experience. York, himself, is critical of what he sees as the excesses of his early films like *Marsaw*. Particularly, he points out weakness in using archival footage as filler, visual gimmicks, and quick cuts instead of staying with a subject. He said, "So there is this beautiful person telling this beautiful story, and then there is this buffoon knocking the camera around or making poor edits, making bad decisions about which music to use or where to put it. That is why I don't like some of the early [films], because I felt like I got in the way of really good stories and I think my shortcomings took away from the audience's ability to take the story in."[166] While *Marsaw* presents Martin Sawyer as a source of knowledge, it is so fractured that audiences could come away with a few new drinks and a sense of the layered history of twentieth-century New Orleans bar culture or an image of New Orleans bar culture and of Sawyer that reifies stereotypes of race and class. The editing of the film disrupts the

[166] York, interview.

audience's ability to process Sawyer. Disruptions do have the potential to maintain ambiguity in a film, which could allow for a more nuanced understanding of subjects; however, in *Marsaw*, York's editing choices distract from Sawyer, undermining the film's effort to present a complex portrait of its subject.

Cud

Will Harris, an organic cattle farmer and abattoir owner in Bluffton, Georgia, is the subject of York's later film, *Cud* (2009). The film opens with Harris driving across his land, calling his cows as they run toward him. Harris introduces his farm, White Oak Pastures, where his family has raised cattle since 1886. The film cuts between Harris speaking directly to the camera, panoramic shots of cows in pasture and woods, and archival footage of industrial agriculture. Standing in the woods on his land, Harris talks about the history and industrialization of cattle-raising. He explains that the industrial system's excesses came to bother him, and, in 1995, after reading about "sophisticated consumers who wanted to eat beef that was just raised on grass," he decided to shift his operation to grass-fed organic. Harris frames his choice to raise cattle on pasture as natural and a return to older methods. He says his beef is "made from sunshine, microbes, water—grass." These claims are visually corroborated in York's film by idyllic images of cows pasturing on Harris's land.[167] The final shot of Harris drinking red wine out of the bottle on the pasture in the setting sun reflects the down-home, sophisticated consumption he promotes in his business. He claims, for example, that his work is "all art, no science" and that his family land will continue to be fruitful through "vertical integration and sophisticated eaters." Through the use of direct statements such as this,

[167] Images of Harris's production facility, which is clear and bright, are the only representations of White Oak Pastures not shot using natural light.

Cud frames Harris as an authority and teaches the audience about the history of industrial agriculture and Harris's practices by combining images of White Oak Pastures and archival footage to corroborate the story Harris's tells.

In the film, Harris is presented in ways that tap into preconceived notions of southerners and cattlemen to bolster the authority of his claims. To quote one of my interviewees, Will Harris seems "straight out of central casting." *Cud* is successful, in part, because Harris looks like and sounds like a character. Dressed in a cowboy hat with a distinct southern Georgia accent, he fulfills imagined expectations of a farmer, a cattleman, and a southern gentleman. While, as a person, Harris is much more nuanced than the stereotype he visually and aurally fulfills, the ways that his image plays to expectation is an important part of how he assumes a position of authority and knowledge about the "right way" to farm in Georgia.

This image of Harris as a (stereo)typical southern cattle farmer plays both with and against other assumptions about types of farming and farmers that viewer's bring to bear on the film. A wide range of people practice organic farming; however, images of organic farmers as counter-cultural abound.[168] Harris upsets these established images instead presenting himself (through speech, appearance, and actions) as a farmer from a long line of farmers invested in their land. He frames his decision as a realization that being invested financially and personally in the land meant that he should farm differently. Thus, Harris's narrative about how he came to choose organic farming has the potential to depoliticize his decision, presenting a progressive farming method without arguing for other progressive positions and making Harris's appeals seem more

[168] Warren J. Belasco, Appetite for Change*: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry, 1966-1988* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

neutral "authentic" through his connection to a historical farm family, to a state agricultural education, and to a life on the farm. Because of his stance on farming practices and his appearance and personal history, Harris can negotiate different audience expectations and desires, while telling a story that people are more willing to believe.

This negotiation of identities and expectations also in the film's presentation of Harris as "southern"—a position that *Cud* defines by connections to place and by agricultural investment. Again, Harris fulfills (and perhaps even plays to) the audience's expectations for what it means to be a southern farmer—wanting to go to sleep each night and wake each morning on his own spot of land, for example. However, he then presents progressive ideas about how to work the land. York's framing of Harris—shots looking directly at him standing in the woods or in his fields, showing him on his land in the dappled, waxing, and waning sunlight—presents the farmer as the central authority of the film. He is, in fact, the only person in the film.[169] The last image of the documentary, which shows Harris drinking red wine but drinking it straight out of the bottle, solidifies his identity as simultaneously progressive and traditional.

Part of the argument presented in *Cud* is that the scientific knowledge of twentieth-century agriculture may have been accurate, but it was wrong and inattentive to the needs of the land and animals. In contrast, the documentary promotes a way of knowing and relating to places and animals that is intimate and "natural." Harris talks about knowing his cows like people know their dogs, and the film includes shots that show his intimate and loving relationship with his own dog. If Harris is the main focus of the film, however, the cows are in the second spotlight; they get their own close-ups and

[169] Some long shots of butchers in his abattoir are the only other humans shown in *Cud*.

group and action shots, showing them running and laying, eating, and generally being bovine in the sunshine. Harris's personal and industry narratives are paralleled to pastoral images of the farmer, his animals, and his land.

The parallel use of pastoral narrative and colorful images of White Oak Pastures contrasts the black-and-white archival footage of industrial agriculture in the film. Though *Cud* could easily use contemporary color footage or even older color footage to illustrate Harris's claims, the black-and-white images serve several functions. First, black-and-white film and photographs tend to convey the authority of historical truth because audiences have been conditioned over time to accept the realism of documentary images as evidence of objective fact.[170] Therefore, when Harris is giving a twentieth-century history, the footage visually reinforces the accuracy of his claims. Moreover, the use of black-and-white creates a visual line between past and present—that is between old practices and progress—which further reinforces Harris's claims about the rightness of his work. This visual distinction between old and new is especially interesting given that Harris has, in fact, gone back to older ways of farming. There is, however, no black-and-white footage of older ways of farming in the film, just as there is no color footage of contemporary factory farming. Instead, York creates a visual factory-and-pesticide past and a sunshine-and-grass present. Modern industrial agriculture is presented as part of a past that farmers, like Harris, have left behind. In contrast, "progress," in the form of humane, sustainable, and healthy farming practices, is represented in vibrant and engaging color.

The film is aesthetically beautiful, crafted to give the audience insight into White

[170] Jones, 13.

Oak Pastures and to become invested in Harris and his beef. Harris points out in *Cud* that he cannot ask people to pay more for his beef without telling them the story of it, a claim which has been borne out in research on the subject.[171] Harris, then, has a clear reason for participating in this film project. In addition to presenting history and giving a sense of place, there is a small "how-to" section in the film where Harris makes and eats a simple rare steak. In this way, the film combines agricultural education with consumer education in the packaging of cultural education. Harris's expository claims about his experiential and professional knowledge—about farming, about cows and steak, and about land—are supported and even buoyed through the film's images.

Cud has been well-received and quite successful in reaching audiences and teaching them about grass-fed beef and White Oak pastures. Harris himself bought 4,000 copies of the film, which he uses in his business. Restaurant managers have, further, used the film to teach staff about the meat they are serving and have given DVDs to customers. Teachers have used the film in lessons about meat production and about storytelling. Parents show it as consumer education for their children. In an example that pinpoints this film as an effective introduction to a person and a business, a law professor uses *Cud* in his classroom to demonstrate a client interview in a mock case about property rights and pollution. Finally, other filmmakers have seen *Cud* as a template for animal rights activism and for industry PR.[172]

However, the response of a woman I talked with the first time I saw *Cud* complicates this litany of success. She had photographed and documented Will Harris's

[171] See for example, Asebo, K., et. al, "Farmer and Consumer Attitudes at Farmers' Markets in Norway," *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture* 30, no. 4 (2007): 63-93.

[172] These filmmakers said that *Cud* tells a short, smart story that gets viewers emotionally engaged with the subject.

farm for another organization and was so upset by the film that she left the screening. She said she was frustrated by the fact that the film did not seem to reflect the trial it has been for Harris to switch from conventional to organic cattle farming. She felt it glossed over the real difficulty, the family rifts, the anxiety, and the major decision-making involved in changing the course and methods of his farm.[173]

What the example of this woman's response points out is that, though *Cud* presents a mixture of personal and historical knowledge, it leaves significant issues unknown. In personal conversation and speaking engagements, Harris does tell a story that includes the difficulties of being and becoming an organic, grass-fed cattle farmer at a time when conventional, industrial animal production is still the norm. Why then is the narrative of the film about success, well-made decisions, and beautiful athletic cows? The answer to this question lies, in part, in the ways that the SFA understands authority in its work and its relationship with subjects. The SFA wants to maintain positive (if not always equal) relationships, and it usually works against undermining the authority of subjects. Subjects can have their own intentions—in Harris's case there is the desire to make a clear argument in favor of grass-fed beef. In some ways, this is a fair relationship—it allows subject to speak as they would like, to present themselves as they would like to be presented.[174] The complicated result of this arrangement, however, is that the stories subjects tell may skirt difficulties or elide critique. This can be interpreted as a joint effort between the filmmaker and subjects or as part of the structure of making

[173] Conversation at Southern Foodways Alliance Potlikker, Athens, Georgia, August 2009.

[174] Most often this occurs with subjects who have public speaking experience and constructed ideas about their work. Business owners are more likely to be in this position than other film subjects, making the relationship somewhat classed. They are also often white men. York may develop different relationships with them, or their positionality may allow them to more readily shape their narrative. Of course, there are individual factors as well. For example, African American writer and farmer Dori Sanders has a strong stake and voice in the film about her.

celebratory, wide-audience cultural films *with* subjects.[175]

To Live and Die in Avoyelles

While the opening production credits for *To Live and Die in Avoyelles* (2011) are rolling, a man begins speaking in Cajun French. A boy says in English, "What does that mean?" And the man says, "It means you aren't supposed to know if you don't know already." This exchange presents the central ideas of *To Live and Die in Avoyelles Parrish*. Avoyelles Parrish, Louisiana is represented in York's documentary as having its own special knowledge and practices; however, unlike the man's response, the film provides audiences with "what they don't know already." It focuses on the place-based technology and philosophy of a group of white men in Avoyelles through exploring the practice of cochon de lait (roasting suckling pigs over open fires). *To Live and Die* moves between the voiceovers of the men York interviews, images from the cochon de lait process, interview shots, and footage from various cochon de lait events (a slaughter, a festival, and two home roasts). While the subjects of the documentary are individuals, the film is edited into a collective voice and representation.

To Live and Die begins with death. Looking at a red farm against a bright blue sky, the audience hears a man calling and shooting a pig and declaring that some must die. The sound then switches to Cajun music, and after a montage of scenery in Avoyelles Parrish, the scene lands on men working a pig carcass. The sounds and images are finally synced, and then the pig carcass falls from the table onto the floor, interrupting Gerald Wayne Lemoine. He tells the men to pick the pig up, and audiences, without fail, gasp and laugh. As he methodically eviscerates a pig, shown in a close-up, intestines

[175] It should be noted that the subjects only have control over the shooting and how they interact with York. York makes all of the editing decisions. York's philosophies of filming seem to in part rely on the idea of presenting the best subject rather than presenting the most round or complete profile.

bursting out, Lemoine talks about how, if for some reason society lost electricity and gas-power, the people of Avoyelles would be ahead of the curve because of their food production knowledge.

The next section of the film concerns that know-how, particularly in terms of cooking cochon de lait. With interludes of Cajun music, York edits together a series of Cajun men explaining aspects of cochon de lait, each tending the pig and speaking alone. The film then moves to a cochon de lait festival, which is introduced by another Cajun man in a voice over. The fire department is cooking 9,800 pounds of pig, he says, as the audience watches sped-up footage of the men hanging and tending the pigs, and then slowed-down footage of the pork cooking. Several cooks for the festival talk about the mechanism of the cooking racks and the techniques for rendering the fat from the pigs. The film then turns to the adapted technology of home traditions and, parallel to that, philosophies of the good life in Louisiana. The expository knowledge from the men is accompanied by demonstrations of cooking the pork—close-ups of fire, of roasting meat, of the chain and ice-cream-churn contraptions people use for cochon de lait.

The last scene of *To Live and Die* is filmed in the dark. Unlike the other parts of the documentary, it is not composed. Instead, men raucously take the pig from its spinning, vertical grate and tear it apart; the footage is loud and fast-moving. Men talk over one another, and the camera is canted and blurry at times. This brief scene conveys a sensory experience that is very different from the talking-head and sensory b-roll of the rest of the film. The sound and moving images are synced, but disorienting. It is a demonstration of some of the philosophical tenets of Avoyelles that the men have discussed but is presented in a way that is close and a bit unbridled; we even hear York's

voice in the brief section.

In a discussion of the film and its representation of cochon de lait after its premiere screening in New York, York was asked about the racial make-up of the tradition.[176] The subjects in his film are, notably, all white. He said that his film reflected the people he encountered and the places where he was invited in. Writer and scholar Lolis Elie, speaking on the same panel, pointed out that Avoyelles Parrish is one-third black and that there is a strong black cochon de lait tradition there as well. This disjuncture between the food culture that is known to exist in a place and the representation of that culture on film reflects some of the complications of the filmmaker's positionality.[177] Most of York's subjects are assigned to him by the SFA, meaning that they are in restaurants or on farms that have already been chosen for filming, so his perspective simply manifests in the film's production. For other films, York finds the subjects himself. It makes sense that he would be more likely find and film white practitioners in rural Louisiana because of his own race and gender.[178] Social

[176] I watched *To Live and Die* with two audiences. The first was in New York City, at the Big Apple Barbecue Block Party (BABBQ) and the second in Eunice, Louisiana, on an SFA field trip. The people at BABBQ came from a variety of places and included people from Avoyelles. During the film, the audience laughed a lot but were audibly disturbed by the butchering scene. In the panel discussion afterward, after York, barbecue scholar Lolis Elie, and food writer Brett Anderson discussed the making of the film and the pork traditions of Cajun Louisiana, the audience asked questions about the food—how it compared to barbecue and about how to find their own cochon de lait in Avoyelles—and about the place. In the SFA screening, people also laughed, but their response to the butchering was different. The audience was mostly interested and afterward people discussed how important seeing those processes are for understanding food.
[177] These are not unlike the issues of positionality that oral historians face, as I discussed in chapter two.
[178] To make the film, York first attended and filmed the cochon de lait festival. This is an easier way to find subjects—at the public event. However, York also filmed at private homes. While he was in Avoyelles, the Mississippi river was flooding, and 250 deer were caught in a soybean field, unable to escape as the water rose around them. York was filming the incident because it might prove useful in the film, and a local man came up to him, assuming he was from the news. When York explained that he was not and the project he was doing, the guy, Joe Mayou, invited him to do some cochon de lait that weekend. To get a pig, York went to Ronny's store, making another connection for the film. Then he filmed the small cochon de lait on the "coon ass microwave." When York then mentioned to Ronny that he didn't have any footage of a traditional-sized pig in the traditional method, Ronny said he could do that. The next Wednesday, they filmed what became framing scenes for *To Live and Die*—the pig slaughter and roasting on the backyard, vertical spit. The subjects in this film were selected by York when he was attending public events and then

structures in the places York films, and probably in most places in the United States for that matter, make white-white relationships easier to initiate and cultivate. However, the structures and constraints of York's filming process lead to stories being framed and presented in ways that perpetuate simplified and exclusionary understandings of culture—south Louisiana traditions remain depicted as white. It is easy, in turn, for the viewer to accept the racial homogeneity of the practice.[179]

At the same panel, an audience member asked about the fact that no women were present in any of the scenes. While this reflects the gendered breakdown of cooking cochon de lait, York averred that the women did make the rest of the meal. The film sutures the voices of many men, which makes it seem like a distinct collective. On the one hand, this reflects the tradition, in terms of the race and gender segregated nature of cochon de lait; at the same time, it shapes, or even misshapes, understanding of the tradition as a white tradition. Further, the voices in the film rarely say something that one would not expect them to say, creating a nuanced display of technology on an uncomplicated background of subjects.[180]

The voices in this film belong to the men who showed Joe York how to cook cochon de lait; however, from filmed voices and actions, York constructs his interpretation of a collective Avoyelles testimony. The film relies as much on subjects' voiceover and observational footage as on moments where the subjects speak to the

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through snowball sampling in Avoyelles.

[179] Additionally, at the same panel in New York, an audience member asked about why no women are present in any of the scenes. While the predominance of men does reflect the gendered breakdown of cooking cochon de lait, York averred that the women did make the rest of the meal.

[180] I was told a story about the filming that is also absent from the film, in ways that reflect who crafts these stories and what they are meant to showcase. Apparently, at one moment, one of the men said something particularly racist, which a person from the SFA, there for the filming, verbally rejected. The film has no sense of this—racist discourse or tension between the speakers and the film producers, not complicating a mastery and enjoyment narrative with critical discourse.

screen. Further, it is edited in montages that play with time and order to define the practice of cochon de lait. As I suggested before, the film is framed around Avoyelles technology and Avoyelles philosophy. The technology—roasting pigs in a particular way—and the philosophy—living in the moment—are not necessarily coordinated, though they are presented as being of the same ilk. The story seems to be about what York discovered to be the defining aspects of cochon de lait culture in Avoyelles. However, the story York encountered and tells in his film is but one perspective on this food tradition and its practices, which can and should not be confused for a comprehensive or all-inclusive representation.

Conclusions

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, SFA films encompass a range of cultural knowledge— about social history, food practices and recipes, memories, and business strategies. York's films range quite widely in how they approach knowledge construction; however, they all rely on montages that mix archival and contemporary footage with interviews. The testimony of the subject is always the central concern of the film, and the construction is always celebratory. The subject is presented as knowledgeable and, in most cases, aesthetically engaging, through their work and their environment.

Filmed interviews, along with footage of people working, form the center of York's documentaries. York's films use many cuts to create rhythm, experience, and structure. Most of them use music along with ambient sound and interviews. The films separate image and voice usually only when a film subject is speaking in an interview or

in another moment that York is filming.[181] Subjects' voices are often laid over images (observational or archival) of the things they talk about. York uses very tight shots for interviews and often uses extreme or unusual angles in filming. While his films have become more streamlined over time, they are still highly manipulated. He often chooses montages and layered audio over long shots and synced sound. The outcome of this form is that the films have a moving tempo and can make long or repetitive processes, which are often the basis for food production, engaging for a range of viewers.

York is also skilled at capturing sensory detail in his films. His use of ambient sound, like the scraping of oyster tongs, the rustle of squirrels, or the din of a festival, makes the audience feel closer to the subject. He films food in ways that are aestheticized but seem natural, which follows a particular mode of food photography. He makes use of ambient lighting in ways that create mood and beautify his subjects.[182] Finally, he frequently includes close ups of textures—the coals of a pitmaster's fire, the crumb of a pastry, the lapping of water. These sensory details are aspects that are not captured in the SFA's oral histories because they are mediated—the visual disappears, and the aural is mainly speech.

York's films, in contrast to the oral histories, create a sense of directness. Audiences see and hear the world that the subject dwells in, and the subject does not need to be "good with words" or to remember and verbalize things to share. Less is lost in description, particularly when it comes to movements, colors, and textures of food practices. However, it is important to note that this seeming immediacy is mediated by

[181] In an earlier film, "experts" speak about a deceased subject.
[182] He often uses firelight and early or late daylight. However, one of the overwhelming qualities of his films is the use of natural light (shooting indoors sometimes but most often outdoors) that is visually appealing, which means that he corrects the color, saturation, and brightness on his work as well as that he has an eye for good light in a variety of situations.

York. The audience sees what he understands to be the most significant elements of the food cultures he documents, which are also caught and edited in a way that makes them visually and aurally engaging.

York's films demonstrate the ways that documentary can create the kind of affective knowledge, based in sharing experience, that David MacDougall and Laura Marks discuss. Particularly in films like *Avoyelles* and *Cud*, SFA documentaries provide access to places and experiences that are not readily available to audiences. Through the close attention to people, even in less successful films like *Marsaw*, they allow audiences to meet strangers and learn about their lives and practices. However, because of the subject-filmmaker-audience relationship in these films, they also trouble ideas of what people "know" and who authorizes that knowledge.

York posited a theory of this relationship between the subject and the audience, which he said "might sound weird" but is apt. York said he wants it to seem like viewers are in his position. He wants the viewer to have the experience of meeting this person, of being with them. In this framework, audience members are vicariously set in York's body, with his vision and voice, and in York's mind, attending with him.[183] The medium York works in allows for shared sensory experiences between the subject, the filmmaker, and the audience despite its inherent disembodied nature. Film, in some ways, takes viewers out of their own bodies, allowing them access to what others see and hear and understand.

