**THE POLITICS OF SOUL-FOOD (CONVERSATION)**

**E.D. Mondainé**

I grew up in a family where excellent cooks surrounded me. A highlight of my childhood was anticipating my mother's delicious evening meals.

Considering how little was in the cupboards and fridge, the meals she prepared seemed to appear out of nowhere. In addition to candied yams, fried corn, collard greens, and pork chops, the menu included pig ears, feet, and pigtails. Chitterlings, or Chitlins as they are known, are another item I forgot to mention.

Most African American kitchens serve this mouthwatering dish during holidays, and it has become a celebrated delicacy over the years. Throughout the United States and abroad, chitterlings have been highlighted in various competitions and festivals. It will delight your soul if you have never tried it before. Most people are shocked when they discover what chitlins are, "pig intestines."

Cooking pig intestines produces a foul smell, especially when cleaning them. Although made from pig intestines, it is still a viable food source, but it must be carefully and thoroughly cleaned before it can be consumed. As part of West African culture, sharp and peppery spices mask the innards and protect against bacteria.

In addition to being African American legacy dish, their ingredients, preparation, and festiveness have contributed to the survival of mostly impoverished households. The chitlin is a delicacy, but it also illustrates the innate creative abilities of African Americans and their inherent survival ability. African Americans needed to use traditional herbs and sauces to cover the unpleasant smell and taste of the master's barns and storehouses' leftovers.

As a metaphor, it perfectly describes where African American society has been and continues to be. Since the master butchered and kept the best parts for himself, African Americans had to make do with leftover scraps.

The period following the Civil War, known as The Reconstruction, is the best example of how African Americans have settled for the tripe of social and political power. The history here is surprisingly little-known and should shock us all. The events of that time were much more volatile than most Americans recognize or comprehend today.

A new South was emerging from the old South. Southern economies were devastated by the Civil War, the burning of cotton fields, and the destruction of cotton gins. Aside from that, all of the necessary equipment for cotton production was in disrepair or nonexistent. The loss of enslaved labor, the main driver of cotton production, was an even more significant blow. But, again, exploitation and brute force were the basis for this system. Suddenly, the world's most influential community, the white elitists, disappeared, and cotton's economy collapsed.

The old South couldn't survive without African Americans, and white Southerners were angry at the prospect of having to pay for labor. In the minds of white southerners, if something has been free for so long, why should they pay for it now?

The so-called "American Dream" was impossible in such a terroristic regime because African Americans had limited access to wealth, achievement, and growth mechanisms.

What happened was as follows.

The "War Between the States," more commonly known as the Civil War, ended on April 9, 1865, when the Southern troops surrendered to the Northern army. A year into the war, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that "all persons held as slaves shall be free and shall be free from now on.” Although that was a great day, the Emancipation Proclamation is still not a law. For the Emancipation Act to become law, it would have to be passed by both houses of Congress.

Consequently, despite Abraham Lincoln's abolishment of slavery, enslaved African Americans remained enslaved. Why is that so important? Imagine what it would be like to be black in Mississippi on April 10, 1865 - the day after the Civil War ended. What are your thoughts on this? When you tell the old slave master, "peace, I'm out!" and walk off the plantation where you were once enslaved and brutalized, it must feel nearly impossible! I don't think that's an easy thing to do. One would probably fear that walking off the plantation would only bring more savagery or even being shot in the back before reaching the road. Consequently, I'd think that most thought it was safer to remain in the same place and wait for something significant to change.

As well as experiencing anxiety, white enslavers were also experiencing a sense of insecurity. There were suddenly four million formerly enslaved people in the South despite the South's best efforts to resist the dismantlement of slavery. Because of their cruelty, white southerners must have feared what these blacks would do to them.

In addition to taking them away from their homeland, we have bound, shackled, and enslaved them for generations and treated them worse than farm animals. Is there a possibility that they will rise and kill us all?

Keeping their heads down, they begin to plan, hoping and praying that this is just a bad dream.

The Emancipation Proclamation, not yet enacted, was not in effect, and without warning, President Lincoln was assassinated four days after he declared slavery's freedom. As a result of Lincoln's killing, Andrew Johnson became President, and he, a good old boy from the South, began pardoning generals and eradicating the Emancipation Act mercilessly.

For white southerners, it might just be a horrible dream after all. However, this was more of a nightmare for African Americans formerly enslaved.

