Jibaritos Y Más: The Impacts of Migration, Gentrification, and Cultural Maintenance on Chicago-Puerto Rican Cuisine

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History at Pomona College

May 1st, 2020
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Acknowledgements

I grew up eating Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine, but I never imagined I would be writing about its history for my senior thesis. Thank you to everyone that helped me make that happen. I want to give a special thank you…

To my parents, who always push me to realize my dreams and have supported me every step of the way.

To April Mayes and Samuel Yamashita, two incredible professors who have inspired me to dive deeper into history that I thought possible, and to find it within myself to finish thesis amid a global pandemic.

To the restaurant owners and workers who gave me their time and their stories. I learned more from them than was printed in any book or database and everyone greeted me with loud laughter and an open heart. I hope to preserve their voices so that they can continue bring this history to life.
Chicago Neighborhood Maps

(Fitzgerald, Peter. “Chicago Neighborhoods Map.” Wikimedia Commons, May 6, 2007.)
Because the Near Northwest Side is not an officially defined area, I created my own map below to show what are generally accepted as its boundaries. The Near North Side is included in purple and the Near Northwest Side is in orange.

I also included many of the Puerto Rican restaurants which fill Chicago and the surrounding suburbs.

Please visit this link to access the full version of the map:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Dj2dAOtYTFQ_Hf3woDQ5uqu0ZsOyiOm&usp=sharing
Introduction: Chicago Puerto Rican Diaspora

I’ve always had a love for Puerto Rican food, but it wasn’t until I found out that the Jibarito, the most iconic and popular Chicago-Puerto Rican dish was actually invented in Chicago that I realized that the history and development of this specific diaspora’s cuisine required a deeper examination and analysis. The Jibarito, a sandwich which uses fried plantains called tostones instead of bread, serves as my entry point into this research. By examining its invention and promulgation throughout Puerto Rican Chicago and, eventually, to other places and cuisines, I have been able to break down the stages of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine as they are created by surrounding social and economic contexts.

While I began my research focused on the jibarito and other specific dishes, my interviews with restaurant owners forced me to expand my scope to include issues of migration, gentrification, diaspora, and self-identification which complicate the lives of Puerto Ricans and their descendants living in Chicago and are often viewed very differently by Puerto Ricans on the island. In these interviews, every restaurant owner brought up the complex issues of serving Puerto Rican food in Chicago, a city which is constantly changing. While early Puerto Rican migrants may have moved into Lincoln Park and Chicago’s Near North Side, waves of gentrification has pushed many Puerto Ricans further west, first to the Near Northwest Side neighborhoods of Humboldt Park, Logan Square, and West Town, and later, even further north and west. Restaurants that serve these communities have utilized different strategies to adapt to these changes with some implementing new dishes which appeal to their new clientele and others doubling down on their self-identification as authentic Puerto Rican restaurants. These varying
strategies reshape Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine to respond to the specific context of Chicago. Whether they accept or reject the pressures of this multicultural urban environment, it impacts the formation of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine as articulated by these restaurants.

In my research, I have delineated three main stages of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine: the original stage which closely replicates Puerto Rican-national cuisine, the second stage which is born from transnational interaction between the city and the island which I call island-facing cuisine, and the third stage in which elements of Puerto Rican cuisine are borrowed and combined with aspects of other cuisines which I call diffused cuisine. These three stages are not discreet and thus a restaurant can fall anywhere on the spectrum between the stages. The stages are both spatially and temporally defined, as gentrification continues to displace Chicago-Puerto Rican communities over time.

Articulation of Cuisine, a Critical Perspective:

Puerto Rican national cuisine was created in the Caribbean as a result of the uneven mixing of Taíno, African, and Spanish cuisines. Based on the first genetic testing study of the island, conducted in 2014, “the average Puerto Rican individual carries 12% Native American, 65% West Eurasian (Mediterranean, Northern European and/or Middle Eastern) and 20% Sub-Saharan African DNA.”¹ This mixed background is a result of centuries of migration to the island and subsequent miscegenation, both through willful travel and family building and through forced migration, enslavement, and extremely unequal power dynamics. This further complicates Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine as the

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offspring of Puerto Rican migrants in Chicago as these people are part of multiple layered diasporic migrations. First, they are the descendants of migrants to the island from multiple Europeans and Africans mixed with Native peoples, and secondly, they are migrants from the island to Chicago, where they form an unique Puerto Rican diaspora. Interestingly, most of the Chicago-Puerto Rican diaspora sees their ancestral homeland as Puerto Rico and orient themselves around the island rather than any of the origins of ancestors who migrated across the Atlantic. References to African, Taino, and Spanish ancestry are usually vaguely centered on the moment of these populations mixing, rather than on the individuals or groups pre-mixing.

Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine is an example of the diasporic interchange between Puerto Rican migrants, Chicago natives, and other agents of *latinidad* who, together, define and are defined by a cuisine that is typically referred to simply as Puerto Rican food, but is also a product of this interchange transnational understandings and different Latino cultures within Chicago. Diasporic cuisine has not been explored as extensively as regional, ethnic, and national cuisines and I hope to add to this scholarship. While this understanding of diaspora is central to an analysis of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine, an analysis of colonialism and the coloniality of power is fundamental to both the underlying factors which caused Puerto Rican migration to the U.S. and Chicago and to the construction of the cuisine itself.

James Farrer argues that the globalization of cuisines is intensifying as we reach a more globalized and international age. The increase in information and migration technology means cuisine can travel more easily than ever before and is very applicable in the Puerto Rican-Chicago diaspora because of the relative ease of movement between
the island and the mainland. Farrer posits that “cuisine is a symbolic communication within a field of social relationships that define what is edible, how it’s cooked, and what constitutes good tastes, or a culinary field. (emphasis mine)”2 This concept of a culinary field is central to an analysis of cuisine because it both acknowledges the role of social, uneven, and evolving understandings of cuisine and expands the analysis from a strict examination of foods to all parts of the culinary experience. Farrer argues that cuisines are deterritorialized from their original homes and are reterritorialized in cosmopolitan culinary contact zones. Restaurants are a prime example of these culinary contact zones in which people of different backgrounds are exposed to deterritorialized and then reterritorialized Puerto Rican cuisine.

Cookbooks and restaurants have issues with replicating institutions of power which are based in coloniality. As Appadurai writes, “restaurants tend to parallel, in their offerings, the dialectic of regional and national logics to be noted in the new cookbooks. The twin developments sustain in each other.”3 The restaurants I examine here are not free from this potential bias and thus must be examined critically to understand the role of power and the influence of the culinary hegemony of European modernity-rationality. The restaurant itself is subject to relations of power which are especially prevalent in the production and consumption at restaurants of the culinary Other. As Farrer argues, restaurants are microcosms of the “highly stratified social order of the global city”4 and thus are deeply impacted by the role and perception of power within their environments.

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While domestic food production is still heavily influenced by these power relations, home cooks are also not as restricted by the pressures of capitalist production to create foods that other people will choose to buy and consume, and thus have more agency in their cooking as far as style. At the same time, they are restricted by the costs of ingredients and tools which limit them based on their socio-economic class. While an analysis of domestic food production is not within the scope of this thesis, it would provide an invaluable insight into the way Chicago-Puerto Ricans cook for themselves. In this case however, I will be examining articulation, through cookbooks, food media, and restaurants, which, according to Appadurai, reveal an effort to “standardize the regime of the kitchen,” “transmit culinary lore,” and “publicize particular traditions” which allow these regimes, lore, and traditions to become canonized in the cuisine of a region, ethnic group, or nation. In this framework, the articulation and textualization of these cuisines is what creates the cuisine in the first place. The articulation is what binds the households making various similar versions of their traditional foods together into one regional, ethnic, national, or diasporic cuisine.

Because I am focusing on restaurants in this research, my analysis will be orientated toward the articulation of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine instead of the way that cuisine is consumed domestically. This focus privileges Puerto Ricans with the power and wealth to start their own restaurants over those that simply cook for themselves and their families. While I concede that this is an issue with my research, I address this by arguing that my analysis is limited to the public economic sphere in which consumption and production are ruled by the forces of capitalism. Because of this, the changes and

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history that I analyze are the articulation of cuisine for a broader audience which serves both insiders and outsiders and cannot be separated from its classed, raced, and gendered implications.
Chapter 2: Puerto Rican National Cuisine

Any attempt to define an authentically Puerto Rican cuisine immediately runs into a problem. Is Puerto Rican cuisine the food that was eaten by the Taínos and other Indigenous American groups before colonization? Is it the food that Europeans ate during the Spanish colonization of the island? It seems that a distinctly Puerto Rican cuisine would have to have developed through the mixing of Indigenous, African, and European cuisines during colonization; the same influences that construct Puerto Rican art, music, and culture today. One way to define this cuisine would be through an examination of culinary texts such as cookbooks and recipes designed to introduce Puerto Rican cuisine to the outside world, what Arjun Appadurai would call a “national cuisine.” Another would be to examine the foods eaten by ordinary Puerto Ricans in their homes both before and after colonization—this is what I will call the “everyday cuisine” of Puerto Ricans. In this chapter I will take both approaches to defining the roots of Puerto Rican cuisine, examining both the definitions proposed by articulators of the cuisine and those that consumed it daily.

In order to define Puerto Rican cuisine, it is important first to understand the political and cultural context of the island which both differentiates it from and makes it similar to the other Caribbean nations. This specific case also requires an additional analysis of the concept of nation in the Context of Puerto Rico. While Puerto Rico is not a sovereign state, the island does have some level of self-governance and control over its own territory. Furthermore, there is a strong sense among Puerto Ricans that they have their own cultural and ethnic identity which is distinct from mainland American identity.
In Benedict Anderson’s book, *Imagined Communities*, he argues that the fundamental element of nationalism are the “imagined political community” in which a community defines itself as a nation in three main ways: in contrast to an “Other,” by possessing sovereignty, and by maintaining a believed fraternal relationship between members of the that community. These understandings of nationalism do not reveal hidden states but rather create nations “where they did not exist.”¹ In the case of Puerto Rico, the only element of the three that is missing is state sovereignty over the island. Definitions of the Other and fraternal relationships between Puerto Ricans on the island are ubiquitous.

Puerto Rico is not a sovereign state because of its continued colonial relationship with the U.S., not because it inherently lacks any of the ingredients of nationhood. People on the island are U.S. citizens but cannot vote for president nor do they pay federal taxes. At the same time, they do have an elected governor and some democracy in the state structure. This is also evident when the island is compared with other Caribbean island nations such as Cuba which was also a former Spanish colony but now exists as a sovereign nation.

Although Puerto Rico is not independent and is still under U.S. political control, the island does exercise a kind of cultural sovereignty over itself. Despite U.S. dominance, Puerto Ricans speak Spanish, have distinct cultural traditions, and share a sense of identity as Puerto Ricans, not as U.S. Americans. While the island exists in a liminal space between colony and statehood, Anderson’s definition of nationhood can still be applied to great effect while analyzing Puerto Rican food. There is very clearly an

¹ Benedict R. Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. (Verso, 1982), 4, 6.
ethnic or regional cuisine in Puerto Rico, but I would argue that there is also what Appadurai describes as a ‘national cuisine’ present in the island, despite the lack of official statehood. While Puerto Rico is politically subordinate to the U.S., culturally the island is independent. For the purposes of this thesis, Puerto Rico is a nation and should be analyzed using theoretical frameworks which assume nationhood.

Traditional narratives about the island claim that modern day Puerto Ricans are a result of interethnic mixing of these three groups: the Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans. While miscegenation was very common in colonial Puerto Rico, there were also obvious and powerful racial hierarchies in which Europeans exploited the labor of Africans, through trans-Atlantic slavery, and native people, through the *economienda* system of forced labor and tribute. Thus, current and popular narratives of Puerto Rico as a haven for racial equality lack critical analyses of the institutions of power which were set up during colonial times.

The first genetic testing study of the island’s population, revealed that “the average Puerto Rican individual [is] 12% Native American, 65% West Eurasian (Mediterranean, Northern European and/or Middle Eastern) and 20% Sub-Saharan African DNA.”\(^2\) This mixed background is a result of centuries of migration to the island and subsequent miscegenation, both through willful travel and family building and through forced migration, enslavement, and extremely unequal power dynamics. As a result, Puerto Rican national cuisine is an unequal mixture of these distinct and overlapping identities and is central to an understanding of the island and its culture in

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the Caribbean. To talk about “Puerto Rican cuisine” is to talk about the cuisine that emerged during the colonial period from the mixing of Taíno, Spanish, and African cuisines. Any cuisine from before that period would instead be Taíno cuisine because Puerto Rico as a nation and a concept did not yet exist.

**Ordinary Puerto Rican Cuisine**

While Cristóbal Colón’s diary of his first landing on the island of Borinquen, later named Puerto Rico, is no longer extant, his travelling companions filled their accounts with the spices, plants, animals, and eating habits of the island’s native population. When Colón claimed Puerto Rico for the Spanish crown, he set in motion the formation of a colonial regime which would shape the island forever. Unfortunately, there are no known written culinary records kept by the Indigenous peoples of Puerto Rico from before colonization. Instead, we must rely on the diaries and journals kept by early explorers to reconstruct what Indigenous peoples and early Puerto Ricans would have eaten. This is despite the obvious issues of bias of the Spanish colonizers and the lack of sufficient data on food in these recordings. Here I will refer to letters sent from Diego Álvarez Chanca, a physician to Cristóbal Colon, to the Town Council of Seville, Spain in 1493 and the first general history of the Puerto Rico, written by Íñigo Abbad y Lasieria, a Spanish Benedictine monk, during his time on the island from 1772 to 1778.

**Ingredients: Flora and Fauna**

Chanca’s description of Caribbean flora, fauna, and culinary practices in Puerto Rico is the first known document of its kind and is particularly problematic because, like
other Spanish colonizers, he saw Indigenous islanders as “brutal” cannibals.\textsuperscript{3} Despite this, his account is useful because it details important aspects of early Puerto Rican cuisine which are not described elsewhere. Because these Spanish explorers believed that they had landed in Asia, they falsely identified many of the plants and spices they saw in the Caribbean as Asian spices that they knew from trade. Chanca claimed to see “ginger,” “nutmeg,” “cinnamon,” and “myrobalans” in Puerto Rico, however all of these are Asian plants and would not have appeared in the Americas until they had been brought there.\textsuperscript{4} Instead, Chanca is overlaying his knowledge of European and Asian plants onto those of the New World. This assumption of expertise over plants that they had never seen before plagues the diaries of early explorers and obscures the information they are attempting to provide.

In another example of Spaniards categorizing indigenous foods using their previously known systems of culinary epistemology, Chanca writes about the starch consumption of Taínos. He writes, “their food consists of bread, made of the roots of a vegetable which is between a tree and a vegetable.”\textsuperscript{5} The food he is describing is yuca, also known as cassava or manioc, a tuber whose root is harvested, ground, cooked, and then can be prepared in a myriad of ways. What he is describing is probably most closely related to \textit{casabe}, frequently referred to as cassava bread. This desire to understand native cuisine by applying a European perspective is representative of the colonial mindset of these explorers. They used European culinary frameworks to categorize native foods.

\textsuperscript{4} Chanca, “Letter of Dr. Chanca,” 308, 309.
\textsuperscript{5} Chanca, “Letter of Dr. Chanca,” 311.
without realizing or readily admitting that the frameworks themselves lacked the capacity to accommodate the distinct foodways of the Americas.\(^6\)

Chanca also describes some of the fauna of the island and notes the lack of large animals raised for consumption. He writes,

> No four-footed animal has ever been seen in this or any of the other islands, except some dogs of various colors, as in our own country, but in shape like large house-dogs; and also some little animals, in color and fur like a rabbit, and the size of a young rabbit, with long tails, and feet like those of a rat; these animals climb up the trees, and many who have tasted them, say they are very good to eat.\(^7\)

This description of fauna reveals that there was little consumption of red meat on the island before Spanish colonists began importing and raising pigs and cows. Instead, Indigenous people ate guinea pigs (as described in the quote above), land crabs, and to the disgust of Chanca, “snakes, and lizards, and spiders, and worms that they find upon the ground; so that, to my fancy, their bestiality is greater than that of any beast upon the face of the earth.”\(^8\) Chanca’s revulsion towards the foodways of Indigenous people foreshadows the impact of European colonial power on Puerto Rican cuisine. The hunting and gathering of reptiles and insects would be actively stopped by later colonists as they forced European culinary paradigms onto native foodways.

Writing in the 18th century, Íñigo Abbad y Lasierra’s depiction of Puerto Rican cuisine reflects the changes that the intervening three centuries of colonialism had on the island. He describes the mixing of culture in the Caribbean by characterizing the

\(^6\) For more discussion of the ways that American foods were evaluated to determine how they fit into Catholic and humoral paradigms of colonial Europe, see Zilkia Janer, “(In)edible Nature,” (2007).

\(^7\) Chanca, “Letter of Dr. Chanca,” 296.

\(^8\) Chanca, “Letter of Dr. Chanca,” 312.
interactions between Spaniards and Indigenous American peoples whom he describes as “Indians.”

The first Spaniards who settled on this island partly corrected the character of the Indians, taking from them at the same time their way of living, feeding and lodging: they left many of the customs of their upbringing with their treatment and change of climate; the same variation is observed in the animals, plants and seeds that are transported from Spain to the Americas, which form the population of this island, has resulted in greater variety of colors and castes.\(^9\)

While he writes that the first Spaniards “corrected” the natives, presumably changing certain cultural and social practices, they were also heavily influenced by them and adapted many aspects of their way of life. The Native peoples lost a part of their original culture as the Spaniards forced them to embrace certain cultural practices and forced labor, and the Spaniards lost some of their original culture as their new territories could not support many traditional Spanish plants and animals. Fernando Ortiz argues that “this culinary fusion has been a process of transculturation, defined as a process that includes the partial loss of a culture, the partial acquisition of another culture, and the eventual creation of a new one.”\(^10\) Transculturation is not only the mixing of two cultures, but is the creation of a new culture by means of piecing together the remnants of multiple cultures.