In this framework, a film captures the experience of listening to, of hearing, rather than representing a subject. The filmmaker's role is to be an embodied listener and watcher. This framework also ferrets out nuances and difficulties in York's role; the idea

[183] MacDougall, 54.

that York is sharing not only the lives of others but also his own embodied experience accounts for the diverse ways that subjects' stories are told in SFA films.

The SFA's films rely on situated knowledge, human relationships, and specific filming and editing choices to tell stories about people, places, and foodways of the U.S. South. The SFA trusts its subjects as key informants on what local food culture is and means, and the organization believes it can aggregate their narratives to construct a southern imaginary. Yet, using individual claims and stories to represent southernness brings up certain specific problems of material history and social imagination. While York interviews most of his subjects in addition to filming them at work, the relationships he forms with each of these subjects vary significantly. Some subjects, like Will Harris, have specific stories to tell or arguments to make—often these films can seem collaborative; sometimes these films seem (and act) promotional. Other subjects don't tell a particular story at all. Through observation and editing interviews, York pieces together a film, which tells their stories as York interprets them (as he does in *To Live and Die in Avoyelles*, *Working the Miles*, and *Cut/Chop/Cook*). Then, there are films in which the subject is interesting, but the film itself seems to meander. In these works, the subjects reveal themselves to be complex figures, but they don't emerge with coherent narratives (as in *Marsaw* and *The Welcome Table*).

York's films are not traditionally expositional—they are constructed instead as a mixture of observational, interactive, and expository work. They are rarely reflexive; instead they often negate the audience's position, working to shrink the distance between the subject and the viewer by structuring the perception of an open-access experience. This can and does create connections. After seeing an SFA film, viewers attest to feeling

like they know more about the topic of the film and the person or people it depicts. This is especially notable in how interactions between subjects and audience members change from the time before a film is shown at an event to afterward.

There are assets and dangers in creating what seems like direct knowledge through a mediated form like film. SFA films prove are a way to engage audiences and to help them create bonds with subjects and learn about others' experiences. However, there are still questions about how this knowledge is authorized and understood (or changed) as it moves from the subject to the filmmaker to the audience. While the films frame knowledge as highly subject-based, York works alone to select and structure the story and present it in an aesthetic form that SFA members and viewers will find engaging and pleasurable.

In the next chapter, I continue to investigate how the SFA structures subject-audience relationships in the context of education and pleasure. Chapters two and three have explored how oral history and films rely on and position individual voices in different ways in order to tell a story of culture. In the next chapter, I explore how these stories function within the context of collective experience. At events, subjects' voices are represented in many ways—in films, the subjects are on screen for audiences and then mingle with them and in presentations, others talk about them and they talk about themselves. In the chapter that follows, I look at how the consumption of narratives about people and food in this collective context informs audience's understandings of and engagement in cultural production.

Chapter 4

"Not with that Jack Daniel's in your hand": Consumption, Experience, and Learning at SFA Events

In "Is There a Difference Between Southern and Soul?" Shaun Chavis describes a 2004 argument that broke out at a Southern Foodways Alliance symposium: "Passions rose as people argued about southern food and soul food, debating which cuisine came from where, who taught whom how to cook, and whether there ought to be one name for both."[184] These are the kinds of debates over identity and cultural construction that I discussed in chapter one. However, Chavis's next lines frame the specific questions that I consider in this chapter. She says:

> You might look at this scene and wonder why it exists. You'd rather go get some deviled eggs or fried chicken, and southern or soul, as long as it tastes good and the sweet tea keeps comin' (or maybe you'd prefer Tennessee whiskey), who cares? Certainly there are better things to debate, and even so, you're not going to get into them now, not with that Jack Daniel's in your hand.[185]

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between asking people to engage with debates about culture and identity and having them engage in pleasurable acts. Particularly, I ask what it means to feed people fried chicken and ask them to care about debates over fried chicken. Can talking about fried chicken get us to the "better things to debate"—economic inequality, environmental issues, present and historical struggles for justice?

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[184] Shaun Chavis, "Is There a Difference Between Southern and Soul?" in *Cornbread Nation 4: The Best of Southern Food Writing*, ed. Dale Volberg Reed and John Shelton Reed, 234-44 (Athens, GA: University Georgia Press, 2008), 237.
[185] Ibid.

And what is the relationship between trying to study culture and history and having a Jack Daniel's in one's hand?

In the above statement, Chavis reveals both a fear that these debates are not crucial enough to invest time and energy in and that celebration, especially with a drink, discourages debate completely. Since 1999, the Southern Foodways Alliance has wrestled with questions about food, education, and pleasure. This chapter takes up how collective, programmed engagement functions in the SFA. In it, I explore how the potential and limits of collective, celebratory engagement to further the educational and promotional goals of the SFA's oral history and film work and facilitate other forms of participant engagement.

Scholarly Background

At the center of this chapter is the idea that knowledge is formed and informed by myriad sensory experiences. The previous chapters examined forms of mediated knowledge; through audio and video, subjects' experiences and ideas were shared and mixed with the ideas and experiences of those who worked on SFA oral history and film projects. This work is mediated through recording and editing the sound, image, and/or words of a person. In these cases, the audience does not have direct exposure to the subject. While first-hand knowledge is central to the power behind oral history and documentary film—in the reification of the subject and in the technique of production, these forms do not give the audience first-hand knowledge. Instead, this is the promise of live SFA events, which give audiences experiences in the flesh, providing direct sensory and social knowledge to participants. In order to better understand how knowledge is constructed at these events (particularly leisure events) I draw upon work from scholars

who study ways of knowing and the senses, feasting and social experience, and celebratory activism.

Despite arguments that the Western world has historically denigrated taste and smell as "lower senses," the current prominence of food culture demonstrates that those senses are embedded and significant in social interactions and networks.[186] Though "taste" in the Bourdieuian sense is a complex social system, sensory experiences are central to that system.[187] I take as a given that that sensory experience is part of a making knowledge and social relationships and aim to better understand this method of knowledge-making.

I draw in this chapter upon the work of anthropology of the senses, which focuses on how bodily experiences affect cultural perception and production. As Paul Stoller discusses in *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, extra-lingual communication is a central part of cultural experience. Stoller argues for an anthropology that accounts for and is attune to sensory experience as a form of knowledge production and transmission. An anthropology of the senses is not only essential to understanding "other" places and societies, which may have unfamiliar sensory expressions, but is also central to doing ethnography at home.[188]

As I frame a sensory investigation, I am interested in the embodied and integrated approaches of scholars like Tim Ingold, Daniel Miller, and Nadia Seremetakis.

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[186] Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
[187] Pierre Bourdieu, *A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).
[188] Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993); Kathryn Linn Geurts, *The Culture and the Senses: Ways of Bodily Know in an African Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Paul Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

Seremetakis, in particular, encourages and models work that focuses on the materiality of experience. Her work engages with the way sensory, embodied experience informs discourse, rejecting the notion of "reading" experience "*as if the dense and embodied communication between persons and things were only a quick exchange between surfaces*."[189] Further, my scholarship is informed by Daniel Miller's claim that "by dwelling upon more mundane sensual and material qualities of the object, [scholars] are able to unpack the more subtle connections with cultural lives and values that are objectified through these forms, in part, because of the particular qualities they possess." I argue that the SFA attempts precisely this kind of engagement.[190] In doing so, I follow anthropologist Tim Ingold, who advocates for an intersensory approach that attends to how people interact with their environment as whole and interdependent agents.[191] The work of sensory anthropologists, like those mentioned here and others, attends overwhelmingly to the sensory constructions of everyday life. My work turns the lens slightly, focusing on curated sensory experience.

In particular, this chapter explores *making* sensory experience in order to engage people in cultural education. While educational studies have used experiential learning as a model for decades, I draw from the work of media scholar Laura Marks and spatial scholar Dolores Hayden, both of whom explore ways in which people create sensory experiences that attempt to transmit knowledge and how people, in turn, experience those creations. Marks, specifically, uses sensory studies to understand cultural products. In

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[189] Nadia Seremetakis, ed., *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1994), 134. Italics in original.
[190] Daniel Miller, ed., *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9.
[191] Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000).

The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses, she focuses on memory and experience, both on screen and through audience interactions, and asks how people capture lost homes and "unrepresentable" senses (touch, smell, taste) in film.[192] One of her main goals is to "understand how meaning occurs in the body, and not only at the level of signs."[193] Marks's methods of studying cultural production are not radical; however, where and how her attention is drawn shifts the analysis toward bodily experience, on camera and in the viewer's seat. Hayden's work, similarly, focuses on the producers of public history exhibits and their audiences, attending to the ways that different spaces are constructed for different sensory experiences and how those experiences inform investment in and understanding of urban history.[194] Drawing on the work of these scholars in my discussion of how sensory experience impacts knowledge production in the SFA, I look at how different kinds of sensory experiences—eating foods, inhabiting places, and viewing multimedia productions—make meaning.

At SFA events, people are asked to dwell in places, to observe and listen, and to ingest. Moreover, they are asked to do these things in a collective environment, situation that invites comparisons to discourses on feasting. My work draws from theory, like Bakhtin's concepts of the carnival, and from anthropology and culinary history that examines the feast as a practice. Feasts serve multiple purposes: to garner power, create or reinforce solidarity, escape social norms, celebrate abundance, and express

[192] Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), xvi, 20.
[193] Marks, xvii.
[194] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

generosity.[195] Some of these aspects seem at odds with one another, in part because a royal feast in Versailles would be quite different from public holiday feasting in Paris. However, these disparate aspects all rely on pleasure to facilitate social work.

Feasting can be used to create bonds and facilitate social action.[196] I examine how that occurs in groups of highly educated, financially secure people in the contemporary United States; I am especially interested in how feasting facilitates certain modes of discourse, how experience changes what can and is said. In addition to the metaphor of the table as a space of inclusion and exchange, I consider that the literal dining table is often a site for civic discourse. Janet A Flammang argues that, because of the way dining works, action and interaction is structured "in such a way that a reservoir of goodwill is replenished," making political discourse possible.[197] While this representation of the table can overlook some of the realities of uncivil discourse and also of harmful civil discourse, which most people have witnessed at some point, it frames the way that the table has become a space for the *promise* of civic engagement. My work then examines how these promises are or are not fulfilled at SFA events.

To evaluate the relationship between feeling good and doing good—between pleasure and civic action—I draw on the concept of celebratory activism. "Celebratory activism" is a term coined by Slow Food to describe using pleasurable experiences to facilitate social action. While the term emerged from a food movement organization, the concept extends beyond its origin. Following Bakhtin's claim that laughter makes it

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[195] Nichola Fletcher, *Charlemagne's Tablecloth: A Piquant History of Feasting* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2004), 4-6. Brian Hayden and Suzanne Villeneuve, "A Century of Feasting Studies," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011), 433–449.
[196] Hayden and Villeneuve, 435-437.
[197] Janet A. Flammang, *The Taste for Civilization: Food, Politics, and Civil Society* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 12.

possible to investigate subjects, celebratory activism provides a lens for understanding how pleasure, rather than guilt, can become a tool for public action.[198] Celebratory activism frames pleasure as a way to bind identities and sees guilt as an experience that divides the concerned from those affected.[199]

Drawing on the work of ACT UP, Ben Shepard argues for "joyfulness" in activism, saying, "If alienation, social isolation, and a turn away from public life are what ails contemporary civil culture, joy cultivates the networks that allow community and democracy to thrive."[200] He claims the success of ACT UP is in part due to "a recognition of the dual yearnings for connection and justice"—to create bonds as well as fight for justice.[201] Part of this movement has been about "creating a new sort of culture of life and activism that was inspired less by guilt than by fun and life affirming joy and vitality."[202] In her work on radical clowning, L. M. Bogad says this play-based activism disrupts notions of power and ideas of stodgy or angry social movements. By creating a space for pleasurable participation, celebratory activist groups involve more people in civic action and reject claims that activism is a space of negative affect.[203]

The clear political goals of groups like ACT UP and radical clowns make them different from the SFA, which is neither radical nor overtly political. The 2012 plans for

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[198] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas, 1981), 23.
[199] Political philosophers like Wendy Brown and Iris Marion Young, in particular, have argued that guilt—which is associated with feelings of anger, sorrow, and resentment—is politically unproductive, often forestalling or preventing discourse, engagement, and action. See Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Iris Marion Young *Justice and the Politics of Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
[200] Ben Shepard, "The Use of Joyfulness as a Community Organizing Strategy," *Peace and Change* 30, no. 4 (October 2005): 436.
[201] Shepard, 440.
[202] Shepard, 441.
[203] L. M. Bogad, "Carnivals Against Capital: Radical Clowning and the Global Justice Movement," *Social Identities* 16, no. 4 (July 2010): 537-557.

the organization acknowledged the necessity of figuring out how the SFA would negotiate the growing environment of food politics, since this is not a place they had specifically mapped out as an organization. While the organization engages in discourses about land use, environmental costs of food, food insecurity and inequality, and labor issues, as well as histories of injustice and poverty, its engagement emerges from an attention to the stories of individuals and practices within southern food culture as opposed to solidifying around an action plan. Since the SFA's goals have not been about affecting political change but, rather, about encouraging social and cultural discourse, I ask: how does one assess the educational or discursive opportunity and risks that the SFA's pleasurable experiences cultivate?

Psyche Williams-Forson and Carole Counihan provide a point at which to begin answering this question. They claim that food has been "taken public," meaning that it has become a space for civic engagement in the twenty-first century.[204] However, this activism is complicated by the popularity of food culture as leisure activity. In some ways, one facilitates the other—chefs, like Jamie Oliver, and many viewers who began with the Food Network in the 1990s are now engaged with questions that extend beyond food preparation. People have become invested in the health, environmental, and human impact of contemporary food systems, which manifest in an array of organizations, businesses, discourses, and practices. However, local and sustainable food movements are critiqued as ways wealthy whites better their own lives, with a sense of moral right, without attending to larger structural inequalities.[205]

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[204] Psyche Williams-Forson and Carole Counihan, eds., *Taking Food Public: Redefining Foodways in a Changing World* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-7.

[205] For example, Julie Guthman, "'If They Only Knew': Color Blindness and Universalism in California Alternative Food Institutions," in *Taking Food Public*, 211-222; Lisa Markowitz, "Expanding Access and

Staff and members of the SFA are well-aware of these critiques and find themselves asking about the validity of work that so often looks like a party. The organization simultaneously hopes that pleasure will facilitate thoughtful engagement and fears that it will squelch thoughtful discussion. As I discuss below, people in the SFA interpret the work of the organization differently; however, they generally agree that the group works to educate people not simply about food, but also about culture and that education involves engaging with discourses about identity formation and social structures, often in terms of race, class, and ethnicity.

Case Studies

In this chapter, I examine relationships between experience and study that emerge primarily from SFA events. SFA members, staff, and critics don't question the value of SFA media as a site of thoughtful engagement (though they could). Often, they point to media productions as the serious and significant work of the organization; however, SFA members and observers say it is the events that draw a crowd, energize the group, and lead to its success.

The SFA mission statement states that the organization's goal is to "document, study, and celebrate."[206] The celebration aspect of the organization manifests in its programming in several ways. In the SFA, celebration is a rhetoric that encourages positive portrayals of people and culture and also a mode of practice that relies on joyful, pleasurable, or ecstatic experience. People in the SFA celebrate with a direct object, through awards, discourse, and attention, and also intransitively, through parties. The relationship between pleasure and awareness is at the center of the SFA's philosophy.

Alternatives: Building Farmers' Markets in Low-Income Communities," in *Taking Food Public*, 531-541;and Chad Levin, "The Year of Eating Politically," in *Taking Food Public*, 576-591.

[206] Southern Foodways Alliance, Mission Statement, 2009.

For most members, SFA events are where pleasure is most deeply rooted. While the organization is a media producer now, it began with a successful conference in 1998. The group has steadily added more events to its annual roster—instituting adult field trips, day camps, film screenings, dinners, lectures, and other engagements over the years. Many of these events have grown as well—the first symposium had around one hundred people; now there are three hundred; instead of one annual Potlikker film screening, the organization now puts on three. While the structure of these events differs, they generally involve a large group of participants eating well, being entertained, and listening to people speak about food culture.

I focus on the SFA's three major events: symposiums, Potlikkers, and field trips. The symposium is an annual, three-day event in October in Oxford, Mississippi that includes academic lectures, educational talks, performances, screenings, and meals programmed around an annual theme. Field trips are also annual events in which fifty to one hundred people go to a location for three days to tour local food businesses (farms, processors, restaurants, stores), listen to talks, and have meals. Potlikkers are film screening parties that occur in different locations across the United States, primarily in the southeast. Each Potlikker includes an evening of food and drinks from local chefs, short lectures, music, and the screening of three to five short films. Symposiums, field trips, and Potlikkers all require a paid ticket.[207] These three events are the key gatherings that have defined the organization. Each of them, in different ways, showcase SFA documentary work and, more importantly, form the public, in-person space where members learn and network. SFA events create spaces where people engage with SFA

[207] The organization sponsors free events as well. These free events are often discussions, screenings, or lectures, and while they often include food, are not seen as central to the identity of the organization, nor are they seen as quintessentially SFA events.

materials, and they are the defining frameworks of the SFA's work for many members.

These events differ in their duration and in how they position subjects and audiences in relation to each other and to locations of practice. The symposium brings together around three hundred people for conference-style presentations, awards, communal meals, and performances. The field trips, occurring in a different place each year, are weekends marked by communal meals and presentations, but also by tours and on-location events. Potlikkers are one-night-only events and center around the screening of several films; they also include music, cocktails, and light food. Potlikker events occur across the southeast—the chefs are local, and the programming is location specific. Unlike field trips, which are on-location events, film screenings usually take place in a designated public event space.

These different events demonstrate how consuming media collectively, interacting with subjects and other audience members in person, and being in particular locations inform the way that knowledge is produced, both in relation to media and in relation to cultural experience. Because the symposium and field trip are longer and more elaborate events, my studies of them are longer; however, the Potlikkers provide an important counterpoint for understanding particular aspects of field trips and symposiums that change discourse and interaction.

My study of SFA events draws on four years of personal experience and observation. Specifically, I attended the annual symposium as a volunteer from 2008 to 2010 and as a paid attendee in 2011. I participated in Potlikker events in Athens (2008), Charleston (2011), and Greenville (2011), and I was a field trip volunteer for Buford Highway, Atlanta (2010) and a field trip attendee in south Louisiana and the Mississippi

Delta (both in 2011). In addition to participant observation, I use information I have collected through interviews with members, staff, and attendees; surveys conducted by the SFA and by myself; and printed and published materials for and about the events.

1. Symposium

Saturday nights at the SFA annual symposium often border on the bacchanal. A clawfoot bathtub full of champagne punch. People dressed as devils and deviled eggs. Forty cow heads smoldering in an open barbecue pit. A band playing, and people dancing, laughing, hugging. A twenty-four-foot table piled with candy. During these Saturday nights, without fail, my thoughts turn to the role of hedonism in human culture and experience. My interviews with other participants demonstrate that I am not alone in these thoughts. The intense pleasure of this annual night is something that attendees talked about and assessed in a variety of ways. How can we understand the social and sensory blowout that is the last night of the symposium? And how does it relate to the symposium's other high-sensory, communal moment—the artistic performances Sunday morning? In this section, I examine symposium talks, meals, and performances in order to better explain the connections, disconnections, and misconnections between the educational discourse and the sensory and social experience of this important SFA weekend.

Before examining specific aspects, I want to briefly describe a typical symposium weekend. The symposium occurs in October and has basically the same schedule each year.[208] On Friday morning, after check-in, a scholar kicks off the symposium by discussing the annual theme. After a membership meeting in the morning, often at a bar, presentations begin. Scholars and journalists, farmers and chefs, politicians and

[208] The Thursday programming from 2001-2008 just allowed for more talks.

entertainers each speak for thirty minutes to an hour on a topic. After a break for lunch, which is prepared by a well-known chef and can range from gumbo to bento boxes, there are more presentations, followed by a book-signing. The programming ends with the Ruth Fertel Keeper of the Flame Award and a screening of a film about the award winner. For dinner, busses take everyone to Taylor Grocery, a local catfish restaurant.

