

**The Slaw and
the Slow Cooked**

*Culture and Barbecue
in the Mid-South*

EDITED BY JAMES R. VETETO
AND EDWARD M. MACLIN

FOREWORD BY
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1

Smoked Meat and the Anthropology of Food

An Introduction

JAMES R. VETETO AND EDWARD M. MACLIN

It seems only fitting that anthropology would have an interest in the slow cooking of meat on a spit over an open pit of coals, as it is one of the most ancient ways of food preparation known to human beings. Yet it is also a contemporary foodway in many parts of the world, so its persistence spans nearly the whole trajectory, as we currently know it, of human cultural experience. Many would perhaps not be surprised then that the much discussed and maligned etymology of the word *barbecue* can be traced to the Spanish word *barbacoa*, a bastardization of an American Indian term, used by the pioneering nineteenth-century anthropologist E. B. Tylor to describe “a framework of sticks set upon posts” (used by the Arawak of Hispaniola to smoke animals over a hot coals) in his work *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (cited in Warnes 2008). Of course, Andrew Warnes has argued that Tylor’s term was significantly lacking in accuracy and infused with Eurocentrism. Nonetheless, it is striking that one of the founding fathers of anthropology has been so influential in the origin and spread of the word that we now know, in English, simply as “barbecue” (so much so that the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites Tylor, apparently inaccurately, as the original authority on the term).

Nearly all anthropologists, and perhaps a smattering of other anthropologically savvy readers, will recognize that our title is a play on the book *The Raw and the Cooked*, by the great French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969). Lévi-Strauss saw these two categories of food as representing a pair of binary opposites that denoted a deeper level of structural organization universally common to

all human beings. Ours is not quite such a broad claim. By denoting “Slaw” and “Slow Cooked,” we have pointed out two components of a barbecue meal that are ubiquitously present in all subregions of the American South. However, that is where our modest structural analysis will end, not the least of reasons being that the human culinary variation laid upon those two basic categories of food is so dazzlingly diverse and particular that it prompted barbecue scholar John Shelton Reed to famously make the observation that “Southern barbecue is the closest thing we have in the U.S. to Europe’s wines or cheeses; drive a hundred miles and the barbecue changes” (2004, 78).

Situated among a wide diversity of world barbecue traditions are those of the American South, where intraregional variations of slow-cooked, smoked meat have an almost cultlike following. It is an oft-repeated saying in the South that there are three subjects that must either be avoided in casual conversation or be defended to the death, and those are, in no particular order, religion, politics, and barbecue (with college football not far behind as a fourth contentious topic). This book is a collection of essays that articulate a kaleidoscopic look at one of the major barbecue regions within the U.S. South, that of the Mid-South. West Tennessee/Memphis is the best known, and arguably the hub, of the Mid-South barbecue tradition and as such receives the bulk of our attention. Yet the spokes of this hub reach out into neighboring subregions and states. This collection investigates snapshots of Mid-South barbecue from middle Tennessee and Mississippi to central and southern Arkansas, and even into the Piney Woods of northernmost Louisiana.

Our delineation of the Mid-South is, of course, to a large extent arbitrary, but has also been borne out through the life experiences and ethnographic work of the authors. Veteto came of age eating barbecue at family gatherings and roadside joints between Lexington, Tennessee, and Hot Springs, Arkansas, every summer, and Maclin grew up firmly in the West Tennessee barbecue tradition from the vantage point of his family’s historic farmstead near Stanton, Tennessee. Though Veteto noticed differences between the barbecue served in Lexington and Hot Springs, he also observed that they were a lot more similar to each other than to the barbecue of North Carolina, Georgia, or Texas. Other scholars have likewise noticed continuity in the barbecue of the Mid-South, but have defined the region in slightly different geographic terms. For instance, Southern food writer John Egerton sees Mid-South barbecue as existing in the section of Tennessee “that includes the area north of

Jackson and around Dyersburg. It extends into parts of Arkansas and Kentucky. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule, but that’s barbecue country to me” (qtd. in Kelly 2007, 112). In this book we will attempt to define our interpretation of Mid-South barbecue as we go along. We are confident that readers will get a better understanding of the variety and commonalities of barbecue served within the region as they read through the case studies presented in this volume. We will also challenge the boundaries of our delineated region by presenting case studies from border areas such as the Timberlands of southern Arkansas and northernmost Louisiana, where barbecue enthusiasts are torn between two competing traditions: the Delta-style Mid-South pork barbecue and vinegar-based sauces found in the eastern portion of the Timberlands, and the Texas-style beef brisket and sweeter sauces found in its more westerly locations (see Nolan, Chapter 4, this volume).

