The Cuban Sandwich: A History in Layers

Austina McFarland Jordan
rating scores of visual sources (namely photographs and maps) and her own personal observations from driving equines. General readers without an intimate knowledge of horses or mules (presumably most readers in the 21st century) will particularly benefit from definitions of equine-related terminology found throughout the work.

There is one minor critique of the book. Butler’s enthusiasm for equines is rivaled only by her avid interest in architecture. As a preservationist, she is most in her element in the eighth chapter, “The Buildings Where Equines Lived and Worked.” While thorough and informative, the author regrettably loses sight of the horses and mules at times in discussing their facilities. This criticism, however, does not detract from the quality of the book. Well researched and well written, Charleston Horse Power: Equine Culture in the Palmetto City is a worthwhile contribution to the growing body of animal history literature. Academic libraries, particularly those with Southern history, animal studies, and urban history collections, should consider adding this title to their stacks.

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The Cuban Sandwich: A History in Layers

Andrew T. Huse, Bárbara C. Cruz, & Jeff Houck
Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2022
ISBN: 9780813069388
180 p. $24.95 (Pbk)

The Cuban Sandwich: A History in Layers by Andrew T. Huse, Bárbara C. Cruze, and Jeff Houck from the University of Florida Press is a historical look at the relationship between Spain, Cuba, the United States, and the people who come from those nations. It combines social, economic, and political history as a way for the reader to see the complexity that lies in the Cuban-American experience. At the center of this story is the Cuban sandwich. It is a clever way to draw the reader in and connect them to an essential piece of the American experience.

Each chapter examines the Cuban sandwich, considering a particular element in this complicated story rooted in independence, revolution, and conflicting ideas about the political and economic direction of this island just 90 miles south of Florida. The authors also profile individuals in each chapter who have a connection to the Cuban sandwich and to the theme of the respective chapter. The profiles give the reader a true sense of how this complicated history connects directly to the lives of everyday entrepreneurs and their desire to share a part of their story through food, specifically the Cuban sandwich.

In its seven chapters, the book gives the reader a journey through the geographical locations where this story unfolds—not just across America, but globally. One chapter highlights the story of a Cuban living and working in Ireland and his success bringing the Cuban sandwich to an island nation nearly 7,000 km from Havana. Carlos Arguelles’ story is used as an example of what it means to live in exile as a Cuban: “Others pointed out that the sandwich, ‘despite its name, since the 1960s has been practically only eaten in the geography of exile’” (p. 98).

It is hard to imagine that a single sandwich and its origin story could take up more than a handful of pages. Yet the authors of this book do just the opposite, giving the reader a story of a sandwich, a people, nations, and a desire to feel at home in a place that is not quite home. Food is often a great unifier within the story of humanity. It can connect people who might otherwise be at odds with one another. From its humble beginnings in Cuba and South Florida, to failed attempts by McDonald’s to give its spin on this cultural phenomenon, the Cuban sandwich is an essential artifact in understanding the Cuban-American experience.

Public and academic libraries will find this book a great addition to their collections. While written with an academic voice, the prose is accessible to the general reader, and the book tells an intriguing story for the armchair historian or for the professor looking for supplemental texts to draw their students into the beauty and benefit of historical narrative. It is beneficial for collections seeking to tell the immigrant story and its deep connection to the American story, and in particular, the story of Florida and its profound and sometimes divided ties to its Cuban neighbors less than 400 km away.
Andrew Huse is a curator at the University of South Florida Libraries. Bábara Cruze is a professor of social science education at the University of South Florida. Jeff Houck works in marketing for the Columbia Restaurant Group, having also previously been a food writer.

Austina McFarland Jordan, University of North Georgia

The Foxfire Book of Appalachian Women: Stories of Landscape and Community in the Mountain South

Kami Ahrens, Eds.
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023
ISBN: 9781469670034
268 p. $25.0 (Pbk)

Seldom is the origin story of a book as compelling and inspirational as that of the book itself. The Foxfire Book of Appalachian Women is one of the rare exceptions. In 1966, a high school English teacher from Rabun Gap, Georgia, decided to create a literary magazine focusing on the poetry, stories, and personal accounts of Appalachia. As the popularity of the magazine grew, it was the interviews—first with relatives and neighbors and then branching out to individuals living in the wider region—that caught the imagination of the Foxfire Magazine readers. These stories became the basis of the dozens of books in the Foxfire series. The Foxfire Book of Appalachian Women, edited by Kami Ahrens, mines the Foxfire publications and chooses 21 narratives which Ahrens believes reflect the complex lives of the women interviewed by the Rabun Gap students all those years ago. The book encompasses women of different ages and regional cultures, and each chapter concentrates on a particular individual, with multiple interviews spanning several decades. Stories and mythologies of Appalachian ancestors are woven into the women’s personal narratives, creating a continuous tale of Appalachian history and folklore. Ahrens endeavors to preserve the syntax and dialect of the interviewees, establishing a sense of their specific time and space. Photographs of the subjects and their homes provide the reader with an invaluable glimpse into the rich environment of the region.

Margaret Burrell Norton (1910-1983) from Betty’s Creek, Georgia, was the first to be interviewed by the students in 1967. Norton planted crops as dictated by the signs of the zodiac and the phases of the moon, as was the local custom. She explains what it was like to raise her own food and livestock, which grazed the land without the limitation of fences. She demonstrated to the students how she churned butter, spun wool, and cooked in a traditional wood stove. Perhaps inspired by her involvement with the project, Margaret went on to pen a column in the Foxfire Magazine from 1967 to 1972 which featured her own recipes as well as those of neighboring women. The chapter ends with Margaret’s recipe for carrot pudding or cake.

As the reader moves through the interviews, life in Appalachia begins to take shape, incorporating a mix of past and present mountain life. Another chapter focuses on Mary Carpenter (1912-2002) of Scaly Mountain, North Carolina. Her Southern heritage harkens back to an antebellum lineage of smart, strong, working-class women who led food protests and took a stand against hard times and harsh conditions. She recounts tales of hunger during the Civil War and seeing Halley’s Comet shoot across the mountain skies. She is also not shy about expressing her skepticism about events such as Watergate and the moon landing. Carpenter regales the reader with ghostly Appalachian tales, including a personal experience with a spirit horse that would run up the dirt road at night, stop at her window and stomp loudly, then disappear. Adding to her stories are wonderful photographs, which bring the reader even closer to Carpenter’s mountain life.

A completely different perspective is given by Anna Tutt (1911-2008), an African American woman who was born and raised in Georgia during the Jim Crow era. Her father was a sharecropper. By experiencing this post-Civil War system firsthand, Tutt describes a system in which tenants farmed lands that were not their own, essentially trapping them in a never-ending cycle of oppression and poverty. After her father died, Anna and her siblings scattered until they were finally united to live with their beloved grandmother in Cornelia, Georgia. Tutt’s charismatic personality shines through in her reflections on social dances, church gatherings, dating, and why she never