While both groups gained aspects of the other’s society, over time, they merged their cultures to form a new Caribbean culture, but the power wielded by colonists over the Taínos meant the privileging of Spanish over native paradigms. He describes that the

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\(^9\) “Los primeros españoles que se establecieron en esta isla corrigieron en parte el carácter de los indios, tomando de estos al mismo tiempo el modo de vivir, alimentarse y alojarse: dejaron mucha parte de las costumbres de su educación con su trato y mudanza de clima; la misma variación se observa en los animales, plantas y semillas que se transportan de España á la América, que forman la población de esta isla, ha resultado mayor variedad de colores y castas.” Abbad y Lasierra, Iñigo, and Acosta José J. *Historia Geográfica, Civil Y Natural De La Isla De San Juan Bautista De Puerto-Rico.* (Liberaria de Acosta, 1866), 398.

\(^10\) Janer, Zilkia. “*(In)Edible Nature.*” (Cultural Studies 21, 2007), 397.
plants, animals, and even seeds went through a similar adaptation when they were brought to the Americas. The Caribbean climate made the cultivation of certain Spanish crops, such as wheat, grapes, and olives, impossible. These restrictions forced the colonizers to rely more heavily on indigenous crops and thus Indigenous knowledge of their cultivation and preparation.

At the same time, Spaniards attempted to continue their traditional foodways by cultivating the Spanish plants that would grow in the Caribbean and importing those that would not. As Abbad y Lasierra writes, "the inhabitants of the island of Puerto-Rico for the most part sustain themselves on the fruits of their crops, but they do not stop consuming much flour, wine, oil, spirits, olives, cheeses, hams, and other foreign foods."11 When referring to the inhabitants of the island, he ignores the Indigenous people who would not have eaten these expensive imported foodstuffs. The cultivation and consumption of imported foods drastically changed the cuisine of Puerto Rico.

While the resulting mixture of Indigenous and European (and Asian via European trade) foodways privileged Spanish culinary paradigms, the ease of cultivation and abundance of native flora meant that indigenous plants were consumed more frequently on an everyday basis. This is representative of the culinary hierarchy which puts European cuisines above all others. While Spanish ingredients and foods like wheat, wine, and pork formed the “high” cuisine in Puerto Rico, the ordinary people’s cuisine was based in indigenous foods like fish, crabs, small animals, yuca, and plantains.

11 “Los habitantes de la isla de Puerto-Rico por la mayor parte se alimentan con los frutos de sus cosechas, pero no dejan muchos de gastar harina, vino, aceite, aguardientes, aceitunas, quesos, jamones, y otras víveres extrangeros.”
Abbad y Lasierra, Historia Geográfica, Civil Y Natural, 335.
Abbad y Lasierra argues the reason plantains were (and are) so important to the consumption of Puerto Ricans is that “this beautiful and admirable plant, for all its circumstances, produces a bunch of plantains every year, without requiring any care or work of the laborer.”\(^\text{12}\) Because they grow naturally on the island, plantains are well adapted to the environment and thrive where other starches like wheat wither and die. He later writes, “When green and roasted over embers they serve as bread; when they are already ripe they are eaten raw, fried with butter, in a pot, roasted and in other ways and always taste good.”\(^\text{13}\) Here Abbad y Lasierra again attempts to apply European culinary epistemology to Indigenous foodways by classifying the roasted green plantains as bread. This dish, which today is eaten across the Caribbean and is usually made of twice-fried plantains, is called *tostones* in Puerto Rico. While *tostones* can be used to replace bread, they are made from fruit rather than grain and so cannot actually be bread. By calling the *tostones* “bread,” Abbad y Lasierra is translating it to European cuisine so that it can easily be classified and understood by the Spaniards.

Cooks: Cuisine-Makers

While these early explorers recorded information about the ingredients that they came across in Puerto Rico, they also wrote about who was doing the cooking. The preparation of ingredients to make dishes is an essential part of cuisine making. An analysis of the origins of ordinary Puerto Rican cuisine would be seriously lacking

\(^{12}\) Esta planta hermosa y admirable por todas sus circunstancias, produce todos los años un racimo de plátanos, sin exigir cuidado ni trabajo alguno del labrador.  
Abbad y Lasierra, *Historia Geográfica, Civil Y Natural*, 310. 

\(^{13}\) Estando verdes y asados sobre las ascuas sirven de pan; cuando están ya maduros los comen crudos, fritos con manteca, en la olla, asados y de otras maneras y siempre saben bien.  
Abbad y Lasierra, *Historia Geográfica, Civil Y Natural*, 466.
without discussion of both how food is prepared and who is doing the cooking. While Indigenous Puerto Ricans cooked for themselves using traditional methods, Spaniards during the colonial period delegated the responsibility of domestic work such as cooking to the enslaved Africans. Because the Spaniards had colonial power over the island and actively fought against native foodways, Spanish food held prestige and power over that of the Indigenous people. Additionally, Indigenous people generally would have continued their previous pre-colonial food production; they would cook Taíno or Borinquen\textsuperscript{14} cuisine, a precursor to Puerto Rican cuisine. Puerto Rican cuisine is by definition a combination of the influences that appear during colonialism, the same time period in which the name Puerto Rico becomes the dominant name for the island. Slaves were thus the cooks in charge of creating the newly forming Puerto Rican cuisine, a combination of Taíno, Spanish, and African influences.

The idea of slaves as the creators of the new Puerto Rican cuisine is reinforced by Abbad y Lasierra when he writes about domestic work. He writes of the Spanish and criollo\textsuperscript{15} women, “The work of the women is almost none: they don’t spin fabric nor make stockings, sew very little, spend their lives making cigars and smoking in their hammocks; the house chores are run by the slaves.”\textsuperscript{16} Domestic work was assigned to enslaved Africans, including the preparation and cooking of food. How to prepare these abundant new ingredients was thus frequently left to the discretion of the slaves.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Borinquen} is the Taíno name for the island that the Spanish later named Puerto Rico. \textsuperscript{15}\textit{Criollo} is the name that emerged to signify ethnic Spaniards born in the Americas. They often developed a disdain for Iberian Spaniards because they were treated as inferior due to their American birth. \textsuperscript{16} “El trabajo de las mujeres es casi ninguno: no hilan ni hacen media, cosen muy poco, pasan la vida haciendo cigarros y fumando en las hamacas; las faenas de casa corren por cuenta de las esclavas.” Abbad y Lasierra, \textit{Historia Geográfica, Civil Y Natural}, 403.
Zilkia Janer argues that the people with the “most impact in shaping [Caribbean] cuisine, were primarily Africans.”\textsuperscript{17} These cooks needed to “cater to the taste memories of the masters: diverse European tastes in some cases modified by Indigenous American eating habits” but simultaneously “had a certain level of space for creativity applying what they remembered from African cooking and inventing new recipes.”\textsuperscript{18} The resulting food made by these enslaved peoples is a mixture of these three influences, with Africans cooking for Europeans using ingredients indigenous to America. As Janer writes, “Caribbean cuisine was invented primarily by African cooks who made choices in terms of how to recreate and create dishes and techniques based on a considerably large but new pool of ingredients and a number of imperfectly remembered traditions.”\textsuperscript{19} These enslaved people were the primary cuisine-makers of the new Caribbean cuisine which used indigenous ingredients and was catered to colonizing European tastes. Janer references Fernando Ortiz to argue that “this culinary fusion has been a process of transculturation, defined as a process that includes the partial loss of a culture, the partial acquisition of another culture, and the eventual creation of a new one.”\textsuperscript{20} Transculturation is not only the mixing of two cultures, but is the creation of a new culture by means of piecing together the remnants of multiple cultures.

There are several characteristics of the preparation of Puerto Rican cuisine that developed from the enslaved cooks. Some of these techniques come from the memory of enslaved Africans who recalled the preparation of foods in their homeland. For example,

\textsuperscript{17} Janer argues for a more general definition of “Caribbean cuisine” rather than focusing on any one nation individually. The aspects of Caribbean cuisine which she identifies are prevalent in Puerto Rican cuisine as well as the cuisines of other Spanish speaking Caribbean nations. Janer, “(In)Edible Nature,” 398.
\textsuperscript{18} Janer, “(In)Edible Nature,” 399.
\textsuperscript{19} Janer, “(In)Edible Nature,” 399.
\textsuperscript{20} Janer, “(In)Edible Nature,” 397.
the use of a “grinding stone to make dough from plantains and root vegetables” came from African culinary traditions. The Africam grinding stone was adapted to use with Indigenous American ingredients in what is a distinctly colonial Caribbean culinary technique.²¹

Other characteristic elements of this new cuisine seem to grow out of this mixture of cultures without a clear antecedent in African, European, or Indigenous American cuisines. For example, the use of sofrito, “a paste of ground seasonings,” is representative of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.²² Sofrito is referenced in many of the Puerto Rican cookbooks I examined and was mentioned in several of the interviews I conducted. Its distinctive mix of onions, various pepper, garlic, culantro, and other spices is the defining flavor of Puerto Rican cuisine.

Perhaps the most important culinary technique of Caribbean cuisine is “individual and collective improvisation.”²³ This improvisation can be best understood as part of the “imperfectly remembered traditions” which have been partly lost and mixed up with Spanish and Taíno techniques due to the racially varied milieu of the Caribbean.²⁴ Improvisation emerged directly from the process of inventing a new cuisine with unknown ingredients rather than as an imported technique from any of the influencing cuisines. The lack of Indigenous culinary knowledge among the African cooks meant that they were often inventing their own preparation techniques for ingredients they did not have experience with. Because of this, they had to experiment frequently to find the best ways to prepare these new ingredients and could not rely on previous knowledge as

²² Janer, “(In)Edible Nature,” 400.
²³ Janer, “(In)Edible Nature,” 400.
²⁴ Janer, “(In)Edible Nature,” 400.
much, thus creating an environment where improvisation and individual style was more valuable than consistency.

Coloniality of Power in Cuisine

Puerto Rico emerged as a colonial project, and the remnants of that colonialism continue to impact the politics, culture, and cuisine of the island. As the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano writes, one of the most lasting impacts of colonization is that systems of power and institutions that are set up by colonizers continue to replicate themselves even after the end of official colonization, creating a state of coloniality. Quijano addresses this in three places, highlighting the coloniality of power in the state, capitalism in the market, and Eurocentrism in community and cultural spaces.

Zilkia Janer connects the coloniality of power to food by arguing that this coloniality of power leads to the “subordination of Indigenous and many other culinary knowledges made possible [by] the establishment of the superiority of [European] cuisine as the culinary expression of European modernity-rationality.” Janer argues that the exportation of modernity-rationality to the Americas privileged not only modern science, capitalism, and Eurocentrism, but also legitimized European culinary epistemology and its supporting institutions. This meant the “degradation of Indigenous culinary knowledge” and the standardization of restaurants and cookbooks as sites of cuisine

26 Janer explicitly references French cuisine as the fundamental expression of European culinary epistemology, but for colonial Puerto Rico, Spanish influence was far stronger than French. The French dominance of cuisine is particularly evident in the 20th century with the advent of haute cuisine, an expensive, extravagant, and complicated style of cooking which came to represent the international standard of high-class restaurants. Janer, “(In)Edible Nature,” 393.
making in the Americas. Many of the institutions set up during the colonial period which define and control the articulation of Puerto Rican cuisine continue to replicate colonial power and thus privilege European over African and Taíno culinary epistemologies.

A prime example of the influence of colonialism on cuisine can be found in the introduction to Carmen Aboy Valldejuli’s 1975 cookbook, *Puerto Rican Cookery*. She begins the book by writing, “when I was a girl in Puerto Rico, most of the young women I knew were taught in the Spanish tradition that proper young ladies never performed menial household chores. Cooking was one of those chores.” Valldejuli’s memory is extremely similar to the description given by Abbad y Lasierra on the role of servants two hundred years earlier. Valdejuli’s family had enough wealth to have multiple servants and thus those servants did all of the cooking for her family. She even explicitly attributes this practice to the “Spanish tradition” which shows the way colonial practices and power relationships have continued and replicated themselves on the island for hundreds of years after the end of Spanish rule. In Puerto Rico, this tradition of servants as cooks is rooted in the history of slavery, when enslaved Africans became the main cooks for European plantation owners. This extremely unequal distribution of power meant those with power and wealth relied on their servants or slaves for their food preparation, thus giving them a larger role in the creation of the cuisine. This kind of unequal reproduction of power continues in all formerly colonized nations through the replication of the coloniality of power.

**Puerto Rican “National Cuisine”**

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Arjun Appadurai argues that the creation of a national cuisine is part of a historical process which elevates aspects of regional and ethnic cuisines to the national level. These regional and ethnic cuisines enter conversations and competitions with respect to available resources and access to power, meaning elites have the greatest say in what dishes and techniques will become part of the new national cuisine. The rise of a mobile middle and upper class, especially in a cosmopolitan context, allows for these cuisines to be in direct conversation and to compete for consumers. Appadurai examines the use of cookbooks as part of the standardization and articulation of a national cuisine. By extrapolating from his study of Indian national cuisine, Appadurai argues that cookbooks are a central element of the reification of any national cuisine by constructing and standardizing certain ethnic or regional cuisines as more important, high, or specific to that nation than others. According to Appadurai, national cuisine is created through the interaction of metropolitan cooks who, by defining which of these dishes and regional and ethnic cuisines fit into the conception of the national cuisine, are actively defining that cuisine through their work. This process is heavily dependent on power relations which influence the extent to which regional and ethnic cuisines are represented and which dishes within those cuisines are aggregated to create the national cuisine.

In the case of Puerto Rico, the creation of a national cuisine is thus the work of cookbooks writers and those in power who sought to strengthen the sense of Puerto Rican nationalism through a shared definition of Puerto Rican cuisine. While enslaved Africans had been making the everyday Puerto Rican cuisine for centuries, the creation of a “national cuisine” did not take place until the 19th century, when certain aspects of the everyday cuisine of the island were articulated as part of an explicitly Puerto Rican
national cuisine. This took place as nationalist ideas began to have more and more influence over the island and the jíbaro was christened as the conceptual identity which would tie together all Puerto Ricans.

**Jíbaro nationalism**

A jíbaro is a Puerto Rican peasant and subsistence farmer and the concept has been at the heart of Puerto Rican nationalism since the late 18th century. As Francisco Scarano writes in “The Jíbaro Masquerade,” the self-identification of both peasants and elites as jíbaros was part of the delineation of ethnic space “based on the practice, common in many parts of the world, of elevating a mythologized peasant to the status of a national icon.”

Scarano’s work traces the use of jíbaro self-identification as a mask for elites who sought to portray themselves as members of the masses of ordinary Puerto Ricans. Scarano argues that “the Puerto Rican-as-jíbaro trope assumed a key role in the liberals' struggle to fashion and solidify a Puerto Rican ethnicity, a proto-nation.” The jíbaro trope was used to great effect in Puerto Rican nation building and allowed the diverse ethnic groups that made up the island’s population to unite under one identity, even if it was a false one. It is important to note that the conception of the jíbaro as the symbol of national identity was a way by which elites could infiltrate and control the masses of real peasants by pretending to be part of the same group. This allowed elites to obscure their strategy of stirring nationalist fervor against the Spanish crown behind a jíbaro mask while publicly maintaining their dominant position in society over

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Indigenous and Black Puerto Ricans through their control of the capitalistic means of production.

The *jíbaro* can be critically analyzed to highlight the values of the elites and institutions which cemented it as the symbol of national identity. The *jíbaro* is “the humble, hard-working, fiercely independent and rebellious worker of the land,” a set of attributes which help to build up a sense of pride in this symbolically shared history. At the same time however, he is also specifically of European descent, a construction which excluded the African and Taino roots of the island. The whitening of Puerto Rican symbolic identity mirrors the whitening processes going on throughout Latin America as people realized that being seen as white or closer to white gave them increased access to resources and opportunities from white colonial institutions and the coloniality of power.

Similarly, the *jíbaro* is almost always depicted as male, with the *jíbara* rarely if ever mentioned. If the ancestors of modern-day Puerto Ricans were *jíbaros*, they were undoubtedly also *jíbaras*, so the focus on the male symbol is based entirely on the hierarchy of gender and the devaluing of women in modern (i.e. based in coloniality) society. The *jíbaro* is a symbol of Puerto Rican identity and is pridefully upheld by many Puerto Ricans on the island and in the diaspora, however the origins of the symbol belie an elite nationalization project set up to increase elite domination and value whiteness and masculinity over the mixed African, Taino, and European men and women who historically made up Puerto Rico.

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As Efraín Barradas argues in *Saberes y sabores en México y el Caribe*, the symbolic *jíbaro* served as a focal point for nationalism which in turn generated the need for a national cuisine. Barradas argues that “when a post-colonial community begins to identify itself as a nation, it has to invent a cuisine, not in the way food is prepared but rather in the way it is named and claimed as its own.” He argues that a post-colonial nation needs to create its own cuisine to show that it’s distinct from its colonizer, but that this cuisine need not be distinct in any way besides the way it is articulated. Because national cuisine is defined through its articulation, through cookbooks, recipes, literature, or other means of explaining the food to the cultural or ethnic Other, it does not matter whether the everyday foods consumed within the nation are distinct from other nations; it matters only that they are articulated differently. This is the means by which a nation differentiates itself from its surroundings and one important way its people conceive of themselves as part of the same Andersonian imagined community.