On Saturday morning after breakfast, talks resume until lunch. The Viking Lunch, sponsored by Mississippi Delta high-end appliance maker Viking, is an upscale, multi-course lunch made by a star chef. It is the only meal that is served seated, rather than cafeteria style. The chef usually talks about the meaning of the meal during dessert. Attendees listen to presentations for the rest of the afternoon before coming to a cocktail hour where the SFA gives out the Lifetime Achievement Award and the John Egerton Award. The Saturday dinner is a large affair that includes plenty of food, copious alcohol, live musicians, and dancing. People often continue celebrating at homes and bars once the official SFA party ends. Sunday begins with a light breakfast and coffee, followed by an artistic performance—a chitlin' ballet, a collard opera, a dramatic monologue. There is a benediction, and people go to brunch and then head home.

The days' activities run from eight in the morning until midnight. All weekend, the same people attend events together; there are no simultaneous events. This means that over the course of the conference attendees have shared a good deal of knowledge and experience. This collective experience of eating, listening, moving, and sitting together creates spaces for encounter. The pace, space, and content of events cultivate opportunities to form relationships and exchange views and ideas. The content provides both interesting topics to discuss and a sense of meaningful discourse and experience.

Being together constantly—sharing space and experiences—promotes bonds and interaction. Moreover, as the events get more exciting and fancier over the course of the symposium, the momentum aggregates and intensifies, creating a crescendo of social and sensory experience that, by its very structure, is meaningful for participants. This meaningful experience with others also reinforces relationships between participants who have shared an extraordinary time together.

Before turning to Saturday's revelry and Sunday's reveries, I look at the talks and meals, where attendees spend more of their time. While the format is mainly lecture, the speakers range in their presentation styles. They tell stories, present biographies, explain cultural geography, analyze songs, and present social and political histories. Some are funny; others are moving, and a few are even dry. Some speakers use props, while others use visuals, and still others employ only their voices.[209] There are also interviews and panels in dialogue.[210] These talks invite listeners to engage in a variety of ways. For

[209] In addition to olive trees to take home and plant, attendees of the 2011 SFA symposium were given tiny cups filled with spicy, green olive oil, which people alternately identified as communion cups and shot glasses. It was the first commercial olive oil pressed in the U.S. South in over one hundred years, pressed specifically for the SFA symposium. Participants drank the olive oil after Husk chef Sean Brock talked about Jefferson's historical role in olive cultivation in America, the rise-and-fall of commercial olive oil production in this country, and the contemporary Georgia farmers who are producing the oil.

The olive oil tasting and small trees made what could have been a forgettable lecture on the history of olive oil in the southeast into a memorable event. In almost all of the press and blog coverage of the symposium, Brock's talk was mentioned, usually with a brief line about Thomas Jefferson and the history of olive oil in the United States. While Brock's status as a star chef helps, the impact of this presentation also relied on that fact the people got to try something new that others had not tried and got to take home a plant. Being given a plant is important because it extends the material relationship. Not only is a plant something to literally take away from the event, it is also something living that, in theory, could grow into the trees that Brock discussed and even produce the olive oil the audience members tried. Moreover, it directly connects the audience to the growers and tradition by allowing people to have and interact with a clipping from the Georgia orchard. Attendees continued to note the progress of their trees on Facebook and Twitter. The experiential accessories—plants and cups of olive oil—made this talk more memorable.

[210] Individuals speaking about their personal experiences, applied to food and social issues, are often the most powerful talks. In 2009, for example, Brett Anderson gave a talk about his experiences of New Orleans food and music after Katrina, which made many people cry and included a standing ovation. In 2011, Shirley Sherrod discussed her family's farming and land dispute history and then her own experience working in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The talk was quite personal, including an extended

example, interviewees repeatedly reported on and referred to Chingo Bling's powerful performance "They Can't Deport Us All," which took place at the 2010 symposium. In the section that follows, I want to examine how this presentation functioned and how the SFA audience responded to it.

Other than two teenage girls who had driven from Jackson to see Chingo Bling, the audience was unfamiliar with this Mexican American rapper from Texas. His presentation began with two music videos, followed by a talk, ending with a rap performance. Chingo Bling ran something of a shock-and-awe campaign in his presentation. Poised and professional with a strong sense of identity, contemporary politics, and audience, he had the audience laughing and tearing up. He swore and then apologized for doing so. He spoke candidly about his difficult and positive experiences and his understandings of politics and play. He wore dark glasses for part of the presentation, which he removed at just the right moment to reveal himself and his complex position as not just a performer or political satirist, but also as a young Mexican American man. With song and vocal performance, he got people to their feet; he changed the energy of the room. By creating an experience that engaged the audience rhythmically, physically, and emotionally, he got people to invest in him.

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discussion of her father's murder. Framing discussions of land rights and civil rights in the U.S. South not as policy issues, which she clearly could have done, but as issues of human experience, Sherrod revealed how racism functioned historically and, simultaneously, created strong connections with people in the audience. This discourse was quite different from civil rights worker Bernard Lafayette, who some people remember as giving a moving talk and whom others criticized as sugar-coating racial oppression.

My comments about the personal presentations above are not meant to suggest that academic talks can't engage people. For example, Elizabeth Engelhardt and James Peacock's talks academic talks both engaged audiences intensely, though in very different ways. Engelhardt's 2011 talk on farm bulletins captivated the audience, with its poetic turns of phrase, sense of whimsy, and ability to capture the lives of forgotten farm women. She said in the talk that she could present the work more critically, but that for this engagement, she did not. Conversely, in 2010, James Peacock pulled out a Confederate flag made in China in order to talk about the Global South. The action caused intense debate during the question and answer session. While his work framed a concept—the Global South—that many in the audience were unfamiliar with, people were also willing to argue with him over his definitions, particularly the role of race in the contemporary U.S. South.

This is an example of how SFA presentations function; they audiences in unexpected ways and, by doing so, change discourse around important issues. Chingo Bling was invited because he is the self-titled Masa Messiah, his lyrics include food, and his parents run a tamale truck. This is a case where discourses about fried chicken—or corn dough—reflect directly on more complicated issues. Humor and song provided attendees a non-threatening entrée into complex discourses, even when the performer explicitly implicated them.[211] Through watching performances, audiences (who are majority white at the SFA) are able to hear and engage with topics that might make them feel uncomfortable or implicated if they were delivered as part of an expositional, third-party discourse. By creating an atmosphere of play, through the use of comedy and character, Chingo Bling opened up space to make serious claims and create dialogue within the audience.

As a symposium centered on food, meals are central to the experience and aim to function beyond nourishment and gustatory pleasure. "Context with every bite" is a mantra in the SFA; however, staff and members posit different theories about the role of meals in the work of the organization and even express doubts about how to evaluate the impact of these eating experiences. Ann Cashion's 2004 Viking Lunch, in particular, is repeatedly held up as an example of the ideal SFA meal—a story through food. The Viking Lunch is the most formal meal of the symposium and the only meal that is served seated. It comes on Saturday, after people have been intellectually engaged all morning and the day before. During lunch, attendees talk about the lectures and getting to know new people.

[211] As I discuss below Jessica Harris also did this in her dramatic monologue, "Postcard Benediction," verbally implicating the mostly white audience.

In 2004, the lunch presented ideas of race and class at the dinner table. Cashion's goal was to have "two contrasting presentations that defined markers of race and class" for each course.[212] She served she-crab soup and peanut soup, an avocado and grapefruit salad and a wild greens salad, caramel cake and molasses ice cream. For the main course, she served braised pork and vegetables, food that "everyone ate."[213] Years later, many members and staff members remember and can express the goal of the meal. In part, this is a reflection of the presentation—people were given clear taste, texture, and smell contrasts. Further, Cashion is articulate and invested in discourses of economic disparity and the kitchen. In addition to the knowledge manifest in ingredients and preparations—literally in bites—Cashion spoke about the context for her choices. People came away understanding economic differences in eating in the U.S. South, despite the fact that what they were eating—high and low—was all transformed by Cashion into a high-end dining experience.[214]

The Viking Lunch, even when it does not present such clear and memorable context-on-the-plate, is still a central event of the symposium. It is particularly significant for fostering conversation and creating new networks between participants. This happens for two reasons, which I have both observed myself and heard about repeatedly in interviews. First, the multi-course lunch for three hundred people, served by symposium volunteers, is long. It is not unusual for the meal to last a couple of hours, and because it is coursed and served, people remain at their tables during this time. The tables usually

[212] Ann Cashion, interview by author, telephone, April 12, 2011.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Not all Viking Lunches are as contextually successful. While there is rarely a bad meal, some meals seem much less storied. They are high-end, well-made meals, which are memorable for their food but not for their meaning. This is part of the difficulty of attempting to overtly tie food to meaning. Sometimes the eaters do not make the connection and, instead, just enjoy a good meal without the education.

have around ten people, who are seated as they come in with little attention to pre-formed groups. This means that almost everyone eats with someone at the table they do not know. Second, people have been in talks all morning, were in talks the previous day, and saw the Keeper of the Flame film, so they have multiple points of shared experience and are usually pretty excited about what they have been learning. As a result, the Viking Lunch is often a place for people to consider the discourses presented by the programmed speakers while establishing new relationships and strengthening existing ones.

The Friday dinner at Taylor Grocery presents a different kinesthetic and gustatory experience that is less about learning and more about experiencing a place and interacting with others. Instead of a meal framed around historical or social context, the meal at Taylor is characterized by a sense of camaraderie. Taylor Grocery is an old grocery store turned into a restaurant in a tiny Mississippi town, which, according to *Field and* Stream, has the best catfish in America. While other chefs make small plates to serve there, the meal at Taylor Grocery consists mainly of the food served at the restaurant.

On Friday night, participants take busses to Taylor, which is a fifteen-minute drive from Oxford. People bring bottles of liquor, mostly bourbon but occasionally whiskey or moonshine; once there was a cocktail with brandy, and sometimes there is beer. The liquor is passed around the bus. If it comes to you and you would like to drink, you can. Multiple busses are taken and have different alcohol loads depending who is on them, but drinks are communal to the people on that bus. Once symposium attendees arrive at the wooden, graffiti-covered restaurant in Taylor, they stand in lines inside and outside the restaurant to get food and drinks. People hang out on the porch, sitting and standing to eat, but they generally move and mingle throughout the night before loading

up on busses and heading back to Oxford.

These bus rides are a space for people to get to know each other.[215] Attendees present these rides as a central experience that puts people in conversation with others they might not know. In interviews, members said the bus rides gave them a chance to bond with other attendees and learn about other lives, opinions, activities or groups, and ways of being. People discuss a variety of things, from metropolitan taxation, university agriculture programs and school lunches, and the value of English degrees to making cocktails and favorite vacation spots. Also, attendees share the physical experiences of being on a bus: drivers getting lost, not having air conditioning or being in the wind, and navigating a people-dense space.

A striking aspect of shared food practice at the SFA is that it is not confined to circles of friends; instead, it becomes confined to specific spaces. People share salamis or spiced meal worms or pink salt, flasks of bourbon and jars of moonshine, whatever they have brought, and the sharing is done by proximity with others in the vicinity and not in a closed group. However, it is a small group experience, and the fact that food is drawn from purses and bags makes it seem more illicit. The experience seems to be about people being "insiders," but status is conferred by attendance. At my first SFA event, for example, I walked into and then left a room where I thought people were sharing exclusive bourbon and was then invited back in and poured a drink because, as I was told, the room was open to everyone. This practice of sharing does not seem to have an age, race, or professional divide, although people in the restaurant industry are more likely to be suppliers. The idea is that if you are at the event, you can sample; however, because scarcity is a fact, distribution is haphazard. These practices bond people with strangers

[215] The SFA also take attendees on bus rides during its field trips.

and create space for encounters, as people often talk while they share food.

Standing in line and milling about to eat are also practices that reinforce social encounter and networking. Some people complain about lines at the SFA because the events are costly and standing in line is boring and not at all what one would expect out of high-end dining.[216] Yet, others explain that they love the SFA lines because they create a sense of egalitarianism among people—there is no way to get to the front of the line; everyone is there, in it together—and because waiting with others creates opportunities for exchange. The unseated, group dynamics of getting food and eating facilitate people moving between conversations and interacting with many different people. Like the bus rides, people inhabit space together and often end up in conversation.

Makele Faber Cullen was among the members who described the importance of these rides and the way that conversation functions on the bus and at dinner. She said,

> Because it's intergenerational and people come from so many places, and you are all ingesting things, and that sort of becomes you. Maybe it's the lubrication of some of the spirits that are served, but I feel like people are willing expose deep moments that formed their identity. They talk about going looking for Indian spices in Alabama, or having a vegetable patch out back, or going to visit their grandparents' farm. You start to realize how profoundly those moments formed who they are. It's just such a deep thing. There is this intimacy that is more than small talk.[217]

The night at Taylor is a space where people get to know one another. At breakfasts, lunches, and cocktails hours across the weekend, attendees are engaged in this kind of talk, which burgeons out of dining together and being put in close physical proximity—standing in line, sitting next to one another, walking or riding from one venue to another together.

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[216] The SFA is not a high-end eating experience, but the feedback from events shows that some people expect better service.

[217] Makele Faber-Cullen, interview by author, Brooklyn, New York, June 2011.

The next night's dinner is understood as the pinnacle of partying at the SFA. Saturday evening is intricately and elaborately choreographed. Take, for example, the 2011 Global South symposium. Melissa Hall, the events coordinator, decorated the space with fiesta decorations, including bright flags and confetti filled eggs that she purchased at a Hispanic party supply store. Kelly English and Jonathan Magallanes pit cooked 40 cowheads for tacos, and Drew Robinson roasted whole hogs. As people stood in line for food, Theaster Gates and the Mississippi Monks performed. Inside, the Nueva Banda Corral, a Mississippi mariachi band, played and sang, and there was a brief performance by rapper Chingo Bling. In addition to the experience of the evening and the waves of blog and social media posts from this night, people continued to talk about the evening in interviews and conversations over the next year. While for some people, the conversation was clearly about the pleasure of the moment, others' memories were tied up with social networks and knowledge building, with seeing a friend who beat cancer dancing, eating a part of an animal they didn't think they'd like, or watching a combination of Mexican American musicians who lived very different lives and played very different music playing together.

Another Saturday night that members repeatedly talked about was at the 2002 symposium. Sara Roahen's description is a good example of how people remember about these evenings:

> We always used to have the last night outdoors in these tents, but it always seemed to be bad weather. … We had all this carnage, all these carcasses and meats, and it was kind of rainy and drizzly and cold, and they had this fife and drum group. I can't remember their names, but they were from Mississippi. It was four generations, grandpa down to the tiny four-year-old grandson. They would walk around sort of like a second line was more serious than that. They would play the drum and fife and sing or chant a little bit. It was beautiful. … It was so moving. They were just outside in this bad weather, and there weren't even that

> many people at that moment when I saw them because they were in this dark corner of the field, and there was warmth and food going on under the tents.
>
> And I was standing next to this guy, Johnny Apple, who used to write for the *New York Times*. He was this larger than life person, figuratively and literally. And he was getting teary. He had been the bureau chief in Baghdad. Before he wrote about food, he wrote about war. He had been around the world, and the fact that he could still be moved by anything was cool to me. And he looks at me and says, "What's your name?" And I told him, and he said, "Sara, have you ever been to West Africa?" And I said, "No." And he just said, "Alright, well." And then he just kept watching. That moment totally stood out to me. It was like he was having this complete worlds coming together experience. You could just tell in his head and in his body, all these things he had experienced were coming together. That's how I feel a lot at SFA events. Ideas and flavors and people come together for these really golden moments.

In such memories, these types of moments stay with people in ways to which they later assign associations of the global south, camaraderie, or cultural recognition. Much of what people describe is about sensory memory. The carnival atmosphere is a mix of timing (often Halloween weekend), planning (the band and booze are thoughtfully planned by the events coordinator) and attitude (people have been in rooms listening to talks all day, forming friendships and seeing old friends, drinking, eating well, and feeling good about themselves).

Clearly participants enjoy themselves, but does this night fit into the SFA's goals of knowledge production? The easiest answer, which even members and staff sometimes give, is no. This night is excellent for retaining membership and helping people form bonds and affective ties to the each other and the SFA. The night is about affect and not education. However, there is a secondary argument to be made that affect leads people to be more invested in the education. Many of the members I spoke with said they drank less and less at these events because being awake and aware for the talks and performances seemed more and more important. People, from young chefs to older food writers, averred that they came for the education. At the same time, the evening is a

central part of the symposium experience. It is an affective and experiential culmination of a time of education. Participants invoke and talk about things they have learned; they also talk about things they have seen, heard, and tasted over the weekend. Participants, in this evening and at other festive moments (like the nightly cocktail hours), talk to speakers, talk about speakers and presentations, and talk to colleagues. They extend and maneuver through relationships they have created over the weekend—people give each other advice, plan future collaborations, and find out what is happening in the groups and cultures they are a part of. Attendees have conversations about poetry, land use, anthropological theory, and apartment hunting, and they dance and share baggies of fried worms. Some people are simply at a party; however, many people said this last night of the symposium is significant to them for the relationships it fosters through shared experience.[218]

Perhaps the most stunning aesthetic experiences that the SFA creates are its symposium Sunday productions: ballets, operas, dramatic interpretations, comedy, and musical displays. I will focus on two here—the commissioned opera *Leaves of Green* and Jessica Harris's dramatic monologue "Postcard Benediction," with regret that I cannot also include the Chitlin Ballet, which was one of the most captivating performances I witnessed.

In 2011, the Southern Foodways Alliance commissioned and staged a very short opera about collard greens, with costumes by fashion designer Nathalie Chanin. It was based on a 1984 collection of poems and composed by University of Mississippi

[218] Of course, part of that could be that when a scholar asks you about an experience that is just a party, you provide a justification. At the same time, their claims seem to be borne out in how people who consecutively attend SFA events behave and in the other connections people made about the work of the SFA, their knowledge base, and their interest in cultural discourse.

undergrad Price Walden. *Leaves and Green* was a mix of playfulness, high art, pure spectacle, and cultural education. The singers and live musicians explored different aspects of greens in Southern culture, following a range of characters through joy and sadness. Part of the vision of the piece was to take a historically "low" food and create "high" art—to celebrate and elevate greens and the people who have cooked and eaten them.[219]*Leaves of Green* was restaged at the Atlanta Food and Wine Festival in 2012 and, after its symposium debut, registered in the Twittersphere (#leavesofgreen) and in national media.

In 2010, Jessica Harris performed "Postcard Benediction," a dramatic monologue set against a background of projected historical postcards of markets in Africa, the Caribbean, and the U.S. South. Harris's monologue was about the experiences and history of being a street vendor. Her character, a praline sales person, discussed histories of hawking wares, the discursive strategies of doing so, her African predecessors, the kind of financial freedom that this work sometimes allowed for African Americans, and histories of black people selling and being sold.

Both "Postcard Benediction" and *Leaves of Green*, like most of the SFA Sunday performances, involved simple but powerful staging, acting, and scripts. Viewers talk about these original pieces of art, presented at the time when church usually happens, as religious experiences. The performances capture places, people, or experiences and create an aesthetic sensory experience.

In talks, meals, and performances, what the SFA creates during the symposium is an atmosphere of sensory indulgence. People get to delve into a subject with their whole bodies and with a crowd of others. Rarely do people end up spending all of their time

[219] Making the "low" into something "high" is also reflected in SFA meals and awards.

with hundreds of other people for three days. Rarely do they spend six hours a day listening to people talk. And if they do, rarely do those talks range so broadly in topic and experience—personal testimony inducing tears, snacking on the subject, engaging in scholarly discourse, listening to rap, etc. Moreover, the SFA symposium presents aesthetically engaging experiences. This collective sensory experience charges the event and increases the value of the weekend, not simply in terms of pleasure, but also because of the sense of engagement and collective ritual that participants have.

The collective element of the symposium experience gives people the sense they are part of a group and part of something larger. Participants compare these experiences to church and camp, reflecting the sense of social and bodily engagement that they experience. They are engaged in diverse, highly pleasurable ritual experiences; moreover, because participants have also been educated about the histories and meanings of activities, the ritual aspects are heightened. As SFA assistant director Mary Beth Lasseter said, the study increases the pleasure, just as the pleasure lures people toward the study.[220] The notion that people are getting knowledge that they recognize as knowledge along with experience that they recognize as life-changing gets configured in discourse as life-changing education.

2. Field Trips

While the SFA introduces audiences to specific southern places in their documentary work and talks, field trips expose people to the experience of inhabiting a place—how space, sound, and smell are constructed in particular landscapes and locales. In this section, I focus on the 2011 Cajun Country field trip to show how sensory

[220] Mary Beth Lasseter, interview by author, Oxford, Mississippi, January 19, 2011.

experience constructs and informs knowledge-making in these events.

