The Southern Table: Place, Politics, Memory, and Mythology in the Food Cultures of the American South
Advanced Writing Seminar
WRTNG-UG1120 Section 001
Sara B. Franklin
Fall 2015
Monday and Wednesday, 9:30-10:45
sf1563@gmail.com
Office Hours: Monday 12 noon-3pm, 603 1 Wash Place (Gallatin Building)
**I prefer if you make an appointment if you need to speak with me. Drop in hours or quick conversations are always fine right after class, but I need to ensure I clear adequate time if you have something that demands more than a quick chat.

Course Description
This semester is going to challenge you to think about Southern food cultures from a number of angles, and to consider how we use food as a lens through which to discuss, and work out, other issues, topics and themes.

Though we’ll primarily be reading written material, we’ll also dabble in radio, television and short films to think about how written and spoken words shape perceptions and emotions around Southern food.

My goals in this course are several-fold:

- I want you all to experiment. Good communication and, in particular, good writing takes a lot of practice. *A lot!* It also involves taking risks. I want to encourage you all to play.

- I want you to begin to think of food as a lens as much as it is a subject. How does keeping food front and center in our consideration of the world alter how we see things? How can we use food to magnify issues, pleasures, memories, tensions, trends, etc.? How might food be problematic as a substrate for such views? Though we’ll occasionally read things that fit into the emerging academic arena of “food studies,” we will *not* be reading (or writing) academic writing. Instead, we’ll be looking at how messages are portrayed and conveyed in the world around us and in popular writing (including journalism, cookbooks, essays, radio and literature).

- I want you all to become more comfortable with giving and taking critique. Workshopping one another’s work will be a key component of this class. From day one of the class, we will practice critical analysis of food writing. My goal is to help you learn to apply that same critical (yet respectful) eye to one another’s work and, most importantly, to your own. *Learning to edit yourself is one of the most important skills a communicator—or writer—can have. You must be your own harshest critic!* Learn to ‘kill your darlings’!
• Learn to ask questions of, and challenge, your teachers and peers! This course will take us into realms of discomfort considering race, gender, ethnicity, religious and class. My job it is to help facilitate your process of inquiry and exploration, and to encourage bravery in your critical thinking and writing. Don’t be afraid to speak up if you disagree or think I’m wrong. It helps make class interesting, and a good debate often sparks the most interesting writing.

Learning Goals and Objectives:
• We will practice and hone ethnographic, interviewing and writing skills in the creation of our final projects.

• We will analyze both scholarly and popular writing about the foods of the American South, looking for the nuances and distinctions in the ways each narrates place, memory, and politics of race, gender and class, and seek to understand how the politics of inclusivity and exclusivity can be both perpetuated and interrupted by narrative media.

• We will deepen our knowledge of the emerging field of food studies, and the South’s unique and important place in that field.

• We will work to draw connections and recognize differences between scholarly and popular media.

Required Texts (available at the NYU bookstore and online)
• The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region by Marcie Cohen Ferris (UNC Press, 2014)
AND
• Cornbread Nation 7: The Best of Southern Food Writing ed. Francis Lam (UGA Press, 2014)
• All readings marked with PDF are posted to NYU Classes.
• Please note: some of the links provided here will have changed by the time we get around to doing those readings. Please search thoroughly with the information I have provided before emailing me about a broken link.
• All audio assignments are available free of charge online. There are a couple of videos that I will assign to you as homework over the course of the semester. All of these are available online; if you can find them for free somewhere, that’s your prerogative, but each assigned video can be purchased or rented for just a couple of dollars. Given the low cost of course materials for this class, I do not expect cost to be a barrier to completing these viewing assignments. If it is, however, please speak with or email me and we will come up with a solution.
**Course Structure**
Class time will be a mix of discussing assigned materials and workshopping one another’s writing.

For each assignment of the term, we will have two types of workshops: 1) a full class workshop, in which everyone in the class reads and responds to select pieces (*everyone will have their writing workshopped via a whole class workshop once during the semester*) and 2) small group workshops. The class will be divided into groups A-D on the first day of the semester. You will meet with the same small group over the course of the term.

**EVERY TIME your writing is workshopped** (small group or whole class), you are responsible for **handing in a print (paper) copy of your work to me in class. Consider group workshop dates the due dates of your drafts.** Failure to turn in your work on time may result in not getting comments from me to use towards your final, revised work.