*El Cocinero Puertorriqueño* (1859)

There is no better example of the way the articulation of national cuisine was employed for a nationalist agenda than the oldest known Puerto Rican cookbook, *El Cocinero Puertorriqueño*, first published in 1859. The cookbook is published without a known author and claims to detail the earliest Puerto Rican dishes alongside those of other nations in Latin America and Europe. The book itself highlights the replication of

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colonial power through the dishes that are chosen to represent Puerto Rican cooking in the 19th century. While there are occasional references to other Spanish colonies in the Americas, like Cuba and Cartagena [Colombia], most of the nations mentioned as influences are European. The adjectives Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, German, Polish, Dutch, English, and French, appear as common descriptors throughout the book. This European influence reveals the impact of coloniality on cuisine. While the Spanish brought many of their techniques and ingredients with them, their most lasting effect has been the centrality of European culinary tradition in the articulation of Puerto Rican national cuisine.

There is plenty of evidence within *El Cocinero Puertorriqueño* to argue that it is based in European cuisine rather than the everyday Puerto Rican cuisine eaten by the islanders. However, the most damning evidence for its lack of authentic Puerto Rican recipes can be found in the particularly thorough research done by Barradas on the book. By tracking down early editions of both *El Cocinero Puertorriqueño* and its companion book written three years prior, *El Manual del Cocinero Cubano* (1856), Barradas was able to prove that the two are “one and the same book, the work of Eugenio Coloma y Garcés.” This discovery completely eliminated any evidence in defense of the articulation of Puerto Rican national cuisine as a uniquely home-grown Puerto Rican cuisine. While there are many elements of Puerto Rican national cuisine that come from earlier Taíno and Caribbean cuisines, its articulation as a distinct national cuisine which justifies culinary nationalism is baseless. At the same time, it substantiates Appadurai’s

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argument that the articulation of a national cuisine is based more on the class and power dynamics of its articulators than the cuisine actually eaten within the confines of the nation.

This argument is only strengthened by looking deeper into the cookbook’s recently revealed author, Eugenio Coloma y Garcés. Barrada explains that he was a Spaniard who lived a large part of his life in Cuba who published various manuals, brochures, and almanacs. It is unclear how or why his name was removed from *El Cocinero Puertorriqueño* but the lack of official authorship evokes the same nationalist anonymity as the *jíbaro* masquerade. While Coloma y Garcés does not claim to be a *jíbaro* explicitly, the way the book is mythologized requires his anonymity in order to deny the Spanish influence over cuisine, and, perhaps more importantly, to deny the role of the elite *criollos* in fomenting nationalist sentiments. Whether he puts it on himself or if it is placed on him retroactively, anonymity allows Coloma y Garcés to don the *jíbaro* mask.

By taking advantage of the *jíbaro* masquerade, *El Cocinero Puertorriqueño* is able to circumvent some of the problems that occur when constructing a national cuisine because having a *jíbaro* as the author presupposes that the articulated cuisine is eaten everyday by the people of the nation when in reality it was not. As Barradas points out, about the cookbook, “obviously, it was not the text of the *jibaras*, the peasants of the center of the island, nor the black ones of the coast, but of the bourgeois ladies of the largest urban centers of the country, San Juan and de Ponce.”

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35 Obviamente, no era lectura de las *jíbaras* o campesinas del centro de la isla ni de las negras de la costa, sino de las señoras burguesas de los núcleos urbanos más grandes del país, de San Juan y de Ponce. Barradas, “La Formación Del Nacionalismo,” 275.
Appadurai’s analysis that the consumers of an emerging national cuisine are generally the middle class cooks who have “acquired new-fangled urban notions of authenticity regarding their own natal cuisine” which they are expected to fulfill. These cooks, or their servants, are thus forced to turn to cookbooks to make a nationally recognized cuisine which may have significant differences to what they have eaten their whole lives on the island. Because those in power choose which aspects of the everyday cuisine become part of the newly articulated national cuisine, the elites wearing the jíbaro mask are able to construct the national cuisine while actual jíbaros are left out.

*Jíbaros* and Cuisine

The resulting Puerto Rican national cuisine is a complex mixture of influences through a long historical process. Early Europeans forced Taíno foodways into their own culinary paradigms, then used enslaved Africans as cooks who improvised with indigenous ingredients and the little Indigenous culinary knowledge that was accessible to create dishes that appealed to European gustatory preferences. The dishes that arose from this process were the outcome of uneven power relations between the three groups, an issue that was only exacerbated by its transformation into a national cuisine. As elites masquerading as *jíbaros* were writing cookbooks and defining national cuisine, they picked and chose which elements of Puerto Rican foodways would be included in this process. While for these elites, the specific elements of Puerto Rican national cuisine were not as important as its existence and articulation, the consumption of the national

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cuisine has ensured that these specific elements have retained their position as the symbolic and understood definition of Puerto Rican cuisine.

The *jíbaro* masquerade was part of a specific political agenda which sought to incite nationalism among the masses without revealing that the instigators were elites. As Scarano argues, “the masquerading creoles sought specific advantages without challenging the existing order. In so doing, they unwittingly launched a key metaphor of Puerto Rican identity.” As we will see in the next chapter, the *jíbaro* remains a key symbol of Puerto Rican identity, despite its roots in the manipulation of the common people for the advantage of the island’s elites. These elites used the mask to push a nationalist agenda which included a national cuisine. This process marginalized the same *jíbaro* peasants which they pretended to represent while simultaneously interlacing Puerto Rican nationalism with the *jíbaro* identity.

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Chapter 3: Underpinnings of Migration to Chicago

As the name suggests, Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine is based on the Puerto Rican national cuisine discussed in Chapter 2 but adapted to a Chicago context. It was brought with the Puerto Rican migrants who carried the knowledge, tastes, and ingredients with them in their migration in the United States. In 1898, the U.S. invaded Puerto Rico and claims the island for itself, eventually turning it into a Commonwealth of the U.S. despite a 1914 unanimous vote in favor of independence by Puerto Rican state officials. The U.S. continued a colonial relationship with the island, giving Puerto Ricans born after 1989 U.S. citizenship in 1914 so they can be drafted into World War I. While there was some immigration to the U.S. in the 1920s and 30s, migration became a major driving force in the late 1940s and 1950s.

The first Puerto Ricans arrived in Chicago in the 1930s and came from New York rather than the island. This may explain why this initial small group of mostly did not form a significant ethnic population or enclave in the city. It was not until Operation Bootstrap went into effect in the years following World War II that the first major wave of Puerto Rican migration reached Chicago.

In 1947, the Puerto Rican legislature under the U.S. government passed Operation Bootstrap which eliminated corporate taxes to entice U.S. investors and transform Puerto Rico’s agrarian sugar plantation-based economy into an industrial one based on manufacturing. This change had profound effects on Puerto Rico as agriculture laborers were pushed into manufacturing roles. This meant that jobs were increasingly found in urban centers where people worked in factories rather than the fields. The jíbaro was already a somewhat mythical image of old Puerto Rico, but the industrialization of the
economy contributed greatly to the decline of the jíbaro and the dwindling of subsistence farmer.

At the same time, Puerto Rico was increasingly criticized for its proportionately large population, an attack frequently leveraged against the island which claims that overpopulation the caused poverty across the island. Puerto Rican officials at this time was acutely aware of this stereotype and so attempted to reduce the population covertly through Operation Bootstrap. Luis Muñoz Marín, who would become the first elected governor of Puerto Rico in 1949, said as far back as 1922 that the problem of Puerto Rican poverty can be solved by either “reducing the population or increasing the wealth. .. I believe that reducing the population is the most important, the most practical, and the cheapest.”¹ The focus on overpopulation as the alleged root problem of poverty led to political support of sending migrants to the United States in order to fulfill expectations about what a modern, developed country looked like. The overpopulation issue continued to be debated throughout the 1930s and 1940s and was addressed through government policy in the late 1940s.

At the end of 1947, just seven months after the start of Operation Bootstrap, the Puerto Rican legislature established the Bureau of Employment and Migration in order to support Puerto Ricans searching for work in the United States. While the Bureau’s actions implied the support of emigration from the island, its officially stated position was that of neutrality.

The government of Puerto Rico neither encourages nor discourages the migration of Puerto Rican workmen [sic] to the United States or any foreign country; but it considers its duty to be, in the case of any workman or groups of workmen who wish to move to the Continental United States or to other countries, for the

purpose of securing lucrative employment, to provide the proper guidance with respect to opportunities for employment and the problems of adjustment usually encountered in environments which are ethnologically alien.²

Whether or not the government “encouraged” migration to the U.S., they were facilitating this migration, a strategy which was too convenient for their goals of industrialization and depopulation to be a coincidence. This statement also foreshadows the difficulties that Puerto Ricans would encounter in the United States as “ethnologically alien” despite being citizens of the United States. These obstacles to assimilation are so high that the Puerto Rican government put in place a specific organization to alleviate these issues.

**Official Puerto Rican Culture: Instituto Cultura Puertorriqueña**

While Operation Bootstrap industrialized the Puerto Rican economy, Governor Luis Muñoz Marín launched Operation Serenity to reify aspects of Puerto Rican culture that were central to the creation of a national consciousness. More than anything, this meant a return to the *jíbaro* as the symbolic heart of Puerto Rican identity. In 1955, Operation Serenity saw the creation of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, hereafter referred to as the ICP), a governmental institution with the explicit mission of “investigating, conserving, promoting, and publicizing Puerto Rican culture in all its diversity and complexity.”³ Government support of researching, collecting, and disseminating culture is the most direct form of cultural nationalism possible and the ICP used its influence and institutional power to cement cultural symbols and practices in the national consciousness.

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Especially in its early years, the ICP focused on the traditional history of Puerto Ricans as born of the mixing of the Taínos, the Spaniards, and the Africans, as well as on the symbol of the jíbaro. For the ICP, the jíbaro represented the historic and symbolic identity of the Puerto Rican people, and they utilized this image to foment nationalism, similarly to how the white elites used the ideal in the 18th century and 19th centuries. The ICP even explicitly referenced this previous nationalist campaign in their bimonthly arts and culture magazine. In 1955, they released the article titled “El mito del Jíbaro” (“The Legend of the Jíbaro”) by Tomás Blanco, an examination of the jíbaro and its history. Blanco wrote,

During the eighteenth century —perhaps only after the first half of the century—a recognizable type of peasant, predominantly white, was forged on this island, which, by its character modalities and ways of living, . . . represents a trend of easy adaptation to the various factors of the island environment of the time.  

This early edition of the ICP magazine highlights both the vaguely white identity of the jíbaros and their centrality to their conception of Puerto Rican identity. Blanco’s reference to the rise of the jíbaro as a symbol builds off of this previous campaign while recognizing its importance and persistence in the Puerto Rican zeitgeist. Just a few paragraphs later, he makes an aside to recognize that the history of the jíbaro “has to be useful in glimpse and comprehension of the emotional load that the word jíbaro carries between us” (emphasis mine). Here he again emphasizes the importance of the jíbaro as

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4 “Durante el siglo XVIII —Quizás sólo después de media de la centuria— se va fraguando en esta isla un reconocible tipo de campesino, predominantemente blanco que, por sus modalidades de carácter y maneras de vivir, . . . representa una tendencia de fácil adaptación a los diversos factores del ambiente isleño de la época.”

5 “ha de ser útil en el vislumbre y comprensión de la carga emotiva que la palabra jíbaro llega a tener entre nosotros.”
Blanco, "El mito del Jíbaro,” 5.
not just an idea but a feeling which carries emotional weight. The pride and power of self-identity comes from belief, and that belief is felt more than it is thought. By calling upon the *jíbaro* as the symbol of national identity, the ICP drew on generations of emotional investment. Blanco also used the word “us” [*nosotros*] to further their cultural nationalist stance by encouraging the idea that all Puerto Ricans have the same emotional attachment to the *jíbaro* symbol, eliding differences of race, class, and geography.

Government and cultural institutions utilized the *jíbaro* symbol to define Puerto Rican identity and official understandings of the nation.

Along with reproducing the *jíbaro* as an important symbol in the official government magazine, the ICP also highlighted the importance of Puerto Rican national cuisine and its dishes and ingredients. Later in the same article about the *jíbaro* mythology, Blanco writes about the way *jíbaros* have cultivated and consumed traditional Puerto Rican foods in a section titled “Alimentación y Viveres” [“Diet and Provisions”]. He writes that they had “cultivated foodstuffs: plantains, beans, rice, maize, pumpkin, sweet potato, yuca, and their *casabe* [casaba] bread, which they prefer to maize, freely available the free wealth of wild fruits.”

By defining the cuisine eaten by *jíbaros*, Blanco defined and articulated Puerto Rican national cuisine. Because the ICP has defined the *jíbaro* as the embodiment of Puerto Rican culture, the food that he ate became the apoctheosis of Puerto Rican cuisine. By creating institutions to govern national culture, the Puerto Rican government exercised far more control over cultural nationalism and therefore construct a Puerto Rican identity that everyone must subscribe to.

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6 “Los comestibles de cultivo: plátanos, frijoles, arroz, maíz, calabaza, batata, yuca, —y su pan cazabe, que estiman con preferencia al maíz—; disponían libremente de la gratuita riqueza de las frutas silvestres.” Blanco, “El mito del Jíbaro,” 8.
Another issue of the ICP magazine, published in 1959, opens with an article titled, "Símbolos de Borinquen" (“Puerto Rican Symbols”) by María Teresa Babín. This article is a poetic and romantic rendering of the symbols that define Puerto Rican culture. The very first symbol that Babín discusses is a personified version of pan casabe, bread made from yuca which was traditionally consumed by the Taínos since before contact with the Spanish. She writes,

What do you keep under those withered green leaves whose age-old stain will forever mark us as Puerto Ricans? Will it be casabe bread, the bread kneaded with the calloused hands of time, the bread of the indigenous yuca that another white bread has not been able to banish from our island?7

Through poetic language and imagery, Babín makes three interrelated arguments. First, that Puerto Rican identity is fixed or durable; second that Puerto Rican national cuisine is the real-life manifestation of this identity; and third, that embracing this identity is an inherently anticolonial act. The “age-old stain” of plantain leaves, by which all Puerto Ricans are marked is what Pierre Bourdieu (1992) would describe as a rite of institution by which a person is “consecrated” as a member of a specific community, in this case, as Puerto Rican.8 Once someone is instituted as a member of a group, they cannot be unmarked. This process solidifies Puerto Ricans as a group with shared symbols and understandings because everyone can unify under the official culture articulated by the ICP. By positioning traditional Taíno dishes such as casabe as key symbols of Puerto Rican identity, the ICP contributes to the articulation of the national cuisine by further...

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7 “¿Qué guarda debajo de esas verdes hojas mustias cuya mancha secular llevaremos por siempre los borincanos? ¿Será el pan de Casabe, el pan amasado con las manos callosas del tiempo el pan de la yuca indígena que otro pan blanco no ha podido desterrar de nuestra Isla?” Babín, María Teresa. 1959. "Símbolos de Borinquen." Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, no. 4: (Julio y Septiembre 1959).

cementing it as a fixed cuisine based in ancient tradition which continues today. They also argue that the cuisine itself is anti-colonial because it rejects and survives through multiple colonial empires. Just as white bread was unable to banish *casabe* from the island, white colonizers were unable to destroy the spirit and identity of the Puerto Rican people.

This final argument, that Puerto Rican identity is inherently anti-colonial, is an essential part of the ICP’s identity construction. By combining anti-colonial sentiment and traditional Puerto Rican symbols and imagery, the resulting culture is directly counter to the colonial powers which have dominated the island for hundreds of years. This creates a sense of pride which is available to all Puerto Ricans that just by existing and practicing Puerto Rican culture, they are taking action against these horribly oppressive systems of power. While this is true to some extent, it completely ignores the heterogeneity of Puerto Rican society. While many aspects of Puerto Rican culture are drawn from Indigenous and African roots, many also come from the colonizers themselves. Many Puerto Ricans are descendants of these colonizers who enslaved, murdered, and exploited people under these colonial regimes. The issue with the ICP’s conceptualization of Puerto Rico is that it encourages everyone to draw upon these anti-colonial symbols without regard to the history which oppressed huge portions of society to the direct benefit of others. This articulation of Puerto Rican erased Indigenous and Black oppression by replacing it with a superficial celebration of these peoples and their contributions to this broad blanket of unifying culture. The nationalist culture walks a fine line between incorporating Indigenous and Black people and minimizing them to a shallow symbol of the island’s history.
They came to make money
rest, laugh, and yawn with
contented bellies
and dream in half-truths.

Llegaron a piés, en barco,
por trén y avión busando
la luz de esperanza sombrada,
encantados con cuentos jámás realizados.
Llegaron a trabajar ha pesár
de un invierno eterno, la apatía,
la indiferencia y la pobresa
invadiendo una vida migrante,
extranjera y orgullosa.
Llegaron para enterrár
los sueños en concreto
y derramár lagrimas
en cuentas desconocidas.

[They arrived on foot, by boat,
by train and airplane looking
for hope's sheltering light,
enchanted by never-realized stories.
They arrived to work weighed down
by an eternal winter, the apathy, indifference, and poverty
that invades a migrant life,
foreign and proud.
They arrived to bury
their dreams in concrete
and to spill tears
in unknown stories.]