Unfortunately, Southern barbecue has received scant attention in the vast literature of the anthropology of food. Warnes (2008) argues that this is because of a bias by famous anthropological food scholars such as Sidney Mintz, who dismiss the assumed-to-be completely invented, commercialized, and unhealthy nature of Southern barbecue in favor of the more organic and traditional lifeways of regions such as Mediterranean Europe. Warnes also argues that Southern barbecue revels in disdain toward such elitist notions, upholding its grease, paper towels, plastic plates and cutlery, and drive-through windows in an almost punklike contempt for the conventions of an effete Western civilization, and that such competing attitudes are to some extent a carry-over from the relegation of native ways of cooking meat to a barbaric and “savage slot” by the very first European explorers to visit the New World. Whatever the reasons for the absence of serious anthropological scholarship on Southern barbecue, the resulting silence is one that we hope to, at least in part, begin to rectify with the publication of this volume.

In fact, the barbecue tradition of the Mid-South touches on many of the themes current in the anthropology of food and culture, and we will highlight several of the most salient here. To start, it is a culturally constructed phenomenon that is both traditional in many regards and at the same time undergoing constant change and reformulation. Warnes (2008) traces the construction of barbecue to Spanish conquistadors who characterized the cooking of various meats over fire and coal as a savage and barbaric act. The early essentialisms of the conquistadors continued wherever waves of European colonists cast their gaze upon

the native “savages” of the New World and their “primitive” cooking techniques. This historical revision, using his own interpretation and expansion of the theoretical framework set forth in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s classic *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), has led Warnes to draw the following conclusion: “We need to grasp that this most contentious food is necessarily transatlantic—that European ideas of the primitive have shaped it from Day One, and that its native credentials have been somewhat overstated. We need to grasp, in other words, that barbecue is an invented tradition” (2008, 4). After making a complex historical argument about the Eurocentric and racist origins of Southern barbecue, Warnes also notes that the dubious history of barbecue has helped influence, but has maintained a degree of separation from, a “pit” barbecue tradition that has quite often served to help bridge deep racial divides. It is with this pit tradition that this volume is primarily engaged. Although Warnes’s observation that Southern barbecue is an invented tradition is a point well taken and undoubtedly an important contribution to the history of the evolution of the cuisine, his assertion that barbecue was essentialized as savage by an all-embracing and seemingly homogeneous European gaze is probably somewhat overstated.

John Shelton Reed and Dale Volberg Reed (2008), for example, have traced Southern barbecue in the North Carolina Piedmont tradition back to its predecessors in German-speaking and other regions of Europe and found that the barbecuing of meat slowly over hot coals has been an acceptable form of cooking since at least the Middle Ages. Smoked pork shoulder, or *Schäufele*, is a specialty in the Franconia region of southern Germany, where pork is the traditional meat of the peasant classes. Tracing the lineages of the founding purveyors of barbecue restaurants in and around Lexington, North Carolina, Reed and Reed show that they all come from significantly German heritages, and it is more than likely that their ancestors sprang from a large German peasantry who immigrated to America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They conclude that slow-smoked pork, flavored with vinegar and other spices, was not in fact a taste that was alien and “savage” to German American immigrants, but a time-honored tradition they brought with them from the Old World that changed and evolved as they met with then-exotic New World ingredients such as tomatoes and peppers. The tensions between the constructed and well-researched histories provided by Warnes and by Reed and Reed are symptomatic of larger issues pertaining to the push-and-pull or hybridizing tendencies

of cultural forces such as tradition, change, invention and reinvention, modernity, revitalization, and essentialism that are present in almost all contemporary studies of food and culture in anthropology (e.g., Counihan and Van Esterik 1997) and other disciplines.

Identity formation is also a central theme in food and culture studies, and “like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves to both solidify group membership and set groups apart. . . . Ethnicity is born of acknowledged difference and works through contrast. . . . Once imagined, such cuisines provide added concreteness to the idea of national or ethnic identity” (Mintz and Dubois 2002, 109). Southern barbecue is a tradition and cuisine that has been used both to promote in-group regional solidarity and (by outsiders) to denigrate those who participate in eating it. No other foodstuff has contributed more to the formation and delineation of diverse Southern identities: “Of all the signature foods of the South, none unites and divides the region like barbecue. When it comes to barbecue, southerners cannot agree on meat, sauce, technique, side dishes, or even how to spell the word. What they can agree on is that barbecue in all its variety is one of the fond traditions that makes the South the South. It drifts across class and racial distinctions like the sweet vapors over hickory embers” (Auchmutey 2007, 22–23).