**You are responsible** for posting your drafts on NYU Classes for your peers to read and respond to at least 24 hours before the start of the class in which your piece is to be workshopped. If for some reason you are unable to do this, you are responsible for providing printed (paper) copies of your piece for everyone (whole class or small group, depending the day); in this case, time to read your work will cut into your workshop time.

**Assignments**
Over the course of the semester, you will hand in four peer- and instructor-critiqued, and revised, pieces of writing, each worth 20% of your final grade. They are:

1. Critical review of *The Edible South.* Your job will be to summarize the goal of the book, its main points, and then to critically evaluate how successfully the author meets those goals. Are there shining moments? Holes in the research/argument? What is your final conclusion about the book? You will be responsible for searching out, and reading, other book reviews to prepare you to write this assignment. (**We will not be treating this as an academic book review, so you are not responsible for creating a mini literature review in your piece, or positioning this work within other academic discourse**). 1,000 words.

2. Interpretive/argumentative essay responding to a piece (or pieces) of Southern food writing we’ve encountered in class; you may expound upon, or take issue, with its/their claims. Your aim here is to be convincing and firm in your argument, using examples from the text to back up/position your argument. 1,200-1,500 words.

3. Profile. This piece will require you to *research* some aspect of, or player in, Southern food culture of interest to you. This can be a person, restaurant, food product, or movement. You will be required to gather evidence from a variety of thinkers, writers and evidence you collect through reporting (interviews, observation, etc.). This is your longest, most detailed piece of the semester: the challenge is to integrate a narrative portrait of some person, place or thing with research that helps position that subject. We
will read many examples of such work throughout the semester—use them as guides to help you as you go. Your evidence will help you come up with an organizing principle, and also support ideas of your own. This piece may draw upon any piece of writing you have done earlier in the semester, but may not use any of your word-for-word material from previous essays. 2,500 words.

4. “What is Southern” essay. At the end of the semester, your own personal take on Edna Lewis’s iconic subject piece. 1,000 words

Grading
If you participate fully, listen carefully and work hard, you will do VERY WELL here.

On written drafts, I will provide you with in-depth comments. In workshops, your classmates will do the same. This feedback, together with the development of your own thinking and style, will be the bases upon which your revisions will be based. Final grades on written work are based upon creativity, clarity of thought and language, the work you put in to revisions. If a full overhaul of a piece is needed, I expect you to do it. Final grades for written pieces will be out of 20% and will encompass effort put into first draft as well as your final product. *A note: Shorter pieces do not demand less attention or time; it is often more challenging to write short pieces that are concise, clear and meaningful than it is to write longer pieces. I expect your full effort in drafts and revisions for each of the four pieces.

** All writing is expected to conform to the accepted standards of English grammar and syntax. Careless typos or grammar errors in your final pieces due to a failure to carefully spellcheck and proofread your work will automatically reduce your grade on that written piece.

Class participation will be evaluated over the span of the semester. Class participation grades are NOT negotiable at the end of the semester.

- Please note that in-class time is as important as the work you turn in. I expect everyone in the class to come to class on time. Being late is disrespectful of my time, and, even more so, of your classmates’. Arriving more than 10 minutes late twice without giving me advance notice is equivalent to one unexcused absence.
- I expect everyone to do all of the readings. While I will not assign specific reading evaluation questions for each reading, I expect you all to come prepared with thoughts and questions during every class in which we are discussing the week’s readings. *We may not get to the assigned material in class discussion; you are still responsible for all the material assigned, as it has all been placed into the course for a reason. I WILL KNOW IF YOU ARE NOT READING, and this will affect your class participation grade.
- We will cover a lot of ground in each course. I expect you to be present for every session. Please email me or let me know in advance if you know you need to miss class. More than two unexcused absences (without a legitimate personal or family emergency, religious exemption or doctor’s note) will result in a deduction of three points off your final grade. Every unexcused absence after that will
mean a further reduction by three more points from your class participation grade.

