



LOCAL
ENVIRONMENTAL
AGRICULTURE
PROJECT



Notes from the Roanoke Change Academy's Second Discussion of *The Cooking Gene*

Recipe: Christina Nifong discussed the recipe for beaten biscuits on page 116. Some participants had also tried the recipe. The group discussed how much time the recipe required for beating the dough (25 minutes) and the impact this had on the texture of the biscuits. Some people found that this time was a connection to how much time and effort our ancestors had to spend cooking.

Presentation: Mia Coltrane gave a presentation on her experiences researching her genealogy as an African-American. Mia, who grew up in Ohio, Kansas, Germany, and Texas, did an Ancestry DNA test and found that she is 86% African, 13% European, and 1% Indigenous-North American. She was able to determine the parts of West and South Africa her ancestry is from, but would like to be able to narrow it down to regions and tribes.

- Challenges Mia has faced include inaccurate record keeping (including spelling errors and literacy issues), and discrepancies in the ways names were spelled and recorded.
- Mia has been able to trace her mother's side of the family back 4 generations, to about 1878.
- A participant asked how Mia keeps her records organized. Mia recommended keeping physical files and organizing photos on Shutterfly. She also recommended that family wills designate how historical documents will be passed down.
- Mia also shared the importance of recording stories from older generations.

Discussion Questions: The group split into breakout rooms to discuss the following questions. We then returned to the large group to have a brief discussion about each.

- 1) On page 129, Twitty writes that "All I ever wanted was a recipe of who I am." What is your understanding of your own personal recipe?
 - This group discussed the barriers and roadblocks people have come up against, including family unwillingness to discuss the past or disinterest in it and language barriers.
 - Consider: How can we be honest with ourselves and reconcile with surprises that come up?
 - Happy surprises: a friend who grew up in social services found his family's town in Poland. His father had left his wife and children in Poland and run off with the woman who became the man's mother. Despite the drama, the people in the hometown were still delighted to see him.
 - A recipe is not destiny. You take a recipe as it's written and you make it your own.

- 2) A genealogist tells Twitty that genealogy is a hobby for white Americans and “With African American genealogy, it’s more about social justice, regaining a heritage denied.” Does this ring true to you? Is knowing your own genealogy empowering?
- This group discussed visible versus invisible history. White history is fairly visible and easy to access in the U.S.
 - Invisible history can happen to things like changes to landscapes. Locally, Old Lick Cemetery’s 1,100 bodies were moved to Coyner Springs for the 581 on-ramp downtown. This has caused a lot of anger and despair and created roadblocks for people trying to do their own research. Renee Worthen and others are working on identifying more of the bodies that were moved.
 - Genealogy is empowering, but sometimes there are things that you may not wish to go back to or wish to trace.
 - Hollins is doing work reckoning with its history of slavery on an institutional scale.
 - Compare the way white versus black cemeteries are managed by municipalities—this is a phenomenon across the South.
- 3) Twitty discusses how many black families have white ancestors and vice-versa. He asks “would we be better off if we embraced this complexity and dealt with our pain or shame? Would we finally be Americans or Southerners or both if we truly understood how impenetrably connected we are?” How do you respond to these questions?
- This group concluded that it’s better to embrace our similarities despite the pain.
 - Jimmy Carter and the person who brought us Motown share an ancestor.
 - Food can bring us together. We can have the tough conversations while we share a meal.
 - The Henry Louis Gates PBS special (African-Americans: Many Rivers to Cross) features Twitty in the first episode.
 - Remember that happiness and pride can be found in the unexpected connections.
- 4) On page 143, Twitty writes that “the black journey in the Americas is founded on a human sense—the sense of taste. Slavery began with food.” What do you think of this statement?
- Once sugar was discovered, it created a whole industry that was fueled by slavery.
 - Food is so connected to each of us and our families and our history. Cooking can connect us to family and bring up fond memories of relatives. The food embodies people’s history and culture in a profound way.
 - Mark of resilience: enslaved people turned the throwaways they were given into delicacies that people enjoy to this day.
 - Sunday dinners—it’s about the fellowship, not about the food. It’s therapeutic to cook and it’s a way of showing love.
 - Try to get people to talk about the big things.

Resources:

- <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/>
- <https://afroculinaria.com/tag/many-rivers-to-cross/>
- Virginia Room – Roanoke City Main Library - <http://www.virginiaroom.org/>

- <https://africanancestry.com/>
- <https://livingdna.com/>
- <https://www.familysearch.org/en/>
- <https://www.virginiahistory.org/>
- <https://www.ancestry.com>
- <https://www.usa.gov/genealogy>
- <https://www.myheritage.com>
- <http://www.onegreatfamily.com>
- <https://www.legacytree.com>
- <https://www.justanswer.com>
- https://www.eatingwell.com/longform/7888077/migration-meals/?did=606156-20210210&utm_campaign=etg-nonewsubs_relationship-builder&utm_source=eatingwell.com&utm_medium=email&utm_content=021021&cid=606156&mid=50677845967
- <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/03/federal-writers-project/617790/>
- <https://gardenandgun.com/recipe/the-art-of-the-beaten-biscuit/>

[Read about next week's guest, Michael Carter, Jr. here.](#)

Two upcoming events from the Library of Virginia:

CIVIL WAR & EMANCIPATION DAY VIRTUAL EVENT

Enslaved Virginia Ironworker to California Pioneer:

A Conversation with the Descendants of Emanuel Quivers

Thursday, April 1, 2021, from 5:30 PM–6:30 PM, online

Free, but registration required. <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6767659409288456206>

GENEALOGY VIRTUAL WORKSHOP

Private Papers at the Library of Virginia

Friday, April 9, 2021, from 10:00 AM–11:00 AM, online

\$15 (\$10 for Library of Virginia members)

Registration: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/private-papers-at-the-library-of-virginia-tickets-136977329881>