In other words, to be a Southerner is to love barbecue with very few exceptions. And to be a North Carolinian is to love either Eastern or Piedmont styles of barbecue, to be from West Tennessee is to love to order particular cuts of meat from the whole hog, to be from Memphis is to prefer shoulder sandwiches and wet or dry ribs, and to be from most of Texas is to expect nothing but smoked beef brisket the moment the word *barbecue* has been uttered. And these are not just rhetorical and stylistic arguments—they are fundamental to the identity formation of each situated Southerner who claims them. In North Carolina, defenders of Eastern-style whole-hog barbecue served with a sauce consisting of little more than “God’s own apple cider vinegar, salt and pepper” (Dennis Rogers, qtd. in Reed and Reed 2008, 38) insist that they are preparing barbecue in the old, traditional, orthodox manner, as opposed to the Piedmont-based “upstarts” who prepare their barbecue shoulders “Lexington style” and serve it with a “dip” that sinfully includes miniscule amounts of tomato. The Piedmont purveyors of Lexington-style barbecue, by contrast, insist that there are parts of the whole hog that you just do not want to eat and that they have vastly

improved on methods that began in the eastern part of the state but have remained locked in a pattern of semi-arrested infancy there (Reed and Reed 2008).

John Shelton Reed has even gone so far as to suggest that Southerners replace that long-standing and controversial symbol of pan-Southern regional identity, the rebel flag, with a more fitting representation of their cultural unity:

I once suggested half-seriously that if the South needs a new flag—as it surely does—we could do no worse than to use a dancing pig with a knife and fork. You want to talk about heritage, not hate. . . . That represents a heritage we all share and can take pride in. Barbecue both symbolizes and contributes to community. And that's without even mentioning its noncommercial manifestations—for instance, in matters like fund-raising for volunteer fire departments. But there's another side to this coin. It's often the case, and it is in this one, too, that community is reinforced by emphasizing its differences from and with outsiders. (2004, 81)

He goes on to elaborate on how barbecue helps to create and maintain diversity among unique and localized Southern identities:

As I wrote once, barbecue is not like grits—in more ways than just the obvious. Grits (if you'll excuse the image) glue the South together. Barbecue, on the other hand—well, you could say that it pits community against community. This rivalry, this competitive aspect of barbecue, has been institutionalized in the formal contests that seem to have become a permanent feature of the Southern landscape.

. . . And those traditions reflect and reinforce the fierce localism that has always been a Southern characteristic, the “sense of place” that literary folk claim to find in Southern fiction, the devotion to states' rights and local autonomy that was an establishment characteristic of Southern politics long before it became a major headache for the Confederate States of America. (2004, 82)

Across much of the South and the Mid-South, ethnicity, for better or worse, is often cast in terms of a binary distinction between black and white. This is despite considerable ethnic and racial diversity within the region. In one sense, such a dualistic distinction makes life seemingly simpler, but it also washes over a great deal of underlying cultural

variation. And the barbecue tradition of the Mid-South is not immune from this tendency, often being cast solely in terms of black and white by those who participate in eating and discussing it. The racial politics and identities associated with barbecue are touched on from various angles in many of the essays in this collection and are instructive in the complexity that they reveal. We refrain from commenting much more on this controversial subject here, preferring instead to let our readers form their own interpretations of the empirical fieldwork presented in the case studies that follow. We will say that it is clear that large numbers of people from various ethnic backgrounds are involved in and knowledgeable experts at preparing and celebrating the countless delicious variations of unique local barbecues. The importance of barbecue to the identity (in all of its complex forms) of Southerners across the Mid-South is a theme that continually interweaves itself throughout most of the essays in this volume.

The ritual aspects of eating have been identified by anthropologists as another central theme in food and culture studies (Sutton 2001; Mintz and Dubois 2002). This theme is not lost on food writers engaging Southern barbecue; William Schmidt, for example, has described barbecue as “a cultural ritual, practiced with a kind of religious fervor among various barbecue sects, each of whom believes their particular concoction of smoke and sauce and spices is the only true way to culinary salvation” (qtd. in Reed and Reed 2008, 7). John Egerton has also couched his observations about Southern barbecue in overtly religious terms: “There are more barbecue factions and smoked-meat sects around here, each with its own hair-splitting distinctions, than there are denominations in the far-flung Judeo-Christian establishment” (1990, 67).

To elaborate on the theme touched on by Egerton, such distinctions can run along several lines. The smoking of the hog is where it all starts. Hogs are smoked whole or divided into any number of sections to be slow cooked over hot coals: shoulder (subdivided into “Boston butt” and “picnic” cuts), middlin, tenderloin, catfish, ham, or ribs. Each of these sections of the pig is considered desirable for their different eating qualities. Next you have the matter of whether or not to smoke the meat directly over coals or to use indirect heat by cooking the meat slightly to the side of the coals or by way of a side-box smoker. While cooking the meat, it further has to be determined whether to moisturize the meat while cooking it, by spraying it with water or basting it with a special concoction, or to dry-smoke it and add the sauce later. Once you have

finished smoking the meat (time varies according to what portion of the hog you use: up to twenty-four hours for whole hog, eight hours for shoulders, and four hours for ribs), the highly contentious subject of how to remove it from the bone and serve it is approached in one of several ways: pulled, shaven, sliced, chopped, minced, chipped, shredded, or ground. In most of West Tennessee and Memphis, for example, barbecue is not considered barbecue unless it is pulled straight off the cut or whole hog by human hands. The entire act of preparing barbecue is typically ritualized from the moment the fire is started and is often done in the company of friends, family, and beer or whiskey. During overnight sessions lasting as long as twenty-four hours, a lot of fun is to be had and life's deepest insights, fears, aspirations, and secrets are oftentimes shared. Topics of a more overtly religious and pious nature are discussed with increased frequency (sans alcohol) when the barbecue is being prepared, as it often is, for a gathering or fund-raiser at a local church (see Bradley-Shurtz, Chapter 5, this volume).

