

ABSTRACT FROM
Dr. E. L. Powe's
Black Cuisine of the Tropics

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Black Cuisine of the Tropics: We are what we eat and drink, is a unique attempt to describe the cuisine of Black peoples of the Tropics with sufficient context to give the reader a greater appreciation of the toil, time, and effort involved in food-getting and food-preparation. The reader, therefore is not only provided with recipes, but is also given descriptions of community life and the farming, fishing, gathering, and trapping techniques employed to obtain the necessary ingredients used in the preparation of Black tropical cuisine. It not only provides answers to what is prepared and how, but also gives an account of who the people are, where they live (i.e. their environment), and why they live as they do. If a person habitually consumes alcohol he is a "drunkard" and if he habitually consumes beans he is "flatulent." Indeed, we are what we eat and drink and it logically follows that if we do not eat wisely, we are unwise.

Drinks described in this volume include *utshwala* (Zulu beer) from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa; *rhum arrangée* (a kind of spiced up rum) from Reunion; kava (a drink that numbs the lips and mind) from Fiji and Vanuatu; coca-leaf tea (yes, the same leaf from which cocaine is derived) from Bolivia & Peru; special rice *chicha* (a nectar for the Gods, from Ecuador); *api* (another drink of the Gods) from the Andes; *kalou* (a sweet or alcoholic beverage prepared from the sap of the coconut palm) from the Seychelles; trembo (similar to *kalou*) from the Comoros; *fresco de cebada* (a refreshing barley beverage) from Peru; and *baboha* (a sweet watery tuber) from Madagascar.

Cuisine highlights include *lap-lap* (baked beneath the earth) from Vanuatu; goat and dumplings from South Africa; *raiketa gasy* (a luscious cactus fruit) from Madagascar; a tantalizing red-fish dish from the Philippines; fried, boiled or stewed cuy (a sweet-tasting creature that resembles a guinea pig) from Ecuador; *rondón* (a truly filling and sumptuous dish) from Nicaragua, *christophene* (an elegant tasting vegetable from Martinique); *casabe* and *marote* (types of Carib bread) from Honduras; *feijoada completa*, the so-called "national dish" of Brazil; gourmet Swazi cuisine from Swaziland; *ceviche* (a raw fish dish) from Peru; octopus curry from Rodrigues; fruit bat from Madagascar; *halim* (a tasty rich soup) from Mauritius; exotic egg cutlets & special fish treats from the Maldives; and many many others.

Throughout the book one finds descriptions of the trials and tribulations of Black community life (e.g. the "lethal yellowing disease" that is destroying the coconut palms of the Garifuna of coastal Honduras), detailed accounts of such topics as Nguni cattle, types of fish and fauna consumed, etc. as well as some of the author's "most memorable meals" with a description of the setting in which they were experienced. Moreover, in the event the reader decides to visit any of the countries discussed, this book indicates where s/he can go to find this or that dish.

Though all regions of the Black tropics have been visited (i.e. Africa, Indian Ocean, Melanesia, Greater Melanesia, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean), the book does not pretend to encompass the entire range of tropical Black cuisine. Rather it attempts to present representative dishes of each region which when compared with one another may reveal a greater commonality than one might have otherwise imagined. Indeed, just as Black music and dance can be said to have derived from a common source, perhaps the same can also be said about Black culinary arts.

Finally, this book also contains a useful glossary which describes in great detail some of the important foodstuffs utilized in the tropics (arrowroot, bananas, breadfruit, cocoa, manioc, nutmeg, provisions, etc.) and provides interesting facts about them. There are also glossary entries dealing with other related topics including one about special utensils fabricated to prepare, store, and consume food and drink.