The "Cajun Country Ramble" was a three-day trip from June 23-25, 2011, which started in New Orleans and ended in Eunice, Louisiana. Like other SFA field trips, it included a private upscale dinner at Cochon with significant chefs in the city (food writer Brett Anderson interviewed Paul Prudhomme and Amy Evans interviewed Donald Link), several meals at local restaurants or catered by local cooks (lunch at Bubba Frey's Mowata Store, crawfish at Hawk's, a smothered plate lunch at an event space, a rice dressing dinner at Ruby's), talks about local food culture (on gumbo, boudin, cracklins, and Louisiana cookbooks), entertainment (at three music venues, which I discuss below), and tours of local restaurants, stores, and food producers (a crawfish farm, a rice mill, a rice farm). By more closely examining three aspects of the trip, the drive to Mowata, the tour of the rice mill, and the three musical performances, I examine how SFA field trips present knowledge about place, food, and culture to participants.

In preparation for the field trip to New Orleans, participants received an itinerary and information about the places we would be going, including driving directions from New Orleans to Mowata, Louisiana. The directions did not take participants down the interstate, though that would have been faster; instead, we were instructed to drive through ungentrified New Orleans, into strip mall suburbs, and ultimately through wide-open bayous dotted by small towns, ending in rice and crawfish fields. The aim of the drive was to get people from one place to another in a way that provided some cultural context. In line with the larger goal of promoting cultural tourism, the staff created a route that took travelers by the businesses of oral history subjects, so that participants could read or listen to SFA interviews and then stop at boudin and cracklin purveyors.

Not everyone took the back roads, and not everyone stopped at boudin shops. Some people who took the interstate stopped at boudin purveyors, and some people who took the back roads did not stop. Several participants said they purposely listened to the radio, so they could also learn about the place by listening to what the locals hear on a daily basis. As in its principles of making films and oral histories, the organization believes that being in a place is a way of understanding it. Just as first-person narratives are central to SFA media, staff members see first-hand experience as a way of best understanding. They structure events like this drive to show the seams and textures of place, to include scenes of breathtaking beauty (one of the speakers discussed the large cumulous clouds he and most participants had seen over the swamp that were to him the very image of home) along with more mundane and commercial vistas, including local and national businesses, homes and strip malls, and different kinds of building and economic structures. These diverse scenes along the road from New Orleans to Eunice are often erased from sight by travel along the interstate. Instead of learning first about the food culture of Acadian Louisiana, participants learned about the landscape by seeing locals' houses and businesses and following an American travel tradition of being educated on and by the road. This type of road trip experience allows participants to see and learn about specific location, while simultaneously subverting idealized notions of place inherent in tourist experience.

After completing the drive, one hundred field trippers arrived at a two-room store in Mowata for a lunch of boudin, bread, and fig preserves. After two talks (on gumbo and boudin), field trip attendees went to one of three locations—a rice farm, a rice mill, or a rice cooking class. The mill tour took place at Falcon Rice, which is a family operation

on an industrial scale. The tour lasted a little over an hour and was conducted in different parts by the father, who has been running the mill all his life; the son-in-law, who recently moved his family to Crowley to be part of the family business; the granddaughter, who is running PR for the mill; and a longtime, skilled worker who grades rice. After a brief discussion of the history of the mill, field trip participants were split into smaller groups and each walked through the different processes of rice production in different sections of the building. At the end of the tour, everyone was given a bag of rice and a DVD about the mill.

Rice mills in June in Crowley, Louisiana are hot and noisy. The rice has to be stored at a cooler temperature (a fact I learned from our tour), but the mill itself was incredibly hot. The place had high ceilings, vats of rice, and moving machinery. We learned how to grade rice in the quality control room. We learned the process of milling from farm deliveries to distribution. We learned about the challenges of keeping a business with local sourcing and a small work force in international large-scale crop trade. We learned about the importance of packaging; we also learned that rice sent to Louisiana prisons can be ninety percent broken..

We could have learned much of this elsewhere, from a Mr. Roger's-style video or in a paragraph like the one you just read. However, going through the town of Crowley, seeing the massive scale of the rice facility next door, being shown around by the people who run the family business, and hearing them talk about their experiences as business people and as citizens of the town added insights, about labor, locality, and family businesses. Hearing first-hand the different ways in which the father, granddaughter, son-in-law, longtime skilled workers, and wage laborers talked about their work and seeing

the work environment from their particular perspectives rounded out participants' understandings of what this work meant in ways that could not be conveyed in other forms. The son-in-law, an ex-cop who was learning the business, talked about expanding the business and adjusting operations; the father talked about the routine of production volume and distributing rice; the skilled rice grader discussed ways that rice can go bad. While they told us similar facts about rice, their descriptions played up investments in a changing future, a prosperous if fickle business, and multifaceted technical problems.

In addition to these different perspectives, being with the producers where they work provided multi-sensory knowledge about temperature, space, sound, and smell. In rice production and storage, heat can destroy the grains and seriously impacts working conditions for people on the floor. Seeing workers and management in motion gave the audience a better idea of what it means to work in the rice business. This was true of the rice mill as well as the many other places—blueberry farms, distilleries, grocery stores, seafood processing facilities—that attendees visit as part of SFA field trips.

As well as allowing owners and operators to tell about their work and showing that work directly, tours also give participants a chance to ask people questions about the work they do. This means that the audience and the subjects can form their own discourses, which might be different from those presented by the organization. At the mill, several participants were especially interested in how the business was growing and its shipping and storage logistics. They also talked with owners and workers about the relationship between world markets and regional markets and the rice producers' branding strategy. Other participants were interested in what it meant to be part of a family business. This turned into an interesting conversation about being invested in

small places and ideas about raising children. These discourses, arising out of direct conversation between field trippers and business operators, reflect the kind of relationship between food culture and cultural experience that the SFA promotes. At the same time, this kind of open-ended educational experience may miss important areas of discussion, reflecting familiarity or homogeneity rather than difference in people's experiences. For example, other issues that would have been interesting to the organization's staff and some membership, like the experience of the labor force, were overlooked in this conversation.

Based on the questions participants asked, their discussions on the bus, and their conversations throughout the rest of the weekend, it seemed that people came away with quite different ideas about the business of rice production. While many people went on the same tour, met the same people, and were told the same facts, their positions as rice farmers, business people, scholars, and food enthusiasts colored their experience and interpretations. While this is true of all types of knowledge gathering, emersion experiences are different because they often give people a sense that they can claim expertise despite the fact that their knowledge is still influenced by positionality.

In addition to landscapes and work places, the SFA takes people into cultural spaces, where locals go for leisure and cultural events. On the Louisiana field trip, participants went to three music venues—a shop where a group of Cajun musicians jam each Saturday morning, a French Cajun music show presented at a large, restored theatre and broadcast on public television, and Slim's, a small black club with zydeco musicians and dancing.

At the morning venue, SFA members crowded the small shop. The musicians

running the session greeted the field trippers; however, the music went on and the repertoire did not seem overly influenced by our attendance. While people listened to the performance, the room was aglow with SFA participants photographing and videoing the performers. Some SFA members also bought goods. Everyone in attendance was invited to sing or play instruments, but only a few SFA participants joined in.

The evening French Cajun show and Slim's were the greatest contrast, though both venues had music and dancing. The bilingual "Rendez-vous des Cajun" music show was in a restored theatre that is on the national registry. Local white people filled the theater, and a smaller, older group clearly danced at the show every week. Local teenagers ran the sound and filming of the program, and the band and MC were middle-aged. The show was in French and English with the French untranslated. The couples who danced were seasoned, skilled, and invested in each other and their dancing. Watching them was mesmerizing. Some of them were dancing for themselves; others played up to the audience. The dancers from the area were clearly a bonded group—they changed out partners and teased each other and the audience. Both in the experience and in the filming of the show, which was projected on two screens to the left and right of the theatre, the dancers were as much the subject as the musicians.

Only one couple from the SFA, Dale and John Shelton Reed, danced, which they did to roaring applause, and the SFA's oral historian Amy Evans danced with an older, local gentleman. The SFA was significantly louder when the Reeds were dancing and seemed to abide by a different set of rules of decorum than when the local people were dancing. Amy Evans was the only SFA representative who crossed local-visitor boundaries, which is not surprising because of her oral history work. However, her

dancing did not provoke the same vocal engagement of SFA field trippers that the Reeds' dancing did.

At this event, multiple levels of connection were created—watching others bodies and engaging with music in a beautiful space allowed the SFA visitors to be tourists, admiring but set apart from performances of local cultural traditions. This feeling was enhanced by simultaneously watching the event on screen as it was being filmed for broadcast. This experience of watching was moving and provided insight into the local culture. It was notably a cultural production created not for visitors, but for local participation and distribution. At the Liberty Theatre, the SFA audience mostly listened and watched.

The experience at Slim's was more participatory but for a smaller group. Many field trip attendees did not come to Slim's, a late-night destination a town away. The average age of the crowd was younger, and many of the people who attended also worked for the SFA (as oral historians, board members, or staff). The SFA field trippers were all white, and the club was mainly black. The band was a black zydeco band called Lil Wayne. The place was cash only, including a cover charge, and when SFA members arrived at around ten o'clock, there were few other patrons. Many SFA people danced with one another and with locals. As a club, it was less a place for watching than the theater had been. Patrons, including those from the SFA, did watch people dancing, but they were also much more likely to dance themselves. There did appear to be a group of local people who were not dancing, and I wondered if we—a conspicuous group of white people at the bar and on the floor—might be inhibiting their movements. However, there seemed to be no tension in the room between SFA members and the local patrons, like

that I experienced in a Vietnamese karaoke bar that the SFA went to the previous year. This may have to do, in part, with the SFA group's ability to engage without monopolizing the floor in a barroom setting, whereas karaoke is a complicated negotiation of time and space in which one can see who is center-stage, and the person on stage calls the shots. At Slim's, though, the band played its set, door prizes were awarded—one SFA member and several local people won—and everyone drank small beers. The visitors in this space changed it; however, field trippers also came out with exposure to a slice of local experience, seeing, feeling, and engaging with a specific kind of Louisiana Saturday night.[221] After the evening, women on the staff encouraged the director to schedule the band for an SFA event and for months afterward sent each other videos of Lil Wayne's zydeco performances. At Slim's, there was little conversation. Like a symposium Saturday night, it was a bonding ritual, with people pulling each other on the dance floor and watching one another; at the same time, it was a venue for playing with people at the club, dancing and teasing in both directions.

The New Orleans field trip involved moving between being a large private audience with guided experience, being a large audience in public, and interacting with places individually. Part of the goal and outcome of these excursions is to get people invested in particular locations. While this is partly a monetary investment, it is also an affective one, rooted in personal experiences. Many people in the SFA see some of the organization's engagement with New Orleans after Katrina as a result of having gone there are on field trip in 2005. As I was told myriad times, because of the field trip,

[221] In addition to the events that are planned, these SFA trips also put people into places that are less planned, such as local bars and Walmarts. It might be an encounter in a bar that clearly serves minors and does not serve glassware after 11:00 pm or getting a sense of what the grocery store carries and who shops there that provides attendees with a less cultivated or curated way of understanding a place.

"people felt close to New Orleans."

At the same time, SFA participants are tourists—they may be on a tour that takes an invested approach to local culture, but coming in a large group and experiencing even a hidden or in-depth aspect of another culture can leave gaps in understanding while simultaneously shoring up a sense of bonding and knowing. For example, at the 2011 Delta Divertissement, Bonita Conwell introduced attendees to sweet potato greens. She and the greens were well-received and became the subject of discussions at the event, later at the symposium, and in the media; however, this celebratory discourse, cultivated by both Conwell and the SFA, elided some of the complicated history of Conwell, her community of Mound Bayou, and their relationship to the SFA.

At the brunch, Conwell told about Mound Bayou, the historically black town she is from, and its history of farming. She told how the farmers' organization came to produce and harvest sweet potato greens for a West African community in Houston and how they built up processing facilities for these and other products. Her discussion of her youth as a Mississippi farmer and her current position as an advocate for Mississippi women farmers and youth farming was inspiring and fascinating. It endowed those greens with a history and a promise. She stood in front of a diverse, but mostly white group of tourists in an upscale dining experience in Greenwood, Mississippi and shared her story and her product, which was new product for most of the attendees. The incident was blogged and tweeted, part of a discourse that people wanted to invest in emotionally and even financially.

At the same time, the story of Conwell's sweet potato greens is longer and more complicated than her talk at that pleasurable SFA brunch suggests. Mound Bayou, the

historically black town Conwell is from, was slated to be the site for much of the Delta Divertissement field trip that year, but the SFA could not get those plans to work. When Amy Evans tried to interview people about Mound Bayou about its farming history, she was stonewalled. People in Mound Bayou worried that they would be exploited, that their stories would be taken, and that they would not benefit from the exchange. The staff of the SFA, including Evans, understood that the African Americans in that community had little if any reason to trust a white person from the University of Mississippi with their stories and even less reason to give those stories out to a white woman if they might be valuable cultural commodities that the community could profit from. In addition to this break over oral history, there was skepticism and a series of logistical misses that stalled plans to tour the sweet potato fields in Mound Bayou.

Most of the people who attended brunch that day did not know anything about these failed plans or the history between the SFA and Mound Bayou farmers; many of them probably knew little of the history of Mound Bayou itself or racial politics in the Delta beyond the general stories that are told about this part of the country, though some attendees, who have gone to the Delta for years with the SFA, may have had more insight. This instance is an example of how sensory experience and personal interaction can provide access to forms of knowledge that audiences did not previously have. However, it also makes clear that these same experiences cannot always be relied upon to tell about long histories or complex social structures. Sensory experience can often allow people to glimpse, reflect on, and be impressed by complex personal and historical narratives, but it cannot necessarily explain them.

Each place the SFA goes—Vietnamese karaoke clubs on Buford Highway in

Atlanta, shack motels and church gardens in the Mississippi Delta, or former jails in Montgomery, Alabama—presents its own nuances of experience. On the one hand, this experience can be interpreted simply as tourism, fraught with the problems of the tourist gaze. On the other hand, these sensory investments change what a place is to people.

3. Potlikkers

Potlikkers are less expensive than the symposium and field trips, are only one night, and are conducted in different cities across the southeast. This makes them the easiest way for members and non-members to participate in SFA events. Potlikkers include a standing meal with food from a variety of local restaurants, performances by local musicians, a brief talk, and screenings of four to five short films about food in the area, which can be defined quite widely. For example, while the films for the Charleston Potlikker in 2011were appropriately about the South Carolina Lowcountry, films for the Greenville event that same year were also overwhelmingly about the Lowcountry even though Greenville is usually more identified with the mountain South.

These events also usually feature or create a local food celebrity. Guests of honor—like Victor "Goat" Lafayette, who picks oysters for Bowen's Island Restaurant, or the Colleton-Green family, who run a catering business, or Emile de Felice, who farms free range pigs—become known during Potlikkers because they are the subjects of films that are shown. This often means that subjects go from being engaged by only a few participants before the screenings to being swamped with attention afterward. Other times, these subjects are already minor celebrities like cookbook author and television cook Vertamae Grosvernor or filmmaker Stan Woodward. These honored figures present materials, participate in interviews, or are the subjects of presentations by others.

Potlikkers are structured as large cocktail parties. Attendees talk in passing groups, meeting new people and spending time with friends. They move in and out of conversations with drinks and small plates. After a while, everyone watches short films together. There are, therefore, two main kinds of experience at these gatherings: mingling and watching films.

The shared experience that marks these events is watching films together. The viewing room is darkened and usually set off from the cocktail space. People are seated. At funny moments, they laugh together; at serious moments, you can feel the stillness. This shared experience of viewing, however, does not mean that everyone shares the same reaction to the films. At all of the Potlikker events I attended, for example, I saw people become upset by films that others enjoyed. These individualized and unpredictable responses are attributable to the range of personal experiences, knowledge bases, and positions of the audience members.[222]

The film-viewing experience at Potlikker events is quite different than the experience of being on-site, and spending an evening engaged with the material is quite different from a full weekend of engagement. As a result, Potlikkers often don't have the same discursive and educational imperative that the other SFA events do. In particular, there is less choreographed interaction—diners are never seated, and lines are generally shorter, so attendees may or may not talk with people they don't know. Unlike other SFA events, where one has occasion to see and interact with the same people several times and for an extended period of time, at Potlikkers there is neither the expectation of seeing

[222] In addition to the woman who walked out of *Cud*, which I discussed in chapter 3, I was in several screenings where some members of the audience were laughing, while others were offended by a stereotypical representations. I also encountered a women was enraged by the absence of the history of slave labor in the rice fields of the South Carolina Low Country in *Carolina Grist.*

someone again nor of knowing someone on sight. Perhaps most significantly, there is not the same amount of shared knowledge at film events as there is during symposium weekends or on field trips. Still, after the collective viewing experience, participants at Potlikkers often do talk to a wider range of people, including the subjects of films and presentations, making these events a more discreet and somewhat constrained form of engagement and knowledge production and sharing. Because the pro programming and setting skews neither the social atmosphere nor the kinesthetic experience, networking at Potlikkers feels more like networking at non-SFA events, like professional conferences or benefit galas.

Potlikkers provide a good date night, but a person could attend without learning much beyond the content of the short films, which may or may not encourage critical engagement with cultural practice or identity construction. The SFA frames these events as outreach and has lamented that they don't always transform people into invested members. This may be because the organization and execution of Potlikker events invites the audience to be less critically and personally engaged.[223] They don't change people's experience but, rather, fit into experiences that people already recognize—watching a film, being at a cocktail party. While participants are exposed to valuable content through films, presentations, and conversations, the experience itself is not transcendent.

Events, Experience, Evocation

The SFA understands that it cultivates particular experiences, and it hopes that those experiences create an investment in local cultures and economies and networks of engagement. In order to accomplish this, SFA events foster pleasure through sensory and social experiences.

[223] The lower cost of admission may impact how invested people are for a variety of reasons.

SFA staff members understand that they create this experience in part through sensory and engaged theatre.

In addition to the events I described above, the story of the annual SFA auction demonstrates how the organization staff understands their productions. Each year, the organization hosts a fund-raising auction at the Blackberry Farms resort in Tennessee. This fundraiser is about as inaccessible and undemocratic as the SFA gets.[224] Staying at Blackberry for a night is a thousand-dollar investment, and that doesn't even include the cost of the auction packages—pieces of original art, private dinners by famous chefs, weekend tours with food culture connoisseurs. The high cost of the event makes sense because the auction is a fundraiser, which regularly brings in over 100,000 dollars. At the same time, the staff expressed some ambivalence about the event in earlier years because, in addition to being so elite, it did not *feel* like an SFA event to them. Too glossy and lacking contextual elements, it had few atmospheric signifiers of the organization. Then, after the owner of the resort came to a symposium in 2009, the event began to shift. The SFA was allowed more input and, even more significantly, it began to have the sense of play and attention to context that other SFA events have. John T. Edge said that he felt they finally found common ground in 2010: One of the demonstrations began with gunshots ringing out in a field next to the lodge, and then Chef John Folse walked to the glass door with four freshly killed ducks in his hands, which he cleaned and cooked for the audience. This kind of theatre of the real is at the center of how sensory experience informs education at SFA events.

[224] The auction coincides with Taste of the South, which is an award for chefs, artisans, and farmers put on by the SFA and sponsored by Blackberry Farms. This means that there are people who have been awarded admission instead of having paid for the event, and there is also usually a high-profile speaker. However, the event is elite—either you have been honored to get there or you have paid thousands of dollars.

The SFA places a premium on experiential learning—in its choice of subjects and experts and in its construction of events. At the very least, people are given the chance to eat the food they learn about and meet the food producers the SFA showcases. Quite often, audiences have full sensory experiences, going to production facilities on field trips or watching live performances that are visually and aurally engaging. This work is presented—usually with someone talking about its significance, its history, it development—before, during, or after the moment of bodily engagement. Because of this, and because the organization and the participants put a premium on meaningful experience, participants often assign cultural importance to these sensory memories.[225]

Key to these sensory experiences is how they structure interaction, and the choreographed sociality of experience at SFA events facilitates many kinds of engagement. First, events provide multiple places and moments for strangers to talk with each other, such as during "down time" and while in close physical proximity—at tables, in lines, on busses. During these interactions, people form new friendships and networks or at least have conversations with new people. Participants are able to form their own discourse in these interactions with SFA speaker, subjects, and fellow participants. At the same time, their discussions happen in the context of shared sensory experiences and presentations crafted by the SFA.