Once you have actually placed the smoked meat onto a plate or between a bun, several more options become readily apparent, not the least of which is what side dish should accompany your barbecue. (In West Tennessee and eastern Arkansas you do not even have to ask to have coleslaw put on top of your pulled or coarse-chopped sandwich meat—it is just assumed.) But we will leave those aside for the moment to focus on the most controversial of all the options—sauce. In the Mid-South you can encounter a variety of sauces, from mustard to vinegar to tomato based, from sweeter to spicier to tangier, and anything else in between. In North Carolina you will encounter a sauce called “dip” that is vinegar combined with a few pepper flakes and a dash of tomato, in parts of Texas and Kansas City you mostly get a thick and sweet sauce the consistency of ketchup, in parts of South Carolina and Georgia you get mustard-based sauces, and in Alabama you can procure barbecue sauce that is mayonnaise based. However, we would argue that a good Mid-South barbecue sauce is usually an attempt at blending four key variables—tomato, vinegar, pepper, and sweetener of choice—with tendencies toward one or the other depending on the tastes of its creator (see Veteto, Chapter 10, this volume).

Despite all this variation, most Southerners who engage in the act of cooking or consuming barbecue think the way they are used to having their barbecue prepared is the only way God intended it to be done. Sitting down to a meal of barbecue excites Southern sensibilities like no other foodstuff; it can only be properly understood as a ritual act of cul-

tural continuity and identity formation. Barbecue has been the central component of meals in many areas of the American South at important family, political, and religious gatherings for the past three hundred years (Reed and Reed 2008; Moss, Chapter 2, this volume). Stephen Smith sums up the ritual aspects of Southern barbecue in metaphorical terms:

In many ways, the Barbecue Eucharist serves as the perfect metaphor for understanding contemporary Southern society. The catechism contains a reverence for tradition and heritage of the past, the vestiges of rural camp meetings, a chorus of regional chauvinism, a pulpit for oratory, and opportunity for community participation, appreciation for the vernacular, equality of opportunity, and subtle interracial respect. . . .

The community values represented by the high priest cooks and the dedication of their congregations suggest that the rhetorical ritual of barbecue, characterized by hyperbole and boastful humor among friends, may also serve to further human understanding and humanitarian values among the faithful. As such, it is a regional community ritual worthy of our academic analysis as well as our voracious appetites. (2004, 68)

Since the 1980s, food scholars and anthropologists have increasingly identified gender as an important topic of scholarly inquiry. As Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik have noted, “Across history and cultures, women have a special relationship to food and a particularly vivid experience of their bodies” (1997, 3). In the preparation, performance, and consumption of Southern barbecue, however, the participation of women has often been understated and invisible. Men dominate the official stories. Eric Lolis Elie has provided some insight into why that may be the case:

First of all, barbecue requires the taming of fire, and it was this act of taming that first lighted man's path out of the cold drafts and raw-meat dinners of cave life. Any prehistorian worth his weight in testosterone can tell you with certainty that it was a man, not a woman, who first bent fire to human will. Women are perfectly capable of cooking in controlled environments, of starting fires with pilot lights and adjusting the heat with knobs, the logic goes, but from the beginning of human time, men have lighted fires from sparks and beaten

small flames into blazes. It is this image of themselves that men cling to. . . . Women barbecue cookers are not rare, but neither are they common. . . . To an extent women *don't* barbecue because men *do* barbecue. (1996, 68–70)

Elie's half tongue-in-cheek account seems linked to Warnes's contention that Southern barbecue is entrenched in an essentialized performance of the "savage." And there is certainly an element of that entrenchment in barbecue preparation, particularly in its more modern formulation in events such as barbecue competitions (see Deutsch, Chapter 8, this volume). But there are also more benign reasons why women are not as visible in Southern barbecue traditions. As Elie goes on to write, men have taken over certain American culinary "events" such as making pancakes on Sunday morning, while women have been generally responsible for the day-to-day cooking. Such is often the case with noncommercial Southern barbecue, as the smoker is only lit up on the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, or other special occasions when the man of the house labors a full day over hot coals. Women, however, are not absent from the occasion, as they are usually responsible for preparing side dishes and making sure that the overall timing and preparation of the event go smoothly (see Bradley-Shurtz, Chapter 5, this volume). Elie notes that if women had to cook the barbecue too, it would be too much work. However, men receive the majority of the praise for the event, even though the role of women is just as important to its success.

