Books about African American foodways, historical or contemporary, are few and far enough between to make it disappointing that the essays in *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture* seem to have been shoehorned randomly into the covers. I did not get the feeling that these essays were originally written for this volume. The two sections of essays are mismatched; the first, “The History of African and African American Food,” on its origins and culinary history during slavery, is clumsily juxtaposed to section two, “Representations of African American Food,” comprised of essays on cookbooks, literature, and movies. The second section might better have explored specific issues of contemporary African American foodways, such as community garden initiatives or the continuing problem of access to fairly priced foodstuffs in inner-city supermarkets. None of the essays mention prenatal nutrition, low-birth-weight babies, or low rates of breastfeeding by African American mothers. I understand that this one book cannot address all the pressing social issues affecting the African American community, but of those issues directly affected by foodways I would expect some mention of possible connections.

The introduction by the editor, Anne L. Bower, focuses on *Soul Food*, the movie. Given that Psyche Williams-Forson’s book, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs* (2006), has only recently been published, Bower’s largely derivative restating of the Williams-Forson examination of the same film is redundant and not nearly as interesting. It is time that this movie be retired from having to carry the entire weight of scholarly interpretation of contemporary African American foodways.

The first section contains the strongest essay in the entire volume, Anne Yentsch’s archaeological study, “Excavating the South’s African American Food History.” Using studies of faunal remains and primary written sources, Yentsch examines changes in dietary habits by nineteenth-century plantation laborers under slavery and into the early twentieth century by black farmers and sharecroppers. Robert Hall’s “Food Crops, Medicinal Plants, and the Atlantic Slave Trade” describes food crops early African societies ate before and after European introduction of New World crops. I would have expected to see evidence of more recent scholarship in his material.

Sociologist William Whit’s “Soul Food as Cultural Creation” creates as many stereotypes as it seeks to debunk. In several cases the arguments he makes are just plain wrong, and he cites material clearly gathered third and fourth hand rather than up-to-date sources. He allows for no culinary nuance; whites get the best of the pig, slaves get the offal. He seems to be unaware of the wide use of pork offal or innards prepared as souse, or scrapple, or headcheese, or blood sausage, not only by the enslaved but as popular dishes widely served in the South in white homes throughout the nineteenth century. With the exception of the Yentsch essay there are few references to the skills of the enslaved as expert agriculturalists, as skilled husbandmen and women, as gardeners, as hearth cooks.

The volume shifts to cultural and literary interpretations in the second section. In “From Fiction to Foodways: Working at the Intersections of African American Literary and Culinary Studies,” Doris Witt explores the way the concept of soul food emerges in cookbooks and other African American literature. The negative ways young black men feel about examining their own cultural history through foodways is the topic of Psyche Williams-Forson’s “Chicken and Chains: Using African American Foodways to Understand Black Identities.” Three professional black cooks working and writing on their experiences in the nineteenth century are the subjects of Rafia Zafar’s essay, “Recipes for Respect: Black Hospitality Entrepreneurs before World War I.” But instead of providing a conclusion connecting these scattered essays, Bower ends with a bland essay, “Recipes for History: The National Council of Negro Women’s Five Historical Cookbooks” on the evolution of the five cookbooks produced by that group between 1958 and 1998.

This volume might be of limited interest to a reader who has already read widely on African and African American history. But for a new student of African American foodways it would be a poor introduction.

—Leni Sorensen, Researcher, Monticello

*A Workman Is Worthy of His Meat: Food and Colonialism in the Gabon Estuary*  
Jeremy Rich  
Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007  
(France Overseas: Studies in Empire and Decolonization)  
xx + 220 pp. Map. $45.00 (cloth)

This interesting, short book describes the history of food in the coastal cities of Gabon, a region of equatorial Africa.