People engage in a variety of discourses at SFA events. In the first kind of interaction, as Melissa Booth Hall memorably put it, "people geek out together." Attendees discuss presentations, foods, or other topics that have emerged during the event

[225] I cannot determine whether the people who come to the organization are primed for this kind of engagement or if the SFA fosters it in people who would not normally engage with materials in this way. There are both people who seem to have developed a sense of significant learning and inquiry through their engagement with the organization and also many people who could be called "lifelong learners."

in ways that are about sharing enthusiasm and knowledge. They talk, for instance, about the rise of the term "soul food" in the 1960s or using the market bulletin to find mayhaws. They engage in discussions about food culture, usually for the love of it and their interest in it.[226] The second kind of interaction is professional discourse—chefs, writers, scholars, and organizers share ideas, experiences, and contacts. This kind of talk often intersects with the first, but the target of the conversation is different—instead of talking about a subject, the conversation is often more project and solution oriented. For example, a restaurateur interested in sourcing pigs ethically and at a low cost might talk to someone working with an agriculture school on breeding. While this might sound like business, it often takes on a personal tone as well. Attendees share management solutions, but they also share stories about and strategies for, say, making a major career shift with two young daughters in the house. Personal conversation abounds as well. People who know each other well or are becoming friends share significant news and intimate information that are central to creating and maintaining personal bonds.

Perhaps the most complicated form of discourse, which emerges directly from an event experience where people inhabit space together and eat together, is small talk. People chat about the weather and contemporary events; they get to know each other, where they work, their family structures, where they call home. Several of the members I interviewed said small talk is a vital aspect of SFA events and often shifts into significant conversation. I took part in a memorable discussion like this myself, talking with Cliff Barton about coming to the SFA. We were in a bar; though he offered to buy me a drink, neither of us was drinking. The conversation started as small talk—he asked me what

[226] Because attendees are often self-proclaimed learners, the discussion can extend beyond food to, say, the Oxford comma or contemporary poetry.

brought me to the symposium—but we moved onto talking about what Mississippi meant to him as a black man who came of age during the Civil Rights era, what he thought of his son's involvement in the SFA and his own invitation to the symposium in Mississippi after his wife's death, and how the SFA changed Mississippi for him. He made an important claim about congeniality during our conversation: he said that people will "greet you real kind and ask what you are doing," then he noted that this greeting is a façade but is still nice. The blurry lines that Barton highlights between invested discussions and niceties are significant for understanding the boundaries of how events can and cannot create discourse on subjects that are "more important to talk about."

From professional intimacy to geeking out to small talk, people move between modes of discourse fluidly at SFA events. Part of the question then becomes who is included in this feasting and talking. On the one hand, inviting people who shape food culture to be part of these conversations is a way to influence cultural education and discourses surrounding food. If journalists, chefs, photographers, and academics are being exposed to conversations that highlight the complex social histories of food, then their participation will shape contemporary interpretations. At the same time, the people who are most often at the SFA table are well-educated, financially-stable or wealthy, and white. Consequently, the organization worries about diversity and who is part of their conversations at these events.

Attendees at SFA feasts appreciate the intimate engagement with strangers that these meals provide, which is unlike the experience of a restaurant or a dinner with friends. At the same time, the SFA charges for these events to cover the cost of the undertaking, and the cost is—as one might expect—high for many people. In 2011, the

symposium was $545 for the weekend; the field trip was $325; even the low-end Potlikker nights are $40 per person. The ticket price includes dining, education, and entertainment, but not travel or lodging. This cost, the organization and many of its members recognize, can be prohibitive. At the same time, the SFA prides itself on paying the people who cook at events a fair wage. The SFA couches its costs in terms of value and values. People are paying for labor and a well-curated event, investing in the organization and in people who provide food and information; however, the costs also make the discourse part of a closed system, where the people in attendance are those who can afford and are willing to pay for it.[227]

It is interesting to think about the role of cost in feasting practices at the SFA. The practices, like sharing food and standing in line, point simultaneously to creating a bonded group and to a fantasy of egalitarianism. As with carnival traditions, hierarchies are blurred; however, the group that has access is already composed of a specific kind of people. Do attendees see the SFA as a safe space for discourse because the events create a sense of egalitarianism, or is it that these events are largely attended by "like-minded" people and, therefore, are safe spaces because they are not spaces of diverse opinion?

One could argue that part of the reason strangers are willing to engage in significant cultural conversation and networking at SFA events is because the group is already closed. By virtue of financial requirements and self-selection, attendees are surrounded by generally "like-minded people," as many of my interviewees stated. In

[227] The SFA does have volunteer programs for full-time students; however, many of the volunteers have backgrounds and aptitudes that are similar to that of other attendees and often go on to become paying members after they graduate. Further, volunteers often miss the content portion of events as they prepare spaces for meals, set up spaces for performances and talks, and clean up after events. Some people who have more limited means come to SFA events on vacations—they save up and decide to spend their income on attendance. However, the choice to allot funds to an SFA vacation still requires the ability to save up enough money for a vacation and so cost still creates barriers.

addition, the people the SFA honors at events, who are sometimes more diverse in terms of class, race, lifestyles, and views, have been chosen by the organization and so come with an organizational voucher. The ease of discourse that can be observed during events may result from people "preaching to the choir." At the same time, attendees at SFA events express a range of political views, life experiences, and demographics, and the group is made up of people who are invested in southern imaginaries and food politics on very different parts of the spectrum.

So, can a model of learning through experiential pleasure facilitate significant civic engagement? If these experiences tie knowledge making and collective sensory experience, how do we understand this kind of knowledge production in relation to significant cultural discourse?

As myriad anthropologists and historians have written, eating is a way of creating meaning and transmitting knowledge. For the SFA, having people think through the ways that food speaks and acts as a cultural message is central. One way they teach about the cultural meanings of food—not only the meaning itself, but also the claim that food carries meaning—is through providing food at events. SFA audiences are given verbal and sensory knowledge at the same time. This practice of educational eating works in a few ways. First, it lures people into academic considerations. On a somewhat prosaic level, people are more willing to come to events that have high quality, interesting food.[228] Second, eating creates a double-access point for knowledge. Instead of understanding an abstract concept, eating is concrete and personal. Studies of smell and memory have shown that connecting a scent with a concept makes helps people create a

[228] Or, as any event organizer can attest, people are generally more willing to come to events where food is served. A survey of events on most any university campus in the United States reflects this.

multi-avenue brain path for ideas. Further, people are able to form their own assessments of a substance when they ingest it, connecting personal knowledge to a externally presented knowledge, and making both seem more valuable. Third, returning to the idea of the personal, like communion or cannibalism, ingesting food creates a connection between people and other entities. It forms bonds that are physically manifested—it is symbolism made concrete.

At the same time, and for the same reasons, tasting culture can be misleading. What seems intimate and understood can, in fact, leave a chasm that is overlooked. Eating like another person may create certain bonds and shared knowledge, but it also leaves out a great deal of knowledge as well. As taste is culturally constructed, the context can be lost while the experience remains, leaving the consumer with the belief that he or she understands something or someone when that other person or entity remains quite separate and unknown.

Some of these same complications of SFA events arise when the group visits places as well. SFA members and staff see the experiential learning of field trip excursions as ideal. They argue that learning-by-doing experiences invest audiences and allow them to create their own first-hand knowledge. Trips provide a level of exposure that engages audiences fully, and they emerge believing they have established an intimate relationship with a place. Again, this intimate knowledge can be problematic because the histories, desires, and prejudices that participants bring with them shape their experiences and understandings and can cause them to overlook or misapprehend important topics or details. Still, SFA field trips can provide access to disrupting or captivating aspects of culture that expand attendees knowledge about the histories, people, and practices of a

variety of locations throughout the U.S. South.

Pleasurable sensory experience can invest people—it lures them in and makes them feel like they are a part of and have a stake in things. Seeing, hearing, and tasting for one's self provides a kind of access to knowledge and an affective bond that exposition alone cannot provide. The bonds of shared knowledge and affect created by collective sensory experience may, in turn, create avenues for discourse and increase the gravity or impact of ideas. However, learning about culture through produced experiences carries with it a dual risk: 1. That people will embrace the pleasure and ignore the discussion, and 2. that people will think they have intimate knowledge of a place or situation but will, in fact, be missing significant aspects of a story. While people within the organization fear the first risk more, the second risk is actually more prevalent.

In chapter five, I examine the intersection of experiential and mediated cultural narratives in SFA cookbooks. Like events, the SFA's cookbooks invite users to create first-person experiences that engage with and emerge from the words and lives of others. However, instead of creating a collective where people are physically gathered, they often invoke an absent collective, particularly in the case of community cookbooks. In the next chapter, I explore this alternate form of sensory and social engagement as a way of producing and teaching culture.

Chapter 5

"Honest Stories" and "Aspirational Tales": Community Cookbooks and Authoring Identity in Southern Foodways Alliance Cookbooks

In *A Gracious Plenty: Recipes and Recollections from the American South* (1999),John T. Edge writes of community cookbooks: "a closer look at the foods selected for inclusion, the names ascribed to the dishes, and the tales told of meals reveals as much about the community of compilers as any local history could."[229] In the September 2010 edition of the *Oxford American*, Edge revises his claim, "I now realize my read was accommodating, forgiving, and even lazy. Few of those books have been great at telling honest stories of actual cooks."[230] Edge's article "Looking for Honest Stories: The trouble with community cookbooks" is a critique of what he terms the "white-washed" form of community cookbooks, which "have always offered aspirational tales, told slant, to evoke the way the collaborators would like you to understand their place, and, by extension, them" and how that vision often fails to acknowledge many of the laborers and complex relationships, particularly of race, in the U.S. South.

Edge's critique of community cookbooks highlights a problem that scholars raise about cookbooks in general: cookbooks simultaneously hold and leave out a great deal of cultural information. Cookbooks can seem like "revealing artifacts of culture in the

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[229]John T. Edge, *A Gracious Plenty: Recipes and Recollections from the American South* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1999), 2.
[230]John T. Edge, "Looking for Honest Stories: The trouble with community cookbooks," *Oxford American* (September 2010), 22.

making" and at the same time "subtle gap-ridden artifact[s]."[231] The promise of understanding a culture better and the limitations of information in cookbooks emerge from the conventions of the genre and the decisions editors and authors make. Edge's initial claims about how cookbooks carry meaning and his subsequent critique of what is left out of these texts reveal their possibilities and limitations.

Scholars have argued that cookbooks should be read as imaginative texts as well as instructions for food preparation.[232] In "Romanced by Cookbooks," Anne Bower avers that women read cookbooks like romance novels, as fantasies of accomplishment and escape:

> Whether the world depicted within a cookbook's pages is exotic or homey, low budget or pricey, stresses health or sensuality or some particular tradition, I would contend that the cookbook reader is frequently consuming the book and its imaginary possibilities, rather than deciding which recipe she'll cook and consume at her table.[233]

At the same time, Bower says that cookbooks can engage people in significant discourses that affect their values.[234] In *Recipes for Reading*, Bower shifts her discussion to community cookbooks saying, "these books contain the writing of women who took the time and energy to formulate written discourse not only to raise money for a cause but also to formulate and express their collective value system and to produce texts of their own."[235] The scholars in Bower's edited collection explore how community cookbooks create a space of individual and group expression, as well as construct (and exclude

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[231]Arjun Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 1 (Jan., 1988): 3-24, 22. Anne L. Bower, *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 140.
[232]See, for example, Appadurai, Bower, *Recipes for Reading*, and Susan J. Leonardi, "Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie," *PMLA* 3 (May 1989): 340-347.
[233]Bower, "Romanced by Cookbooks," *Gastronomica—The Journal of Food and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2004): 35-42, 42.
[234]Bower, "Romanced," 38.
[235]Bower, *Recipes for Reading*, 4.

others from) social identities of womanhood, the middle class, regions, nations, and ethnicities. Food and folklore scholar Janet Theophano, too, explores how women use cookbooks to speak, analyzing their rhetoric and the lives of their authors.[236] In addition to portraying cookbooks as spaces for women to exercise voice and social influence, other scholars have looked at how these voices cultivate a particular relationship between the author and reader—creating a sense of trust, respectability, or even discursive give-and-take.[237]

Additionally, scholars have examined how cookbooks form national, regional, and ethnic cuisines. Even David Sutton, who is skeptical about the value of cookbooks as tools for cultural transmission, explores how "nostalgia cookbooks" reproduce and re-encode the desire for a food culture or tradition.[238] In the seminal work "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," Arjun Appadurai further shows how cookbooks emerged as significant texts for middle-class women forming an Indian identity. His work argues that cookbooks create and alter food cultures and, in turn, cultural identity. As a whole, this scholarship frequently shows that cookbooks garner authority through voice, convey cultural identities, and are used to create real and imagined relationships. However, most of this scholarship examines the content of cookbooks in a cultural context. Only studies of community or family cookbooks begin to

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[236]Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives Through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

[237]Leonardi, 340; Rosalyn Collings Eves, "A Recipe for Remembrance: Memory and Identity in African-American Women's Cookbooks," *Rhetoric Review* 24, no. 3 (2005): 280-297; Rafia Zafar, "What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 1, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 88-90.

[238]Sutton, David E. "Cooking Skill, the Senses, and Memory: The Fate of Practical Knowledge," in *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums, and Material Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips (New York: Berg, 2006); and David E. Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (New York: Berg, 2001).

explore cookbooks as physical objects, as artifacts in and of themselves. Many of these works use recipe selection as a way of assessing identity construction, but they talk little about the editing processes through which recipes are chosen.

If we are to read cookbooks to understand lineages of movement and taste, to travel through space and time, to understand cultures, then it seems pertinent to understand the construction and dissemination of these books more clearly. In the above statements, Edge implicitly reveals why presenting cookbooks as objects of cultural history is complicated: cookbooks have authors and editors, and these authors and editors have ideas about how they understand the world or want it to be understood. In this chapter, I ask: What strategies do writers, editors, and publishers use to draw people into cookbooks? How do these strategies function at the intersection of practice, memory, and fantasy, and how can we understand the power of cookbooks in relation to the processes of their production and dissemination?

At the heart of Edge's assessment of community cookbooks is a desire for these texts to "reveal" a place, a people, or a culture. Edge raises questions about the truth claims and authority in cookbooks, both in his initial belief that these books could have "honest stories" and his subsequent charge that they are often lying, "aspirational tales." I believe that Edge is likely right on both counts—cookbooks can reveal and distort. Instead of analyzing truth claims, I am more interested in how and why readers and writers of cookbooks are making these claims. In other words, how is a rhetoric of truth produced in cookbooks, and what is the purpose of this rhetoric?

To answer these questions, I examine *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* (2010), a community-commercial cookbook hybrid that Edge

edited.[239] After describing the production history of *The SFACC*, I analyze a specific caramel cake recipe from this cookbook. In particular, I examine how the construction of this one recipe reveals a series of editorial choices and rhetorical strategies. From there, I move through elements of the text—from attribution and headnotes to introductions and illustrations, finally turning to consider the object itself and its binding. I conclude by exploring the book in a social setting, looking at how the SFA has presented it at book talks and festivals. My analysis draws on a close examinations of the texts themselves; on interviews and conversations with editors, writers, and contributors; on archival materials from the Southern Foodways Alliance's collection, including manuscript development, contract, and editing materials; and on observations that I have made at public events. I consider how specific features of *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* carry cultural meanings and what its production and public presentation reveal about the complex ways that cookbooks create and hold authority.

The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook

In 1999, before the Southern Foodways Alliance was officially formed, the Center for the Study of Southern Culture produced *Gracious Plenty: Recipes and Recollections from the American South*. Published by Putnam and written by Edge, the cookbook was well-reviewed and widely distributed in bookstores and cooking stores. The proceeds from the book, about twenty-thousand dollars, were used as seed money for the SFA. The organization's beginnings are inflected and reflected by the goals and content of this

[239] Sara Roahen and John T. Edge, *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010). Hereafter referred to as *SFACC*.

text.[240] In its early years, the Southern Foodways Alliance collected cookbooks and recipes; however, SFA leadership (including Edge) came to believe that its affiliation with recipes was diluting its mission of cultural education: people saw the SFA as a place to go for cooking instead of conversation. After publishing two small cookbooks (on deviled eggs and pimento cheese), it ceased collecting and publishing recipes for a decade. While the SFA still included recipes in event ephemera, it made a point of not publishing recipes in its anthologies, newsletters, or other materials.

In 2008, the organization decided its position as a food culture organization was established enough that it could reenter the world of recipes, this time through a full-fledged cookbook that would be a retrospective of and promotional vehicle for the organization's work. In 2010, with the University of Georgia Press, the SFA published *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook*. Edited by John T. Edge and Sara Roahen, it is a collection of recipes from SFA members and honorees. The 285-page book has a hard cover and spiral internal binding. Its cover is a block-print-aesthetic illustration of the SFA's logo (fig. 5.1 and 5.2). A typical page has a single recipe with a paragraph headnote (fig. 5.3). Each chapter focuses on a particular food type (gravy, greens, pig, etc.). The book includes a foreword by Alton Brown, a preface by John T. Edge, and short chapter introductions with cultural information and is sold at cooking stores and bookstores across the United States.[241]

The SFA chose to make a cookbook that looks a lot like and follows patterns of recipe submission that are similar to a community cookbook. Emerging in the United

[240] This text, too, has a complicated production history and is an interesting case for examining the development of a cookbook in an academic context; however, a detailed analysis of it is beyond the scope of this chapter.
[241] In 2011, it was in its fourth printing.

States after the Civil War, community cookbooks, also called charitable or fundraising cookbooks, are recipe books compiled by organizations (churches, civic groups, etc.) to raise money. Generally, women (and sometimes men) who belong to the group submit recipes, which are then bound, reproduced, and sold directly by the organization.

The SFA could have chosen another form for its cookbook. Many SFA members have authored their own cookbooks, and there is a book-signing with over a hundred books at the group's annual symposium. As one member told me, "you couldn't swing a dead cat at an SFA event and hit less than two people who have written cookbooks."[242] A collection of SFA member cookbooks forms a representative sample of contemporary commercial Southern cookbooks: Virginia Willis's *Bon Appetit, Y'all*, Bill Smith's *Seasoned in the South*, Ted and Matt Lee's *The Lee Bros. Southern Cookbook*.[243] A glossy, photo-laden edited collection of recipes could have been a clear choice for the SFA's project of compiling a cookbook to celebrate the group's tenth anniversary. In fact, the group tossed around the idea of using recipes from foods at events, which would have been contributed by notable chefs.

Choosing not to make a star-studded, photograph-laden compilation that was an active decision, according to the book's editors and writers. Their choice, instead, to use a community cookbook model was a claim for a "little-d democracy," as they use the term. The book was meant to reflect the SFA's belief that cuisines are constructed by a range of people, particularly in the U.S. South, where race and class have excluded many people

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[242] Personal exchange, Southern Foodways Alliance symposium, October 2010.

[243] This is a small sample; hundreds of other cookbooks have been written by SFA members. Ted Lee and Matt Lee, *The Lee Bros. Southern Cookbook: Stories and Recipes for Southerners and Would-be Southerners* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006); Bill Smith, *Seasoned in the South: Recipes from Crook's Corner and from Home* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005); Virginia Willis, *Bon Appetit, Y'all: Recipes and Stories from Three Generations of Southern Cooking* (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2008).

from having their contributions acknowledged. At the same time, the writers and editors wanted the book to make a claim about the organization: the Southern Foodways Alliance is not a culinary professionals club. Though this book is clearly a commercial text (highly edited and commercially distributed), the form of the community cookbook allows the creators to make claims about the organization and the South as they imagine it.

How *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* editors chose recipes demonstrates the various pressures and concerns of producing a book that is a hybrid between commercial and community models. Community cookbooks have historically been less edited, often including duplicate recipes and errors. Because *The SFA Community Cookbook*'s editors were actively constructing a narrative through this cookbook, their recipe editing process was more involved. Selecting recipes for the book was a process of creating an ideal Southern Foodways Alliance—one that was geographically, demographically, and professionally diverse—and an ideal southern food culture—one that represented a range of expected and new foods and reflected histories of oppression and resilience as well as changing demographics.

When writers and editors began working on *The SFA Community Cookbook*, they thought that they already had most of the recipes they would include in their book. At a two-day brainstorming workshop, they tested recipes from SFA events and publications, thinking these would make up the bulk of the book.[244] However, editor Sara Roahen says,

[244] Over the course of its development, professional recipe tester Sheri Castle tested every single recipe in the book. This testing process also reflects a balance between the ethos of a community cookbook and the requirements of a commercial one. Testing is a standard practice in commercial cookbooks, but an uncommon one in community cookbooks. It reflects the editors' investment in a usable book; however, Castle said the unorthodox process of testing—for readability and presentation, but not for the dish's quality—also reveals their commitment to what they saw as community cookbook ideals. According to Castle, she wanted the recipes to work and be mostly uniform in their presentation, but did not alter them

"They just didn't fit. They were too cheffy, difficult, or too esoteric. It didn't reflect our organization. We're not an organization of chefs."[245] So, the cookbook authors discussed what recipes *should* be in their compilation. They developed categories the book should have and a list of recipes and cooks to solicit. Finally, they put out a call for submissions from members and then sifted through hundreds of recipes.