In the commercial barbecue business, despite the overall dominance of men again, there are also examples of successful female smokers. Amy Evans (2009), oral historian at the Southern Foodways Alliance, has documented case studies in which two of Memphis's most famous barbecue restaurants, Payne's Bar-B-Q and Cozy Corner, were taken over, and have since been run successfully, by the widows of the men they cofounded the businesses with. Elie (1996) has also documented three prominent women in the Texas barbecue trade: Mrs. Softa, Soul Sister, and Sis Ward. Our book, like most on the topic of Southern barbecue, is male dominated in its subject matter, and this reflects the reality of barbecue as a Southern social institution. However, we fully recognize the need for more scholarship on women and gendered spaces in Mid-South barbecue, and several of the chapters in this book address these subjects in varying degrees.

The anthropology of food and memory is another current research theme (Holtzman 2006; Counihan 2004; Sutton 2001; Serematakis

1996) that has particular relevance to the study of Southern barbecue. The smelling, preparing, eating, and sharing of barbecue engages the memories and histories of Southerners in unique ways that parallel those that have been described among other cultures, such as the flood of sensory memories that Serematakis (1996) experiences when biting into a certain old and delicious variety of Greek peach. We are certainly not the only Southerners who, when confronted by even the faintest hint of hickory smoke wafting off the skin of properly smoked pork, experience an immediate flood of fond personal memories. For Veteto, such memories consist mostly of past family gatherings hosted by his late grandparents on the shores of Lake Hamilton in Hot Springs, Arkansas, featuring his grandpa's mouthwatering smoked ribs slathered in the family sauce. Or of watching his grandpa's forehead bead up in sweat as he struggled to finish off a pork sandwich doused in the irresistibly spicy sauce at McClard's Bar-B-Q while his dad cracked jokes about it. In fact, McClard's sauce and restaurant has a primary role in Hot Springs lore, its story known to practically any locals worth their weight in barbecue. According to the official story, as articulated



McClard's Bar-B-Q building.

by the restaurant on their website and every menu in the store, in the 1920s, Alex and Gladys McClard owned Westside Tourist Court in Hot Springs. “When a down-and-out traveler could not come up with the \$10 he owed for his two-month stay, he asked the couple to accept instead a recipe for ‘the world’s greatest bar-b-que sauce.’ Since something was better than nothing, the couple accepted the recipe. To their great surprise and delight, they tasted the truth in the traveler’s claim. In 1928, the Westside Tourist Court became Westside Bar-B-Q.” Much has changed at the restaurant since then, but the kitchen is still manned by second-, third-, and fourth-generation McClards, and the main ingredient is still that “priceless sauce,” the recipe for which resides in a safe-deposit box (McClard’s Bar-B-Q 2009).

Aside from the actual food, even the location, architecture, and furnishings in barbecue restaurants can contain significant historical memories (both accurate and mythologized). Take, for instance, the origins of a wooden bar that is located inside Papa KayJoe’s Bar-B-Que in West Tennessee, according to Devin Pickard, the restaurant’s owner:

Supposedly, when my grandfather passed away—he was 95 years old, so he was a real packrat, never kept house, never kept the house clean. His wife, my grandmother, passed away in the middle 70s, so he was pretty much single for the last like 25 years of his life. He said, his opinion was, if someone wants to come look at my house, I’d just as soon them not come. If they want to come visit me, I want ’em to come. You know, he was into [harvesting wild] ginseng, hunting, growing a garden, and all that. So anyhow, when he died, we were out back kind of cleaning up, and this bar was out underneath a little shed that he had. It had a bunch of wood and old stuff on it. And dad recognized it, and he said, “Hey, that’d be a pretty neat deal to put in your restaurant.” So we did. Evidently, it came out of a grocery store. The name of it was Walt Thompson’s Grocery, probably back in the 40s, 50s, 60s. It was the type of grocery store like in a lot of small towns. Walt, the owner, would allow folks to run up really large bills, and then when the crops came in, they’d come in and pay it all off at one time. My dad worked there, his brother, lots of kids worked there during the summer, would deliver groceries on a bicycle and all that. So, he said that this was the bar—I don’t know if it was maybe the meat-cutting bar or just the bar that kind of sat there with the register on it. Supposedly, and I don’t know how true this is, Davy Crockett—now this may be an urban legend—but he supposedly danced on

this bar. I don’t know if he got drunk or what. But it was in a, I don’t know if it was actually, if he actually did it in the grocery store, and this may have been in a bar, more of a saloon, previous to that. Now I don’t have any proof of that. But that’s one thing someone told me one time, that Davy Crockett danced on this bar. So, you know, that’s something good to tell, whether it’s true or not. (Qtd. in Southern Foodways Alliance 2009)

