Southern and soul foods use similar ingredients and influence each other

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Chef Gerry "G." Garvin conducts a culinary presentation during a 2014 Food Network Food Festival in New York City. Photo: Bryan Bedder/Getty Images for NYCWFF

Fried chicken, biscuits and mac and cheese are all famous dishes in both Southern and soul food. But what’s the difference between these two very similar cuisines? Some say history, culture and maybe even appropriation. Appropriation is when a group with more power tries to profit off of the culture of minority groups.

Candace Boyd Wylie is a cook and blogger at "The FoodLoveTog." Wylie believes that the differences between soul food and Southern food run deeper than variations in recipes or dishes.

Wylie said she thinks of soul food and Southern food as cousins. They are heavily influenced by each other. However, soul food was created first as a result of the slave trade.
"Traditionally slaves were given the worst and the last of the last — the tougher cuts of meat. Its roots are Southern because of where slavery was rooted and prevalent. When most people hear the term 'soul food,' they think black, and oftentimes I agree," Wylie said.

**Changing Neighborhoods Often Mean Foods Change**

Although soul food was created from a need to survive, making meals out of the scraps, now it's been appropriated and in Wylie's words, "gentrified." Gentrification means to change something to make it meet a middle or upper class, and usually white, preference.

This can happen when middle-class and wealthy people move into lower-income places where people of color or poor people have lived for many years. This brings changes to the culture of the area. It can often result in housing costs rising as well. This pushes out people who have lived there for years.

"Cities aren't the only thing being gentrified right now," Wylie said. "Food is high on that list."

Wylie added that Southern food can vary from state to state. She says soul food is generally the same everywhere.

**Spirituality And Soul Food Go Together**

Chef Gerry "G." Garvin is the author of "A Message to my Children" and former host of cooking show, "Turn Up the Heat with G." Garvin said soul food is about the spirituality, the love, the family, the connectivity and escaping the strains of life over a really good meal.

"Soul food is something that was derived from the generation of former slave mentality, where we were given a certain ingredient, and we were taught to survive by eating it," Garvin said. "That's what made them survive — soul food in name is part Southern and part soul." Garvin said that times were obviously hard. "All they had was a good Southern dinner where they shared a good dinner and their soul."

Garvin believes what makes soul food unique is the community of "beautiful black older women" and culture behind it. He says you'll find soul food where family is gathered, including church, family reunions, weddings, and holidays.

These hearty meals brought people together out of a need to survive. The meals slowly evolved into Southern food. Garvin noted that 60 years ago, soul food was considered affordable. Now, Southern restaurants are charging "17 bucks for it."
Southern And Soul Food Are The Same To Some People

Garvin rattled off a list of food items that have been changed and are sold for steep prices in restaurants. One item in particular — mac and cheese — was originally seen as an "outhouse" meal, or food reserved for the poor.

The chef said that Southern restaurants have elaborate takes on mac and cheese. The restaurants are slapping a hefty price on the normally inexpensive dish.

"I see it all the time, we've got the fancy mac and cheese and the over-the-top fried chicken in neighborhoods that the people who built the communities don't have access to the ingredients to make them," Wylie added.

Some chefs would describe the two cuisines as exactly the same.

"It's the same food, it just depends on your point of view on whether you call it soul food or Southern," said Alabama native and Southern food blogger Jackie Garvin (no relation to G. Garvin). She thinks that the viewpoint on what to call the food is influenced by ethnicity or race.

"I cannot think of one item that would be classically known as Southern food that would be completely eliminated from someone who describes their diet or cuisine as soul food."

History And Culture Are Main Ingredients

Jackie Garvin, also the author of "Biscuits: Sweet and Savory Southern Recipes for the All-American Kitchen," added that there are a lot of African influences in Southern cuisine like okra and black-eyed peas.

If Southern and soul food are the same exact foods but called different names, the distinction is in the history and culture, and sometimes seasoning.

"They may be the same ingredients — African-Americans definitely deserve the right to say that they started it," G. Garvin said.

"It's a part of the black culture, and like rice and gravy, it is rich," Wylie added.
Quiz

1. Which two of the following sentences from the article include central ideas of the article?

   1. Fried chicken, biscuits, and mac and cheese are all famous dishes in both Southern and soul food.
   2. Gentrification means to change something to make it meet a middle or upper class, and usually white, preference.
   3. Garvin said soul food is about the spirituality, the love, the family, the connectivity and escaping the strains of life over a really good meal.
   4. If Southern and soul food are the same exact foods but called different names, the distinction is in the history and culture, and sometimes seasoning.

(A) 1 and 2
(B) 1 and 4
(C) 2 and 3
(D) 3 and 4
2 Read the following paragraphs from the section “Southern And Soul Food Are The Same To Some People.”

"It's the same food, it just depends on your point of view on whether you call it soul food or Southern," said Alabama native and Southern food blogger Jackie Garvin (no relation to G. Garvin). She thinks that the viewpoint on what to call the food is influenced by ethnicity or race. "I cannot think of one item that would be classically known as Southern food that would be completely eliminated from someone who describes their diet or cuisine as soul food."

How is the central idea developed in these two paragraphs?

(A) They provide evidence that soul food and Southern food are different from each other in some ways.

(B) They describe how gentrification has changed the way people view soul food and Southern food.

(C) They support the argument that there is little difference between soul food and Southern food.

(D) They prove soul food and Southern food are influenced by African and African-American culture.

3 Which of the following MOST influenced the creation of soul food?

(A) the changes that Southern food underwent because of the process of gentrification

(B) the impact of the slave trade on food that was already popular in the South

(C) the rising housing costs that forced people to make food with inexpensive ingredients

(D) the need of the people who were slaves to make a meal out of the scraps they were given
How did Southern restaurants affect soul food?

(A) They changed the main ingredients of traditional soul food meals and increased their prices.

(B) They changed the presentation of traditional soul food meals and hiked up their prices.

(C) They changed the names and seasoning of traditional soul food meals and reduced their prices.

(D) They changed the people who cooked the traditional soul food meals and slashed their prices.
Answer Key

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