The editors tried to balance contributors geographically and professionally and to balance traditional food, variations, and newer foods (hoppin' john and refried black-eyed peas) as well as fancier and simpler foods (boiled-peanut beurre blanc and boiled peanuts). After culling the submissions, the group solicited specific recipes they still wanted. For example, they needed a jambalaya recipe and so sent out a general call—the recipes that were finally included ended up being from Louisiana and from Kentucky. Alternately, they solicited a few people directly for catfish recipes. Even after extensive editing, the first version of the book was four hundred pages, much too long for a commercial cookbook in its genre.

The final selection of recipes in *The SFACC* are based on what the members submitted, what the editors and writers found, and the constraints placed on content by the press. They reflect a desire for a definition of southern foodways that is not bound by traditional foods or maps. Decisions about what to include in the cookbook did not follow the democratic publish-all model that most community cookbooks use. Instead the process was highly selective and took into account the foods, people, and stories the

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for taste or content. For this job, she said that it did not matter if she did not like the outcome: the goal was a recipe faithful to the intent of the recipe's author. By focusing more on the people and the "integrity" of the recipe, as Castle put it, the organization was making a production-level decision about the intent of the text. At the same time, many dishes were cut from the book at the recommendation of the publisher.

[245] Sara Roahen, interview by author, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 2, 2011.

writers and editors thought would best represent who the members of the SFA are and what the organization values.

Attribution, Authority, and Caramel Cake

Edge's critique of community cookbooks in the *Oxford American* centers on what recipes are included and who gets credit for them. He raises significant questions about how we read and interpret a culture through cookbooks. Recipes are often the focal point for understanding how a cookbook functions.[246] In addition to asking what recipes are included and excluded in the *SFA Community Cookbook*, I examine how these recipes were chosen, how they are represented, and who constructs those representations to what ends. Beyond simply reading recipes, I ask how they garner authority—how they sell ideas and books.

The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook maintains the tradition of attribution common to community cookbooks. The editors are ideologically committed to this as a way to "sing the praises of the cooks who went before us." They want contributors to be named, believing in the power of naming that is implicit in most community cookbooks. However, the ownership of a recipe can be complicated. While scholar Ann Romines tells how her mother insisted on attributing recipes to their creators as a sign of respect, Bower notes that attributions in the *Sisters* cookbook she examines assert an ownership that excludes servants (including African Americans) from the text even though the food was often made by them.[247] Karen Hess further notes that *The Virginia Housewife*, like many other books from the U.S. South in the nineteenth and

[246]Anne Bower, "Cooking Up Stories: Narrative Elements in Community Cookbooks," in *Recipes for Reading*, 29-50.
[247]Ann Romines, "Growing Up with the Methodist Cookbooks," in *Recipes for Reading*, 82. Anne Bower, "Our Sisters' Recipes: Exploring 'Community' in a Community Cookbook," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 31, no. 3 (Winter 1997): 137-151.

twentieth century, is full of cooks' recipes attributed to their employers.[248] These examples demonstrate that the one-name-one-woman-one-recipe attribution system of many community cookbooks hides laborers and complex systems of labor in food production.

In an attempt to foreground a variety of laborers, cooks, and relationships that spawn, change, and use recipes, *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* often has multiple attributions within a single recipe. Sometimes the person who submitted the recipe will be named below it, but the origin of the recipe is explored in the headnote. Other times, the headnote explores the person who would be considered the recipe contributor and attributes the recipe to the creator. The practice of double-attribution is not completely unique. Titles of recipes in traditional community cookbooks can perform a similar function—as in "Aunt Ester's Biscuits," for example. Double-attributions such as this often reflect an internal obligation to the original recipe cook (Aunt Ester) rather than a statement about the food culture.[249]

The writers and editors of *The SFA Community Cookbook* made a conscious decision to try to illuminate social history, particularly issues of labor, inter-class and inter-racial connection, and connections between commercial and home cooking. It is notable that these relationships can only be contextualized through headnotes. Naming a dish after the recipe's author cannot perform the function of making relationships explicit. Ann Cashion and Demetrie McLorn's recipe for Caramel Cake provides an illustrative example of this.

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[248] Randolph, Mary, *The Virginia House-wife*, ed. Karen Hess (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1984).
[249] Romines, 83.

A caramel cake is a butter cake with caramel icing. The editors of *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* originally solicited this recipe because chef Ann Cashion made it, in 250 petit-four cakes, for an SFA event. The meal at that event explored race and class markers in southern foods through contrasts: the soup course was she-crab soup and peanut soup and the salad course included an avocado and grapefruit salad and a creasy greens salad. SFA staff and members often cite the meal as a prime example of how a menu can educate, as I explained in chapter four. The cake recipe was chosen initially because its role in the organization as a marker of a successful event. In an early draft of the book, it was submitted without a headnote, so the editors asked Ann Cashion to tell them a bit about the cake. Her story of its origins transformed the recipe from an organizational narrative to one about race and class.

The headnote for "Revelatory Caramel Cake" in the *Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* tells the following story: Ann Cashion's parents are from Texas, but she grew up in Mississippi and currently lives in Washington D.C. Her family "had no caramel cake tradition themselves," so Cashion "borrowed" one. The recipe comes "from the Robert N. Stockett family of Jackson" (a traditional patriarch name plus location attribution) "or, more accurately," from the family's African American cook, Demetrie McLorn. When Cashion discusses the cake's preparation and shipment to her at college in an extended quote about icing technique, she consistently refers to the cake-maker as Demetrie.[250]

There are quite a few complications here. The headnote focuses on Cashion's mobility, moving away to college, and McLorn's icing, "which held the cake in place during shipping." This story simultaneously reveals and elides people who are missing

[250]*SFACC*, 231.

from the "community" cookbooks of many white organizations: the African American cook's full name and her expertise. Cashion's story illustrates borrowed or adopted traditions and passing recipes, both of which are part of the fantasy of attribution, which suggests there is a kind of honoring and exchange that can move between class, race, and geographical divides.

However, the headnote does not tell a particularly complicated story. Instead, it traffics in familiar tropes about the significance of black domestic workers, particularly in the U.S. South. The story tells about a great cook whom people love without confronting race and class inequality. Cashion moves, but the cake and McLorn stay in place. The SFA holds up this recipe and headnote as an example of its goals of honoring and acknowledging cooks; however, the story suffers from the many pressures of writing a headnote in a community cookbook or a commercial cookbook. It has to engage the casual reader, while maintaining a fidelity to contributor's memories and stories, and all of this in about five sentences.

My interview with Cashion suggested a range of ways this headnote could have been different, each of which reveal insights into the editors' goals.[251] Cashion has served on the board of the Southern Foodways Alliance and runs the John Egerton Prize committee, which "recognizes artists, writers, scholars, and others—including artisans and farmers and cooks—whose work, in the American South, addresses issues of race, class, gender, and social and environmental justice, through the lens of food."[252] She said that her role on the board was often to call for a more politically conscious or activist edge and that she would like the SFA to tell more stories people might not want to hear.

[251] Ann Cashion, interview by author, telephone, April 12, 2011.
[252] Southern Foodways Alliance, "The John Egerton Prize," http://southernfoodways.org/hall_of_fame/john_egerton/index.html, accessed March 3, 2013.

In this vein, Cashion told a more complicated and self-critical story about the development of her caramel cake headnote. After being smitten with the history of the cake (editor Sara Roahen specifically mentioned this recipe's story as one that she was surprised and glad to have), the editors told Cashion they had to have McLorn's full name.[253] Cashion said at the time she "had no idea" what McLorn's full name was. Like many white families with black domestic workers, she had never known Demetrie's last name—"typical, but embarrassing," Cashion said. So she went looking and found it mainly because Demetrie McLorn was the domestic worker that much of Kathryn Stockett's *The Help* was based on.[254] The popular book and film, which engage with representations of black domestics, received an onslaught of critical attention. Cashion thought that the writers and editors of the cookbook might mention the relation to *The Help* in the headnote, but the editors did not.[255]

The choice not to reference McLorn's connection to *The Help* reflects, in part, an effort to foreground an individual and a personal relationship. The editors chose not to subject the story of McLorn's caramel cake to larger dialogues or to lose sight of Demetrie McLorn herself in the fan-power of a popular book and film. Clearly, that position is double-edged: it sings the unsung, but it also pushes some of the public debate into the background. The cake, Cashion says, is "laden with the history of a family," with relationships between white family members and McLorn. The headnote suggests some of this history and some of how food becomes a focal point for exchange; however, Cashion's story complicates that exchange, including what knowledge, social and

[253] Roahen, interview.
[254] Cashion knew Stockett, but they were ten years apart in age and not close.
[255] Cashion, interview.

culinary, is exchanged and how people engage with histories of shared and hidden knowledge.

Attribution

While Cashion's story is about larger concepts of authorship and attribution, below the recipe for the caramel cake, the recipe is attributed to "Ann Cashion, Washington D.C." I want to look more closely at that single line of text, which is a conventional form of attribution in community cookbooks. The *Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* attributions include the contributor's first and last name and the place they are from. The people who contributed recipes range from retired pediatricians to star chefs and include a who's who of southern cooking—Nathalie Dupree, Frank Stitt, Sean Brock, Paul Prudhomme, and Leah Chase, among others. There are also many contributors who would only be known to SFA members and some who would not be known even to them. The locations represented range from Oxford, Mississippi and New Orleans (which one would expect) to Ann Arbor, Michigan and Brooklyn.

The use of attribution in *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* does three things. First, it replicates traditional community cookbook forms, naming the contributor and making the book look like a community cookbook. Second, the addition of location changes the geographical parameters of both "community" and "southern," reflecting both the membership's geographical diversity and the organizations belief that a wide range of people can create Southern foodways. Third, the inclusion of names allows the SFA to create a star-studded cookbook while maintaining a folk vibe. Since all the names are in the same font and placed similarly, the collection resists being read as

celebrity cookbook; yet, the parade of southern food culture celebrity still draws on the fame and established reputations of contributors. Attribution in *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* garners authority by signaling the community cookbook genre, while also naming famous chefs.

Headnotes

As in the caramel cake example, the story that frames the recipe is located in the headnote. The *Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook,* like many commercial cookbooks, uses headnotes to introduce recipes. These headnotes describe dishes, ingredients, or methods of preparation; provide food histories; or tell about the cook, restaurant, or family the recipe comes from. Headnotes also contextualize the recipe, providing more information and, sometimes, an emotional entry for readers. As I demonstrated in the Cashion example, the headnotes in *The SFA Community Cookbook* are often interpretations. They are stories and descriptions that are being retold (sometimes multiple times, depending on the number of writers and editors who worked on a particular note). Their function is to mediate between the experience of the contributor and the experience of the reader. Sometimes, the contributor's voice and ideas are fully present in the description; other times, the SFA writers don't even mention them.

Headnotes about sensory experience can entice the reader to make the dish, can better acquaint the reader with what to expect from the dish, or can provide access to another's experience. The most standard incarnation of the sensory headnote simply describes the food. For example, the headnote for "Fried Green Tomatoes with Shrimp Remolaude" reads, "It's a simple dish, really, this combination of two iconic and exalted

Southern foods. The taste relies on contrasts: Hot, crunchy, cornmeal-dredged fried green tomatoes, born of the rural and resourceful farming tradition. Cool, creamy, spicy, luxuriant New Orleans shrimp remolaude, born of Uptown, New Orleans."[256] However, the most intriguing headnotes give us access not only to the food, but to the lives of others. The headnote for "Chitlins," for example, describes Audrey Petty's memories of chitlins in her childhood. She describes their smell as "vinegary and slightly farmy," yet "[f]or all their potent smell, the flavor was calm and subtle … Precious, strange, and furtive food; I longed for them even as I consumed them."[257] This exploration conveys sensory experience and knowledge about the cultural and emotional context of eating chitlins in a Northern city.

While many of the headnotes explore the history of foods (the dish, cooking method, ingredients, and recipe development) in mini-history lessons, personal stories are central to how and why readers are drawn to recipes.[258] Therefore, the headnotes in the *Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* often focus on the people behind the food. While sometimes people in the headnotes talk about their elders—grandmothers, aunts, great uncles, mothers, fathers—headnotes are also frequently about contemporary cooks and their practices. Beyond family, food is presented as part of a lineage of restaurant "families," hired domestic cooks, and friends. Framing recipes around cooks serves two functions: first, it honors the people who made the dishes, and second, it

[256]*SFACC*, 40.
[257]*SFACC*,144.
[258] For example, the headnote for Mississippi Delta Hot Tamales reads, "The history of the Delta hot tamale is murky. As best can be determined, it came to be a Mississippi favorite in the early years of the twentieth century when Mexican laborers began making their way up from Texas to work bumper cotton harvests. In the Delta cotton fields, Mexican laborers shared their bundles of pork and corn with African American laborers. And a hybridized form was born" (116). This history, like any in a headnote, is quite abbreviated; however, the author clearly focuses our attention primarily on hybridizations and the influx of new people. This is a common version of culinary history in the cookbook, one I explore more in the conclusion.

provides a personalized cultural history that gives the reader an understanding of the lived lineage of the recipe, why it was made, and what it meant to earlier people who cooked the dish.

Introductions

Before getting to the first recipe, *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* has four introductory pieces: an epigraph, an introduction to the organization, a foreword by food celebrity Alton Brown, and a preface by John T. Edge. These materials provide a framework for approaching the book that points to the significance of attribution, the history of recipes, and using food to define culture.

First, the epigraph from "Eudora Welty of Jackson, Mississippi" centralizes the concept of attribution. Welty says that women shared recipes in Jackson, but she also explains that these women continued to attribute shared recipes to the person who was the original source of the dish ("Mrs. Mosel's White Fruitcake," for example) and that this attribution is a point of remembrance and celebration of the recipe's creator. As I demonstrated above, this investment in attribution as a form and as an ethical and social practice is central to the SFA's decision to make its text on the model of a community-cookbook.

After this epigraph, there is a "Meet the Southern Foodways Alliance" page that tells the organization's mission and gives a sense of its voice. Not simply a catalog of what the SFA does, it uses phrases like "documenting the lives of fried chicken cooks, bartenders, and cattlemen who raise grass-fed beef" and explains that SFA events "function as camp meetings for true believers in the cultural import of regional cookery and culture." These documentary productions and events "work to pay down debts of

pleasure, earned over generations." Finally, the SFA extends membership to all, "Even if—bless your heart—you put sugar in your grits." This is tongue-in-cheek and cheeky, as "bless your heart" is a particularly southern insult disguised as a nicety, meaning "you poor soul." The language is colloquial and academic at the same time, mixing "cultural import" with "true believers." It also includes the idea that there is a "debt of pleasure," a phrase which is not fully clear but suggests the histories of oppression and unrecognized labor that southern cuisine emerged from. These are histories of slavery and racial inequality and histories of cooks being overlooked in the historical and even personal record. The description of the organization in this section, then, moves between investment and a wink.

Next, the foreword by Alton Brown explores what makes an "authentic" community cookbook. He begins by noting his extensive collection of community cookbooks and then goes on to talk about "four attributes that indicate authenticity": authentic community cookbooks are spiral-bound, have directly-attributed recipes, are "truly democratic," and "convey a strong sense of place." He verifies that *The SFACC* is a community cookbook and "a very good one" at that. Brown's narrative then speculates about the book's production process; he has the SFA search for recipes in "shoe boxes, lock boxes, notebooks, and kitchen drawers" and on "piles of scraps, napkins, store receipts and postcards," drawing an image of material density reminiscent of James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Ultimately, Brown claims, "Regardless of whether it looks back into the past or ahead into the future, this book looks ever Southward."

In the Preface, Edge riffs on and even contradicts Brown's assessment of the text. His introduction also examines the material experience of community cookbooks—"dog-eared and gravy-splattered, their margins scribbled with notes, their spines bulging with yellowed newspaper clippings and pastel index card."[259] However, instead of arguing that the *Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* is a community cookbook, he discusses the book as a "tribute" and focuses on the ways that it shares stories and was democratically developed. Finally, he clearly presents the claims of the text:

> Our South reflects contradictions and contains multitudes. Our take on Southern food culture embraces the region's ongoing evolution. With that in mind, the goal here is straightforward: to publish a cookbook that reflects this large family of cooks and eaters, artisans and farmers, writers and thinkers.
>
> Herein, we showcase complex recipes from home cooks and simple recipes from chefs. We recognize that community cookbooks, as published in years past, were never perfect. And we know that the same is true for our modern-day effort. We don't seek to showcase perfection. Instead, by way of the community endeavor, we celebrate everyday life.[260]

In this preface, Edge lays out the two kind of authority *The SFACC* attempts to develop: first, promoting an evolving and complexly peopled South, and second, evoking an everyday, "homely" South.

Taken together, the *SFA Community Cookbook*'s introductory materials lay out explicit goals of celebrating vernacular cooks and expanding definitions of Southern cuisine. Two famous people—Welty and Brown—talk about vernacular practices and texts, and the SFA then puts itself into those vernacular conversations with a focus on expanding cultural definitions. The use of famous people, on the one hand, is a draw for consumers—it gets Alton Brown's name on the cover of the book. On the other hand, the

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[259] *SFACC*, xiii.
[260] *SFACC*, xiv.

explicit focus on the vernacular both highlights what the organization wants to present as its work and also, especially in Brown's discussion, draws the SFA into those traditions—sharing the aura of folk experience—while Edge's preface puts the cookbook in dialogue with those traditions. These juxtapositions allow the book to draw on the emotional capital of community cookbooks while simultaneously claiming authority to define southern food culture.

Illustration

Beyond words, a cookbook, as a material object, and the images that it contains carry meaning and establish forms of authority. The illustrations in and the binding of the *Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* demonstrate this. Glossy, full-color, styled food photography is the mainstay of cookbooks, food magazines, food websites, and blogs. Sometimes this highly produced work is called "food porn," a term usually invoked to critique a genre of photography that makes food seem perfect, enticing, and unattainable. This kind of photography often hides labor and thwarts, as opposed to encourages, practice.[261] Initially developed by food advertisers, this photographic genre draws customers in with aesthetic pleasure. *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* writers and editors rejected the common cookbook convention of using color photography—which is a present (or future) focused sensuality—and, instead, embrace simple artwork. This decision reflects a past-oriented purpose and demonstrates that *The SFA Community Cookbook* is a contemporary riff on a genre associated with the past.

Instead of color photography, the book is illustrated with woodblock-print style designs (fig. 5.4). The look is part of the SFA's branded identity. The illustrations reflect a recognizable and sellable retro aesthetic, but is in opposition to idealized food

[261]Anne E. McBride, "Food Porn," *Gastronomica* 10, no. 1 (2010): 41.

photography. Of the thirteen chapter images, nine are illustrations of ingredients; only four are of prepared foods (A Taste—cheese straws, Gravy—a gravy ladle, Put Up—jarred foods, and Cane—cake).[262] The illustrations' simple lines hearken to the pictures in many community cookbooks; however, the images in *The SFACC* are in full-color. Full-color printing demonstrates that this book is a commercial cookbook; yet, instead of contributing to the spectacular culture of food, it takes a stand against it.

At a book festival event for the *Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook*, four panelists, including a food stylist, discussed how the lack of photography in community cookbooks allowed cooks to be more imaginative and less intimidated because they were not working toward a beautiful, desired, pictured outcome. The discussion chair tied this notion of culinary imagination to *The SFACC* editors' decision to not include photographs.

In addition to rejecting idealized depictions of recipes, the illustrations in the *Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* are explicitly retro. A retro aesthetic draws on historical forms and invokes a past time, but does so with a valence that is different. It is usually playful, moving between tones of nostalgia and irony. It maintains distance while replicating older forms; moreover, it is the precise recognition of this distance that makes retro images function in the ways that they do.

While the black-and-white, archival photographs of the first Southern Foodways cookbook, *A Gracious Plenty,* refer directly to the past, the retro drawings of *The SFACC* reenact and riff on the past, both evoking it and turning it on its head. Omitting photography (and including retro illustrations) not only encourages imaginative

[262]This also reflects the organization of the book in general, focusing more on ingredients than dishes as defining Southern cuisine.

engagement with food production, it also encourages imaginative engagement with the past. This kind of play can be risky: it may replace the fantasy of a perfectly-lit chicken wing with a fantasy image of the past that may not engage with actual experience. The fanciful images in *The SFA Community Cookbook*—retro and form-over-detail—remind the reader of a time period without engaging extensively with its historical details. *The SFA Community Cookbook* illustrations are polychronic, suggesting a historical grounding—particularly that of the post-mid-century community cookbook—in the context of recipes and stories from the present and much more recent past.