The lot on which the restaurant is built and the name of the joint are also infused with memories, both past and current, linking the generations:

In 1999, my grandfather passed away. He owned all this property. And if you could see, there’s a—well, you can see it at some point—there’s a hill behind us. There’s a house up on that hill. When he passed away, this was all growed up land. So we decided, you know, we had done it for a good long while [cooked barbecue], thought we sort of knew what we were doing, and decided we would give it a shot. We cleaned all this off, built this little building, and so the “Papa” in the Papa KayJoe’s name is my grandfather, Papa. [Points to a photo on the wall] That’s him with the overalls and all that. The “Kay” is for our daughter. Her name is Kaylee—we call her Kay. And the Joe is for Jordan, our son. We call him Joe. So “Papa KayJoe’s.” (Ibid.)

Clearly, rather than simply thrown-together shacks of wood and steel located in a commercially desirable location—with a bunch of old flea-market knickknacks thrown around haphazardly to decorate—barbecue restaurants are often historical sites wrapped up in deeply meaningful intergenerational familial and local memories.

The subject matter of this volume is far from being the cheap and greasy bastion of an overly commercialized American culture that many scholars think of when considering (or not considering) fare such as Southern barbecue. We would argue instead that the Southern barbecue tradition, its participants, and its methods—even its seemingly quaint or meaningless commercial artifacts—are often aspects of a localized and particular Southern culture that is deeply infused with history, identity, ritual, memory, gender, and sense of place and belonging. Furthermore, it is currently at the crossroads between tradition and modernity, community cookouts and corporatization, hickory-smoked pits and modern electric cookers. In other words, like other subjects of anthropological inquiry, it is situated in the present postmodern moment, “liquid and

prone to incessant reinvention" (Warnes 2008, 91), and is threatened in its more traditional localized forms by homogenous commercialization. As such it is a fascinating topic of inquiry that has much to add to the contemporary study of food and culture.

Despite a decidedly anthropological focus, the contributions to this volume are highly interdisciplinary. Most of the essays come from authors situated in diverse disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, but important and illuminating essays have also been submitted by popular food writers, journalists, and community food activists. We realized very early in our editorial process that anthropologists who have made a study of Southern barbecue are few and far between. Yet the popular literature and culinary scholarship on Southern barbecue is, at this point in its trajectory, perhaps more voluminous than that of any other American food. With this edited volume we hope to bring the unique cultural phenomenon that is Mid-South barbecue to the attention of other scholars working in the anthropology of food and culture, but to do so we have had to seek expertise from writers working outside of our discipline. Following previous studies and methodological recommendations by other researchers (e.g., Brown and Mussell 1984), we agree that the only way to gain an understanding of a subject as complex as food traditions and their relation to culture is to engage an interdisciplinary lens. As editors we have joyfully gleaned insight from all the fine contributions to this volume and have come to realize that any anthropology of Southern barbecue will necessarily borrow insight from and engage a wide variety of expertise from other disciplines, from food writers for popular magazines and journalistic outlets, and particularly from the purveyors of barbecue traditions themselves.

Despite the diverse academic and professional backgrounds of the authors in this volume, ethnography is perhaps the theoretical and methodological approach that stands out as uniting us all. The following chapters contain a strong ethnographic and ethnohistoric presence, suggesting that to truly gain an understanding of regional and ethnic foodways, it is necessary to sit down and get firsthand information from local participants and experts through intensive participant observation and the documentation and analyzing of oral history and interviews. To engage in ethnography is to use one of the most time-honored methodologies of anthropology and helps to make this collection recognizable as "an anthropology," but it is also important to remember that

"anthropology is not ethnography" (Ingold 2008) and that ethnography is also a robust fieldwork methodology in current use among many other disciplines as well (Marshall and Rossman 2006). The extensive presence of ethnography as a fieldwork and literary methodology herein also serves to distinguish this book from almost every other work that has been written about Southern barbecue, save a few (e.g., Engelhardt 2009; Elie 1996).

An additional benefit of having among us some of the most established and upcoming food writers working on Southern barbecue from both outside and inside the academy is that it lends readability to many of the chapters that will have appeal beyond academic audiences. Our intent is to create an academically rigorous book with the flexibility of being enjoyed by casual readers on the topic of Southern barbecue. We as coeditors both have family roots in Mid-South barbecue traditions and have learned most of what we know of the subject through oral tradition, down-in-the-pits hog smoking, gatherings of family and friends, and feasting at the tables of the region's many barbecue joints, and we want to be able to receive feedback on our work from the true local experts. We are curious to see how this hybrid collection is received along both sides of the academic-popular divide and sincerely hope it goes down as easily as a plate of smoked ribs slathered with Mid-South-style barbecue sauce and washed down with a big glass of sweet tea. (But then again, the subject *is* barbecue, so we would be mildly disappointed if we didn't at least step on a few toes and start a controversy or two!)