They came in freshly cut green bunches
that ripened in dark basements
with linoleum floors, plastic covers
figurines and worn-out photographs
of youthful weddings.
They worked overtime for half pay
to put on layaway their son's
wheelchair and silver braces.
Becoming strangers to each other's faces,
they fulfilled the myth of countless others.

They departed.
Paying extra-flight baggage
for 30 years of arriving
while dreams flew by
on clouds where sky
It was ten degrees below freezing as I walked from my car to Cafe Central one early January morning, but inside I was immediately greeted and with a cafecito and a warm smile. This was my first restaurant interview and my first time visiting Cafe Central, the oldest standing Puerto Rican restaurant in Chicago. Like every Chicago Puerto Rican restaurant, I visited, the atmosphere was vibrant. Even at eight in the morning Salsa music was playing loudly and the sheer quantity of paintings, newspaper articles, and photographs of happy customers made the small empty building feel almost full.

As I drank my coffee at the counter, chatted with the waitress, Maura Colon, and waited for the current owner, Laura Cruz, to appear, a laminated 2002 article hanging on the wall caught my eye. It was an interview from The Reader with the original owner, Cruz’s grandfather-in-law who founded the restaurant in 1952. He started the restaurant because he realized that the influx of single Puerto Rican men had “bemoaned the fact that they were going to be forced to get married if they ever wanted to eat well again.”

This idea that the restaurant served men who came to Chicago for work but who missed the cuisine of the island was mirrored by the current owner. She said,

“Years ago, when the Puerto Rican men, because of the poverty and work and all that, they came out here to look for work in the factories, and they had to leave

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1 David Hernandez, dubbed the unofficial poet laureate of Chicago, uses poetry to narrate the hopes, dreams, and realities of Puerto Rican migrants. He was born on the island but moved to Chicago as a baby and grew up in the Humboldt Park neighborhood.

Hernandez, David. *Elvis is Dead But at Least He Isn’t Gaining Any Weight.* (Self-published, 1995), 15.

their wives and their children behind. So, they had no one to cook for them while they worked. That’s the whole basis of how the restaurant [Cafe Central] started. So then the food, they tried to replicate all the foods that they would eat at home. So that’s why the menu is kinda—a lot. Cuz most of the restaurants nowadays, they try to keep it a little simple.\(^3\)

While this oral history minimizes the existence and role of women in the migration process, it also highlights the importance of restaurants in anchoring a migrant community. Because male migrants did not have wives to cook for them (and they usually did not cook themselves because of gendered domestic roles), restaurants like Cafe Central fulfilled this role. While the restaurant moved just over a mile north in 1968, it was a key element in cementing the Puerto Rican community in West Town, where the restaurant currently sits.

But why is it that Cafe Central, a venerable restaurant in the Puerto Rican-Chicago Community, is so far from most other Puerto Rican restaurants in the city which are centered around Humboldt Park? Did Puerto Ricans have to travel across the city to eat at this restaurant? This question is best answered by examining the earliest waves of migration from the island to Chicago and tracing the path of the migrants who would have sat at this very counter to eat *mofongo, bistec con tostones, cuchifritos*, and drink *café*.

**Migration to Chicago: De/reterritorialization and Diaspora**

The first large migration of Puerto Ricans from the island to Chicago took place at the end of the 1940s as migrants responded to the promise of jobs as contract laborers in steel production factories. Companies like the Chicago Hardware Foundry, the United

\(^3\) Cafe Central Interview, Laura Cruz and Maura Colon, interview by author, Chicago, January 8, 2020.
States Steel company, and the National Tube Company hired workers directly from the island to the Midwest with promises of good wages and consistent work.\(^4\) The people that migrated for these jobs were men who faced job shortages on the island because Operation Bootstrap’s industrialization process reduced rural employment opportunities. At the same time, women migrated for both economic and reproductive work, playing a key role in creating the beginnings of the Puerto Rican-Chicago diaspora.

Because Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens, they were able to take advantage of job opportunities on the mainland more easily than immigrants. Unfortunately, employers took advantage of these migrant workers instead, paying them far less than they initially promised. The migrants were poor, especially by U.S. standards, and had difficulty surviving on their pay which “seldom amounted to more than a dollar a day.”\(^5\) They migrated mostly by plane, carrying with them just what could fit in their suitcases. their memories, dreams, tastes, and social relationships which continued to connect them to the island. While many of these initial migrants would go on to return to Puerto Rico, those that stayed would eventually bring over family members, partners, and spouses.

The migration of Puerto Ricans from the island was marked not only by a physical departure of people, but also of culture and cuisine. While migrants may have carried spices or ingredients with them, they also brought taste memories and palates that shaped the way they cooked and ate in their new homes. As Pierre Bourdieu (1985) argues, palate, or “taste” is “a manifestation of class habitus, the dispositions, acquired over a lifetime of socialization, through which we make judgements about desirable and

\(^5\) Cruz, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 9.
undesirable activities and objects.”⁶ way people decide what tastes good to them is part of their socialization and their embodied habitus, not through some objective analysis of flavor. This is what James Farrer would describe as a key element of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of cuisine.

Farrer argues that the globalization of cuisines is intensifying as we reach a more globalized and international age. The increase in information and migration technology means cuisine can travel more easily than ever before and this is very applicable in the Puerto Rican-Chicago diaspora because of the relative ease of movement between the island and the mainland. Farrer posits that “cuisine is a symbolic communication within a field of social relationships that define what is edible, how it’s cooked, and what constitutes good tastes, or a culinary field. (emphasis mine)”⁷ This concept of a culinary field is central to an analysis of cuisine because it both acknowledges the role of social, uneven, and evolving understandings of cuisine and expands the analysis from a strict examination of foods to all parts of the culinary experience. Farrer argues that cuisines are deterritorialized from their original homes and are reterritorialized in places where that cuisine is reconstructed, what he calls “cosmopolitan culinary contact zones.”⁸ Restaurants are a prime example of these culinary contact zones in which people of different backgrounds are exposed to deterritorialized and then reterritorialized Puerto Rican cuisine. Thus, Puerto Ricans arriving in Chicago carried with them deterritorialized gustatory and culinary preferences which were then reterritorialized in the cosmopolitan city of Chicago.

In reterritorializing cuisine, the context of the new locale has an impact on the way this cuisine manifests. In this case, Puerto Rican migrants faced a number of challenges settling in Chicago. While Chicago is a diverse city, it also has a history of segregation which continues to divide the city today. In 1927 a rule was added to the Realtor Code of Ethics which "forbade realtors to introduce members of any race or nationality" into neighborhoods that would lower the area’s property values. While this was ruled unconstitutional in 1948 by the U.S. Supreme Court, Chicago continues de facto racial segregation even today. Racial housing discrimination affected Puerto Ricans very differently based on their perceived race. Because Puerto Ricans can have any combination of Spanish, Taíno, and African ancestors, they could be seen as Black, White, or Latinx by landlords. Because of this, darker skinned Puerto Ricans experienced intense racism while white Puerto Ricans could be exempt from it. One early migrant, Raul Cardona explains “I’m taller and lighter than the average Puerto Rican, and whites would think I was Polish, Italian, or some other European.”

Because of this housing discrimination, darker skinned Puerto Ricans were more likely to live in African American neighborhoods than their white skinned counterparts who had the option to live in other neighborhoods.

Between 1955 and 1970, close to a third of the Puerto Ricans on the island migrated or circulated to the United States, a significant portion of which moved to Chicago. This coincides with the first large Puerto Rican community in Chicago which began in Lincoln Park in the early 1950s, a neighborhood on Chicago’s northside by the

lake. At first, rents were relatively cheap and Puerto Rican families were able to rent a place or share with another family. After just a few years however, gentrification began to displace these families in Lincoln Park. As young, white, middle-class professionals moved into the neighborhood, new developments pushed up the price of rent and forced low-income Puerto Rican families to move further west. In the late 1950s, thousands of Puerto Ricans moved out of Lincoln Park and the Near North Side to the Near Northwest Side, made up of West Town, Bucktown, Wicker Park and Humboldt Park.\(^{12}\) Puerto Ricans also began moving north as traditionally white Southside neighborhoods began a process of white flight to avoid Black Chicagoans moving in.\(^{13}\) Puerto Ricans also fled newly Black Southside neighborhoods both because of prejudice against African Americans and because of the poverty left behind as their affluent neighbors moved to the suburbs. Cafe Central would have been one of the Puerto Rican institutions which was already established in West Town and greatly helped to anchor the community in this area.

While there is significant overlap between Puerto Rican culture in Chicago and on the island, the context which surrounds people in each of these places significantly impacts the way that it is expressed. Because the Chicago-Puerto Rican diaspora is made up of people from the island and their descendants, it is based on island culture, but is adapted to Chicago.

Stuart Hall wrote in his 2005 book, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, that cultural identity is constantly being reshaped by representations which are controlled by what Michele Foucault describes as a “power/knowledge” regime. These representations

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\(^{12}\) Cruz, *Puerto Rican Chicago*, 9.

\(^{13}\) Cruz, *City of Dreams*, 75.
connect people and bind them in an imagined community (similar to the concept defined by Benedict Anderson) and are realized in two distinct ways. The first way, which is often utilized uncritically to draw connections and create historical continuity, is that the representations connect people through shared culture and a collective concept of self with a common history and ancestors; this viewpoint assumes that there is a true identity which can be found and embodied by the members of the community.

The second way, which is particularly useful for understanding identity in diaspora, is that although there are similarities, there are also critical points of difference “which constitute ‘what we really are’, or rather; - since history has intervened - ‘what we have become.’”14 This viewpoint acknowledges the ruptures that take place over time which separate diasporic communities from their regional and ethnic origins while simultaneously maintaining the homeward-facing orientation and connections to place which characterize diasporic communities. Ruptures take place in the space between the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of cuisine. In between these, cuisine changes and develops new characteristics which incorporate both aspects of the originating culture and its new context. This view is especially important when considering how the multiple migrations of the Puerto Rican diaspora in Chicago create multiple ruptures in cultural identity. Navigating these ruptures is a common issue for diasporic communities as they struggle to preserve the cultural identity which they arrived with while simultaneously assimilating to the culture of their new residence.

**Puerto Rican-Chicago Cuisine: Origins**

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Cafe Central provides an interesting look into how Puerto Rican-Chicago cuisine has changed over time. I categorize the food served at Cafe Central to be part of the first wave of Puerto Rican-Chicago Cuisine, one that is based almost entirely on what was eaten in Puerto Rico in the 1950s and 1960s. Of course, despite their attempts to keep things the same, they have also implemented new dishes, such as the jibarito, but for the most part they try their best to adhere to their original dishes, such as asopao, mofongo, arroz con pollo, alcapurrias, lechón, and other Puerto Rican classics. This is despite the fact that Puerto Rican cuisine on the island is constantly changing. The rupture between Puerto Rican cuisine and Puerto Rican-Chicago cuisine becomes evident here.

While speaking on how things have changed since Cafe Central’s opening almost 70 years ago, Cruz noted that “Puerto Rican food now is different over there [on the island], they have changed. It’s not what it used to be.” She went on to say, “We’re the classic, this place is old-school.” She went on to explain that although other restaurants are changing and updating their menus, Cafe Central is like a time capsule of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine. While there have been some significant changes to the Cafe Central menu, they do pride themselves on their “old-school” aesthetic which has kept them open all of these years.

While keeping things the same is working for them, Cruz does not condemn other restaurants that are being creative or lose with the rules of Puerto Rican cuisine. She explained that “it’s fun” to go to those restaurants and even that, it feels like they’re more Puerto Rican than us, right Maura? They feel more Puerto Rican because like Maura said, we’re old-school and the newer places, they’re trying new things. And in Puerto Rico they’re doing really different things, and now all the food is all fusion.16

15 Cafe Central Interview, January 08, 2020.
16 Cafe Central Interview, January 8, 2020.
Cafe Central, one of the oldest representations of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine, is committed to keeping this old form of the cuisine alive in the city. This preservation reveals the flexibility and adaptations that are constantly taking place in Puerto Rican restaurants. While Cafe Central attempts to stand still, cuisine continues to move and change around it. The distance and separation between the two allow for this rupture to take place.

Wilo Benet is a contemporary Puerto Rican celebrity chef who published a cookbook on Puerto Rican cuisine in 2007 which demonstrates the culinary changes taking place on the island. It is written in Spanish, intended for a mostly Puerto Rican audience, and presents Puerto Rican contemporary cuisine in a way that respects the traditional techniques but also suggests new easier methods. Benet includes “non-traditional alcapurrias,” a “version of mofongo that is not traditional,” a method for pasteles which “many purists would reject,” and other recipes which ”vary somewhat from their original versions.”17 While he includes traditional dishes, he often prepares them in a new way while claiming to protect their authenticity and integrity. While English-language cookbooks are often part of the articulation of national cuisine, this book is in Spanish and shows that Benet has no issues with reinterpreting and changing the national cuisine. His restaurants combine “traditional Puerto Rican ingredients with Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Spanish, Italian, French and Arab influences,” highlighting his willingness to experiment and surprise his audience.18

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Benet makes a point to discuss elements of Puerto Rican national cuisine which reflect the language of the ICP. Just after mentioning the *pan casabe* of the Taínos, he writes that “it is common in *criollo* speech to hear ‘the mark of plantain’ said to refer to the typical physical traits of the local population.”[^19] The phrasing is too similar to that of the ICP to be a coincidence. Benet is applying the nationalistic sentiments which uphold Puerto Rican national cuisine but reframing them in his more experimental style. He seeks to break away from national cuisine by pointing out the culinary developments happening on the island. He writes,

> Another influence is the variant of street food vendors, from frying kiosks in coastal areas and the most modern stainless-steel carts – with offers ranging from steak sandwiches to *tripletas* – to vans serving bulky "*mixtas*" ... or even charcoal roasted chickens on the sides of the roads. All this remains an integral part of Puerto Rican gastronomy.[^20]

Benet points out that these smaller producers are ignored by Puerto Rican national cuisine despite their powerful influence on what foods are eaten on the island. He is attempting to deconstruct the nationalistic view which attempts to fix culture and cuisine in the past in order to start pushing toward a new future.

In Chicago, Cafe Central attempts to recreate the dishes that they have always made, without worrying about being true to contemporary Puerto Rican cuisine. Through this distinction, the restaurant carves out the basis of Puerto Rican-Chicago cuisine; it is a cuisine based in Puerto Rican national cuisine, but broken off from it, and although there

[^19]: “Es común en el habla criolla escuchar decir ‘la mancha de plátano’ para aludir a los rasgos físicos típicos de la población local.”

[^20]: “Otra influencia es la variante de los vendedores de comida de la calle, desde los quioscos de frituras en las áreas costeras y los más modernos carritos de acero inoxidable – con ofertas que van desde los sándwiches de bistec has las tripletas– hasta las camionetas que sirven las voluminosas “mixtas” ... o incluso los pollos rostizados al carbón en los costados de las carreteras. Todo ello permanece como parte integral de la gastronomía puertorriqueña.”
is a large amount of back-and-forth migration between the island and Chicago, there are also many aspects of culture in each place that are relatively unknown in the other.

Cafe Central owner Laura Cruz said that she sometimes gets Puerto Ricans from the island in her restaurant who have entirely different expectations about what Puerto Rican food is. She says,

We have people come in and, you know they’re Puerto Rican, and they’ll say ‘this doesn’t taste Puerto Rican. Who are you cooking for?’ And I say ‘we’re cooking for the people who come here who like this kind of food.’

Cruz is entirely cognizant of the fact that her food is a traditional version of Puerto Rican cuisine that is becoming harder to find on the island. This is because she serves Puerto Rican national cuisine, a cuisine which Cafe Central has helped to define and build community around in Chicago since the 1950s. The Puerto Rican-Chicago diaspora may have started by making the same foods as in their homeland, but while the homeland changed, Chicago restaurants like Cafe Central did not. They continued to make the classic dishes which their clients loved. They started by serving foods which triggered the taste memories of the migrants, but as time went on, they began to serve those same dishes to their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, many of whom may never have been to the island. These younger generations eat a version of Puerto Rican cuisine which is increasingly unavailable to the younger generations born on the island. The first stage of Puerto Rican-Chicago cuisine is like a splinter off of Puerto Rican national cuisine, an unchanged and nostalgic version of what Puerto Rican food as it was in the 1950s.

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21 Cafe Central Interview, January 8, 2020.
Cruz does not often visit the island and does not attempt to bring island cuisine to Chicago as much as she attempts to continue to replicate the Chicago version of the cuisine that made her restaurant famous. This makes Cafe Central one of the only restaurants still producing the first version of this authentic Puerto Rican-Chicago cuisine. Other restaurants have adapted more and more to the changes both on the island and Chicago which have moved them away from this original version. These changes include different ingredients, different clientele, gentrification, and changing taste habitus among their clients. For example, while Cafe Central was still serving *cuchifritos* in the early 2000s, there is not enough demand today because many Chicagoans are squeamish about eating the snout and ears of the pig. Capitalist supply and demand limit the ability of Puerto Rican-Chicago restaurants, but nothing has had as strong of an impact on early Puerto-Rican-Chicago cuisine as the unrelenting force of gentrification.
Chapter 5: Stage Two—Island-Facing Cuisine

As the cab went back to Division Street . . . we drove again through what had become a tropical West Indies slum, resembling the parts of San Juan that stand beside lagoons, which bubble and smell like stewing tripe. There was the same crushed plaster, smashed glass, garbage in the streets, the same rude amateur blue chalk lettering in the shops.1

As gentrification continued to push Puerto Ricans further West, Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine moved with them. Humboldt Park soon became the new epicenter for Puerto Ricans in Chicago, with the large park of the same name unofficially housing celebrations, sporting events, and informal restaurants which were often little more than a simple cart or the trunk of a car.2 Today, Puerto Rican flags are so common it’s as if every other car had one hanging off the back as they drive by, as if every barren wall is plastered top to bottom with murals representing the island and flooded with symbols of Puerto Rican identity. Humboldt Park has managed to shelter some of its occupants from the constant force of gentrification, but this has not come without intense struggle.