According to Johnson and most Southerners, the intellects of the formerly enslaved people rendered them helpless in managing their affairs and lives. Therefore, he also thought that African-Americans should not be entitled to vote.

To bring the South into submission and protect the civil rights of African Americans, a group of radical members of Congress intervened and forced the Lincoln Reconstruction to proceed. Marking the period known as "Radical Reconstruction."

Emancipation was a hallelujah moment for the enslaved, who had never known freedom before. There would be no more scraps from the masters' table for enslaved African Americans to eat, and as a result, they would also be independent. An absolute dream of African Americans was owning their own homes, churches, and schools and having the freedom to move without restriction.

In most cases, they looked at the potential more than anything else. Freedom should not only be enjoyed and received but also lived.

Nevertheless, southern whites began planning to return African Americans to slavery immediately after Congress passed the 13th Amendment. As a result of the Tyranny of the South, African Americans were severely denied their rights and exploited as slave laborers. It was called the Black Codes, which ultimately meant African Americans would continue to be enslaved.

As a critical point here, it is essential to remember that the Reconstruction had the purpose of establishing an equal, bi-racial society following the Civil War. In addition to serving on juries, becoming witnesses in trials, and serving as judges, Reconstruction also gave African Americans a voice in the South's history. The legislation also set the stage for a generation of black politicians within the South's government. As many as 1500 served through the end of the 19th century. Further, Reconstruction helped many Southern states establish free public schools by passing new social legislation.

While Reconstruction was, in some ways, a new war for freedom, it came at a great price. There was much retaliation, hatred, and attack from Southern whites. As white resistance to the bi-racial government increased, national political support decreased.

It became increasingly difficult for African Americans fighting for their freedom to receive federal aid and sympathy from sympathetic northerners. New laws targeted African Americans and criminalized their lives in every state and county. For example, a farm worker could not walk beside a railroad, nor could he speak loudly in the presence of white women in the South. In addition, the sale of crops from African American farms after dark became illegal. Spitting on the sidewalk, being accused of drunkenness, or loitering in public spaces could also result in confinement.

In 1874, the balance of power in Congress completely changed, and the South returned to power. Following the election of Rutherford B. Hayes as President in 1877, the brutal Reconstruction struggle ended. Under his orders, the government removed federal troops from the South, and state governments took over the administration. Fascism was in full swing as many of the laws implemented by Congress that guaranteed equal rights for African Americans was immediately reversed.

As I continue here, I want to stop and explain that this isn't a speech about all the bad things the White Man did to African Americans. It's also not a speech about all the injustices perpetrated by white systems that support and promote racism.

The simple truth is that we know what white men did.

Despite his unwillingness to admit the truth, he knows what he did. However, the opportunity this evening is mine to speak about what we did with the bit of political and social power we had.

This conversation is about Black Excellence. This conversation surrounds the results of three hundred years of enslavement, cruelty, and exploitation, African Americans blessing our country with the Blues. We introduced Gospel music amidst our silent, weary tears and Jazz amidst our subtle yearnings and sullenness. As a result of our royal and radical spirit, Hip Hop was born.

The above mentioned matters have undoubtedly left an indelible mark on U.S. history and helped shape us as a Nation.

I'm talking about real Black Power, not just a balled raised fist or shouting, "Black lives Matter.” In this way, black power is the product that grows from our character, imagination, and courage, and it tells a lot about our identity right now and our roles in the future.

At this moment, the responsibility of leadership falls on us. The brand of leadership that this moment calls for can only be accomplished by our willingness to learn from history. It's time to take notes from organizations of the 1960s, such as the Panthers and Young Lords, and do not divide the movement into factions but grow our arms around the entire planet to fight the infestation of fascism.

Our world's darkest corners hold the seeds of systemic racism, bigotry, and hatred, which must be eradicated and sabotaged. The kind of movement that will positively affect our nation and world won't be found in the schoolhouse, and there will be no evidence of it in the State House. The courthouse will not have it either, and I am sorry to say, neither will the Whitehouse.

In any case, the meeting will occur in your house, the house where you live. Conversations that will change social narratives surrounding inclusion, liberty, and justice must begin in our houses. As we close down ignorance of racial inferiority and disdain for those who look different from us, we will eradicate fascism as well.

Our world will suffer if we fail to stand shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand. If we fail to do so, we will suffer as a nation and contribute to its destruction.