

It's

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

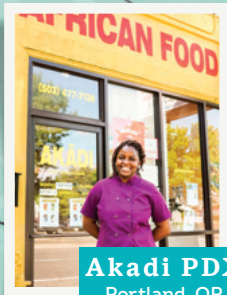


# SERVED UP *family style*

Travel across the country for a taste of Black-owned restaurants making delicious dishes and precious memories

by Samantha MacAvoy

MAP: GETTY IMAGES; AKADI PDX: CHRISTINE DONG; LUCILLE'S: JENN DUNCAN; COMPÈRE LAPIN AT THE OLD NO. 77: DENNY CULBERT; VIRGIL'S GULLAH KITCHEN & BAR: EILEY PHOTO.



**Akadi PDX**  
Portland, OR



**Sweet Potato Sensations**  
Detroit



**Jones Bar-B-Q**  
Kansas City, KS



**Sylvia's**  
Harlem, NY

Find Black-owned businesses near you at [supportblackowned.com](http://supportblackowned.com).



**Lucille's**  
Houston



**Compère Lapin at the Old No. 77**  
New Orleans



**Virgil's Gullah Kitchen & Bar**  
Atlanta

**N**o history is ever complete without food: How a community eats embodies who they are and their origins. From the dishes of the African diaspora to the storied culinary traditions of the American South, we can only begin to touch upon the rich legacy of Black cuisine in the United States on these pages. We can, however,

shine a spotlight on an incredible group of entrepreneurial, pioneering, and ambitious chefs and business owners from around the nation who are celebrating their cherished traditional fare. These restaurants offer more than just good eats; they provide a taste of tangible history, passed down in the kitchens of those who came before.