When Victor ‘Papa’ García moved into Humboldt Park as a baby the neighborhood was entirely different from what it is today. It was the 1960s and Puerto Ricans were just beginning to turn Humboldt Park from a Polish and Ukrainian neighborhood into a Puerto Rican one. As he got older, he got into the restaurant business, eventually starting three restaurants, including Papa’s Cache Sabroso on

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1 This historical fiction account of the changes in Humboldt Park are from the perspective of a White writer who has seen the neighborhood change as Ukrainian and Polish people moved out and Puerto Ricans moved in. The smell of “stewing tripe” is a particularly telling detail which speaks to the role of cuisine demarcating place through cuisine, a process which plays a role in segregating the city while unifying the Puerto Rican ethnic community.


2 Ponce Restaurant owner Marisel Melendez’s mother sold Puerto Rican food from the trunk of her car in Humboldt Park before helping her daughter open a restaurant.
Division street which is still open today. Back then, the neighborhood was a lot more dangerous, with drugs, gangs, and crime often being controlling much of the area. Papa explains how he’s personally experienced these changes:

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It’s really exciting man cuz we’ve experienced so many things that happened with this block since I’ve been here almost fifty years in this neighborhood. I’ve seen everything grow here man. Car flipping, all the bad things that happened, but right now things are changing, I mean drastically now. When I got here there was a gang member, I mean, gang group next to me and it was killing my business. We shut it down and now it’s real happy, you know what I mean? And I love it. It’s my life. And after this I’ll give it to my kids . . . it’s for them.
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The 1960s was a period of extreme change in Humboldt Park, as Polish and Ukrainian residents left and Puerto Ricans moved in, the neighborhood fell into poverty and neglect. While locals like Papa struggled to create a safe environment for their families and businesses, the city government and police discriminated violently against the Puerto Ricans that tried to build a home here.

The change that Papa saw in the Humboldt Park community was fueled by migration both from the island and other parts of the city. While the neighborhood was 99% white in 1960, by 1970, it was 43% Latino, with Puerto Ricans making up two thirds of that percentage. This massive change was the result of gentrification elsewhere in the city, with thousands of Puerto Ricans vacating areas with high rents in favor of a

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4 Although U.S. definitions of race define Latino as an ethnicity rather than a race, the city of Chicago often defines Latinos as their own group within racial demographics instead of subdividing them into racial groups. This is in large part because Latinos are able to self-identify on these surveys and they do not identify themselves as White, Black, or Indigenous American because they feel distinct from these groups. Of course, they would also see themselves as distinct from other Latin American nationals, but this categorization is more accurate to them. A prime example is this community policing document published in Chicago which uses Latino as a racial category.
Cruz, City of Dreams, 75.
Puerto Rican community out west. At the same time, the Puerto Rican population was skyrocketing, from 32,371 in the 1960 Census to 78,963 in 1970, a growth of almost two hundred and fifty percent. The Humboldt Park neighborhood would go on to become the center of Puerto Rican life in Chicago, with Division Street at its heart. It is home to community centers, restaurants, elementary schools and a high school, all of which are deeply integrated into the community and focused on Puerto Rican identity.

Division Street Uprising

Until the mid-1960s, Puerto Ricans were represented in mainstream media as a model minority in Chicago. This was in large part a result of the work of the Bureau of Employment and Migration, now dubbed the Migration Division under the Department of Labor. They sought to promulgate a positive image of Puerto Ricans as hard workers who lacked strong political ties in order to present them as unthreatening to the status quo of Chicago. Part of their work was to ensure that “media portraits of hardworking Puerto Rican families assured city residents that they were not black.” This went a long way to assuage white fears and protect Puerto Ricans from some of the discrimination that terrorized Black communities. That all came crashing down on June 12, 1966 when a white officer shot Aracelis Baez, a young Puerto Rican man, after attempting to arrest him during the festivities following the city’s first Puerto Rican Day Parade. When the police brought in attack dogs to disperse the crowds, the situation exploded into a three-day riot later called the Division Street Uprising. Puerto Ricans flooded the streets,

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burning police cars, throwing rocks and bottles at police, and razing white businesses in the Humboldt Park neighborhood.

This resistance to police brutality was called a riot by city officials and the media and representing Puerto Ricans as hardworking docile people was no longer a possibility. The Division Street Uprising marked an important transition for the Puerto Rican community by forcing the city to address the poverty and lack of opportunity prevalent in the community. City officials met with community leaders to ensure this kind of mass action and organization from going any further. It not only radicalized Puerto Ricans and politicized their struggle, but also gave them more access to power as the city was forced to recognize and address the community. The Division Street uprising lead directly to the formation of various Puerto Rican community organizations such as the Spanish Action Committee of Chicago, the Latin American Defense Organization, and, most famously, the Young Lords. In the aftermath of the uprising, the Young Lords grew out of local street gangs to become a radical human rights and community organization which based much of its ideology off of the Black Panther Party. They took an anticolonial stance against the United States and fought for liberation for all “Third World” (colonized) people around the world, including fighting for Puerto Rican independence.

Since the late 1960s, the site of the uprising, Humboldt Park, has been home to the largest Puerto Rican community in the city and the cultural capital of the Puerto Rican community throughout the Midwest. Despite this, the Near Northwest Side still struggled to resist the forces of gentrification. As they were pushed further west in the 1990s, Puerto Ricans were again forced out of their communities.8 As costs went up, the

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Near Northwest Side was in danger of losing its Puerto Rican identity. This time, the much larger, more powerful, and more unified Puerto Rican community was able to take a stronger stand and hold onto some aspect of their community. The strengthened sense of community in the face of struggle that was spurred on by the Division Street Uprising has helped to unify the Puerto Rican community in Chicago as well as connect them to liberation struggles which include the island.

The anticolonial mentality which helped to fuel the Division Street Uprising has also manifested in Puerto Rican-Chicagoans’ political views on the status of the island. While leaders in the U.S.-Puerto Rican diaspora have traditionally supported independence struggles more than those on the island, “in particular, Puerto Ricans in Chicago have earned the reputation of being more nationalistic than their compatriots on the Island and elsewhere in the United States.”

Jorge Duany draws from anthropologist Ana Yolanda Ramos-Zayas assertion that “the leaders of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community have often resorted to a nationalist discourse to further multiple ideological and material agendas,” to argue that Puerto Ricans in Chicago use an anticolonial framework in their organization to an extent unseen on the island. He says,

Puerto Rican nationalism in Chicago combines an anticolonial ideology with cultural practices that do not rely exclusively on Hispanic traditions. Instead, it combats the public representation of a criminalised and marginalised community, by asserting its hybrid identity

This anticolonial ideology highlights the transnational framework prevalent in the Chicago-Puerto Rican hybrid community. Similarly to the Black Freedom Struggle

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leaders who they drew from, they saw the freedom of the island as integral to their own freedom within the United States. These transnational understandings combined with circular migration patterns between Chicago and the island have maintained lines of continuity between the two places.

Further Gentrification: Moving North and West

While the politicization of Puerto Rican-Chicago struggles contributed to their organization against many issues, gentrification continued to torment the community. While Humboldt Park was the center of the Puerto Rican-Chicago community in the 1970s, by the 1980s and 1990s, “gentrification pushed Puerto Ricans farther west, leaving Division Street as the symbolic heart of the community.”12 As late as the 1990 census, “more than 60 percent of Chicago’s Puerto Rican population resided in West Town, Humboldt Park, and Logan Square, the community areas composing the city’s fabled Near Northwest Side,”13 but the Near Northwest Side is a vaguely defined area with flexible northern and western boundaries. In the 1990s, Puerto Ricans were pushed north and west, again seeking the lower costs of living available slightly farther from the city’s center.

The audience or consumers of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine has expanded alongside the geographic dispersal of restaurants due to gentrification. As Puerto Ricans are pushed around the city, their restaurants follow them, but recently are increasingly sustained by their new gentrifying clients. Betsy Gonzalez grew up in Logan Square and explained the changes she’s seen in the neighborhood over the years,

I grew up in Humbol—at Logan Square since I was nine... when I moved here I was all [white] American, to eat Latino, I had to go to Division Street, and beyond Division, like Damen, Ashland. There you ate Latin food, not here. So it’s changing again to where it was when I first moved here.14

Gonzalez saw the Puerto Ricans move in as they were pushed west in two different waves. She mentions Ashland as one of the main places to get Puerto Rican food before the first wave of gentrification which is just two blocks from Cafe Central. Then people were pushed into Humboldt Park and other Near Northwest Side neighborhoods, and now they are being pushed even further out. The intercity migration of Puerto Ricans flowed both in and out, leaving restaurants like hers in an area rapidly becoming a majority White neighborhood.

‘Papa’ García also commented on this process of serving a new, whiter clientele. He explained that what he has seen from his restaurant on Division Street that the neighborhood was Puerto Rican for years but,

it’s changing now, they’re putting up some condos in the buildings and stuff. People are moving out, some they can’t afford, their taxes are going higher and everybody else is moving in. I mean to me, listen, whoever walks in that door, they’re green. Keep them coming in. Keep them coming in.15

Papa García does not worry too much about who his clients are, as long as they continue to patronize his business, but he also has noticed the recent changes in the neighborhood. The much larger Puerto Rican community of the 1990s has made this a much slower process, but it continues, nonetheless.

14 Me crié en Humbol—en Logan Square desde que tenía nueve años... cuando yo me mudé aquí era todo [blanco] americano, para comer Latino, había que más a la Division Street, y más allá de Division, como la Damen, la Ashland. Allá se comía comida Latina, no acá. So it’s changing again to where it was when I first moved here.
Jibaritos y Mas Interview, Yeliza Rivera and Betsy Gonzalez, Chicago, January 15, 2020.
15 Papa’s Cache Sabroso Interview, January 2020.
Transnational Cognitive Space and Island-Facing Cuisine

Circular migration is a fact of life for many Puerto Ricans on the island and in Chicago; most of the restaurant owners I interviewed travel to the island frequently and bring back ideas for dishes to serve. Marisel Melendez, the owner of Ponce Restaurant in the Hermosa neighborhood said that she tries “to bring stuff back from home so that when you come to Ponce you have that experience of being in Puerto Rico at one of their restaurants. We travel a lot out there to get ideas.”\(^{16}\) Similarly, Yeliza Rivera, the owner of Jibaritos y Más in Logan Square said,

We get a lot of ideas, many ideas from Puerto Rico and to bring them back . . . [We] give it our touch, but yes, we eat on the street all the time, in different towns, we go to try some here, we try some there . . . both to compare how to improve and to look for new ideas.\(^{17}\)

These restaurants are part of the second and most prevalent stage of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine, one which, in contrast to the first stage, remains in conversation with the culinary developments taking place on the island. By continuing to take ideas from the island, they are keeping up with contemporary changes in cuisine and bringing over dishes and techniques which may not have previously been available in Chicago.

Producers of island-facing cuisine attempt to reconnect and continue the continuity of cuisine across borders where it has been ruptured by migration. These restaurants tend to be located in the Near Northwest Side or in the neighborhoods to the north and west, as gentrification continues to push them away. The restaurants which I will directly discuss

\(^{16}\) Ponce Restaurant Interview, January 14, 2020.

\(^{17}\) “Agarramos muchas ideas, muchas ideas de Puerto Rico y para traerlas . . . darle nuestra toque, pero si, comemos todo el tiempo en la calle, en pueblos diferentes, vamos a probar aquí, probamos allá . . . tanto para comparar cómo mejorar y buscar nueva ideas.”

in this thesis that fall into the category of island-facing cuisine are: Papa’s Cache Sabroso, Ponce Restaurant, Jibaritos y Más, La Bomba, Nellie’s, and Borinquen.

Jorge Duany describes Puerto Rican migration as a “pendulous flow, rather than a permanent, irrevocable, one-way relocation of people,” a process which led him to define the phenomenon of vaivén. Vaivén is a contraction of ‘va y ven,’ meaning go and come, which other scholars have described as a circular migration between the island and mainland. Duany argues that traditional understandings of migration assume that a migrant is uprooted from their homeland and then settles into life in their destination, failing to capture the extent of the back and forth movement in the Puerto Rican diaspora. Gina Pérez highlights the importance of using a transnational perspective to understand this movement of people. Any analysis that focuses solely on the island or the mainland would be seriously lacking because although these are geographically distinct places, migrants simultaneously participate in the “economic, social, and political life [and I would add culinary and gustatory changes] of both the society from which they came and their new community of residence.” This is not to say that the island and the mainland should be thought of as being part of the same cultural space, just that they are deeply interconnected.

While not everyone in the Chicago diaspora participates directly in circular migration to the island, the impact of this movement is felt throughout the community. Sarah J. Mahler and Patricia R. Pessar have described this as living within a “transnational cognitive space” in which people see themselves as transnational actors

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and members of a transnational community whether or not they are actively transcending national borders. Because this is a tenuous position to hold, especially for later Chicago-born Puerto Ricans who may never have visited the island, many feel the pressure to prove their position by ascribing heavily to cultural rituals which mark them as Puerto Rican. In this delicate position, Chicago-born Puerto Ricans often embrace “national negotiations, relationality, and hybridity in their families and social networks” in a way that their migrant grandparents may not have. Similarly, “emotional, cultural, and economic connections between island and mainland” are often strengthened by the “participation of second- and third-generation Puerto Ricans” who actively attempt to preserve and maintain the culture of the island. The development of a transnational mindset is key to the second stage of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine.

The transnational cognitive space draws from the iconography of Puerto Rican nationalist identity in its construction. Symbols like the jíbaro and the Puerto Rican flag are constant reminders of the transnational identity held in place by these restaurants. There is not a single island-facing Puerto Rican restaurant in the city that does not have at least one large Puerto Rican flag hanging up or painted across a large wall, and for most restaurants, that is only the starting place. Puerto Rican art, Taino imagery, murals of jíbaros, traditional instruments, tropical landscapes, thatched roofing, cooking instruments, replicas of fruits, paintings of famous Puerto Ricans, and even a full hammock attached to the wall are all common decorations in these restaurants. Some restaurants, like Papa’s Cache Sabroso and Cocina Boricua also have sports memorabilia.

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21 Duany, Puerto Rican Nation on the Move, 58.
for Chicago Bulls, Cubs, White Sox, and Blackhawks. These represent the shared cultural space that these restaurants fulfill. Visiting these spaces is not a journey to the island, but they stake a claim to a uniquely hybrid mixing of Chicago and Puerto Rican iconographies.

One particularly powerful example of this is Cocina Boricua’s invented mascot, the Air Jíbaro. This is an image of a jíbaro in the jumping position the Bull’s legend Michael Jordan takes on his Air Jordan brand shoes. The Air Jíbaro is replete with his traditional pava, or straw hat, and extends his arm for a mango just out of reach. This comically interpolated image is the epitome of the hybrid Chicago-Puerto Rican culture which fuels island-facing cuisine. The image of the jíbaro’s pava has been “deterritorialized and transnationalized” as a “visual icon of Puerto Ricanness in the United States” and here is locally reterritorialized to Chicago through the reference to Michael Jordan. This highlights the importance of Puerto Rican culture, or, at the very least, symbols of Puerto Rican culture which allow Puerto Ricans in Chicago to construct and maintain this hybrid identity.

Cultural Maintenance

Cuisine plays a central role in the way Puerto Rican culture is passed down, especially for the descendants that are getting further from the island with each subsequent generation. In an interview between Pérez and a Puerto Rican mother living in Chicago who immigrated as a child, the mother discussed how she feeds her children, saying,

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I’m Puerto Rican, I eat rice and beans and pasteles and I eat all the Puerto Rican food. I don’t eat meat loafs, or once in a while I’ll make a lasagna for them. But that’s a treat — that’s something different. But no los he criado—no quiero que sean muy americanos [I didn’t raise them — I don’t want them to be too American].

This sets up a clear distinction between the way that Puerto Ricans born on the island and those born in Chicago interact with Puerto Rican culture. Those from the island may have more leeway to choose how they connect with their Puerto Rican heritage because that part of their identity is permanent and assumed to be intrinsic to who they are. In contrast, those born in Chicago must constantly make active efforts to demonstrate their hybrid cultural heritage. This is despite the fact that Puerto Ricans on the island do not always eat Puerto Rican national cuisine and “are just as likely to eat hamburgers and pizza as arroz con gandules.”

Pérez points out that “food, music, and language are all politicized activities” Chicago born Puerto Ricans who “often worry that they are not ‘Puerto Rican enough.’”

It seems that the “age-old stain” which the ICP described as “forever marking” all Puerto Ricans does not always extend to their descendants on the mainland. Instead, these Chicagoans must continuously undergo institutionalized rituals to gain (or perhaps earn) their Puerto Rican mark. As Pierre Bourdieu writes, the “act of institution” signifies an identity by expressing it to the one instituted and imposes that identity by expressing it to everyone else. Food is one of the most tangible aspects of culture because it is constantly produced and consumed by everyone, is always present, and is unique to a specific cultural group. In Chicago, the food that someone eats plays a major role in both

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26 Pérez, The Near Northwest Side Story, 166.
28 Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, 121.
signifying that identity to the consumer and expressing that identity to everyone who witnesses this act of institution. Therefore, the consumption of Puerto Rican national and Puerto Rican-Chicago cuisines is an important aspect for Chicago-born Puerto Ricans’ acceptance to the community and acceptance of their own Puerto Rican identity.

