

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### *Black Food: Stories, Art, and Recipes from Across the African Diaspora*

Edited and Curated by Bryant Terry

#### Community Read, March–May 2023

The Longwood Gardens Community Read is a program designed to encourage reading for pleasure and start a conversation. Focusing on literature about gardens, plants, and the natural world, we feature an exceptional book annually (paired with a similarly themed younger readers' book) through a variety of programs, discussions, and lectures across all community partner organizations. For more information about the Community Read, go to [longwoodgardens.org/community-read](http://longwoodgardens.org/community-read).

This guide was prepared by Longwood Gardens Library and Information Services staff for anyone interested in hosting a book discussion (or another program) for the Community Read book.

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**Community Read**  
Read. Think. Engage.

## Why *Black Food* was Selected for the Longwood Gardens Community Read

Hello Community Readers,

Why this book?

This year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the Community Read. We want to celebrate this milestone with our entire reading community. Together we have quite a bit to celebrate! Collectively the Community Read has engaged many tens of thousands of people. We have shared some wonderful books and sparked discussions about our natural world. The Community Read has grown and now covers a major portion of four states: Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland! Thanks to all for being a part of this journey to share ideas.

In recognition of these achievements, we wanted to throw a big party for everyone. But how to do that when we are separated by many miles? We turned our thinking toward encouraging celebrations wherever our Community Read community lives and reads. And what is more integral to a celebration than food? Food is a connector of people, especially for special moments, and food connects to the world of plants and gardening. We also wanted to be sure we addressed the Community Read's commitment to exploring nature and diverse human themes in relation to the natural world in our book selection. Finally, we wanted to feature a book that is, pardon the word, "meaty" in its approach to ideas and all the while still fun.

For all these reasons, *Black Food: Stories, Art, and Recipes from Across the African Diaspora* edited and curated by celebrated chef and writer Bryant Terry seemed like a great fit. This title is an exuberant celebration of foodways and culture. It is beautiful, and fun to read and explore. The recipes for food and cocktails are truly mouthwateringly delicious. This book is our way of throwing a party for the Community Read in 2023! We hope that you all enjoy exploring the rich essays and artwork as much as the food.

We truly hope you enjoy taste testing the recipes (we have been for the last several weeks) and throwing a potluck or party of your own. Further we hope that you explore including a few new vegetables when planning your garden. Our celebration isn't simply to honor past achievements, but also to celebrate the next ten years of sharing books and new ideas!

Cheers,

David J. Sleasman  
Director of Library and Information Services  
Longwood Gardens



**Community Read**  
Read. Think. Engage.

## QUOTES FROM *BLACK FOOD* FOR SOCIAL MEDIA (Post on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram using #CommunityRead), or to Spark Discussion

“... promote a concept of food that embraces courage, commitment, and self-discovery and ultimately moves each and all of us to a better place.” (Terry, p. 1)

“This book is a Sankofa bird, standing astride the crossroads of past and present, with a neck craning back to what came before, measuring our progress. Its feet point toward what is to come, with an egg signifying the future held protectively in her beak ... *Black Food* represents a bridge from our ties to traditions in the Motherland to our wildest dreams that will manifest in the future.” (Terry, p. 3)

“Why do we do this work? ... How do we define our cultural cuisine? How can we operate more effective and viable businesses? How can we create and support a more fair and equitable food system? How do we tackle food security? Land sovereignty? Pay equity?” (Nelson, p. 13)

“And so it was I turned to food. Not in the form of comfort eating but in the way that expressed how, despite having little knowledge of my mother tongue or my grandmothers’ mothers’ real names, I could cook the foods they had eaten and name the dishes.” (Muyambo, p. 24)

“What is food but an archive of global desires? ... Food is the sustenance of our survival, and the recipes tell a colonial narrative of inheritance that is also a family history for Black and Asian people. From the plantation to the present, our ancestors made us a mixtape of flavors across the continents. It is the taste of something we will never exactly know. It is a recipe for reinvention in times of scarcity, for fashioning the future, for survival.” (Goffe, p. 65)

“Black food as resistance, rooted in justice, can be incredibly delicious. It gets us that much closer to the taste of actual *freedom*.” (Cooper, p. 146)

“... Black people have stories to tell about food. These stories are our influence. They are our power. They are the narratives I pass down to my daughter from my mother, who got it from her mother, and hers before her. Sometimes these stories are the fudge that we call love; sometimes they are in our song lyrics; sometimes they are in our recipes that we will never tell, or they are in the historical records buried under the terms “worker,” “snack vendor,” or “help.” It is up to us to uncover them and learn to read beyond what we see. This is where you will find the narratives of Black women, food, and power.” (Williams-Forson, p. 175)



“Identity in itself does not tell us a whole story of another. Rather, identity is a portal to discovering more intimately the deeper parts of another. And, in its most rigid interpretations, identity is fraught with constructs we must undo.” (Lynch, p. 211)

“What would be possible if we viewed the labor of caring for ourselves and for others--be it through food or other means--as the collective responsibility of every person?” (Carruthers, p. 246-247)

“We build on the past and the present to give our food, our communities a future in which we have space and time to delight in feeding ourselves and each other, a future in which holistic nourishment is the goal to which we hold ourselves accountable.” (Reese, p 271)

“... when we reject our traditions, we are only rejecting ourselves and denying our joy...embracing Black identity has the power to reignite the love and happiness of Black traditions.” (Martinez, p. 275)

“... always leave room for dessert and, equally, make sure to leave room for the future.” (Livingston, p. 296)



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

We hope this discussion guide helps to spark your thinking and ignite a conversation. We also offer a selection of resources for further reading for those who want to continue their journey.

