

Cocina Criolla

**America's Hispanic Cuisine
Homogeny; and How Puerto Rican
Dishes Could Broaden Our Horizons**

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¡Bienvenido!

Introducción

¿Quiubo? Que Onda ¡Hola!

Buenos SALUDOS

Encantado

An integral part of California culture since the start of the 20th century, there is no debate that Mexican cuisine has both influenced and formed the back-bone of culinary taste for those that live here more so than anywhere else in the United States. Making up almost 40% of the total state population, Latinos at-large have had an intense diaspora all over California which in turn has given way to an unfortunate **generalization** over the many diverse and unique sub-cultures we label under the word "Latino". We **lose the distinctions** that make each Latin American culture so unique in the uncultured perspective of the majority—mainly younger, Non-Hispanic, White communities—which has resulted in the downright obscene labelling of many Latin dishes as "**Mexican Food**". Then glossing over the work and development of Mexican culture itself, corporate establishments such as Del Taco and Taco Bell appropriate these foods, ruin them with unethically sourced ingredients and stolen recipes, and then advertise them as "Authentic Mexican Cuisine", further embedding the dismissive stereotype in American culture.

*Dedicated to mi Abuela,
Tomasita D'Agostino*



who taught me to live free, express yourself, and love others.

Ground Beef Tacos and Carne Asada Fries Are Not Mexican Food



The rest stop I grew up at in Corona, CA.

Like many Americans who grew up in a separated family, my living situation required me to stay in Corona, Anaheim, and Costa Mesa (cities in Orange County) throughout the week so that my parents could take me to and from school; which meant we had little time to sit down and have a consistent meal. While this made it difficult to know what was for dinner or when I could see friends again, one thing that did seem to always be near me was the brightly colored sign of a Del Taco just right around the corner.

With 61% of their locations established in California alone (2023), the dependability such a corporate chain exerts on their consumers means that their market not only goes to these establishments for the food, but for the security of knowing they're going to get the exact flavor each and every time. While a great service that one can depend on as needed, corporations such as Del Taco and Taco Bell contribute to a much larger issue in America through the Mexican stereotypes they play into for their predominantly White and Latino consumers.

Marketing Ground Beef Tacos, Carne Asada Fries, and Flour Tortillas as "Authentic Mexican Cuisine"; the fallacy we see these chains base their entire menu off of insinuates the idea that "Authentic Mexican Cuisine" is what they are selling and is what the status quo for Mexican food is.

To those that actually know and want to share this food with the nation, it denies them their cultural right to share their heritage.



**They Have
The Audacity
To Label Their
Inauthentic &
Appropriated
Food as
“Better Mex”.
(To Add Insult to Injury)**

Not only harmful to those who actually want to share real authentic cuisine with the nation, **the “Mexican Food” stereotype** (as I will refer to it from now on) extends to the greater Latin cultures as well by labeling everything under the Hispanic/Latino background as “Mexican”, othering all Latin cultures in America.

Can you think of a single Salvadorean restaurant in your area? Nonetheless a Salvadorean corporate food chain? What about Guatemalan? Peruvian? Chilean? Puerto Rican?

Despite making up **17%** of the Latino presence in California, South American cultures have **little to no representation** in the States whatsoever.

Is It Even Possible To “Keep The Main Thing The Main Thing” In The Face of Corporate Domination and the Uncultured Majority?

Cocina Criolla.

(Puerto Rican Cuisine)

"The foremost authority on Puerto Rican cooking is a silver haired, stylish, and warmly hospitable woman..."



An excerpt taken from the New York Times' review on "Cocina Criolla", written by Carmen Aboy Valldejuli, it stood out to me because it was my abuela to a T; from her vibrant fashion sense to her habit of offering anyone I brought over food the moment they walked through the door. She taught me everything I know, not just about Puerto Rican food, but the powerful **effects it can have on the soul** as well, and I believe that through the introduction of Puerto Rican cuisine to Non-Hispanic consumers in America it could lay the foundation for more Latin American cultures to have a platform for their food as well—much like it did for my family.

Already **blending Latino and American flavors** at its heart, Cocina Criolla maintains its authenticity by merging the two flavors from the start and creating its own diverse swath of sensation which would be both unique and savory, almost comparable to the fried and salty of Del Taco's "Better Mex".