Binding

The book's binding was a central consideration for its producers.[263] Before turning to recipe contributors or the ethos of editing, Alton Brown focuses in his foreword on the physical features of the text. He quips, "such books must be spiral-bound or they are not to be trusted." Edge further discusses the binding of the book in the preface: "Okay, some of those books were plastic tooth-bound, but that's philosophically the same thing. With that idea in mind, please note that the book you now hold is your hands is bound in a manner that is a tribute to, but not a direct replication of, those spiraled cookbooks of yore."[264] The cover of the book even illustrates spiral-binding (see fig. 5.4).

In addition to the cover and discussion in the prefatory material of the book itself, the second line of the press release says, "In tribute to the spiral-bound community

[263] The SFA is keenly aware that the physical experience of the text —the weight of the paper, color usage, font and graphics, and size and orientation—impacts readers. The group's mailings, posters, and other printings, therefore, reflect an investment in paper arts. Since most of their content is available online, SFA printing is as much about presentation as content. The staff and members are invested in having things look not-too-clean ("we like our seams to show") but high-end. *The Southern Foodways Alliance Cookbook*, designed in a retro-community-cookbook style on commercially printed and weighted paper follows this aesthetic.

[264] *SFACC*, xi.

cookbooks that so often present the informal history of people and place in the seemingly simple act of gathering a group of recipes, the book has *an internal spiral binding in a hard-bound case* and the goal of defining southern food in the most open-minded of ways."[265] This sentence merges considerations of form and content, linking the goal of (re)defining southern food with the artifact itself. In the foreword and preface, the authors also claim that the spiral binding signals a commitment to the community cookbook tradition. These claims raise several questions: 1. Why are community cookbooks identified as spiral bound? 2. What does choosing spiral binding demonstrate? 3. What is the relationship between the form and the claim—why use the artifact in addition to the speech act?

The association between spiral binding and community cookbooks reflects their proliferation in the second half of the twentieth century. The spiral binding (particularly plastic comb binding) became popular in the 1950s and 1960s because it was less expensive than other forms of binding. Cost and adherence to genre have since made it the main form of community cookbook binding. Most community cookbook compilers, in fact, don't even consider other forms of binding because of cost. Conversely, commercial cookbooks with spiral binding are rare and usually intentionally evoke a folksy or homey aesthetic.

While spiral-binding makes financial sense for small organizations, it has commercial disadvantages. Because *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* is sold at bookstores and not simply by the organization itself, the editors actually had to campaign for the use of spiral-binding. The publisher was seeking a wider

[265] Southern Foodways Alliance, *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* press release, 2010.

audience, and spiral-binding impacts sales: in bookstores, books are identified by their spines, and most spiral-bound cookbooks do not have a readable spine.[266] The University of Georgia Press and the SFA compromised, creating a book that is spiral bound on the inside but looks like a hardback book on the outside. The text itself looks hybrid—signaling a community cookbook but, at the same time, having market-based functionality.

The repeated references to the binding in the text, cover illustration, and press release demonstrate that it is not a fully legible feature. While the organization may want to draw attention to the hidden binding, the repeated discussion of it reflects a desire for the feature to be interpreted *correctly*. The editors want to signal a connection to community cookbooks, to pay homage in form as well as with words, a strategy which they note has a "philosophy." The choice of binding, as such, reflects both organizational values and goals for the text.

One of the goals for *The SFA Community Cookbook* that spiral binding fulfills is use-value. It is easier to cook from a book where the pages lie flat. The choice of binding establishes that *The SFA Community Cookbook* is to be used for actual cooking, instead of for display, reading, or imagination. The editors and writers said repeatedly in interviews and book production materials that they wanted to create a book that people could cook with, a book that would be subjected to those remarked-upon gravy splatters. The spiral binding, therefore, signals this is not a coffee-table book. Creating a cookbook clearly meant to be used to cook has two main functions: it encourages practice and authenticates itself.

[266] There are some exceptions to this. However, books with printed, plastic comb spines often lose their print quickly with use, which is why the publisher and SFA editors rejected that as an option.

The use-value of spiral binding pushes against presentations of food as spectacle, suggesting that cookbook readers should be cooking. If the cookbook is used to cook,[267] it becomes a material part of the consumer's life. Spiral binding facilitates this kind of kinetic relationship with the text. But even for the armchair reader, the spiral binding still does work. For many food culture consumers, a spiral-bound community cookbooks was the first or is their most beloved cookbook. I discuss the social valence of these books further below; however, what is important to understand, here, is that spiral binding can spark an experiential recognition. The editors of *The SFACC* encourage this authentication by explicitly asking their readers to make a connection between the spiral binding of this book and that of the other community cookbooks in their possession and memories.

Promotion and Personal Memory

The production of a book does not end with its publication, nor do its claims and production of authority. In press releases, book tours, and other venues, books continue to be interpreted, represented, and shaped for the public. After its release, *The SFACC* had quite a few book events. Bookstores, cooking stores, libraries, and festivals sponsored signings, discussions, and even cooking demonstrations. Several of the writers and editors were asked to promote the book, including former SFA president Angie Mosier. I attended two book events where she was the SFA's representative: a panel discussion at the Decatur Public Library in November 2010, just after the book's release, and a panel discussion at Cook's Warehouse, a cookware store, during the Decatur Book Festival. By examining the framing of presentation of *The SFACC* at these events, we can see how the

[267] Consumers, as De Certeau taught us, do not always do what they are supposed to do with goods. See Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

producers intended for the book to be interpreted and the public's response to those intentions.

Mosier was a speaker and the moderator of both of the panel discussions I observed. At the library, the panel included Mosier and two area restaurateurs, Hugh Acheson of the higher-end Five-and-Ten and Empire South and Mike Klank of the mid-range restaurant Taqueria del Sol. Refreshments, made from the cookbook's recipes, were served. The festival presentation panel included Mosier, Taqueria del Sol's chef Eddie Hernandez, Ritz Carlton chef Todd Richards, and Tamie Cook, the researcher for Alton Brown's Food Network show *Good Eats*. The library presentation had an audience of around fifty people in a small auditorium, while the festival presentation was standing room only, probably seventy-five people, in the store's demonstration kitchen. While these discussions were clearly organized to promote this single book, they were also conducted as discussions of the genre of the community cookbook.

At both events, in addition to *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook*, the panelists brought stacks of other community cookbooks to share with the audience and to use in their discussions. At the Decatur Library presentation, these books were from Mosier's personal collection, which she inherited from her mother-in-law and gathered through thrift store shopping. At the festival presentation, the community cookbooks were a mix of Mosier's books and panelist Tammy Cook's. During the presentation, panelists read from these books, displayed and talked about their origins, layout, and content, and attended to them as much as to *The SFA Community Cookbook*. Instead of surrounding themselves with glossy, award-winning, and best-selling cookbooks, they brought community cookbooks. The material presence of these

historical cookbooks informed their discussions. Panelists and audience members drew from both the books that were present and from their memories of other community cookbooks. Their discussions moved between these other community cookbooks and *The SFACC*. The presence of cookbooks as artifacts shaped the discussion at these presentations.

The panelists at both of these presentations talked primarily about recipes and lineages of cooking. In their discussions, panelists and audience members told a variety of stories—about the emergence of particular recipes, about memories of cooking, and even about relationships to written and printed recipes. I want to examine two stories that Angie Mosier told. At both the library and festival presentations, Mosier told a story about a community cookbook from the Fairyland residential area in Chattanooga, Tennessee. When she found this cookbook, she recognized that it came from the neighborhood home of her best friend. The friend's mother had died in a car accident when the girl was fifteen, and, looking at the date, Mosier wondered if the mother had any recipes in this book.

It turned out that the mother had contributed three dishes, including a cocktail recipe. Mosier described for the audience how she and her friend talked about her friend's memories of the food and of her mother. Mosier claimed that this cookbook, which she planned to give her friend as a gift, would become a treasured family possession. During the question-and-answer session at both events, people from the audience shared similar personal stories of cookbooks, and, like Mosier, they talked about both collecting and inheriting these texts as way of positioning themselves within a

lineage. The implicit statement of Mosier's story is two-fold: community cookbooks are spaces where people can recover memories and connect to people in the past.

At the Decatur Library event, Mosier told a second story that reiterated and reframed this connection between remembering people and community cookbooks. During the Q&A, she was asked whose fried chicken recipe the SFA had chosen to include in the cookbook. After looking the recipe up (she guessed incorrectly that it was contributed by Decatur's own Scott Peacock), she saw that the recipe was from Austin Leslie, an African American New Orleanian, who put pickles and parsley on his fried chicken. After going into detail about the food itself, she explained: "So, the story. This is one of the most important reasons that you put together something like this. Whether it's in your own family that you just put together your own cookbook, this is one of the reasons it important. So Austin Leslie…" The story she went on to tell was about Leslie's death. After describing him—wise, funny, captain's-hatted—and his relationship to the Southern Foodways Alliance—he was a chef for one of the early symposia—Mosier described how, after Hurricane Katrina, Leslie had been trapped in his attic, "shipped out to the damn convention center," "sitting on that bridge forever, didn't have his medication," and finally ended up in Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, where he died of a heart attack a few days later. She ended the story by saying, "It was just the tragedy of what happened to this guy, but we can eat his fried chicken and celebrate his life."

As Mosier told this story, which the audience audibly reacted to with outrage and sympathy, she moved between an ode, a paean, and an outcry. While she explicitly claimed that the purpose of the recipe in *The SFACC* is to eat Leslie's food and celebrate his life, she also implicitly argued that the "most important reason" people use

community cookbooks is to access and share a range of stories, which—by her demonstration—are not always celebratory.[268]

While the link between recipes and cooks is explicit in the form and the headnotes often celebrate these cooks, these cookbooks do not tell or retell difficult memories or stories so much as they become a reason for telling or a trigger for remembering.[269] The book events that I discuss above simultaneously reflect and play with the ways that authority is structured within community cookbooks, calling on a variety of voices, invoking both the power of celebrity and the everyday, and mixing sensory experience, memory, and thoughtful discussion.

Conclusions

While *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* is, in part, a community cookbook, it is also published and distributed as a commercial book. The editors, therefore, made specific choices about how to represent their relationships to community and commercial cookbooks, and these choices reflect their overall purposes in the book. The artifact, content, and promotion of *The SFA Community Cookbook* all work to make claims about its authority through an interplay of sensory experience, memory, and cultural authority. As a hybrid book, it employs the emotional appeal of community cookbooks and the consumer appeal of commercial ones. By mapping these ideas onto one another, the writers and editors draw on both the authority of a folk aesthetic and the authority of curated texts.

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[268] Likewise, in Mosier's previous story of her friend's mother and the Chattanooga community cookbook, her friend talked about bad family dinners and shifting mores in pregnancy and drinking. Naturally, these stories are not in the text.

[269] Yi-Fu Tuan establishes the role of artifacts as jumping off points for accessing deep and complex memories in "The Significance of the Artifact," *Geographical Review* 70, no. 4 (October 1980), 462-472.

The production and content of *The SFACC* point to the importance of sense memory in cookbooks. Instead of simply remembering food, people in and around these texts remember books and recipes. They describe the experience not only of cooking, but also of learning and loving recipes. Further, *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* and other books like it rely on select memories from authority figures in the southern food world to hone claims about the cuisine. By using memories, these cookbooks form what looks like a people's construction while they maintain the authority of experts. This is also apparent in the use of voice; writers often use a humorous or colloquial tone to make claims about the political history of food (as in the claim that we should feel shame for the history of sugar production). By working between registers and drawing on the sensory experience of community cookbooks, texts like the *Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook* work to decommercialize themselves while maintaining the marketability of the text and the ideas within them.

Figure 5.1 Cover of *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook*

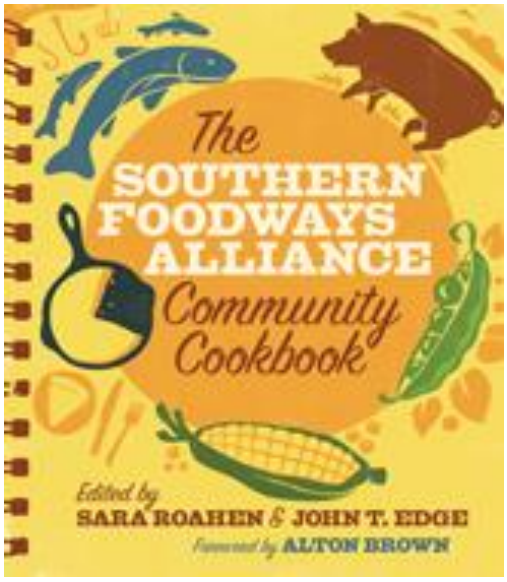
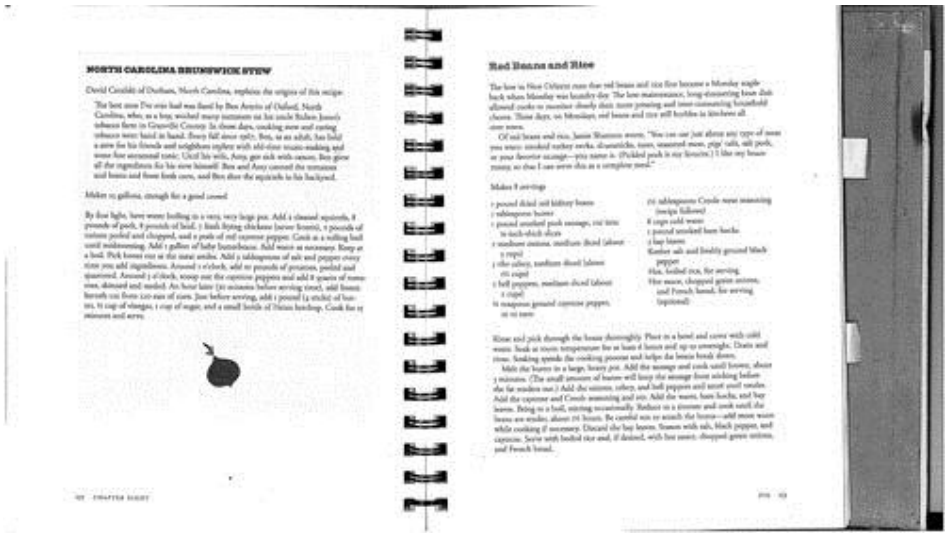


Figure 5.2 *Southern Foodways Alliance* logo

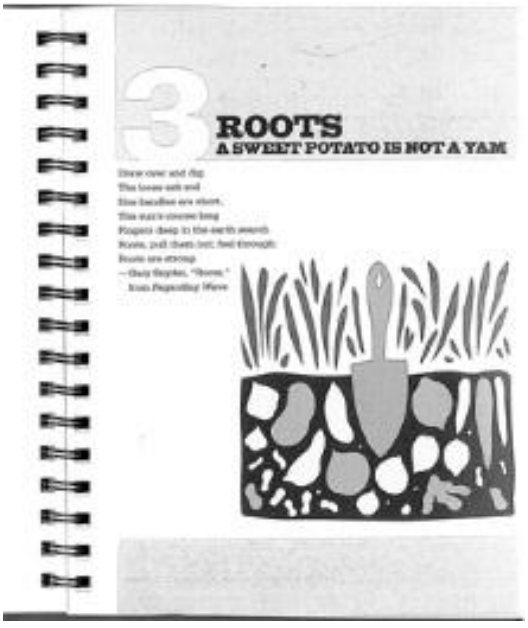
Figure 5.3 A typical page from *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook*.



NORTH CAROLINA BRUNSWICK STEW

Red Beans and Rice

Figure 5.4 Chapter image and example of spiral binding in *The Southern Foodways Alliance Community Cookbook*



Conclusion

> Take someone like Rodney Scott. We make a film about him. Rodney comes to events. We shine a bright light on Rodney. That is something I feel comfortable with. The thing I worry about, and the thing we are starting to work on now, is the back end of that. When you shine a bright light on somebody that means people are calling Rodney with business deals; people are trying to get Rodney to do this and Rodney to do that; people want Rodney to expand his business and open a location near them.[270]

I began this dissertation with a story of Mississippi catfish farmer Ed Scott, and I end it with a story about South Carolina barbecue pitmaster Rodney Scott. Rodney and Ed Scott, no relation, are African American businessmen who the SFA has celebrated, through film, writing, and events. Ed Scott's story centralized discussions about race, food production, and southern cultures; it raised questions about the aspirations of the SFA and audience responses. Rodney Scott's story emphasizes the outcomes of these productions for the subjects. The SFA's work—documenting, celebrating, and studying food practices in the U.S. South—aims to raise awareness by highlighting practitioners and interpreting southern food culture. Just as it presents a range of food practices and local experiences to audiences and encourages investment and consumption, it also collects and expands producers' knowledge and networks of customers and business associates. The story of Rodney Scott demonstrates the opportunities and problems of telling stories about small food producers in order to promote practices, businesses, and cultural awareness.

In 2009, pitmaster Rodney Scott was chopping up trees, burning the wood to

[270] Interview with John T. Edge, Oxford, Mississippi, January 18, 2011.

glowing charcoal, smoking pigs over them for eighteen hours, and then selling that meat to a loyal customer base in Hemingway, South Carolina. In June of that year, Southern Foodways Alliance director John T. Edge wrote a column for the *New York Times* about Scott.[271] Then, in 2010, SFA filmmaker Joe York depicted Scott in the film *Cut/Chop/Cook*, followed by another article by Edge in *Saveur*. *Cut/Chop/Cook*, like Edge's essay, is a portrait. The film begins with Rodney Scott preparing pork at three in the morning, lit only by red coals. It follows Scott as he cuts up fallen oaks, stokes fires and presents his customers testifying about the long distances they travel for his meat.

The film and essays brought Scott to the attention of a nation of food enthusiasts. In 2010, he traveled to the Big Apple Barbecue Block Party and several other events, connected with the SFA and screenings of *Cut/Chop/Cook*. As Rodney Scott became a celebrity, people made him offers to franchise, and in a complicated turn, the family business, which was getting so much attention, was audited and found to have outstanding taxes due. People from the SFA helped Scott and his father with their books, so they could maintain the business, which was passed officially from Rodney's father, Roosevelt, to him during the process. The SFA felt partly responsible to Rodney Scott—it brought him into a media frenzy, where he was being faced with more opportunity and scrutiny than he had as a family restaurateur in a small town.

When I interviewed Edge in January 2011, he said the SFA was adding follow-up processes to their oral history and film work, so they can continue to help people, like Scott, who want support after the SFA has brought attention to them. Longtime member and barbecue magnate Nick Pihakis, who worked with Scott, said that by consulting with small entrepreneurs, the idea is to create conditions "where their

[271] John T. Edge, "Pig, Smoke, Pit: This Food is Seriously Slow," *New York Times*, D1, June 10, 2009.

business can be around for the next 100 years, not just their story." He explained this in relation to the SFA's story production, saying,

> As I was watching [the SFA], I saw that what John T was doing, seeking out these different individuals that represent the culture of the South and the history of it. Take Rodney Scott. They write about them, so it is documented, and that will be there forever. But what I started noticing was the fact that if [the subjects] understood how to run their business better that they could be around forever. So that was a big key for me, trying to interact with them so they could pass their business on to the next generation.[272]

While this can be a complicated relationship (as Pihakis said, "they don't need help with cooking"), it can also create new relationships.[273] From the friendship that Scott, who is African American, and Pihakis, who is white, formed through the SFA, they started the Fatback Collective, which focuses on better pig sourcing and "progressive causes."

In July 2011, *Time* writer Josh Ozersky wrote about the positive sides of Scott's fame, saying,

> The problem with the way we writers think of barbecuers is that we secretly want them to be poor and obscure. […] I will go down here as saying that I want Rodney Scott to get rich and famous. I want him to open a chain of cheesy franchise restaurants; I want him to have his own reality show; I want him to outgrow his unforgettable, magical, one-of-a-kind BBQ joint and to stop cutting trees himself.[274]

Ozersky's argument is, in part, that if people have done well, one shouldn't wish the labor of barbecue, particularly of Scott's variety, on them. The SFA takes a slightly different approach. Likely influenced by the mantra of longtime member and professional business advisor Ari Weinzweig, they want for restaurateurs what the restaurateurs want—some people will want to franchise, other will want to keep their businesses

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[272] Interview with Nick Pihakis, Birmingham, Alabama, August 20, 2011.
[273] Scott and Pihakis formed a friendship, reflecting a common SFA member practice. Jerry Slater, Frank Stitt, and John Currence, among others, talked about the importance of sharing advice, brainstorming, and playing with others in the industry.
[274] Josh Ozersky, "BBQ's Best Secret is Out: Fame Comes to Rodney Scott," Time, July 2, 2011. http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2082757,00.html#ixzz1tRRUICE4

small.[275] The SFA role, to the extent that they can, is to facilitate that. Sara Camp Arnold, talking about Ozersky's article, explained it this way,

> He says, I don't want it to be a hole-in-the-wall. I want this guy to make a ton of money. I think that is what the SFA wants for lots of the people it celebrates. Certainly part of the appeal is that the subjects are undersung, but the SFA is not trying to say, listen to them before they sign to a major label. They are genuinely trying to celebrate them.

