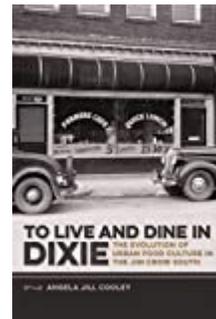




Angela Jill Cooley. *To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South.* Southern Foodways Alliance Studies in Culture, People, and Place Series. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015. 208 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8203-4759-2; \$69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-4758-5.



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To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South

The body of literature that now represents food studies in the United States is notably lacking in material about food and the law. Legal historians seem largely uninterested in food while food historians are perhaps nervous about wading into the arcana of laws and regulations surrounding food. Angela Jill Cooley, assistant professor of history at Minnesota State University in Mankato, is that rare academic who has both a JD and a PhD and is happily for the food studies community interested in food. Her book, *To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South*, is most useful for understanding how laws shaped, and were shaped by, ideas about race and food in the South.

To Live and Dine in Dixie serves as an excellent reminder to scholars to pay attention to how individuals negotiate laws to suit their own needs, either as entrepreneurs or as guardians of particular social mores. Sometimes these two interests clash, and Cooley sensitively shows us those moments. For example, Greek and

Middle Eastern immigrants to southern cities discovered that they, discriminated against themselves in their dealings with native-born white Americans, needed to discriminate against African Americans if they wanted to succeed in the restaurant business. Not personally invested in white supremacy, they nonetheless were party to the oppression of Jim Crow, both because of the laws and their own economic interest. Cooley argues that food was part of the southern strategy to promote white supremacy in the civil rights era. Like other recent scholars of southern foodways, notably, Marcie Cohen Ferris (*The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* [2014]) and Elizabeth S. D. Englehardt (*A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food* [2011]), Cooley shows us that food in the South played, and continues to play, an important role in racial politics.

Cooley sets out to challenge several persistent stereotypes about the South in focusing on cities and in por-

traying southern foodways as changing, rather than fixed in the mythical antebellum era. She shows us a South that, despite its pervasive conservatism, is modern and evolving, neither timeless nor backward. The segregationist laws of the twentieth century were not ancient holdovers from the prewar era but instead contemporary reactions to changing times and an emerging civil rights movement. White southerners constructed Jim Crow because their worlds were changing in ways that they feared. They constructed it in dining establishments because those spaces were both intimate and symbolic of regional identity.

Cooley's central argument is that we can look at both written laws and their lived reality—how and where they were enforced and resisted—to understand the values of a community. Using legal records, contemporary reporting, oral history, and fiction about southern life, she reveals the life of the law in southern cities, as it pertained to food. The strongest sections of the book are those that focus on urban food cultures and the laws that constructed barriers to interracial dining. Cooley gives us the context we need to fully understand the famous lunch counter sit-ins of the 1960s by placing establishments like Woolworths in a landscape that included both segregated and integrated eateries. It is helpful to know, for instance, that many places served both African Americans and whites but did so by providing seats for whites and a take-out window for African Americans. Other establishments served mixed clientele but earned reputations for criminality because of this. In all types of dining places, African Americans cooked and served.

In chapters less tightly focused on the law, Cooley takes up clay eating and the effects of the home economics movement on southern cooking to give readers a broader portrait of what kinds of barriers existed in

southern food culture beyond the racial restrictions that are widely known. The racialization of white southern clay eaters supports her argument that foodways helped to define racial identity for southerners. Cooley categorizes the introduction of home economics in the South as part of the de-regionalization of southern foodways. She also addresses the infiltration of national fast-food chains like McDonald's into the South as part of this process.

A concluding chapter about Cracker Barrel as a perpetrator of white supremacist culture reminds readers that the southern strategy persists in the twenty-first century. Cooley argues that the trope "country" is used by Cracker Barrel to denote a mythical pre-civil rights era South to potential customers. This trope invites whites to feel comfortable in their supremacist heritage while making African Americans feel unwelcome. Cracker Barrel only recently settled a discrimination case that found such violations as white servers being allowed to refuse to serve African American guests, and African American guests being consistently seated in the least desirable sections of the restaurants. Cooley places these legal matters in the larger context of race and dining in the South to give a recent example of whites finding ways to work around laws that challenge their sense of social superiority.

The book would be useful in a wide range of courses beyond food history, including urban history, the history of the South, African American history, and business history courses. In a food studies course it would offer an excellent point of departure for discussions and research projects about local dining laws, the relationship of restaurant décor and enforcement of racial agendas, and many other topics that will enrich the food studies library.

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