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[Opening music]

>> [Female 1 voice]: What is Cornpone? Where does it come from? What are the gender, socioeconomic and racial implications? Where do we see cornpone in literature? These are the questions we will be investigating. First, we went around campus to ask students and faculty "what is cornpone?"

>> Student: I think it's like a type of cornbread but maybe it's denser than I think a regular cornbread.

>> [Interviewer]: So what is cornpone?

>> Student: I have no idea.

>> Student: What is cornpone? I have no idea. [laughs]

>> [Interviewer]: Have you ever heard of it?

>> Student: No.

>> [Interviewer]: Do you know what cornbread is?

>> Student: Cornbread, yeah.

>> Student: Cornpoon?

>> [Interviewer]: Cornpone.

>> Student: I have no idea.

>> [Interviewer]: Never heard of it?

>> Student: It's like cornbread, right?

>> Faculty: What is - excuse me?

>> [Interviewer]: Cornpone.

>> Faculty: Cornpone, uhhhh cornbread?

>> [Female 1 voice]: So, what exactly is cornpone? We won't be able to give you a concrete definition of cornpone, however, we can provide you with some definitions of cornpone that are still being contested today.

>> [Female 2 voice]: John T. Edge provides important etymological information about cornpone in his 2007 encyclopedic entries in Foodways entitled "corn" and "cornbread." He writes that "The Indians called their breads suppone and appone, and pone became the term in the South for cornmeal bread". Edge goes on to describe different traditional Appalachian and Southern recipes involving corn as their foundational ingredient, and distinguishes between "early pone breads" and "'Second generation cornbreads ... with additional ingredients, such as flour, baking powder, baking soda, eggs, and buttermilk".

>> [Female 1 voice]: When looking at the recipes throughout time, it becomes clear that by the late 19th century, the word pone became another word for cornbread. White claims, "what cornpone recipes, as opposed to cornbread recipes, all seem to have in common is that they do not use wheat flour at all, just cornmeal, leavening agents other than eggs are rarely used, and no sugar is ever added."

>> [Female 2 voice]: Here are a few recipes of cornpone throughout history. The recipe titled "Egg Pone" is found in The Indian Meal Book published in 1846 by Eliza Leslie. Leslie, an American, addresses a British impoverished audience in order to educate them in the nutritional and practical aspects of adding Indian corn to their diets as a "substitute for potatoes less costly than wheat flour." This recipe contains eggs, milk, and butter and is baked in a tin pan. Mary Hinman Abel's cookbook titled "Practical Sanitary and Economic Cooking" published in 1890 calls for just water and salt. Water can be substituted for milk

which suggests that water was more readily available and cheaper than milk. This recipe can be baked in the oven or fried in pork fat.

>> [Female 1 voice]: According to Marion Flexner's 1949 "Out of Kentucky Kitchens," the necessary tool for making cornpone is a heavy metal utensil. Flexner claims "lightweight metal pans are not as satisfactory as heavy ones" because cornpone is apt to brown too much on the outside before the inside is done. Pyrex and pottery baking dishes are better than tin ones. Flexner insists that the container must be well greased and very hot before the batter is added.

>> [Female 2 voice]: Now that we have an idea of what cornpone consists of, let's take a look at the history of the dish. Mark F. Sohn's Appalachian Home Cooking: History, Culture, and Recipes, published in 2005, provides some historical context of cornpone and how pone became a staple of Appalachia in particular. According to Sohn, "When settlers came to the Appalachian Mountains, they brought Indian maize and native know-how with them, and after clearing the heave, jungle-like growth of timber, they planted corn in narrow valleys and up the sides of the hills. Corn was better adapted to mountain topography than wheat or barley, and over time, settlers learned to use [it] in many ways..".

>> [Female 1 voice]: While Appalachians used corn for varying items, cornpone is noted as "an important staple in Appalachian kitchens" because "it's simple, accessible, and delicious!" Sohn continues to discuss the many variations of cornpone. He asserts, "if the cornpone is thin, it can be poured onto a griddle and fried to make griddle cakes, hoecakes, johnnycakes, or cornmeal pancakes. If the batter is thick, it can be dropped by spoonfuls onto a cookie sheet and baked like drop biscuits. Cooks also drop thick cornbread batter into stews to make dumplings or what mountaineers call cornmeal dodgers. When this same batter is deep fried, it becomes hushpuppies." Other cornbreads are full of surprises including bacon, cheese, chopped peppers, cracklings and more! Cornbreads today can be thick or thin, robust or tender, sweet or savory, rich or light. Through its evolution, the old Native American cornpone has been changed to include flour, baking powder, eggs, bacon grease, butter, vegetable oil, buttermilk, yogurt and sugar.

>> [Female 2 voice]: Marilou Awiakta, a Cherokee Indian herself, provides an intricate historical overview of corn and its specific cultural significance to the Cherokee in her 1993 book Selu: Seeking the Corn Mother's Wisdom. Awiakta examines the aspects of Cherokee storytelling and provides "survival wisdoms and other seed-thoughts." The excerpts from this book display the cultural significance of corn to Native Americans in contrast to the white settlers' differing views of corn. Awiakta tells the origin story of "Selu," Cherokee Indians' term meaning "corn" or "Mother Corn," illuminating corn's sacred nature. The corn turns into the grandmother in the story, which highlights the gendered association of corn as well as the Cherokee Indians' respect for corn. Awiakta puts Cherokee respect for corn in striking contrast with early white American settlers' treatment of corn.