For the later generations of Puerto Rican-Chicagoans, sharing in the cuisine of their ancestral homeland helps them feel closer to the community. Yeliza Rivera, one of the owners of Jibaritos y Más, explains that, “many people who were born here are thirty or forty years old and have never visited the island. And this is like . . . the closest thing they have. The food, the plantain with the tostones with the rice.”

Cuisine is an accessible means of connecting to culture when traveling to the island or learning the language is out of reach. By tapping into the rich history of cuisine, these Chicagoans can place themselves in the historical culinary narrative which extends all the way back to pre-colonial times.

The cuisine plays a distinct but similar role for direct migrants who long for the foods which they ate in their homeland. As Betsy Gonzalez, the other owner of Jibaritos y Más describes, her mother immigrated from the island and misses the cuisine she left behind. She said, “my mom, she came here and I think she’s been back [to the island] once, and that was for a funeral, that’s it. So to her [the food] is comforting, comforting.”

Cuisine provides comfort for migrants who miss their homeland while providing their descendants insight into what that ancestral homeland is like. Shared cuisine provides both groups with a symbolic connection to the island. Because the role

29 “Mucha gente que han nacido aquí tienen treinta o cuarenta años y nunca han visitado la isla. Y esto es como . . . como lo más cerca que tienen. La comida, el plátano con los tostones con el arroz.”

Jibaritos y Mas Interview, January 15, 2020.

of cuisine in this connection is symbolic, the foods need not be exact replicas of the foods eaten on the island, it is enough that they are island-facing as long as the diaspora accepts them as a symbolic representation.

_Paseo Boricua_

In 1996, the Puerto Rican community set out to protect the cultural legacy of Humboldt Park by establishing an Empowerment Zone Development Plan which would promote new investment in the neighborhood. This was a program by the federal government which sought to “revitalize distressed neighborhoods” throughout the United States.31 Community organizers worked together to acquire the federal funds which would restart investment in the area and reclaim it for Chicago-Puerto Ricans. The section of Division Street between Western and California Avenues was demarcated as _Paseo Boricua_ (Puerto Rican Promenade) and massive fifty-nine-foot-tall, forty-five ton, Puerto Rican flags made of painted steel were installed. These flags act as gateways which arch over the street to represent the entrance to a distinct cultural space and the Puerto Rican diaspora’s claim on this part of the city.

_Paseo Boricua_ is home to a host of institutions, art installations, and businesses which tend to represent the island by “deploying cultural symbols that inscribe a vision of Puerto Rico that is rural, folkloric, and nostalgic.”32 This representation is in line with the official Puerto Rican culture that is supported by the ICP. The romanticization of the island and island life is deeply embedded in the Chicago-Puerto Rican diaspora, especially among second and third generation Puerto Ricans who may not have ever

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32 Pérez, _The Near Northwest Side Story_, 198.
visited the island and thus their conceptions are based on these romanticizations. This narrative is “consistently reinforced by cultural centers, community leaders, and middle-class islanders visiting Chicago, who portray Puerto Rico as an oasis from the supposed chaos and danger of urban life”\textsuperscript{33} The number and strength of institutions supporting this view also encourages return or circular migration to the island because Puerto Ricans in Chicago have a nostalgic view of the island, even if they have never been there. \textit{Paseo Boricua} also symbolizes the defiance of gentrification, a concept intimately tied to the anticolonial rhetoric of the ICP. The colonization of Puerto Rico led to many people being forced to leave their homes to migrate to the U.S., similarly, the capitalistic forces which now impact their communities also threaten to displace them from their current home.

Cindy Espinosa was born in Puerto Rico and spent many years of her life traveling between the island and Chicago. Today, she is the owner of Nellie’s, a Puerto Rican restaurant on \textit{Paseo Boricua} which serves both Puerto Rican and American breakfast and brunch. For her, having a restaurant on Division Street is about more than selling food, it’s a commitment to growing and supporting the community. She said that Chicago is so diverse, but you know you can come to Paseo Boricua, . . . [and] you feel that this is your community. So even though I don’t live in this community, I feel like this is my community and this is a community that I will defend, and I will do whatever it is for the people in this community.\textsuperscript{34} Espinosa volunteers her time and kitchen for the community, cooking breakfast and lunch for a local daycare and Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School, a Puerto Rican high school founded in 1972 directly to support the growing community. She chose to open a

\textsuperscript{33} Pérez, \textit{The Near Northwest Side Story}, 167.
\textsuperscript{34} Nellie’s Restaurant Interview, Cindy Espinosa, interview by author, Chicago, January 15, 2020.
A restaurant in *Paseo Boricua* in order to be close to the heart of the community and to play a role in its preservation, saying,

> It’s always been really important to be in this neighborhood. Obviously with all the changes throughout the city and where Puerto Ricans were being displaced, this is the last epicenter of the Puerto Rican community. . . I think people are trying to hold onto this little space. It’s hard.\(^{35}\)

Nellie’s is one of the institutions attempting to hold onto the Puerto Rican identity of Humboldt Park. Espinosa struggles with the unrelenting pressures of gentrification which has deeply affected the community. Her work highlights the work of cuisine making as a form of cultural symbolism which marks *Paseo Boricua* as a Puerto Rican enclave. She chose to open a restaurant because the Puerto Rican identity is so deeply entrenched in the community, and by creating a culinary institution she is continuing to fortify this identity.

This kind of investment into Humboldt Park and its commitment to Puerto Rican symbolism is a strategy to protect the cultural significance of the neighborhood. There are constant references to *jíbaros*, the historical and ethnic roots of the island, the flag, and rural symbolism, which mirror the official culture of the island promoted by the ICP. This representation relies heavily on the anticolonial framing of Puerto Rican culture to combat gentrification. This anti-gentrification symbolism mirrors anticolonial symbolism of the ICP by drawing from the same shared history of resistance. Puerto Ricans did not want their imprint on Humboldt Park to be erased as it was in Lincoln Park. *Paseo Boricua* became a symbol of this resistance to gentrification with the colossal steel flags embodying the indestructible roots of the community.

\(^{35}\) Nellie’s Restaurant Interview, January 15, 2020.
Despite the investment in *Paseo Boricua*, gentrification continues in the area. While the local government fought for low-income housing and resisted new developments, the area is close to a city train station and is very desirable to developers. Resistance has “delayed displacement of the remaining [Puerto Rican] concentration, *Paseo Boricua* is surrounded by gentrification.”\(^{36}\) The rising rent costs have continued to gentrify the area and move Puerto Ricans further west and north. However, the Puerto Rican-Chicago diaspora of the Near Northwest Side in the 1990s was much more cohesive and powerful than that of the Near North Side in the 1950s.

The Jibarito

![Jibarito](image)

*(A Jibarito de Lechón [Roasted Pork Jibarito] from Jibaritos y Más)*\(^{37}\)

Just a few years before Puerto Ricans celebrated the creation of *Paseo Boricua*, a restaurant owner and chef within the newly inaugurated zone invented a dish that would

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change Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine forever. Juan “Pete” Figueroa of Humboldt Park’s Borinquen Restaurant invented the Jibarito in 1996, undoubtedly the most iconic and archetypal dish in Chicago-Puerto Rican island-facing cuisine. The “sandwich” is made from meat (originally steak but could also be pork, chicken, or seafood), tomato, American cheese, lettuce, onions, and perhaps most importantly, features tostones (double fried green plantains) slathered with garlic in lieu of bread.

Figueroa was inspired to create the sandwich after reading a newspaper article about a “sandwich de platano” at El Plátano Loco, a novelty restaurant on the island which makes anything and everything out of tostones. While other plantain-as-bread sandwiches were already popular in the Caribbean, such as the Haitian Shakabana or the Venezuelen Patacón Maracucho, these have experienced mostly local success and the Jibarito was developed independently of them. Figueroa created the name through the by taking the diminutive version of “jibaro” which is used to connect the new invention to the cultural and culinary history of the island. This sandwich is the embodiment of island-facing Puerto Rican Chicago cuisine because it is the reimagining of traditional and contemporary Puerto Rican techniques and ingredients, to create an entirely new dish.

Of the restaurant owners I interviewed, most of them admitted that the Jibarito is the most popular item on their menus and it is a personal favorite among the owners as well. While it started at Borinquen, the sandwich was quickly adopted across Chicago. Through my research I have examined over twenty restaurants and have yet to find an explicitly Puerto Rican restaurant in Chicago which does not serve a Jibarito sandwich.

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Several restaurant owners provided their own insights into why this sandwich is such a pillar of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine.

The most obvious answer, and the one you would hear from anyone who has ever tried it is simple; it is incredibly delicious. But the Jibarito’s centrality to Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine is about more than taste alone. As Laura Cruz of Cafe Central explains, “When people ask me, ‘Why is the Jibarito so popular?’ I say, ‘because it’s a traditional bistec con tostones [steak with fried green plantain] done in a sandwich.’ That’s like a meat-and-potatoes but in a sandwich.”39 Similarly, Yeliza Rivera of Jibaritos y Más explains that “in addition to the novelty of a plantain sandwich, if you start to look, the steak with tostones is very popular in Puerto Rico, and in the Jibarito you eat the plate of steak with tostones. You eat it in just a sandwich.”40 Ponce Restaurant owner, Marisel Melendez agreed, saying, “For me it’s like bistec con tostones but you just have it all together in one hand.”41 Because the Jibarito is essentially a remake of a more traditional bistec con tostones dish, it retains the symbolic connection to the island that is needed in island-facing Puerto Rican-Chicago Cuisine while still innovating and adapting to the Chicago context.

The Jibarito is made of ingredients that are familiar and nostalgic to a Puerto Rican audience while simultaneously comfortable enough for a U.S. audience to appeal to their gustatory preferences. The Jibarito is like a ‘Greatest Hits’ of Puerto Rican cuisine for a U.S. audience. The tostones are plantains prepared using traditional Puerto Rican.

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39 Cafe Central Interview, January 8, 2020.
40 Además de la novedad de un sandwich con plátano, y si te pones a ver el bistec con tostones es muy popular en Puerto Rico, y en el jibarito te comes el plato de bistec con tostones. Te lo comes en solo un sandwich.
Jibaritos y Mas Interview, January 15, 2020.
41 Ponce Restaurant Interview, January 14, 2020.
Rican techniques while the cuts of steak, pork, and chicken are common in many U.S. dishes. While the meats are prepared using Puerto Rican techniques and spices, especially sofrito, these would not alienate a U.S. crowd who had never had them before. As Cindy Espinosa of Nellie’s Restaurant explained, sofrito is an easy to understand seasoning, “it’s got garlic, and onions, peppers—nothing strange that you wouldn’t know, but these really good vegetables that are put together to form this base that makes Puerto Rican food.”

The Jibarito does not have tripe, cows feet, or pigs snout—ingredients that are found in many traditional Puerto Rican dishes but would be far less appealing to most U.S. consumers. The design of the sandwich makes it accessible even to even the least adventurous consumers.

Calling the Jibarito a sandwich makes it more appealing and acceptable to outsiders; U.S. consumers are comfortable with the sandwich as a concept and thus can easily understand a Jibarito. This is even though the defining feature of a sandwich, bread, is not present in the Jibarito. The label of sandwich is in itself a means of appealing to the gustatory preferences of a U.S. audience by attempting to place the dish in a well-known food category. This process directly mirrors the way the Spanish explorers categorized tostones, saying, “when green and roasted over embers they serve as bread.”

Because European culinary epistemologies largely define U.S. cuisine, it is unsurprising that the same translation takes place hundreds of years later. Plantains are difficult for U.S. and European cuisines to categorize because they are both fruits and starches, an uncommon combination outside of the Americas. This categorization

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42 Nellie’s Restaurant Interview, January 15, 2020.
43 “Estando verdes y asados sobre las ascuas sirven de pan” Abbad y Lasierra, Historia Geográfica, Civil Y Natural, 466.
highlights both the European roots of U.S. culinary epistemology and the failure of this epistemology to understand Indigenous American foodways without fundamentally changing them to fit within their predefined categories.

The Jibarito represents the inclusive culinary politics of island-facing cuisine which combines U.S. and Puerto Rican gustatory preferences. James Farrer argues that the ability of a cuisine to travel requires a “mix of inclusiveness and culinary boundary maintenance” in order for a cuisine to spread without changing too much from its own notions of “authenticity.” The Jibarito is perfectly positioned in the island to mainland culinary dialectic such that it can appeal to both cuisines simultaneously.

As Arjun Appadurai argues, cookbooks are often about exile/nostalgia and are often made for migrants abroad. By applying James Farrer’s concept of the culinary field, restaurants can similarly be seen as actors or articulators of this exile/nostalgia paradigm which connects Puerto Rican migrants and their descendants symbolically to their ancestral homeland while also providing consumers and food media with an “authentic” foreign food experience that fits into local tastes and thus is easily digested by people not connected to PR national culinary tradition. The Jibarito expertly toes this line and thus is the most iconic example of this deterritorialized cuisine that, in its reterritorialization, picks up new elements from Chicago’s cosmopolitan and multicultural environment and thus forms part of the Chicago-Puerto Rican diasporic cuisine. Through this lens, the jibarito can be seen as fulfilling the desires for Puerto Rican-ness of both insiders and outsiders in a format that is easy to digest for both groups. This is particularly important when considering that many of the Chicagoans who claim a Puerto Rican identity have

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never been to the island and thus their only concept of Puerto Rican cuisine is that of the Chicago-Puerto Rican diaspora. For these people, the exile/nostalgia paradigm is not about their own experience, but of a symbolic and communal memory for the island.

The Jibarito has been so impactful in Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine that it has largely defined Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine since its invention. Nellie’s owner Cindy Espinosa pointed out that “it’s already expected that if it’s a [Chicago] Puerto Rican restaurant you’re going to have a Jibarito” on the menu. Restaurants like Cafe Central started serving the sandwich “when people started asking for them . . . once it became popular, and on California [a street in Humboldt Park] there was a lot of demand and the restaurants all said ok we gotta [start serving it], you know.” showing that even long-standing veterans of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine were unable to resist its popularity and economic incentives offered by the new dish.

Papa’s Cache Sabroso’s owner was just a few blocks away when it was invented and played a key role in developing the dish. Papa explained,

I don’t want to take credit for it, but there was a restaurant right down the street from me on California, they made it, and I walked over there and I spoke to the owner and I asked “Can I make this?” and he said “sure.” And I perfected it. I got lucky I was on Chicago’s Best for the jibarito sandwich.

While the invention can be traced directly to Figueroa and his Borinquen restaurant, many restaurants put their own spin on it, expanding it from just one dish to a broader category of sandwich which can be made in many ways. Restaurants like Jibaritos y Más and The Jibarito Stop have even named themselves after the dish in order to advertise themselves. Many of the restaurant owners expressed gratitude to Figueroa for his

46 Cafe Central Interview, January 8, 2020.
47 Papa’s Cache Sabroso Interview, January 2020.
invention and for allowing everyone in the community to take advantage of it, but each of them also claimed to have their own version, secret recipe, or alternative ingredients which made theirs the best Jibarito in the city.

Corruption of Tradition

The greatest mystery of the Jibarito is not how it became popular, but why this popularity has not spread back to the island. While the sandwich continues to spread in the United States, first in nearby Midwestern cities and New York City, and then continuing to spread throughout the U.S. Puerto Rican diaspora, there are almost no restaurants serving the sandwich on the island. Older generation diaspora members and direct migrants talked about how “they don’t make Jibaritos in Puerto Rico. If you find one place—maybe, but no they don’t make Jibaritos.”48 But members of later generations often do not know that the sandwich is only available in Chicago. As Marielie Valcarcel Torres, a young waitress who has been worker at La Bomba for over a decade explained,

I had a group of friends who went to Puerto Rico for a championship thing and I was like ‘what was the best Jibarito you tried?’ They were like ‘yeah they don’t sell that anywhere over there.’ I was like ‘what do you mean?’ They were like ‘yeah, they don’t sell that over there, they sell that here in Chicago.’ I was like ‘shut up!’ And it’s literally a Chicago thing. Now it’s like in Florida some places, but the places you’ll find it in Florida are people who came from Chicago.49

The Jibarito has so deeply penetrated Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine since its invention in 1996 that many later generation Puerto Ricans believe that it came from the island. The Jibarito has been consecrated as an officially Puerto Rican food in Chicago; it is on the same level as bistec con tostones, arroz con gandules, or mofongo. So how is a dish so

49 La Bomba Restaurant, Marielie Valcarcel Torres, interview by author, Chicago, January 16, 2020.
ubiquitous in the Puerto Rican-Chicago diaspora completely absent from the cuisine of the island?

Figueroa himself attempted to open a restaurant on the island but it failed.\textsuperscript{50} While its closure was due to many issues, if the Jibarito was as popular there as it is in Chicago, the sales from that sandwich alone would have been enough to save the restaurant. Laura Cruz of Cafe Central mentioned that young people seem to have a particular affinity for the sandwich, perhaps revealing that although the hybridity of island-facing Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine suits it well, it may not appeal as much to people who desire a strictly Puerto Rican dish. This is probably at the root of why the Jibarito has not been able to transition to the island and is indicative of a larger rejection of U.S. Puerto Rican culture by those who remained on the island.