Chef Fatou Ouattara

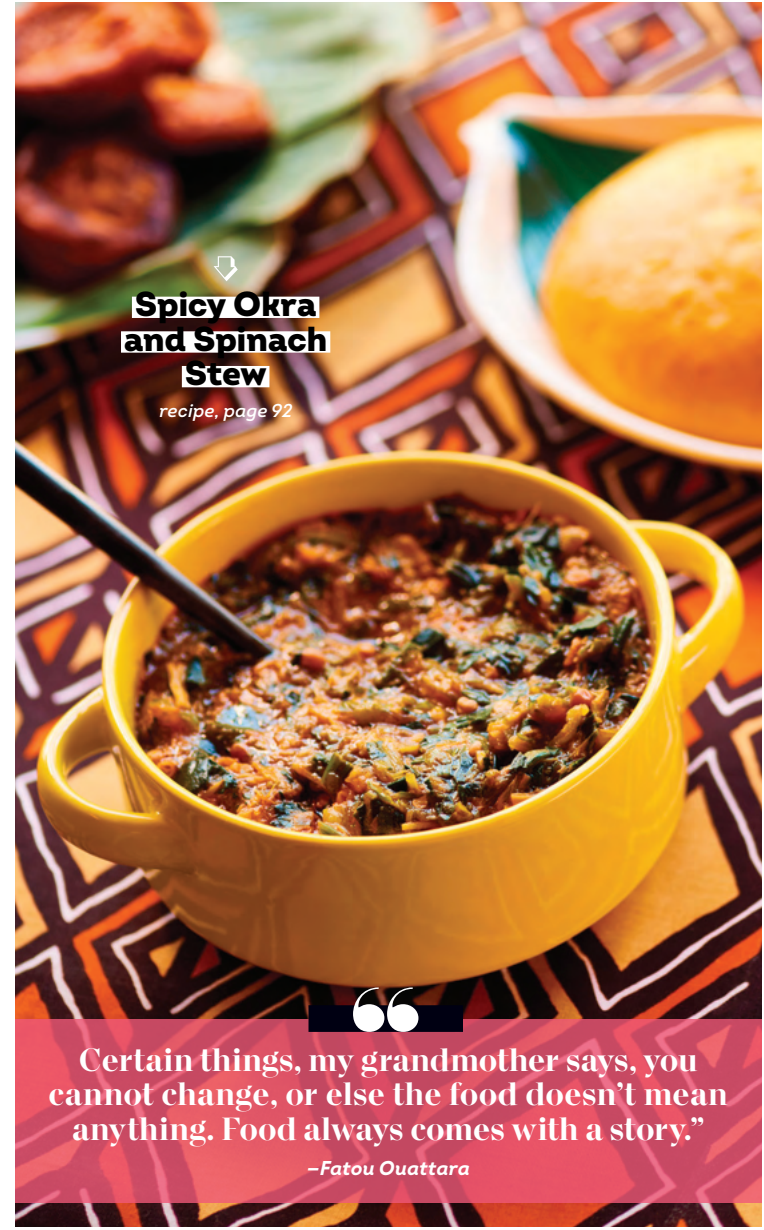
## Akadi PDX

Fatou Ouattara,  
Portland, OR



**G**rowing up in Côte d'Ivoire, Fatou Ouattara learned how to cook from her mother, aunts, and grandmother, who adhered to culinary traditions set by generations of women before them. After moving from the coastal West African country to Portland, OR, in 2010, Fatou missed the food she had grown up eating—nourishing stews laced with hand-ground spices, locally sourced okra, and an abundance of yams, cassava, and plantains cooked and served with nearly every meal. She spent years cooking for friends, and they finally encouraged her to open a restaurant. To Fatou's surprise, a diverse group of customers lined up out the door on opening day, and they still adore the restaurant now.

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## Spicy Okra and Spinach Stew

recipe, page 92

“Certain things, my grandmother says, you cannot change, or else the food doesn't mean anything. Food always comes with a story.”

—Fatou Ouattara



"Akadi" means "tasty."

Didja know...

Black History Month is celebrated in February to coincide with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.



FATOU OUATTARA AND STOREFRONT: CHELSEA COLE. STATE ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES.



“Gullah Geechee is the oldest Black culture in America. It was the very first Black culture. Our ancestors are at the heart of Gullah Geechee cuisine.”

—Gee Smalls

## Shrimp n' Grits wit' Crab Gravy

recipe, page 92



Juan and Gee Smalls



## Virgil's Gullah Kitchen & Bar

Gee and Juan Smalls,  
Atlanta

**N**amed after Virgil F. Smalls, the late father and father-in-law of owners Gregory “Gee” and Juan Smalls, this neighborhood restaurant, opened in 2019, celebrates the Gullah Geechee cuisine of Gee's ancestors. The Gullah Geechee are descendants of Central and West Africans who were enslaved in the remote coastal areas and islands between southern North Carolina and northern Florida. Their isolation led to the formation of a community with deep African roots in their arts and food, namely seafood and rice dishes. Memories of Gee's dad making shrimp and grits, or his mom



A mural by Craig Singleton (@cfluxsing) of the restaurant's namesake.

whipping up okra soup—both staples of Gullah cooking—inspired the comfort food-focused menu. The Gullah spirit of hospitality is also reflected, as the owners seek to create a space of love, affirmation, and acceptance that goes beyond just serving food.

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JUAN AND GEE SMALLS: ELEY PHOTO. SHRIMP 'N' GRITS: MADELYNNE ROSS. DINING ROOM: LEMON BRANDS. STATE ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES.



**Full Slab  
Pork Ribs**

recipe, page 92



The Jones sisters

“Our daddy built this business on customer service, and we follow that model. He always used to say, ‘Don’t never sell someone something to get a dollar.’”

—Deborah Jones

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**Jones  
Bar-B-Q**  
Deborah “Little” &  
Mary “Shorty” Jones,  
Kansas City, KS

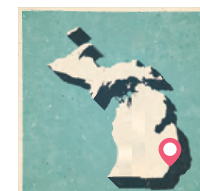
Deborah and Mary’s father, Leavy B. Jones, Sr., would sit his girls up on milk crates to look over the pit at the first Jones Bar-B-Q, which opened in the late ’70s or early ’80s—the sisters can’t remember exactly when. Mr. Jones instilled a sense of self-sufficiency in his daughters, so they were well equipped to take over the business. Years later, they continue his legacy of smoking meats, stuffing house-made sausages, and stirring up the family’s secret barbecue sauce recipe. While the original recipes have been tweaked over the years, Deborah Jones has embraced their father’s approach to barbecue: quality meat seasoned lightly, cooked simply, and made fresh every day.

RIBS: COURTESY OF JONES BAR-B-Q. JONES SISTERS: ZACH MORGAN. STATE ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES.



The Thomas family at the shop.