>> [Female 1 voice]: The cultural significance of corn is erased by the white settlers as most viewed corn as just food. Charleston settlers looked down on corn because it was considered a food for the lower class. However, the Northern settlers in Plymouth Rock respected corn because they were impoverished and needed the corn in order to survive.

>> [Female 2 voice]: In "Beating the Biscuits in Appalachia: Race, Class, and Gender Politics of Women Baking Bread," published in the 2005

Cornbread Nation 3, Elizabeth Engelhardt articulates the significance of divisions of class, race, and gender signified by cornbread and biscuits, particularly in the Appalachian South. Engelhardt explains that corn was a native crop and a fundamental ingredient in Appalachian cooking, but it became a strong symbol of Appalachia as not only "stuck in time," but fixed all the way back in the era of colonial America: corn "had become a nostalgic symbol of America". Engelhardt indicates that Northern Progressive Era missionaries thus introduced wheat to Appalachia because they viewed wheat as a more civilized, progressive, and modern crop. Engelhardt's analysis of corn versus wheat in the Appalachian South helps to explain certain class distinctions.

>> [Female 1 voice]: While corn is presented as a staple of the Appalachian diet and has gender and class distinctions, it is also represented in literature throughout history. Mark Twain provides a notable reference to cornpone and insinuates class and a racial commentary on the food in his piece, "Corn-Pone Opinions," an essay discovered after Twain's death.

[music from video]

>> Video soundtrack: When I was a boy of 15, I had a friend whose society was very dear to me because I was forbidden by my mother to partake of it.

>> [Female 1 voice]: He recounts an instance where a young black man is preaching

>> [Video Soundtrack]: He was a gay and impudent and satirical and delightful young black man, a slave. "You tell me where a man gets his corn pone, en I'll tell you what his 'pinions is". In the essay, cornpone becomes an adjective meaning an absence of independent thinking, an opinion formed on the premise of people's desire to conform. Twain indicates class implications when he explains that people are more likely to adopt opinions from "a person of vast consequence" than "a nobody," and when he says that "a man... cannot afford views which might interfere with his bread and butter". He later discusses America's great divide and Americans' employment of cornpone opinions regarding "our late canvass," a reference to the nation's deep divide over the institution of slavery.

>> [Female Voice 2]: According to the book *What Slaves ate: Recollections of African American Foods and Foodways from the Slave Narratives*, published in 2009, Dwight Eissach and Herbert C. Covey explore the conditions in which slaves cooked and fed. Slave women and mothers often cooked over, "open hearth fireplaces" in an area separate from the main plantation. Benny Dillard, a slave from Georgia, remembers the process of cooking food in his slave narrative claiming, "De fireplaces was a heap bigger than they has now, for all de cookin' was done in open fireplaces den. 'Taters and cornpone was roasted in de ashes and most of other victuals was biled in de big old pots what swing on cranes over de coals".

>> [Female 1 voice]: White slave owners did not eat cornpone, instead, they ate "tea and gingerbread" served by slaves. This photo depicts the slave of Mary Washington, George Washington's sister. The slave, who she refers to as "Mammy," is preparing gingerbread over an open hearth fireplace. Although we are not sure, this mirrors the current cultural appropriation of African Americans in Southern cuisine as noted by critic Michael Twitty of Husk chef Sean Brock.

>> [Female 2 voice]: We also see cornpone referenced in James Still's *River of Earth*, where the impoverished Baldridge family constantly lives on the verge of hunger, and the novel's unnamed narrator is forced to confront feelings of shame associated with hunger and the food his family

eats. Although their lunchboxes are often nearly empty, on one particular day at school, the narrator and his sister, Euly, are surprised by the abundant lunch their mother packs.

>> [Female 1 voice]: The narrator says, "Euly and I ate out of a shoe box at noon. We laughed when it was opened, amazed at what was there. Fried guinea thighs and wings, covered with a brown-meal crust. Two yellow tomatoes. A corn pone, and a thumb-sized lump of salt". He goes on to tell, "We had turned our backs on the others before looking in the box, but now we were not ashamed of what we had to eat". Although cornpone is generally considered to be at the bottom of the corn hierarchy, for the Baldrige family, cornpone is an element of pride, a symbol of bounty instead of deficiency and inferiority.

>> [Female 2 voice]: We've explored a number of things in this documentary: gendered, racial, class-based, historical, and cultural implications of cornpone. As you can see, we have yet to come up with a definitive answer to what cornpone actually is. Cornpone means something different to each person and within each context that it is spoken. No one owns the recipe for cornpone. Cornpone is collectively owned and has adapted over time and to cultural contexts.

>> [Female 1 voice]: To Native Americans, corn has immense spiritual significance and was and still is irreplaceable staple in the culinary and literary aspects of Native American culture. Corn, which was given great reverence, was also equated with the feminine spirit and thus demonstrated Native Americans' great respect for women. To African American slaves, cornpone was one of the only available food sources and was viewed as a means to survive and existed in great contrast to the food that slave owners ate. To Appalachians, corn was and is still a robust and hearty staple in the region. Despite the stigma of cornpone as a lowly food, it still maintains presence within the culinary and literary traditions and perseveres in Appalachia and the South today.

[closing music]

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