Jorge Duany argues that most Puerto Rican nationalism rejects American-Puerto Ricans because they fail to meet certain standards of Puerto Rican identity. I would argue that there are a set of Bourdieuan rites of institution required to be consecrated as a Puerto Rican which many Puerto Ricans born in diaspora are unable to complete. This in turn leads to a mindset that constructs Puerto Ricans in diaspora as “dangerous, hybrid, and contaminated beings, and in danger of, upon returning to Puerto Rico, contaminating Puerto Ricans.”\textsuperscript{51} This xenophobia against Puerto Ricans \textit{de afuera} [from abroad] precludes islanders from accessing and accepting new creations from the mainland.

\textsuperscript{50} Eng, Monica. “Saga of a Sandwich.”
\textsuperscript{51} Pérez, Marvette. La “giagia aérea”: Política, estatus, nacionalismo y ciudadanía en Puerto Rico, 1996. Within Duany, \textit{Puerto Rican Nation on the Move}. 
While today it is estimated that 3,194,000 people live in Puerto Rico, there are 5,459,000 people who identify as Puerto Rican living in the United States. This becomes particularly complex, as “nearly half the population of Puerto Rican origin reside in the United States, but islanders have not traditionally considered them part of the Puerto Rican nation. And yet most of the emigrants and their descendants continue to define themselves as Puerto Rican rather than American.” There is a clear disjoint between mainlanders and islanders over who is Puerto Rican and who is American. Because Chicago based Puerto Ricans embrace this sense of hybridity and “retain strong ties to their country of origin” or their ancestral homeland.

The rejection of American Puerto Ricans reveals that the transnational cognitive space which is prevalent in the Chicago-Puerto Rican diaspora is not commonplace on the island. While those that lived abroad and now live on the island would retain this transnational mindset, they may also be marginalized in mainstream Puerto Rican society. Gina Pérez also encounters this stigma against foreign Puerto Ricans in her work, writing,

Los de afuera is usually employed pejoratively, connoting a culturally distinct group whose values, behaviors, language, and dress directly challenge dominant understandings of “authentic” Puerto Rican culture. This stigmatizing label also homogenizes an extremely diverse group allegedly responsible for contaminating, polluting, and corrupting national identity. On both a local and a national level, los de afuera is used to define membership in the immediate and national community. It is also strategically deployed in local politics to resist the transnational flow of ideas, people, and capital that is believed to destabilize traditional understandings of community, identity, and place.

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53 Duany, Puerto Rican Nation on the Move, 35.

54 Duany, Puerto Rican Nation on the Move, 167.

55 Pérez, The Near Northwest Side Story, 111.
This sense of protecting a fixed national identity from foreign polluters explains the resistance to the Jibarito. As a hybrid food, the sandwich can be seen as corrupting Puerto Rican national cuisine in order to create an Americanized version. While the resistance to transnational culinary flows on the island helps to keep the Jibarito out, it also undermines the concept that Puerto Rico and its U.S. diaspora are partners in the creation of Puerto Rican culture and cuisine. Despite the fact that more Puerto Rican identifying people live in the U.S. than on the island, there is a mostly one-way flow of culture from the island to the mainland. In the culinary field, the heart of this flow is the nationalistic version of history which encourages resistance to the Americanization of Puerto Rican national cuisine. This resistance is directly counter to the hybridization constructed by island-facing Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine. While Chicagoans who subscribe to the ideology of island-facing cuisine continue to revere traditional island culture and cuisine, their own contributions, which are intended as homage, are often thought of as a corruption of this cuisine. Cafe Central’s attempts to recreate the Puerto Rican national cuisine of the 1950s would probably be better received in this transnational flow because its deference to national cuisine continues to resist Americanization.
Chapter 6: Stage Three—Diffused Cuisine

EXTRA! EXTRA!
READ ALL ABOUT IT!!

There is a new member of the Jibarito Time Family and that is, the CHICKEN TERIYAKI JIBARITO!! This marks our 21st Jibarito we have to choose from. It is a grilled chicken or crispy chicken, smothered in a Teriyaki Sauce, caramelized onions, lettuce, tomato, and wasabi mayo, finished with garlic butter, and sprinkled with white/black sesame seeds!! #whattimeisit #jibaritotime Remember Jibarito Fans you could always build your Jibarito at Jibarito Time!!!

In the last ten to twenty years the popularity of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine has grown to the point that many non-Puerto Rican restaurants have begun to adapt dishes like the Jibarito. These restaurants represent the third stage of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine, a diffused and often fusion-based version of the cuisine which, in contrast to its island-facing predecessor, does not attempt to represent the island in a way that is immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with Puerto Rican culture or cuisine. These restaurants freely borrow from island-facing cuisine, especially the Jibarito and the less Puerto Rican specific elements and combine these with other non-Puerto Rican dishes on the same menu.

Some of these diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine restaurants can be described by what Zilkia Janer calls “metropolitan fusion cuisine.” These restaurants are also part of a broader movement of “Nuevo Latino” cuisine, which garners wide praise as well as critics for the way it changes and modernizes traditional Latin dishes. Critics are often the people who grew up eating the traditional version of the cuisine, “they say, 'But that's not ... what my grandmother used to do!'” Chefs like Guillermo Pernot, an Argentine chef who runs high-end Cuban restaurants retorts, “Well, your grandmother is not here. And

the food that you're eating right now, that you know as Cuban cuisine, is 60 years old. So there is new food coming out.”³ These restaurants are doing something new with cuisine which rejects tradition in favor of new haute cuisine trends. They go three steps past the hybridization of island-facing cuisine to make dishes that are almost unrecognizable in the dish’s culinary tradition. As Janer argues, “the recipes produced by . . . fusion chefs more often than not consist of the application of French technique to a Caribbean dish or the addition of Caribbean ingredients to a continental dish.”⁴ They typically privilege French and American culinary techniques over Caribbean tradition. These restaurants cater to a Whiter and wealthier clientele who believe that they are elevating cuisine by “inserting them into the matrix of French cuisine which is uncritically considered the highest form of culinary expression,” an expression of the coloniality of cuisine.⁵ More commonly for Puerto Rican restaurants in Chicago, the diffusion of cuisine can be seen through fusion with other Latino cuisines, most commonly between the cuisines two largest Latino groups in the city, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans.

**MexiRican Fusion and Diffusion**

Mexicans and Puerto Ricans have long been the two largest populations of Latinos both in Chicago and across the United States. While these two groups are very different, they are often tracked and treated similarly by homogenizing systems of power. This, combined with the shared Spanish language and Catholicism, creates channels through which the two groups form bonds of solidarity as well as disdain for each other.

because of their similar positions in U.S. ethnic and racial hierarchies. In Chicago, the Puerto Rican population is eclipsed by the Mexican; according to the 2010 census, there are 575,164 Mexicans and only 103,881 Puerto Ricans in the city.\(^6\) The settlement of Latinos throughout the city shaped the Latino landscape of the city.

Gabriela Arredondo writes that, although Mexicans were “not the dominant group in any single neighborhood,” most other Latin Americans lived “interspersed through areas of Mexican settlement.”\(^7\) As the second largest Latino population in the city, Puerto Ricans were able to construct their own cultural spaces which were less intertwined with Mexican settlements, but the two groups often became interlaced through marriage, business, language, and work. While Mexicans “continue to be spatially identified with the south side” in neighborhoods like Pilsen and Little Village, Puerto Ricans were living in the Near Northwest Side.

Despite this, there is significant interaction between the two groups, to the point that some Puerto Ricans complained that “Chicago was becoming ‘more of a Mexican place,’” and resisted the “Mexicanization” of the city.\(^8\) Others embraced the Mexican population by specifically catering to Mexicans clients or creating MexiRican fusion restaurants.

Every restaurant owner I interviewed has had people walk into their restaurant knowing nothing about Puerto Rican food and expecting it to be essentially the same as Mexican food. They each have their own ways of dealing with this mis-categorization.


\(\text{\textsuperscript{8}}\) Pérez, The Near Northwest Side Story, 174.
that ranges from annoyance and exasperation with the customers to changing their menu to accommodate them. At Cafe Central, Laura Cruz explains,

Some people ask us for guacamole, and I say, ‘that’s the Mexican restaurant, go across the street’ . . . One of my girlfriends said, ‘well Laura that’s easy to make’ and I said, ‘well that’s not the thing. We’re Puerto Rican, we don’t want to take business away from our neighbors.’

As is to be expected from the veteran Chicago-Puerto Rican restaurant, Cruz does not want to serve Mexican cuisine and is the only owner who will literally send away customers if they’re looking for Mexican food. Her philosophy is tied to her position as a first stage Chicago-Puerto Rican restaurant. Cafe Central will continue serving the 1950s Puerto Rican national cuisine it always has; if you want something else, look elsewhere.

Island-facing cuisine producers have more varied positions on the issue. Papa’s Cache Sabroso’s owner similarly becomes annoyed with people requesting guacamole or tortillas at his establishment, telling them “this is a Puerto Rican restaurant” and overemphasizing the final word in a caricature of a White pronunciation to highlight the kind of clients who are ignorant of the differences between the two. Ponce’s Marisel Melendez gets asked for horchata, a Mexican rice drink, so often that she has resorted to suggesting parcha to her customers. Parcha means passion fruit and the juice has basically nothing in common with horchata, it is simply a way for her to reorient her clients from Mexican to Puerto Rican cuisine. Similarly, Jibaritos y Más’s owners get asked for tortilla chips so often that they have coordinated their response.

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9 Cafe Central Interview, January 8, 2020.
10 Papa’s Cache Sabroso Interview, January 2020.
They ask, "you don't have chips?" “no, we have (in unison) BREAD.” A lot of people order tortillas to eat. "Look, we don't have tortillas, we have plantains, we have tostones . . . but yes, they ask, a lot.  

While these island-facing restaurants are comfortable producing Chicago-Puerto Rican hybrid cuisine, adding Mexican influences would be to turn away from their focus on the island. While they accept the Jibarito despite its Chicago origin, these restaurants refuse to serve foods that do not at the very least symbolically represent Puerto Rican cuisine. They are on the conservative end of island-facing cuisine because they only serve Puerto Rican and Chicago-Puerto Rican dishes.

Other island facing restaurants have been more flexible in their offerings, especially when it comes to Mexican food. Nellie’s, which already attempts to fuse Puerto Rican and American brunch foods on their menu, has an omelet called El Vecino [The Neighbor]. Owner Cindy Espinosa explains, “it’s El Vecino because, you know, like your Mexican vecinos” and it’s made with Mexican chorizo, jalapeños, and chihuahua cheese, an homage to the Mexican Chicagoans who they share the city with. Importantly, this falls within the American brunch side of the menu, and so is really fusing American and Mexican foods, not Mexican and Puerto Rican. La Bomba’s waitress Marielie Valcarcel Torres says their customers tried to order horchata so often that “we just put it on the menu, we started making horchata . . . For years we said no. We’ve had horchata now probably maybe the last four or five years.” While Nellie’s serves Mexican inspired food as a tribute to the Mexicans of Chicago, La Bomba serves

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14 La Bomba Restaurant, January 16, 2020.
horchata because they cannot refuse the economic incentives and demands of their clients. These two restaurants still fall under the category island-facing cuisine because they still focus on providing Puerto Rican or Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine and just offer one or two additional Mexican inspired items. These restaurants reveal the edges of island-facing and diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine, but they stay on the island-facing side.

Between Island-Facing and Diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican Cuisine

The Jibarito Stop provides a very interesting test of the influence of Mexicanization on Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine. The restaurant, located in the Mexican neighborhood of Pilsen, is owned and operated by Cely Rodrigues, a New York Puerto Rican, and Moraiama Fuentes, a Chicago Mexican. While they cook Chicago-Puerto Rican food, they don’t hide their Mexican influences, serving guacamole with *tostones* and offering chihuahua cheese on their Jibaritos. It is important to note that while having a non-Puerto Rican chef and owner may contribute to their positioning in the Mexican-Puerto Rican culinary dialectic, this is not evidence in itself that they serve diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine. One of the two owners of Jibaritos y Más, Yeliza Rivera lived in her native Venezuela until she was 28, only then moving to Chicago where she worked in Puerto Rican restaurants, including Ponce restaurant under Marisel Melendez.

The Jibarito Stop owners explained that their decision to put guacamole on their menu was twofold. Firstly, they told me that they “have guacamole now just because, you know we think it pairs well with the *tostones* and with the neighborhood that we’re in…”

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15 Pilsen is also in the process of gentrification and becomes Whiter every year. Still, it is one of the historic centers of the Mexican community in Chicago and continues a strong Mexican tradition in the city.
implying being in a Mexican neighborhood has influenced their decision. Secondly, that “It came down to the ingredients we already had. We already had avocado and we tried it one time and our staff loved it, loved the combination so we were like ‘why not?’” The owners are freely experimenting with Mexican-Puerto Rican fusion by combining dishes and ingredients from the two. While their food is clearly mostly Puerto Rican, their significant Mexican influence sets them apart from island-facing restaurants.

The Jibarito Stop carries Puerto Rican national cuisine dishes such as bistec encebollado [steak and onions] and pernil [roasted pork shoulder] and the owners travel to the island to get ideas to implement in their restaurant, similarly to other island-facing restaurants. They admit that their restaurant has “a little bit of fusion” with Mexican food and described themselves as doing “our own take, but staying as authentic as possible.” The culinary space between island-facing and diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine can be constructed as a spectrum, and The Jibarito Stop falls right on the line between island-facing and diffused cuisine. This is because although they look to the island for inspiration, island-facing restaurants care more about the symbolic connection to the island than the connection to other local groups.

The Jibarito Stop owners explain that “ultimately we think of the mainstream, what would people be open to trying?” and that “Some people asked us for guacamole but I don’t think that was the driving force” for putting it on the menu. They are open to creating new dishes and breaking rules that would not be accepted as strictly nor symbolically Puerto Rican on the island or in the diaspora. While The Jibarito Stop helps

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16 The Jibarito Stop Interview, January 8, 2020.
18 The Jibarito Stop Interview, January 8, 2020.
19 The Jibarito Stop Interview, January 8, 2020.
to sustain a transnational cognitive space similarly to island-facing restaurants, the incorporation of Mexican ingredients shifts that vision ever so slightly away from the island. This is not to say that the rest of their menu is not authentically Puerto Rican or that they are not part of the Puerto Rican culinary community, but instead to argue that they are at the forefront of ushering in a new stage of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine.

Mondongo

(A bowl of mondongo)\(^20\)

Mondongo is a stew made of boiled tripe rubbed with lemons, root vegetables like yuca and yams, pumpkin or squash, plantain, and calves’ or pigs’ feet. The dish has been a classic in Puerto Rican national cuisine since it was first articulated as the national cuisine. There are four variants presented in *El Cocinero Puertorriqueño*, the “Creole,”

“habanero,” “Cuban,” and one called “mondongo or menudo Andalusian style.” While the recipes and instructions are mostly the same, only adding a few different vegetables or spices, the names reveal complex histories of culinary migration. The reference to Andalusia in southern Spain helps to map the way this dish travelled to the Caribbean. The existence of a specifically Cuban version of mondongo in this cookbook reveals that each island’s national cuisine is differentiated from the other despite having the same dishes. While Cubans and Puerto Ricans may consume identical foods within their own homes, the way that these cuisines are articulated ensures that they are defined as discrete formations in their respective national cuisines.

While tripe may be a popular food in the Caribbean and other parts of the world, it is generally looked upon with aversion or even revulsion by a U.S. American crowd. As one Puerto Rican-American cookbook author, Oswald Rivera, explains “upon first hearing of it, most people will go, ‘Yuck!’” but Rivera implores the reader, “my friends, don’t prejudge. Give it a chance.” Rivera understands that he has to be compelling to convince a U.S. audience to try a dish based on tripe because it does not fall within most people’s gustatory expectations or learned tastes.

Of the Chicago-Puerto Rican restaurants I examined, few of them had mondongo on the menu. Those that did carry the dish were exclusively restaurants in the first two stages of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine. No fusion restaurants serve mondongo. This aligns with Arjun Appadurai’s argument that cookbook writers are translators of cuisine for the culinary Other and culinary insiders-as-writers (or in this case restaurant

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21 “criollo,” “habanero,” “cubano,” “mondongo o menudo a la andaluza”
*El Cocinero Puertorriqueño*, 46-47.
owners/chefs) make complex compromises between authenticity and appealing to outsiders.\textsuperscript{23} This translation of cuisine eliminates much of the most distinctive or “exotic”\textsuperscript{24} aspects of the cuisine for the comfort of new outsider consumers. \textit{Mondongo} is one of the dishes that is marginalized in Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine because of its distinctiveness when compared to other Chicago and U.S. dishes. While it is still popular among some Chicago Puerto Ricans, it is too far outside of the gustatory comfort of most U.S. Americans, both Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans, that is not frequently ordered or cooked. Fusion restaurants, which, as producers of diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine, typically cater to a non-Puerto Rican audience have little incentive to make \textit{mondongo} because their demand for it is so low.