Arnold acknowledges that hard work without much attention is an appealing food and folk category. Consumers are drawn in by stories of hidden gems. At the same time, she makes a nuanced analogy, using the trope of listening to the band before they were cool. The implication is not, she says, that signing to a major label will undermine their appeal or their skill. Making money is not framed antithetically to having "honest food," in the SFA's parlance. While Ozersky's article suggests that continuing laborious practices and becoming a celebrity chef are not congruent, the SFA's membership and staff frequently argue that one can have both: the magic of a place is not dictated by its obscurity (but in Scott's case, it may still be dictated by labor-intensive methods).

Rodney Scott's story, in the course of his interaction with the SFA, has changed. The first story—the story the SFA originally told—*is* the story of a hole-in-the-wall. Moreover, it is a story of labor. Scott's barbecue is venerated and beautiful because he cuts his own wood, stokes his own coals, put his own hogs onto grates, and flips them over the open flame. The story of his family's business is told as a story of individual dedication and a flock of fanatics buying barbecue in an out-of-the-way place. Now when people tell a story about Rodney Scott, it is about what happens when fame comes to an out-of-the-way place. What happens when people are watching, when people are expectant, when people are making offers? How people perceive his work changes, and his work itself changes. In this way, stories about food not only produce

[275] Interview with Ari Weinzweig, by phone, September 9, 2011.

cultural records, they shape the practices of food producers and consumers.

Before turning to future avenues for study—the questions about business, representation, and networks, that Scott's case raises—I return to the questions I initially posed about the SFA's methods of using food to perform cultural work. Moving from medium to purpose, I discuss how the tensions of the organization's mission play out in its productions and what reveals about using stories about food to construct culture, and in particular, a contemporary southern culture.

In this dissertation, I examined four key methods of storytelling in the SFA: oral history, film, events, and cookbooks. In chapter two, I discussed oral history, the organization's main line of production. I showed how this work creates collections that are valuable in their own right, as part of an archive, and are transformable for a variety of audiences and media. Oral history allows subjects to speak for themselves, providing space for new stories and expanding the range of people whose stories are told. In the SFA's case, oral history allows them to document food practices and, just as significantly, the experience of food producers in the U.S. South. They create a social record that combines cultural and business knowledge. However, oral histories require people to articulate their experiences and knowledge, which for some SFA subjects is not their central skill, since they are often farmers and cooks first. Since many of the subjects are also entrepreneurs, they have a stake in having positive publicity, so there is little incentive to tell negative stories, which can create gaps in the record.

In chapters three and four, I examined SFA film and events, both of which rely on a range of sensory experience and types of knowledge production. Film allows for a rich sensory experience. While SFA film does some telling, it also shows. Viewers see and

hear subjects and their practices, creating a sense of access and knowledge. In chapter four, I explored the SFA's events, looking at how experiences with sensory and social pleasures, function to educate and engage audiences. Events can seem like the ideal form to make stories about food connect because they combine context and personal encounter. They are the central way that the SFA facilitates relationships. Events allow audiences the chance to have first-hand experiences, converse with subjects and often see, taste, or otherwise experience subject practices. While SFA film and events provide greater access to people and knowledge than texts do and create closer connections, these forms are embedded within highly aesthetic and pleasurable experiences. The beauty of these productions invite audiences in, excite them, and invest them in the subjects; however, this kind of pleasure can also encourage audiences to not engage with more difficult aspects of the subjects' or cultures' stories, either because these aspects are not included during the production or because the audience ignores them.

In chapter five, I looked at how people share cultural narratives and knowledge through cookbooks. These materials combine the linguistic nature of oral history with the sensory aspects of films and events. Like all SFA materials, they are created, edited, and interpreted by many people—subjects, multiple staff, users. Moreover, these materials are created with three pressures in mind: crafting a particular discourse about southern food culture, maintaining fidelity to subjects who are sharing their life and work, and garnering and maintaining an audience. It is these conflicting pressures that I aim to take up in further scholarship.

Critical Celebration and Storytelling in the U.S. South

The SFA tells stories so that audiences come away with a sense that they *know* a person or a social group or a practice; however, the audience has only engaged in a highly cultivated piece. At the same time, it is that cultivated piece—that narrative framework—that allows the SFA to make claims about the U.S. South and allows audiences to engage with strangers, facilitating connections and fostering broader networks in and out of the food world. How the SFA tells stories about individuals, about people in the public, about diversity and adversity constructs a particular version of the South and encourages particular cultural narratives and food practices.

The Southern Foodways Alliance primarily tells the stories of individuals. The SFA's narratives often focus on how people have adapted and improved food production. They focus on two main aspects: how people make it—how they become successes—and how people make do—how they use what is available deliciously, innovatively, and, again, successfully. While individual innovation may be something that a group of people share (preparing charcuterie, seed saving) or a singular feat (revolutionizing crawfish farming, caramelizing bananas for banana pudding), the SFA story centers on an individual improving outcomes. Boucherie traditions in Louisiana emerge from the need to use every part of an animal; hoecakes and tamales emerge from the need to eat during long days of work in the fields. Wild greens, ramps, berries, and game are presented as sources of sustenance and pleasure available despite social and economic inequality. The SFA also tells stories about people who managed to make a living through food production under a variety of strains. Vietnamese fishermen who made it through civil war, relocation, Katrina, and the BP oil spill and continue to shrimp; oystermen working after storms and red tides; farmers who fought to move their production from industrial to

organic; women who raised families through their restaurants, who sent children to school by staying at a stove. These stories are about agency. They focus on how a particular person responds to social and material constraints—a lack of food, spoiling ingredients, intensive labor practices, unjust economic or legal systems. This framing foregrounds difficulty at the same time that it promotes a sense of resiliency and ultimately a pleasurable experience.

SFA stories often read as hero narratives, where the underdog rises up to culinary genius despite or even because of oppression—poverty, slavery, unequal access to resources, slow economies, environmental disasters. The SFA frequently defines southern foodways as the outcome of creativity and perseverance. This representation does not frame an exceptional South necessarily; however, it does act in dialogue with established imagined Souths. It pushes against a plantation South, an idealized leisure or agrarian space, insisting on forward progress and ingenuity. Of course, these constructions are not unproblematic themselves.

The danger of telling stories of triumph over adversity to understand histories of oppression is that by telling stories with positive outcomes, the problems can seem mitigated. The Southern Foodways Alliance explicitly centers celebration in their mission. What that means is that they create a South where people are often agents for progress, where people rise above difficulty—a South of "despite." This can be a productive stance, even in terms of social action, as advocates of celebratory activism demonstrate. However, it can also be problematic for shaping a vision of places and people that involve long histories of violence and oppression. The stories the SFA tells can be read in two conflicting ways: on the one hand, they can be stories of agency,

which put a spotlight on both inequality and resistance. On the other, they can be stories that reify the notion that individual effort can overcome inequality, thereby dampening the problematic nature of social ills.

Because these stories focus on individuals, they also rely on memory and family lore. While incidents are concrete and often dated, by year (1942) or by relationship to another specific event (the year we got married, when Troy was seven, just after the flood), the people telling the story frequently admit to the faulty nature of memory—that they may be wrong or that they only know a particular part of the story. The nature of knowing in these stories simultaneously validates them and can downplay the social discourse they suggest. The invocation of personal knowledge as *personal* plays a part. The listeners to these stories often do not have a stake in being skeptical or critical of the storyteller. Their main stake in the story is having spent time or money to hear it: if anything, this investment makes audiences more likely to trust the story. Further, because the organization has selected the subject to tell their story, these stories have been in a way validated or authenticated.

Because subjects are often speaking from experience, the audience is often engaged and persuaded by the details to the story; however, the personal nature of the subject's claim to knowledge can erode the connection of the story to larger issues. The specificity that makes individual stories captivating can also make them seem less generalizable. The connection then between the instance and a pattern of social experience may not be made. A way to encourage the connection of individuals and patterns is through framing. Some SFA stories are framed to encourage critical engagement; others are not. Making connections for others in a "big tent" organization

can be complicated, and explicit framing could alienate some audience members. On the other hand, not explicitly framing issues can dissipate the impact of individual stories as examples. Additionally, framing also suggests that individual stories *are* examples, which SFA producers sometimes push against, in favor of attention to individual lives and textures as having their own unique value.

Focusing on the Public

The SFA makes their work available to the public and focuses primarily on public spaces. This public orientation is significant because definitions of southern food (like many other cuisines) often revolve around families. The SFA does not entirely ignore home cooking as a framework (it's in the *Cornbread Nation* series and some interviews and presentations); however, the focus of the SFA's work is on public space. This focus emerges from its promotional aims and its position as a public history and public education organization.

Yet the public orientation is also an interpretation of southern identity. The SFA is interested in encouraging people to define their identity through relationships with others, rejecting the insularity of a family-focused interpretation of food culture. It points people to public spaces because that is where cultural exchange and systemic injustice are more easily found. Using public spaces as the locus of identity guards against the proclamation by contemporary white Americans that their family was not part systemic racial oppression because they "did not own slaves" and the attendant negation responsibilities toward reconciliation and contemporary justice. Moreover, public spaces—particularly places like restaurants—were the battlegrounds for many civil rights struggles.

Constructing Southern

In describing the purpose of the SFA's work, John T. Edge said,

> The other thing that matters about the work of the SFA is the community that now claims the organization, a group of people who see food as a portal to understanding people and place and who see food from the South as a kind of lever-point for a better South, not in the political sense, but in a community-building, awareness-raising sense.

The SFA positions itself as an avenue for constructing southernness, simultaneously aware of the past and invested in change. New foods, new dishes, new people, new technology; changing populations, changing practices, and changing perspectives are all central to how the SFA wants to present southern food culture. It proclaims and promotes a diverse south and aims, in programming and media productions, to represent southern foodways as emerging from cultural exchange. The SFA's diversity narrative is not simply about a defining the South as diverse, but an argument that diversity creates better food and better culture, that diversity is the engine for southern cuisine, now and historically.

Food has migrated as long as people. Large-scale food exchanges, like the Columbian Exchange, are often neither peaceful nor equal. Transnational flows and shared foodstuffs do not necessarily translate into shared culture, shared power, or shared resources. Nonetheless, stories of shared food and food culture frequently act not only as explanations—how gumbo developed—but also as symbolic stories of the promise and productivity of interaction and cultural exchange. This symbolic use emerges out of ideas of commensality, which focus on the ways that eating across boundaries or sharing a meal expresses and enacts larger ideas of sharing lives.

The SFA believes that the kitchen and the table are spaces where cultural exchange has happened, and that by talking about that history, people can envision a

multicultural, multiracial South and exchanges beyond recipe development. The Southern Foodways Alliance presents stories of cultural exchange that create a positive history of interracial and interethnic relationships as well as stories that reveal the troubled history of these relationships. These stories of cultural exchange often couch complex issues in the context of food history, an effective frame for its audience. The audiences of the Southern Foodways Alliance have a desire to increase their knowledge about food culture. They want to know why people in Kentucky have mutton barbecue while people in East Tennessee use whole hogs, or how crawfish became a popular menu item in the 1980s. This is not the same as wanting to know histories of migration, of human trafficking, of poverty, of legal systems and social mores. Members of the SFA's audience range in their desire to engage with social, ethical, and political questions and in their positions on difficult or controversial issues. Yet the organization wishes to engage people with these ideas. Stories of cultural exchange can allow the SFA to present these ideas and questions to receptive as well as resistant audiences in ways that are meaningful and accessible.

SFA cultural exchange stories range from large scale defining discussions (scholars explaining the role of rice or sugar in Atlantic economies and the U.S. South) to localized foodstuffs (delta tamales or boudin). From New World to Nuevo South, the stories focus on interactions between Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans or on immigrant experiences. The plot revolves around an incident where ingredients or processes emerge, and the outcome is a food to be celebrated or noted. Tone, then, is complicated in these stories because the characters are often in conflict, and often that conflict is shaped by unequal power (forced labor, exile); however, the conclusion often

sets disempowered people in positions of power: the transformation of cuisine is attributed to black cooks, to Native American ingredients, to workers, women, the poor. This structure is due, in part, to the historical fact that kitchens were places of labor and often of the underclass.[276] Even so, the SFA rarely frames stories as the maintenance of power structure through cuisine: even things that are explicitly about degradation—eating low on the hog—are transformed into cases of ingenuity.

Instead of saying southern food developed out of Lost Cause nostalgia,[277] the SFA works to promote and flesh out a different and often more accurate history of southern cuisine, tracing its origin to a much wider population, particularly those who have been marginalized or excluded. If the SFA can adequately make the case that the foods people recognize as southern in the twentieth and twenty-first century are from a history that is multiracial, multiethnic, and cross-class, then it can make an argument for redefining the cultural imaginary of the South. This discourse relies on audiences reading or hearing stories of cultural exchange and having "a-ha moments" about how they have defined themselves or the South.

The SFA wants a critically-engaged, forward-looking audience. Its values statement says explicitly: "The South has a complicated and peculiar history. We acknowledge that. And we leverage that past for our future." However, how they construct and produce stories and how those stories are presented fosters a range of responses. Leveraging the past for the future is what most people (and particularly heritage organizations) do, but

[276] There are also cases of lateral exchange, usually between European groups (the German influence in Cajun French cuisine) or between non-white groups (the transfer of tamales from Mexican laborers to black laborers).

[277] Seeing southern cuisine (as opposed to particular foods or dishes) as a production of a Lost Cause tradition is a viable interpretation, particularly if one looks at the development of "southern food" through cookbooks.

delineating that future and that past, with different economic and social pressures, and with an eye to facilitating discourse among a wide range of audiences, is not simple.

As I move forward in this research, I am interested in the intersection between cultural knowledge, business knowledge, and knowledge by practice. I will continue to analyze the Southern Foodways Alliance's work, particularly in the representations of labor and of celebrity cooks, especially in seafood industries, in barbecue, and in New Orleans after Katrina. A comparative study, particularly with an organization like Slow Food, which also focuses attention on food producers through stories, would flesh out and test out some of the ways that people produce and use knowledge about food to make social and economic interventions.

Appendix A: Positionality in SFA Oral Histories

The question of who SFA oral historians are and how that influences the records the organization creates has been a discussion central in the SFA, when I studied them and historically in the organization. In 2002, when the first oral history program was launched, two board members "stressed the need to have black oral historians."[278] A decade later, the SFA oral historians are still overwhelmingly young, white, college-educated women. While they have had Asian American oral historians, the organization has a real dearth of African American historians. Though the oral historians come from different backgrounds, they are all well-educated, young, and mostly members of what is sometimes termed the creative class. In examining the oral historians' positionality, I look first at their perspective and then at SFA board members' and members' perspectives.

However, when they talked about documentary practices, they rarely framed their work this way, perhaps because they worried that focusing on the gap could undermined their work or perhaps because the gap was a given for them.

Since most of the SFA oral historians had liberal arts training in universities since the 1990s, they pointed out that they were aware that their positionality affected the relationships with subjects and their final products.[279] However, they rarely framed their

[278] Southern Foodways Alliance, board meeting minutes, 2002.
[279] Amy Evans, interview by author, Oxford, Mississippi, January 20, 2011; Rien Fertel, interview by author, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 1, 2011; Francis Lam, interview by author, New York, New York, June 10, 2011; Sara Roahen, interview by author, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 2, 2011.

work this way. Instead, they said that demographics mattered, but not in the ways that people might assume. In particular, they said geography, professional experience, or personal history were as significant as, if not more significant than, aspects like race and gender in making connections and fostering conversation. At one point he turned to me, after I asked him something, and he said, "but you wouldn't understand that." And I said, "why wouldn't I understand that?" I don't remember what "that" was; I don't think what that was is important. He said, "you wouldn't understand that because you're not from the South." I said, "But, Mr. Parker, maybe you misunderstood. I did just leave New York; I did work there for three years, but I'm from Louisiana; I lived in New Orleans for a long time. I lived all my life in the South, except for three years. I do consider myself southerner." And he said "no, you're not from the South." And that was it.

Subsequently, Rien talked about how easy it was for him to get and do oral histories in Lafayette, where he grew up and where his family lives.

> I definitely saw a difference very early on with the plate lunch oral histories compared to my experience in Memphis and in Tennessee, and it had to do with me being born in Lafayette. I contacted my three subjects the same way I did with the barbecue folk, which was I sent them an SFA letterhead letter, didn't get a reply from any of them. I called them; all those calls were ignored. Then I finally got a hold of her on the phone. I said, "I'm Rien from the SFA. You probably got my letter. I'm from Lafayette." And she was like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, come over and talk." So it was that which was my entry into that world. Just saying, "I am from Lafayette." …
>
> I can't express how hard it was in Memphis to get people to sit down. What I thought would be a one-month exercise—I thought it would be do twenty-five oral histories in thirty days. It took over two months. … In Lafayette, is went like this [snaps]. I did three oral histories in three days; the oral histories went longer. They were quality and quantity at the same time. That might be because of my familiarity with these three places; I had been to all of them before. I knew the region. … I really don't think—I think it was a regional thing, not a racial thing. Two of them were African American women; the third was a white Cajun man. Something about the regionalism really spoke to it. It just was more fluid.[280]

[280] Fertel, interview.

Evans also said class and age have been significant in how she established relationships with people. Though she said she had a range of relationships with subjects, many of her closest relationships have been with older, working class people, and one of the groups she has struggled with most are upper-class subjects.[281]

SFA oral historians also said that while demographics mattered, no one historian would get the same story as another anyway. The details of people's lives, the time of day, and how both parties felt defined conversations as much as race, class, gender, and other demographic factors. The first hand experiences of these historians taught them that the nuances of personal relationships influence storytelling—the textures of individuals' lives are not an abstraction but the very thing oral historians are seeking to capture. The historians I interviewed wanted to make clear that they weren't naïve, that they understood the significance of positionality; however, they also stood behind the significance of their work and their experiences, positive and negative, as people gathering stories, and for them, those experiences of story-gathering were not primarily colored by large social categories.

Some members of the SFA had different perspectives. They believed the SFA could do a better job of cultivating relationships within black communities, beyond simply interviewing black people. Professor Jessica Harris thought that it was quite significant that the SFA did not employ black oral historians. She said that the "intelligent, young white women" did not always seem to understand how to engage with black subjects, particularly older members of the community. She was adamant that a program populated by African American oral historians was vital to getting the best

[281] Evans, interview.

histories of food and culture from African Americans and that having diverse subjects without diverse oral historians was a failing of the SFA's program.[282]

In fact, one of the more tense moments I observed during my fieldwork was at a 2010 board meeting where the subject of oral history interns was raised. A black board member asked why no African American oral history interns had been chosen. The staff said they had not had qualified candidates, which then led to a discussion of what "qualified" meant and affirmative action. The staff talked about how they tried to recruit African American students and at historically black colleges and universities but were unsuccessful in making connections. One of the black board members volunteered to try to make another effort, hoping that he would be able to do a better job than the all-white staff at making inroads. The staff sounded defensive during the conversation, and they were demoralized after the exchange. Members of the board seemed a mix of uncomfortable, worried for their staff, and worried for the program.

After this exchange, the SFA worked on several initiatives with black students and oral histories. Evans trained a group of young women in the Delta, and the oral history training workshops included minority fellowships. The SFA has historically drawn on of student assistants from the southern studies department at the University of Mississippi each year. These students are by-and-large white. The SFA has tried to establish relationships with other schools; however, because different schools have different agendas, finding people who want to do work for the SFA can be difficult. Beyond the program population and politics questions, the SFA are mostly a white organization. However, this ignores the pool of black members, in graduate school or working as journalists, who might be open to conducting oral histories if they were asked.

[282] Jessica Harris, interview by author, Atlanta, Georgia, October 8, 2011.

The oral history projects are still primarily conducted by white men and women, which cannot help but influence the dynamics of the Southern Foodways Alliance oral histories.

Two significant aspects emerge from exploring the positionality of SFA oral historians. The first is an awareness of the different kinds of structures that influence the race of people in oral history positions. The second is an awareness that other demographic and individual factors are paramount in shaping oral history collection. By attending to questions of structure and variation, an organization may be able to open up new paths for becoming an oral historian (as the SFA is trying to do with the minority fellowships) and may be able to frame its work—at the time of the interview and in its public presentation—to reflect with position of the oral historian, while maintaining the focus on subjects.

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Pickett, Julie. Interview by author. Digital recording. University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi, January 19, 2011.

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Slater, Jerry. Interview by author. Digital recording. H. Harper Station, Atlanta, Georgia, November 8, 2011.

Smith, Bill. Interview by author. Telephone conversation, September 6, 2011.

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