**Sweet  
Potato Pie**  
recipe, page 93



**Sweet Potato Sensations**

Jeffery and Cassandra Thomas,  
Detroit

What started as Cassandra Thomas’s quest to satisfy her husband Jeffery’s craving for candied sweet potatoes led to the opening in 1994 of a storefront with a menu inspired by the beloved crop. The shop is a true family operation: It’s run by Cassandra, Jeffery, and their daughters, and all the recipes are sourced from relatives. From frosting-topped cakes to fluffy cookies and favorite pies, the versatile root vegetable is woven through nearly every menu offering. But the restaurant isn’t just a commemoration of one family’s recipes. It also elicits memories of home for customers—each

bite of the comforting, familiar food reminds them of their own families’ cooking. Cassandra’s daughter Espy Thomas says, “We serve tradition, we serve love—it just comes in the form of a pie.”



“In the Black community, sweet potato pie is personal. We feel like ours is the next best thing to your mama’s.”

—Espy Thomas



February is National Sweet Potato Month!

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THOMAS FAMILY: JULIANNE LINDSEY. PIE: ANNIS TIOU PHOTOGRAPHY. SWEET POTATOES AND STATE ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES.



Chef Nina Compton



## Compère Lapin at the Old No. 77

Nina Compton,  
New Orleans

“Our histories, vast and varied, deserve to be memorialized and romanticized by dishes that at once remind us of home and transport us to somewhere new.”

—Compère Lapin at the Old No. 77

### Roasted Jerk Corn

recipe, page 94

Nina Compton recalls driving with her father to the south end of her native Saint Lucia, watching people roast corn on the roadside: “The sweet aroma was intoxicating!” The menu at her flagship restaurant is fueled by sensory memories like this, with dishes that are straightforward in technique but robust in flavor. Named after a mischievous rabbit featured in traditional Caribbean and Creole folktales, Compère Lapin at the Old No. 77 draws playfully from the cuisine of Nina’s childhood, her love for French and Italian food, and the indigenous ingredients from her adopted city, New Orleans. Each plate offers a blend of stories, layered into one delicious bite.



The spacious barroom

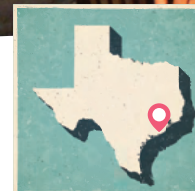
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Didja know...  
Carter G. Woodson, an African-American scholar, created a celebration of Black history in 1926. It became a full month in 1976.

CORN: SARA ESSEX BRADLEY; NINA COMPTON: DENNY CULBERT; BARROOM: COURTESY OF COMPÈRE LAPIN; STATE ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES.



Chef Chris Williams



## Lucille's

Chris Williams,  
Houston

Chris Williams has worked in kitchens all over the world, pursuing his desire to learn about international cuisine. It's this culinary curiosity that led him back to the incredible story of his own great-grandmother, Lucille B. Smith. Regarded as one of Texas's first African-American businesswomen, Lucille held the titles of business owner, home economist, and cookbook author, after publishing recipes in a card file box called *Lucille's Treasure Chest of Fine Foods*. Chris pays homage to Lucille's notable legacy—First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and President Lyndon B. Johnson were among her fans—by replicating her famous Southern recipes and embellishing others with flavors from abroad.

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CHRIS WILLIAMS: COURTESY OF LUCILLE'S; CASSEROLE AND DINING ROOM: JENN DUNCAN; STATE ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES.



### Green Bean and Asparagus Casserole

recipe, page 93

“Lucille laid the groundwork for our business. Having her as our namesake is a reminder that investing in family and community first is most important.”

—Chris Williams



The cozy, classic dining room at Lucille's.

Sylvia with family members.



## Sylvia's

The Woods Family,  
Harlem, NY



In 1962, Sylvia Woods bought the small luncheonette where she waitressed and turned it into a lively restaurant highlighting her family's favorite recipes. Her welcoming personality, familiar dishes, and affordable prices drew people in from the start, and Black Americans who had fled the Jim Crow South in search of a better life in New York City flocked there. Family recipes for fried chicken, barbecue ribs, and Carolina-style catfish, rooted in Sylvia's Southern heritage, were all on the original menu, which remains largely unchanged today. The flagship location of the restaurant won't change either, as it was important to Sylvia, who passed away in 2012, that it remain in Harlem. According to her granddaughter, Tren'ness Woods-Black, Sylvia used to say, "I am Harlem; they just call me Sylvia."



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**Fried Fish**  
recipe, page 93

“My family embraces the cultural tradition of making a loved one's favorite dish instead of buying a gift. We take pride in sharing and passing on our ancestors' recipes. That's what makes soul food so special. It's one of the most important cultural identity markers for African Americans.”

—Tren'ness Woods-Black



A Harlem hot spot.



Sylvia: the "Queen of Soul Food."

COURTESY OF SYLVIA'S. STOREFRONT AND STATE ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES.