Restaurants that serve \textit{mondongo} help to build Mexican-Puerto Rican culinary relationships in Chicago because it is very similar to the Mexican dish, \textit{menudo}. The 1859 recipe in \textit{El Cocinero Puertorriqueño} of the dish notes that it can be called “\textit{mondongo o menudo a la andaluza},” highlighting the interchangeability of the names.\textsuperscript{25} At island facing restaurants like Ponce, the dish is extremely popular, and although they only serve it on the weekends, “come Saturday at 10am we have a couple people waiting outside” because they know it will run out, but “1 o’clock by 2 o’clock at the most it’s gone.”\textsuperscript{26} Marisel Melendez notes that ‘the Mexicans affiliate it with the menudo, so it’s like a hangover recovery thing so it’s popular, it’s popular.’\textsuperscript{27} At the same time, while

\textsuperscript{23} Appadurai, Arjun. "How to Make a National Cuisine,” 17.
\textsuperscript{24} “Exotic” is a historically charged word that conjures ideas of fetisization and objectification of the ethnic Other. I use it here to reference that exact sentiment in the way culinary outsiders see certain dishes that are outside of their own embodied culinary habitus as both lower in culinary hierarchy and simultaneously exciting because of that position under and against hegemonic gustatory standards.
\textsuperscript{25} “\textit{mondongo or menudo Andalusian style}” \textit{El Cocinero Puertorriqueño}, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{26} Ponce Restaurant Interview, January 14, 2020.
\textsuperscript{27} Ponce Restaurant Interview, January 14, 2020.
restaurant owners at Nellie’s and The Jibarito Stop have both had requests for the dish, they chose not to serve it. The Jibarito Stop owners said, “To be honest with you, if we won’t eat it we won’t sell it” and Nellie’s mirrored this message. These restaurateurs are not alone in their dislike of the dish, but their decision to not put it on the menu means it continues to be marginalized in Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine.

**Chicago’s Best: The Role of Food Media**

Demand is the driver for starting and running a successful restaurant. Just as Cafe Central opened to fulfill the demands of early Puerto Rican migrants, new restaurants constantly open to cater to changing culinary demands in the city. This is particularly evident through the gentrification of Puerto Rican neighborhoods and the subsequent inflows of White residents. The changing residents meant changing clients, and thus changing gustatory demands.

These new clients are especially enthralled by the Jibarito, as it consistently earns top spots in magazines and online articles about “Chicago's Essential Sandwiches” or “8 Amazing Sandwiches You've Probably Never Heard Of.” Its categorization as a sandwich means that the Jibarito is given a much larger platform and increased marketability outside of the Puerto Rican diaspora. The sandwich also benefits from the food health trend of avoiding gluten because it is a sandwich without bread, a serendipity which only furthers its acclaim. It the dish’s incredible popularity that keeps Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine afloat, as even during the COVID-19 epidemic, crowds of over 15

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28 The Jibarito Stop Interview, January 8, 2020.
people huddle closely together outside Jibaritos y Más in forty degree weather, risking their very lives just for a bite of that heavenly sandwich.³⁰

Chicago’s Best, a Chicagoland television show in which the hosts visit restaurants, speak with the owners, cook with them, and then eat the food. The show is designed with a broad Chicago audience in mind and so has to translate specific cuisines to a more general audience. They have nine episodes which focus on restaurants serving Puerto Rican food in the city. The show is locally popular and being on an episode ensures a restaurant gets significant exposure and thus an increase in customers. When deciding what to film, edit, and group together on Chicago’s Best, the show’s producers are playing an active role in articulating and thus defining Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine.

From 2012 to 2019, the ten restaurants on Chicago’s Best which feature Puerto Rican food are categorized into diverse thematic episodes. While some are organized by location, like “Best of Lake Street” and “Best Western Suburbs,” the show does not have a Best of Humboldt Park, or a Best of the Near Northwest Side.³¹ Because Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine is spatially located in areas which are largely ignored by the TV series, possibly due to the show’s focus on mainstream and traditional White establishments, the Puerto Rican restaurants which do appear are often further from the main diasporic community. Because these restaurants are more likely to serve a non-Puerto Rican client base and thus more frequently serve diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican

³⁰ Police are often called by bystanders with requests to disperse the crowd. However, in my personal experience, when the police actually do show up, they simply join the crowd to order a Jibarito.
cuisine, the show does more to promote diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine than its island-facing or national variants.

While Chicago’s Best has only made one episode each around the themes “Best Latin” and “Best Tropical” it has seven unique episodes dedicated to “Chicago’s Best Sandwich.”\(^\text{32}\) The focus on sandwiches and other mainstream White-American dishes means that the Jibarito is often the main way that Chicago-Puerto Rican restaurants are able to take advantage of the show’s promotion. Of the ten restaurants that have been featured on the show, six of them are shown making their version of the Jibarito. Of the other four, three of which are fusion restaurants and two of which chose to make non-Puerto Rican dishes on the show. That leaves only two restaurants serving non-Jibarito Puerto Rican dishes in all seven years and three hundred episodes of Chicago’s Best. Although customers to these restaurants may begin to order other Puerto Rican dishes, many of them will not move past the Jibarito to other items on the menu. The incentive created by food media to use the Jibarito to attract the attention and business of a broader audience leads directly to the diffusion of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine.

The massive and widespread popularity of the Jibarito has inspired both love and hate. Puerto Rican food blogger and chef, Roberto Pérez initially titled his blog “Enough with the ordering of that sandwich!!” to call attention to the way Chicago foodies completely ignore the rest of Puerto Rican cuisine and only focus on the Jibarito.\(^\text{33}\) He even came up with the hashtag “#fuckthejibaritosandwich” to share his ire with the


The problem that Roberto Pérez points out has had a significant impact on Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine as the most distinctively Puerto Rican aspects are marginalized to make room for the Jibarito, a sandwich which already struggles with issues of authenticity. Restaurant owners do not seem to have this same issue with the sandwich as its immense popularity helps keep them open. Instead this is a critique aimed squarely at the diffusion of Puerto Rican cuisine as it is, in a sense, watered down, for the newer whiter clientele. Despite this, the impact of the Jibarito on Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine continues, as it plays a key role in both the hybridization of island-facing cuisine, and the universal appeal of diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine.

The Popularity without the History

Another prime example of Mexican-Puerto Rican fusion is the Mexican restaurant, Taqueria Moran in Logan Square, which serves Jibaritos. The Jibarito is the only non-Mexican dish on the menu and their owner. The owner, Pepe Moran, explained in an interview,

We opened a few months ago and people started asking for it right away . . . And they are not Puerto Ricans. Now the Mexicans have started asking, and they are hooked on it, too. Normally in Mexican food we don't eat many fried plantains, but they like this.

This is a much more clear-cut example of a restaurant which serves a diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine. The demand for the Jibarito is so high that restaurants with no Puerto Rican background can now serve it, something that was not true with other more traditional Puerto Rican dishes. A Mexican restaurant serving Chicago-Puerto Rican

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34 Pérez, “The Man Behind the Jibarito Sandwich.”
35 Eng, Monica. “Saga of a Sandwich.”
cuisine directly contrasts the ideals of cultural maintenance and symbolic connection to the island which were necessary for the earlier two stages of the cuisine. As more people discover the sandwich, more restaurants are incentivized to serve it, thus diffusing what was once a carefully maintained culinary tradition across restaurants in Chicago.

Similarly, fusion restaurants across Chicagoland borrow the Jibarito from the Puerto Rican restaurants and add it to their menu, often as the only Puerto Rican dish they serve. This is particularly prevalent among other Latin fusion restaurants such as Caribbean Corner, Junior’s Grill Cafe, El Nuevo Taco Loco, and Jibarito Time. With the exception of El Nuevo Taco Loco, these restaurants are located in the suburbs, and none of them are close to the Near Northwest Side or major areas of traditional Puerto Rican settlement. Caribbean Corner is one of the few non-Mexican fusion restaurants which serves the sandwich. Instead they serve mainly Dominican and Puerto Rican sandwiches and rice bowls, both of which incorporate various Caribbean dishes, such as bistec encebollado, lechón, tostones, and maduros.36 Because it is a Caribbean fusion restaurant, the Jibarito is not out of place on their menu because their other dishes include similar ingredients and are made with similar techniques. However, they are still diffusing Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine by moving away from the connection to the island by spreading their focus across the entire Caribbean.

Junior’s Grill Cafe and El Nuevo Taco Loco are both Mexican American diners which focus on brunch and serve the Jibarito as the only discernibly Puerto Rican dish on the menu. These restaurants include the Jibarito as a one-off dish which shares the overall

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theme of being Latino in a broad sense. They are not serving the Jibarito as part of a symbolic connection to the island, but rather as a popular Chicago sandwich. In the most egregious use of the Jibarito while ignoring its culinary history, the Jibarito Time restaurant offers any sandwich imaginable as a “Jibarito.” This includes a Philly cheesesteak, club sandwich, buffalo chicken, chicken teriyaki, and even s’mores and sundae Jibaritos. Obviously none of these dishes have anything to do with the original sandwich besides the use of plantains instead of bread (or graham crackers). The restaurant is using the concept of the Jibarito but completely displacing it from Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine and ignoring the culinary history of the sandwich and the island. They also serve a Jibarito bowl which is not a sandwich at all, thus calling it a Jibarito is a yet another redefinition of the dish. This is the pinnacle of diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine; a s’mores Jibarito has nothing to do with the symbolic connection to the island which drove Figueroa to use the national symbol of the jíbaro in naming the sandwich. It has almost nothing to do with any of Puerto Rican or Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine at any other time period. It is a completely new invention which borrows the popularity of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine but breaks off from it to create an entirely unrelated set of dishes.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Conclusions:

Cuisine is a representation of culture and shifts, grows, and changes along with the people who carry it with them. While the Taínos, Africans, and Spanish each had long culinary histories from before they ever set foot on the island now known as Puerto Rico, the process of cultural, genetic, and culinary mixing created a new era for the island it its cuisine.

The foods made by this mixed group of people took influences each of them but were ultimately constructed by the same systems of power which have replicated themselves in economic, military, and political spheres since colonization. As power shapes culture, it also shapes cuisine, culinary epistemology, and gustatory preferences. Centuries later Puerto Rican elites defined Puerto Rican national cuisine to stake their claim to an independent culture and justify their nationalist ideology. At the same time, they centered the jíbaro as a national symbol and used the jíbaro mask to position themselves as members of the masses rather than elites. The jíbaro as a symbol of Puerto Rican identity continues to influence culture and cuisine today.

In the period following World War II, this nationalist rhetoric was reignited, along with its accompanying symbols, to support Operation Bootstrap’s industrialization of the economy. The economic changes increased unemployment and government programs were enacted to encourage Puerto Ricans to migrate to the United States for work. This is the start of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine, as these migrants sought out a version of Puerto Rican nationalist cuisine which they could not find in their new U.S. home. Chicago-Puerto Rican national cuisine fulfilled this need for migrants and as they had
children, this cuisine began to give Chicago-born Puerto Ricans a taste of their ancestral homeland.

Gentrification pushed Puerto Ricans from their initial settlements on the Near North Side. As prices rose, some Puerto Ricans returned to Puerto Rico or migrated multiple times between Chicago and the island. Others moved to the newly Puerto Rican Near Northwest Side neighborhoods, especially the areas surrounding Humboldt Park. The poverty that plagued Puerto Rican community came to a head in 1966 at The Division Street Uprising. This event, and the newly concentrated Puerto Rican community of Humboldt Park, greatly contributed to nationalist sentiment in Chicago and inspired the creation of radical nationalist community organizations such as the Young Lords and unified the Puerto Rican community.

Both migration and nationalist sentiment created a new focus on transnationalism which impacted everyone in the Chicago-Puerto Rican enclave, whether they personally migrated or not. It brought new ideas, people, culture, and culinary techniques to Chicago while simultaneously opening new possibilities for transnational relationships, connections, and migration. While generations continued to pass in some Chicago-born Puerto Ricans families where no one visited the island, the community developed a collective transnational perspective which interlaced life in Chicago and the island. At the same time, Puerto Ricans on the island often rejected Chicago-Puerto Rican culture as a corrupting force rather than the rejuvenation.

As Chicago-Puerto Ricans grew in number and political power in the 1990s, they claimed *Paseo Boricua* as a historic Puerto Rican community and cemented their influence by erecting massive steel flags and limited non-Puerto Rican businesses in the
zone. Around the same time, Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine was undergoing major changes.

The invention of the Jibarito was the culinary embodiment of a growing sense of hybridity felt by Chicago-Puerto Ricans. They recognized and honored the culinary history of the island while carving out a space for themselves as Chicagoans. While this position was not always respected by their contemporaries in Puerto Rico, those in Chicago looked to the island for inspiration. Island-facing Puerto Rican cuisine developed from this hybrid of Puerto Rican and Chicago influences and remains the most prevalent version of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine today.

The explosive popularity of the Jibarito has spawned many restaurants looking to profit from the sandwich’s success. These restaurants often have no connection to the island and ignore the culinary and cultural history which inspired previous generation of Puerto Rican restaurants. While they serve the Jibarito, they do not deliver the Puerto Rican symbolism and history that originally came with it. Diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine borrows from the stages of cuisine that came before it and injects those borrowed ideas into a new culinary space. This usually entails fusion with other cuisines and a decentering of Puerto Rican identity and cuisine.

Each stage of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine is situated both spatially and temporally in a specific part of the city and time period. The forces of gentrification and economic exploitation have displaced Puerto Rican communities, processes which have impacted cuisine both directly, through limiting access to resources, and indirectly, by shaping the culture and ideologies which impact the way people interact with cuisine. Now, as Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine is becoming extremely popular among non-Puerto
Rican people, the cuisine is being increasingly marketed to outside communities, often through diffused Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine restaurants. While earlier restaurants made active efforts to support the Puerto Rican community both in Chicago and on the island, newer restaurants are less likely to do so, keeping their business largely economic rather than building community and maintaining culture.

While I attempted to present each stage of Chicago Puerto Rican cuisine without judgement, it is difficult not to construct a hierarchy between them. While all food can be judged purely on the flavors, textures, and inherent qualities, the history of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine highlights how much history is served alongside cuisine. The symbols, rituals, and meaning that these restaurants hold is more powerful than the food alone. By tracing the history of Chicago-Puerto Rican cuisine, I hope to add to and preserve the meaning and importance that these dishes hold for Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans alike.
**Glossary of Terms**

Alcapurria— Fritter dish usually made from ground beef surrounded by a plantain dough with is fried in a ball.

Arroz (con Pollo)— Rice (with chicken).

Asopao— Chicken and rice stew.

Bistec (Encebollado)— Steak (with onions).

Boricua— A person of Puerto Rican descent, especially in the United States. See Borinquen.

Borinquen— The Hispanicized version of the word for the Puerto Rican island from the Indigenous Taíno language. Often used with a sense of pride by Puerto Rican people.

Café (Cafecito)— Coffee (espresso or small black coffee).

Casabe— a kind of bread made from yuca flour and was an important part of the Taíno diet before colonization.

Criollo— (1.) A social caste of European descended people who were born in the Americas. They were lower in racial/ethnic hierarchies than Europeans but above everyone else. (2.) Puerto Ricans on the island often call their cuisine, cocina criolla, or creole cooking to reference the culinary roots which mix Spanish, African, and Taíno influences.

Culantro— An herb similar to cilantro but significantly stronger and native to the Americas.

Cuchifritos— Various fried foods of which the main ingredient is pork. The word has a contested etymology, and derives from either cochino, meaning pig, or cocer, meaning to cook, compounded with frito, meaning fried. Cuchifritos are traditionally made with many parts of the pig, including snout, blood, and other parts not commonly eaten in the United States.

Gandules— Pigeon peas, a legume from the Indian subcontinent that is used in many Puerto Rican dishes such as arroz con gandules.

Indigenous— Indigenous American when capitalized refers to the peoples who lived in the Americas prior to colonization by Europeans, or their descendents. When written without capitalization, “indigenous” it refers to the animals and plants which grew in the Americas prior to colonization. I choose to capitalize “Indigenous knowledge” because it is created by Indigenous Peoples and therefore refers to the people rather than plants or animals.

Jíbaro— A Puerto Rican peasant and subsistence farmer. The term has gained significance as a universal symbol of Puerto Rican identity and history through nationalist ideology at the end of the 18th century.
Jibarito— A dish invented in Chicago which is made from meat (originally steak but could also be pork, chicken, or seafood), tomato, American cheese, lettuce, onions, and features tostones slathered with garlic in lieu of bread.

Lechón— Roasted suckling pig. Traditionally it was cooked whole over charcoal but today prepared in many ways.

Los de afuera— Meaning “those from outside” [the island]. Used to refer to Puerto Ricans born in diaspora rather than on the island.

Maduros— Cooked ripe plantains. The skin of the plantain becomes black and the flesh becomes very sweet as it ripens.

Mofongo— Fried green plantains which are smashed with garlic and formed into a large ball. Often served in a broth and sometimes filled with meat.

Mondongo— Stew made from diced tripe and vegetables, especially root vegetables like yuca or potatoes.

Pan— “Bread” in Spanish.

Pava— A straw hat made from the leaves of a Puerto Rican palm tree and loose strands of straw sticking out on all sides. It is the traditional hat associated with the jíbaro.

Pasteles— A dish made from a dough of grated green plantain, potato, yuca, and/or pumpkin which is filled with stewed meat and cooked within a plantain leaf. The appearance is similar to a Mexican tamale. Pasteles are traditionally consumed at Christmas time.

Pernil— Slow-roasted pork leg or pork shoulder. Pernil is traditionally consumed at Christmas time.

Plantain— Similar to a banana but slightly larger, plantain is a fruit which begins green but as it ripens turns yellow and then black.

Sofrito— A sauce that is integral to Puerto Rican cuisine, it is made of culantro, a sweet pepper, onions, garlic, tomato, oil, olives, capers, and pork.

Taíno— The people Indigenous to the island now known as Puerto Rico before it was colonized by the Spanish

Tostones— Green plantains that are sliced thin and then fried twice to make them crisp.

Tripleta— A sandwich with three types of meat—steak, lechón, and ham, fried crisp potato strips, ketchup, mayonnaise, cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, and onions.

Yuca— Also called cassava, manioc, and mandioca, yuca is a plant and the name for its edible root which is very starchy and a staple food in Puerto Rico. Yuca was cultivated by the Taíno people before colonization.
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