Our argument is that this type of collection should be attempted more often and has the promise of at least two worthwhile opportunities: (1) making academic work more relevant by appealing to a more popular audience, and (2) making popular work more rigorous by situating it, to an extent, within the contemporary theoretical concerns of the academy. This follows efforts by others to develop a more public anthropology through collaboration with individuals outside the discipline (Lamphere 2004; Scheper-Hughes 2009). While the chapters in this volume function independently, together they serve as an attempt to mediate multiple perspectives and engage food enthusiasts, folklorists, historians, anthropologists, and others in a conversation about how Mid-Southern barbecue has developed and how it should develop in the future. As such, our multidisciplinary, dual-audience approach brings a reflexivity common to many ethnographic works since James Clifford and George E. Marcus's *Writing Culture* (1986), combined

with a range of writing styles, from the academic to the journalistic. A more public anthropology of food may also be a step toward preserving local food traditions.

The remainder of this introduction will provide an overview of each of the chapters in the book, identifying themes that hold the collection together as a unified, yet diverse, undertaking and situating—but not limiting—it within the range of topics current in the study of food and culture that we have identified above. For the sake of internal structure, we have divided the book into two sections—though the divide is admittedly rough and somewhat arbitrary. The first section, “Traditional and Contemporary Landscapes of Mid-South Barbecue,” looks at the creators and purveyors of a rich and varied barbecue tradition in the Mid-South. The second section, “Old/New Barbecue Moving Forward,” looks at shifting trends in barbecue, with an eye toward both preserving diversity and recognizing change.

In Chapter 2, Robert F. Moss introduces readers to the origins and evolution of what can be recognized as the barbecue tradition of the Mid-South, placing the region’s barbecue in the context of the historical development of other subregions in the South as well. The chapter begins by tracing the development of barbecue in Virginia and the Carolinas and its migration across the Appalachian Mountains into the Mid-South. Moss provides historical vignettes of political rallies featuring barbecue from pioneer times, of how barbecue was experienced by plantation slaves in the antebellum period, and of send-off and welcome-home barbecues for soldiers in times of war. Arguing that American barbecue was relatively uniform up until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Moss identifies the rise of the barbecue restaurant business as the primary causal agent in the differentiation, development, and continuation of regional Southern styles. He documents the histories of famous Mid-South barbecue restaurants such as Leonard’s Pit Barbecue and Charlie Vergos’s Rendezvous in Memphis, Tennessee, and McClard’s Bar-B-Q in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and of regional specialties such as the Memphis barbecue sandwich. Moss also shows why commercial fast-food barbecue has traditionally been less successful than local mom-and-pop joints in the Mid-South.

In Chapter 3, John T. Edge narrates a personal and ethnographic story about his visits with the family that operates Jones Bar-B-Q Diner in Marianna, Arkansas. He documents the complex historical and contemporary circumstances surrounding the restaurant and delights in its

production of excellent barbecue. The chapter touches on the differences between black and white barbecue experiences in the American South and offers insight into why African Americans are overrepresented among barbecue pitmasters in the Arkansas Delta. Edge relates his recent conceptualization of barbecue as something of a “booty call” for Southern whites patronizing black-owned restaurants, allowing whites to receive the benefits of indulgence without suffering the often oppressive socioeconomic circumstances that surround barbecue production in African American communities.

Justin M. Nolan, in Chapter 4, presents an introduction and analysis of the complexity of the barbecue tradition in the Timberlands region of southern Arkansas and northern Louisiana, a crossroads between the Mid-South and Texas styles of preparing barbecue. A native of the region, Nolan visits old friends and pitmasters and locates other local experts through snowball sampling, providing results from fourteen oral history interviews using methods largely drawn from cognitive anthropology. His statistical analysis is complemented by a personal narrative and textual analysis that provide the benefit of triangulating qualitative and quantitative research methods. In a fascinating discovery using correspondence analysis, Nolan found that the barbecue styles of pitmasters could be identified geographically.

In Chapter 5, Kristen Bradley-Shurtz documents the history and contemporary scene of the St. Patrick’s Irish Picnic in McEwen, Tennessee, a fund-raiser for the St. Patrick’s Church and School that has been ongoing since 1854. Bradley’s extensive ethnographic fieldwork, grounded in her personal experience as a former student of the school, reveals an annual barbecue event that has grown to be recognized as one of the major tourist attractions in Tennessee—hailed by the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 1988 as “The World’s Largest Outdoor Barbecue”—while also remaining true to its humble roots. Pork and chicken are smoked by intergenerational barbecue teams and feature two secret sauces, the oldest of which is rumored variously to have originated in Ireland or to have developed locally in the 1920s. Along the way, Bradley-Shurtz also challenges assumptions regarding gender roles in traditional barbecue scholarship and shows that work crews at the Irish Picnic are more often divided along familial rather than gender lines these days.

