

Title:

United States Regional Cuisine: Soul Food

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Summary:

The history of American soul food can be traced all the way back to the days of slavery. More often times than not, the slaves were given the most undesirable part of the meal, the leftovers from the house. Pairing this with their own home-grown vegetables, the first soul food dishes were invented. After the slaves were freed, most of them were so poor that they could only afford the most undesirable, inexpensive cuts of meat available to them. (The leftover, unwanted parts o...

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Article Body:

The history of American soul food can be traced all the way back to the days of slavery. More often times than not, the slaves were given the most undesirable part of the meal, the leftovers from the house. Pairing this with their own home-grown vegetables, the first soul food dishes were invented. After the slaves were freed, most of them were so poor that they could only afford the most undesirable, inexpensive cuts of meat available to them. (The leftover, unwanted parts of a pig such as tripe, tongue, ears, and knuckles). As in the days of slavery, African-Americans used their own home-grown vegetables and things they could catch or kill to complete their meals.

In the modern United States, soul food has truly evolved. It has become part of the African-American culture, bringing family members together on all occasions from birthdays to funerals, to spend time together preparing meals. The history of soul food is mainly an oral one; recipes were never really written down so while two families may be preparing identical meals, chances are that they don't taste very much alike. Different ingredients, cooking methods, and techniques go into preparing soul food meals, causing the end results to come out differently.

One of the most obvious and widely-recognized characteristics of African-American soul food is the fact that hot sauce and more intense spices are incorporated into meals as often as possible. For this reason, soul food is not for those who can't take the heat or are prone to heart burn!

Another characteristic of true African-American soul food is that nothing is ever wasted. Having originated from the leftovers of just about anything. Stale bread was quickly converted into stuffing or a bread pudding. Over ripe bananas were whipped up into banana puddings, and other ripe fruits were put into cakes and pies, and leftover fish parts were made into croquets or hush puppies.

Sunday dinners are definitely the times when soul food is most commonly seen on tables. Sunday dinners are a time for African-American families to get together to prepare and partake in a large meal. Sunday dinners normally take up the entire day (normally following a church ceremony), and family members come from far and wide to partake in this meal together. Sunday dinners took place in the form of potlucks, also, where various family members contribute a dish or two and form a big, fine meal. Collard and mustard greens, kale, ribs, corn bread, fried chicken, chitlins, okra, and yams are all excellent examples of African-American soul food that might be found at a Sunday meal.

Soul food is not generally a healthy option for a person that must monitor their diet. Fried foods are generally prepared with hydrogenated oil or lard, and they usually tend to be flavored and seasoned with pork products. Since this may be what contributes to such a high percentage of African-Americans that are significantly overweight, soul food preparation methods are now slowly starting to be refined, bringing a lot more healthy options to the table. Rather than the increasingly unhealthy pork products, use of turkey-based products is becoming more and more popular as time passes. The fried foods that are so beloved of the culture can now be prepared using a lower fat canola or vegetable oil.