

Four Generations Of Culinary Tradition From One Black Family

When I was a little boy just starting school, I was shocked that so many of my black classmates knew absolutely nothing about their own history. I'm not talking about book learning, I'm talking about oral history, their families' histories from older relatives.

The history of my own family had been drummed into me from the day I learned my last name.

My grandmother, Ausiabelle, and my mother, Thelma, were both cooks and I was literally raised on endless conversations about my famous great grandmother, Lucinda Macklin.

Over a hundred years ago, Lucinda was a kitchen servant in Tennessee's Old South. I was told in no uncertain terms that a 'house slave' had higher status than a 'field slave.' But the highest rank in prestige and power went to the 'head slave' in the kitchen.

That was Lucinda's place and she ran it like a queen.

So begins **DOWN HOME SOUTHERN COOKING** by LaMont Burns. With wit, warmth, and a generous helping of Southern hospitality, this renowned chef, restaurateur, and former "PM Magazine" chef explores the roots of Southern cuisine and the unique heritage of four generations of black cooks in a delightful compendium of "down home" cooking.

Revealing secrets of certain herbs, spices, and sauces, this charmingly personal cookbook offers a sumptuous and satisfying odyssey through real American cuisine.

Here you will discover such wonderful regional fare as Thelma's Syllabub, Diamondback Turnip Stew, Southern Spoon Bread, and Eggs Ponce de Leon. Weaving family anecdotes with the history of black cuisine, LaMont Burns transforms such dishes as Burgoo, Pot Likker, Chitterlings, and Pandowdy into courses on a nearly forgotten heritage. What's more, you will learn what in the world can be done with opossum, pigeon, and hare.



LaMont Burns, author of **DOWN HOME SOUTHERN COOKING** and owner of his own restaurant in Encinitas, CA, famed for its barbecue menus, with a sampling from his cookbook repertoire. The recipes for these and many other mouth-watering dishes are handed down, generation to generation, from his great grandmother Lucinda, a slave cook on a Tennessee plantation. Photo by Michael Weiss.

OPOSSUM Serves 8 - 10

Wild game has always been a Southern delicacy, and opossum is one of its special treats, even today. Both Ausiabelle and Thelma grew up with the wonders of opossum stew in their repertoire of wild game recipes. One look at a map of the South shows you how easily wild game could be procured for festive eating. Hunting and trapping have always been popular activities.

Today it is usually necessary to rely on specialty shops in large cities to obtain exotic meat like opossum, but it can be done. Opossum tastes a bit like pork, but spicier. Here is a recipe for the adventurous eater in search of a succulent culinary experience with deep roots in history.

- 1 opossum
- Opossum liver
- Bread Stuffing
- Bacon Fat
- Salt and pepper

- 4 slices of bacon
- Strong thread for trussing
- Preheat oven to 350 F.

Skin opossum and slit open from throat down through the stomach to the hind legs. Remove innards and discard all but liver. Wash thoroughly. Dry with paper towels. Boil liver 5 - 10 minutes, then chop and add to Bread Stuffing.

Rub opossum inside and out with the bacon fat, salt, and pepper.

Put into roasting pan. Fill opossum with Bread Stuffing. Sew up the opossum with thread or use skewers. Lace with bacon. Add 1 quart of hot water to pan.

Roast 1 1/2 hours or until tender. Baste every 15 minutes. Put on serving platter. Serve hot.

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