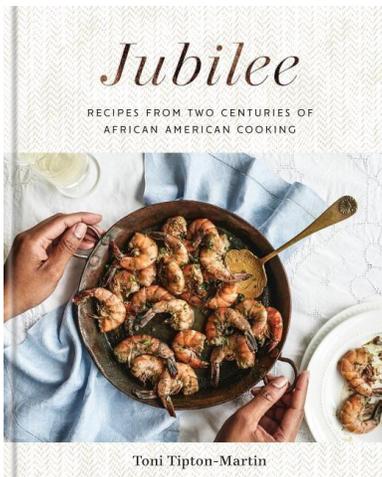


The CommUUnicator

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Eating the Truth

I'm sitting in my home office in the middle of February. In the stack of books to my left, there are three titles that are about the intersection of food and African American history. Right on top, tempting me to do something with it sometime soon, is *Jubilee: Recipes from Two Centuries of African American Cooking*, by Toni Tipton-Martin (2019). As I turn through the pages, I come to a



full-page picture of the preparation of curried meat pies that catches my eye and my imagination. I read the ingredients and think, yes, I think I'd like to make those! And then I read the history of the dish, a story of British pasties that

went round the globe wherever the African diaspora stole people away to.

Everywhere these pasties went, they were modified for local ingredients, tastes, and techniques by local cooks. From Cape Verde's peppery tuna filling to Jamaica's turmeric-flavored meat and vegetable filling in a baking-powder-leavened crust, to Southern United States at the turn of the 19th century, where puff pastry was filled with creamed oysters, sweetbreads, or crab, for example. In the 1960s, Inez Yeargan Kaiser rebranded a version of these

as hamburger turnovers, an approach to this plain and daily food as something that would "bridge the gap in our society" between people with vastly different backgrounds. So she hoped. The version of the recipe that this award-winning cookbook author presents, further hybridized this already hybrid cuisine with samosas.

Farther on in the book there is a recipe for baked beans, accompanied with a picture so luscious that it tempts you to believe you can smell and taste it even though only your eyes are being directly stimulated. The historical text accompanying this recipe claims that, even though baked beans is a dish firmly associated in this country with New England, and the claim has long been made that white settlers learned the approach to baking beans from Native Americans, an alternative explanation claims that there is historical evidence for white sea captains bringing the idea home from Africa, where the North African Jewish communities baked beans called "*skanah*" for Shabbat.

Toni Tipton-Martin says of her approach to the wealth of diaspora versions of a wide variety of foods:

When I tied all of these diasporic practices together, I observed a culinary IQ that is both African and American, the very definition of fusion cooking. You might think this intelligence is not all that different when compared to other world cuisines. *And you would be right.* But the idea that African Americans shared these qualities with the rest of society has been ignored for far too long...

All the evidence points to a reality where even mac-n-cheese derived from a creation by Thomas Jefferson’s enslaved chef James Hemings. Enslaved cooks and chefs applied their culinary IQ to new ingredients and those brought from Africa, new techniques and old, and made something new, a true fusion that, if we learn true histories, opens us to a fullness of hope. Beyond evils that stole people, lives, and resources, our foods – especially, but not exclusively, in the South – were created only through the joining in an infinitely recombining culinary DNA. And, African American enslaved people and their disenfranchised descendants built the world all depend on.

Peace and Blessings,
Rev. Paul

Black History Month Trivia

- William Tucker, son of indentured servants from Great Britain, was the first recorded African child to be born in the colonies in 1624.
- Vermont was the first colony to ban slavery in 1777.
- In the 1770s, a Quaker named Anthony Benezet created the first school for African American children.
- Between 1810-1850, an estimated 100,000 slaves used the Underground Railroad to escape to the North.
- William Wells Brown’s novel, *Clotel; or The President’s Daughter*, is the first written by an African American and was published in 1853.
- In 1864, Rebecca Lee Crumpler graduated from the New England Female Medical College as the first Black woman to receive a medical degree in the U.S.
- Baseball legend Jackie Robinson had an older brother, Matthew “Mack” Robinson, who



broke the Olympic record in 1936 in the 200-meter dash. However, he took home the silver medal because he finished behind Jesse Owens.

- Before becoming a professional musician, Chuck Berry studied to become a hairdresser and has a degree in cosmetology.
- Nat King Cole was the first African American to host a TV show when *The Nat King Cole Show* debuted on NBC in 1956.
- In 1973, Stevie Wonder was the first Black artist to win a Grammy for Album of the Year for *Innervisions*.
- Founded in 1984, the Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo celebrates Black cowboys and cowgirls and is the only touring African American rodeo in the world.
- The theme song to public television’s popular children’s program, *Reading Rainbow*, is sung by Chaka Kahn.
- The oldest living Buffalo Soldier, Sergeant Mark Matthews, died at the age of 111 in 2005 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.
- Gabby Douglas became the first Black gymnast to win the Individual All Around in the 2012 London Olympics.

Atonement

The times when we feel helpless and alone,
When we lack will or strength to set things right,
When faith and even hope sink like a stone;
When we see around us suffering and despair
Beyond our meager efforts to repair,
There’s nothing left but love that can atone,
Or give or take a hand in the darkest night.

Joe Good