- Electronics policy: We all know how distracting screens and the temptations of the Internet and texting can be. While we are in class, there will be NO CELL PHONES, LAPTOPS OR TABLETS in class. Failure to comply with this policy, or having to be repeatedly reminded to put electronics away, will result in a reduction in your class participation grade. While I know some people prefer to take notes on a computer, I have found that when it comes to attentively reading, writing and critiquing, electronics are more distracting than helpful. (If you think this is harsh, trust me, it’s good practice for your writing. If you can’t learn to break away from the ‘net for an hour and fifteen minutes twice a week while we’re in class, you’re going to have a tough time shutting out distractions long enough to put any serious thought or concentration into your interviews, reporting and writing). While I know it can get expensive, I encourage you to print out PDF or online material so that you can take notes on the pieces themselves; this will help you optimally engage in class discussions. Whether or not your decide to print out readings for class, I STRONGLY encourage each of you to keep a notebook specifically for this course, in which you jot down quotes, favorite lines, questions, ideas, etc. related to class readings and discussions. These will come in handy as you work on your pieces.

** Students interested in a tutorial (as a group) or individual study for the spring semester, note that the deadline for submitting all forms/applications is **December 1.** Please speak to me if you’re interested in something for the spring so we can discuss/plan/write early on.

**Academic Integrity:**

“As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.”

**Final Grade**

Writing assignments= 20% each (80% total)
Class participation= 20% (includes attendance; active participation in discussions of readings; attention during guest lectures; insightful and respectful participation in workshops and critique)
**Final Grades** will be calculated by tallying the grades above out of 100%. Your final grade will correspond to a standard numerical→ letter grade conversion (see below):

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**I encourage everyone to come to office hours at least once over the semester, whether to discuss your writing, or larger concerns about class. I do not give midterm grades. Therefore, particularly if you are concerned about your grade, or have a period of extended absences (even excused ones), a meeting with me is a good idea so that there are no surprises when final grades are posted at the end of the term.**
**Course Schedule**

*Note: Readings and writing assignments are to be **completed by the date they are listed.**

**Wednesday, September 2**

Introductions. Why you’re here, what you write. Goals and expectations for the semester.

**Monday, September 7—NO CLASS (Labor Day)**

**Wednesday, September 9: Setting the Table**

- Introduction to *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* by Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris (PDF)
- “Introduction” to *Cornbread Nation, Vol 7* by Francis Lam, p. 1-4
- “Why Study Southern Food” by Marcie Cohen Ferris (PDF)
- “Drumhead Stew: The Power and Poetry of Terroir” by Bernard L. Herman, *Southern Cultures*, (PDF)
- “Soul Food? What is That” by Langston Hughes (Cornbread Nation, Vol 7, p. 217-220)

In Class:

- Discuss these pieces in beginning to frame how we think of “The South” and “Southern Food” for the purpose of this class. What biases do we come into this class carrying? (And what South(s) are we largely neglecting to cover in this class?)

**Monday, September 14: A Whirlwind History**


**Wednesday, September 16: History, Cont’d**


**Monday, September 21**

- *Southern Food* by John Egerton, “Introduction” and “Pass & Repast” (PDF)
- Bitter Southerner, “The Southern Foodways Alliance Wants to Complicate Your Meal”
• “I’m Gonna Eat at the Welcome Table One of these Days” http://bittersoutherner.com/southern-foodways-alliance-part-1/#.VcJZQXjIjnw
• “Unlocking the Rusty Gates” http://bittersoutherner.com/southern-foodways-alliance-part-2#.VcJYxXiJnwy
  • “Dixie is Dead” by Tracey Thompson http://bittersoutherner.com/dixie-is-dead-tracy-thompson-defining-the-south/#.VcJck3iJnww

Wednesday, September 23
  • Group A Workshop of Edible South book review

Monday, September 28
  • All Class Workshop of Edible South book review

Wednesday, September 30: Seeing Blackness in Southern Food Cultures
  • Anthony Bourdain, *Parts Unknown*, “Mississippi Delta” (stream on AmazonPrime or Netflix, or purchase on iTunes)
  • “We Shall Not Be Moved” by Jessica B. Harris (*in Cornbread Nation, Volume 7*, ed. Francis Lam, p. 221-224)
  • “Fried Chicken, A Complicated Comfort Food” Gravy Podcast https://www.southernfoodways.org/gravy/fried-chicken-a-complicated-comfort-food-gravy-ep-16/
  • Interview with Psyche Forson Williams (listen to audio or read transcript) http://www.southernfoodways.org/interview/psyche-williams-forson/