Rien T. Fertel, in Chapter 6, engages the complexity of identity, authenticity, persistence, and loss in the West Tennessee whole-hog barbecue tradition. Fertel’s analysis of oral history interviews with ten

individuals from eight of the most well-known barbecue establishments in the region traces whole-hog barbecue back to its origins on the farms and homesteads of an older generation. Fertel finds whole-hog barbecue to be not just a method of preparing meat but also a whole way of life and a cultural practice that is of foremost importance to the identity of local people. Fertel also finds controversy—where there was once unity—regarding the corporatization of hog farming, and the topic of traditional smoke pits versus modern electric smokers. Staunch traditionalists like Ricky Parker think that anyone who would convert to an electric smoker is “lazy” and doomed to the production of inferior swine. Other pitmasters like Billy Frank Latham have been converted by the convenience, efficiency, and safety of modern electric smokers. In the final analysis, Fertel finds traditional West Tennessee whole-hog barbecue to be an important, yet endangered, culinary tradition.

Maclin focuses on large-scale change in barbecue and the pork industry in Chapter 7. Drawing from both personal experience and literature on food, history, agriculture, marketing, and economics, he paints a picture of the dynamic tension inherent in the current Mid-South barbecue landscape. He contrasts the popularity of landmark barbecue institutions such as Craig’s in De Valls Bluff, Arkansas, with that of barbecue chains like Corky’s in Memphis. The juxtaposition of these restaurants, each a success in their own right, acts as a lens for viewing political and economic currents that underpin today’s commercial barbecue industry. The glossy photographs and polished delivery that surround the newest wave of barbecue can be seen as a type of food pornography—luring in consumers and justifying the industrialization of pork—while historic barbecue restaurants continue to operate much as they always have.

Jonathan Deutsch, in Chapter 8, continues the theme of old and new barbecue in his ethnography of a competition barbecue team. This is not your typical competition barbecue team, however; it is a group of white-collar professionals who did not grow up within a barbecue tradition of their own. As the team moves through competitions, ongoing narratives reflect what counts as “traditional,” what roles are to be played by men versus women, and how new technological innovations are incorporated within the group. Many of these narratives are revealed in moments of tension—physical, mental, and culinary—when team members must decide on a course of action.

Chapter 9 looks at barbecue from a different perspective: that of the Slow Food Movement. Angela and Paul Knipple are food writers and

former members of the board of Slow Food Memphis. In this chapter, they explore the history of Slow Food and the place of barbecue within the movement. They look at how barbecue can be conceived in relation to the Slow Food standards of good, clean, and fair. They also place emphasis on threats to barbecue’s status as a Slow Food and assert that not all slow-cooked food is Slow Food. The impact of barbecue on the environment and the fairness of labor practices in the hog industry are explored, along with the impact of confined animal feed operations (CAFOs) on hog production. Using the guiding philosophy of the international movement as scaffolding, they describe two very different modes of barbecue production along traditional and modern lines.

Veteto, in Chapter 10, looks at variations in sauce across the region. While pitmasters may be open to visitors looking at their cooking gear or even helping with the smoking process, their sauce recipes are often guarded secrets. Veteto uses examples from the professional barbecue community as well as his own family’s sauce to illustrate the unity and diversity of Mid-South sauces, identifying tomato, vinegar, spice, and sweetener as the “Big Four” elements common to most Mid-South barbecue sauces. In conclusion, Veteto ties barbecue sauce to his ongoing research into Southern heirloom tomato varieties, providing descriptions of several heirlooms that would stand up well in the sauce-making process in addition to preserving regional history and agricultural diversity in delicious acts of “eater-based conservation.”

We conclude, in Chapter 11, with a view of barbecue in the digital age and an eye toward the future. What do online ordering, social networking groups, and other digital-age technologies mean for barbecue lovers? How does technology shape experience, and culture shape behavior? What does the future of barbecue hold? And as barbecue, culture, and technology continue to coevolve, will those changes lead toward local sustainability and diversity? We identify the incorporation of Southern heritage hogs back into regional barbecue traditions as one particularly promising trend.

Together, the chapters in this volume paint Mid-South barbecue as a tradition that is simultaneously invented, historic, dynamic, and multifaceted. As a subject for study, barbecue contains many of the issues seen with other foods—questions about representations and categorizations, links to health and obesity, the organic movement, and the impacts of increasing globalization (Watson and Caldwell 2005). The cultural politics of barbecue present vast potential for both academic and journalistic research. To paraphrase anthropologist Claude Lévi-

Strauss, barbecue is not only good to eat—it is also “good to think.” As anthropological researchers and barbecue aficionados, we have a stake in understanding the full spectrum of barbecue production—especially given that barbecue is such an important part of multiple Southern identities. It is our hope that the chapters in the current volume will contribute to an ongoing dialogue—not only within anthropology but also among multidisciplinary groups of both academic and casual readers.

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