The Good News: It's Already Happening.



My favorite part of El Mesón is their brightly colored buildings; which add color to their environment rather than detract with the homogeny of "Modernism"

One of the most popular Puerto Rican restaurant chains in the world, El Mesón Sándwiches delivers **real authentic** Puerto Rican fast-food that mi Abuela would always seem to have on hand such as Questios, Avena, and even a native dish called Caldo Gallego, alongside a wide array of sandwiches **originated in the Caribbean Islands.**

A beacon of hope to the many under-represented nationalities of Latin America, the incorporation of traditional Puerto Rican cuisine into the American fast-food business is done so in a culturally adherent and respectful manner that allows for the majority in America to experience the new and exciting flavors they seek while finally pulling away from the embellished "Mexican Food" stereotype that has plagued American views on Latino cuisine for decades.



Caldo Gallego
(Galician Kale Soup with Chorizo)



Quesito
(Cream Cheese Roll)



Avena

**We Can Change
the Industry
One Culture At
a Time Through
The Respectful
Establishment of
Cultural Flavors
Into American
Markets**

**And now, a very
dear recipe
to me passed
down from my
Abuela to our
family.**

Arroz con Bacalao y Tostones

**(Soul Food to the Puerto
Rican-American)**

Ingredients

White Rice (2 cups, any brand is fine)

Avocado (2)

Tomatoes (8, Cherry if available)

Cilantro

Onion (1)

Olive Oil

Bacalao (Dried and Salted Cod)

Plantains (2, As green as they come)

Vegetable Oil (For frying)



Preparation

Step 1 - Prepare the rice

Rinse the rice with a sifter or by hand in a bowl until there's little to no milky residue left. Set a pot over Medium heat and dice half (1/2) of the onion, making sure there are no large chunks. Then sauté the onion in the pot until it starts to brown. Next pour in your rice and enough water until it just barely covers the rice; then set a timer for 15 minutes. For now though, let's move on.

Step 2 - Boil the Bacalao

Fill a pot with water and bring to a boil, then placing in the Bacalao. Cover and let sit for 5-10 minutes (depending on how salty you want it). Then remove, drain the water, and place the fish into a bowl.

Step 3 - Check the rice

Once the 15 minutes are up, fluff your rice and turn down to simmer. Leave for 15 more minutes.

Step 4 - Mix the Avocado, Tomato, and Onion

Cut the Avocado in half, remove the pit, cut into cubes, and place into a bowl. Take your tomatoes and cut them into small slices, then place into the same bowl. Lastly, throw the rest of your onion in and drizzle olive oil over the mixture. Now mash lightly until you've created something similar to thick guacamole.

Step 5 - Fry the Tostones

Fill a frying pan with about 1/2" of frying oil and set flame to medium heat. While heating the oil, cut your plantains into 1" slices and place them into the oil until they start to darken in color, then flip. Once evenly browned, pull them out and put them into a layer a tin foil, fold the tin foil over the top, and then using a mug or cup, squish the plantain into a disc shape.

Put the plantains back into the oil and fry until golden crispy.

Step 6 - Finishing it all off

Once fried remove the Tostones into a basket with a paper towel to remove the grease and lightly season with Adobo just salt and pepper. Then break up the Bacalao with the Avocado mix and serve over a warm bed of rice (garnished with cilantro of course).

Much like the vibrant and beautiful cuisine of Puerto Rico, sharing our culture from a place of tradition and respect can create a more colorful world for ALL people by giving Latin Americans the platform they deserve to share their cuisine their way.

We must end the harmful effects of the “Mexican Food” stereotype, which has marginalized authentic Latin American food from its own culture and created a wall between Latino cuisine and majority communities in America for decades. Through a societal reinvention of “authentic” in these communities, we can give Latin American cuisine the platform it deserves to share the real, un-Americanized food they have to offer and diversify the homogenous and often offensive “American” versions found throughout the nation. In doing so, we can give equal opportunity to represent heritage for all communities of this nation and bridge the gaps between those disconnected from these cultural ties, showing those of majority communities that the distinctions matter and the world is much more diverse than “Mexican Food” can afford to demonstrate.

¡Gracias por leer!

(Thanks for reading!)