Monday, October 5: Whose Food is it Anyway?
  • *Edible South* Book Review Due
  • “Mother Corn and the Dixie Pig: Native Food in the Native South” by Rayna Green (*in Cornbread Nation, Vol 7*), p. 158-164

Wednesday, October 7
  • Francis Lam visit

Monday, October 12: NO CLASS, Columbus Day Holiday

**Tuesday, October 13 (*Legislative Day: Monday Schedule*): Complicating the Story: Race, Ethnicity, Religion and Gender
• “Every Ounce a Man’s Whiskey? Bourbon in the White Masculine South” by Seán McKeithan (in Cornbread Nation, Vol 7), p. 165-176

**Wednesday, October 14**

• Group B workshop of interpretive/argumentative essay

**Monday, October 19**

• All class workshop of interpretive/argumentative essay

**Wednesday, October 21: From The Southern Culinary Canon**

• “Some Like it Extra Hot” by David Ramsey (PDF) (originally published in The Oxford American 49, in Cornbread Nation Vol. 5)
• “Cutting Greens” by Lucille Clifton (in Cornbread Nation, Vol 7), p. 257

**Monday, October 26**

• Interpretive/argumentative essay due AND topic for profile due via email (or set up a meeting to discuss)
• Tejal Rao visit

**Wednesday, October 28: Love, Loss & Longing**

• “Sweet, Salty, Bitter, Sour” Gravy Podcast, https://www.southernfoodways.org/francis-lam-sweet-salty-bitter-sour/
• “Ode to Gumbo” by Kevin Young (in Cornbread Nation, Vol 7), p. 154-157

**Monday, November 2: Writing in Profile: Key Figures, Past & Present**

• Remembering Craig Claiborne:
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/09/dining/craig-claiborne-set-the-standard-for-restaurant-reviews.html?_r=1


**Wednesday, November 4: Edna Lewis, a Study in Profile**
- “Introduction” and “Spring” from *The Taste of Country Cooking* by Edna Lewis (PDF)
- “Country Cooking by an Urban Chef” by Craig Claiborne, *The New York Times* (**you will need to use the “Times Machine” to view this article—there you can download a hi-res PDF: http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1979/08/01/111186929.html?pageNumber=41**)

**Monday, November 9: Charleston, a Case Study, Part I**

**Wednesday, November 11: Charleston, a Case Study, Part II**
- a look at Sean Brock’s *Heritage* cookbook (**in class**)
- “The Post Husk Era” by Robert Moss (*in Cornbread Nation, Volume 7*), p. 149-153

**Monday, November 16**
- Group C Workshop, profile

**Wednesday, November 18:**
- All class workshop, profile

**Monday, November 23: New Orleans, a Case Study (pre- and post-Katrina)**
**A New Orleans Original**” by Lolis Eric Elie *Gourmet*, February 2000

“Rollin’ on the River: Galatoires,” by Jonathan Gold in *Gourmet*, May 2002,


“No Daily Specials,” by Calvin Trillin, *The New Yorker*
hhttp://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/11/22/no-daily-specials

Interview with Lolis Eric Elie, *Southern Cultures* (PDF)

**Wednesday, November 25: NO CLASS (Day before Thanksgiving)**
**USE THIS TIME TO WORK ON YOUR PROFILE!!!**

**Monday, November 30: Appalachia, a Case Study**
- **Profile due**
- “The People: America’s Great Melting Pot” by Joseph E. Dabney, from *Smokehouse Ham, Spoon Bread & Scuppernog Wine* (PDF)
- Adventures with Ruth, Blackberry Farm, full episode.  
- “Appalachian Chicken and Waffles: Countering Southern Food Fetishism,” by Elizabeth Engelhardt in *Southern Cultures*, Volume 21, Number 1, Spring 2015, pp. 73-83 (PDF)

**Wednesday, December 2**
- Group D workshop, “What is Southern?”

**Monday, December 7**
- All class workshop, “What is Southern?”

**Wednesday, December 9: Southern Food Cultures, Now and Tomorrow**
- “Rebooting a Cuisine” by David Shields, from *Provisions: The Creation and Revival of a Cuisine* (PDF)
- “A Salad Bowl City: The Food Geography of Charlotte, North Carolina” by Tom Hanchett, *The Larder* (PDF)

**Monday, December 14**
- “What is Southern?” essay due. Read-aloud presentation in class.