There is a word that is used frequently in *Black Food*: Diaspora, which may not be familiar to everyone. It may be helpful to give a definition for it and discuss its usage. Diaspora is “the dispersion of any people from their original homeland.” [Oxford Languages: <https://languages.oup.com>] This term was traditionally used in relation to the dispersion of the Jewish people from Israel but is now being applied to other groups of people, predominantly to Black people from their African countries but also to Asian and Native American people from their homelands.

Bryant Terry divided *Black Food* into ten sections. This guide follows that structure and provides suggested questions for each section to help initiate discussions or to help group leaders formulate their own questions.

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### Prologue: Spirit

1. “If there is one thing that is very clear to me, it is the sense of longing that comes from the distance between me and the motherland. The culture. And so, I tell stories, I ask questions, and I cook food, and these all form a part of the journey of looking for something bigger than individual experiences.” (p. 24)

Do you feel a connection to your ancestors’ homeland?

Do you feel a yearning to learn about it and belong to it? If so, why?

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### Chapter 1: Motherland

1. What can we learn from the women food producers of Ingwavuma in Sithandiwe Yeni’s essay “Household Seed Banks” (pp. 25–26)? Should people in food-insecure areas not only learn how to grow their own food, but how to keep and store the seeds?
2. What foods do you enjoy making/eating that have their roots in Africa?



- Were you aware that they had their roots in Africa?

Examples given by Jessica B. Harris, Ph.D. (pp. 27–28) include:

- Greens: collards, turnips
- Okra: fried, gumbo
- Deep fried: chicken, fritters
- Rice: rice cakes, breads
- Nuts: in sweets, sauces
- Hot sauce
- Smoked meats: shrimp, pork, fish
- Sugar: pralines, pinda cakes

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## Chapter 2: Migrations

1. On pages 58–59, Sarah Ladipo Manyika describes how the smells coming from Toni Morrison’s kitchen brought back memories and a feeling of home.
  - What food smells take you to some other place?
  - How do those food smells make you feel?
2. On pages 60–62 of his essay “Foodsteps in Motion: Migration in Black Food,” Michael W. Twitty talks about how the people of Africa “were pushed in chains in the largest forced migration in American history ... The foodsteps delivered refugees’ cuisine ... new dishes were born in the in-between places ... We practiced culinary jazz and improvised, drawing on things we had always done since time began, classical things, endemic of Africa, and things we composed with others in mind and creative flourishes dreamed up in the void ... a food tradition armed with a sense of empowerment and renewal that make for fertile grounds for the foodsteps of the children of Africa to come” (pp 61–62).

In this, Twitty introduces us to two new concepts: foodsteps and refugees’ cuisine. Both encompass pain and change but also empowerment and renewal.

- How can we as a people best acknowledge and honor these foodsteps and refugees’ cuisine and the people who made them?



3. In her essay “It Takes a Long Time,” (pp. 62–63), Naa Oya A. Kwate, Ph.D. talks about how our ancestors worked long and hard to get and prepare the food we still love to eat, but now the ingredients may not be available fresh in our supermarkets, or we choose to get pre-prepared dishes for we either don’t have the knowledge or time to make it from scratch.
    - What foods from your past fall under these categories?
    - What foods do you take the time to prepare fresh? When and why?
    - What is lost when we don’t prepare food fresh?
  4. Tao Leigh Goffe, Ph.D. writes in her essay “The Poetics of Afro-Asian Cuisine” that food and recipes are like mixtapes, that food is associated with “a sound, a song, a color ... a recipe is a mixtape ... a playlist, a love letter written for another, to be experienced with or without the writer, the cook, the DJ being present.” (p 64)
    - What sounds, colors, and/or music do you associate with certain foods?
    - What foods bring you the feelings of love and connection?
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### Chapter 3: Spirituality

1. In “The Spiritual Ecology of Black Food,” (pp. 99–100) Leah Penniman points out that “In traditional African faiths, reciprocity is the law of the universe. When people honor the divine forces of Nature, they are taken care of.” (p. 100)
  - Do we appreciate what we are given by nature?
  - If not, do you think we need to? How do we reconnect with nature?
  - If so, how do we show it and what are our rewards/benefits?
2. In his essay “A Place All Our Own: Uncovering Traditions of Sovereignty in the Black Church” (pp. 101–103) Rev. Dr. Heber Brown, III suggests that Black churches can and should be leaders in reconnecting people with the earth and empowering people to become independent of others who would oppress them.
  - Food self-reliance is found when bypassing a broken food chain. Do you think finding food self-reliance can be done? If so, how?



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## Intermission: Leisure & Lifestyle

1. Osayi Endolyn expresses in her essay “Take Five” (pp. 118–120) what you are taught and thus what you expect are not always what you find. She discovered there is more to France than white people, wine, cheese, and pastries. She found a whole community of brown, Black, and Asian people serving up food from their homelands.
  - Have you ever gone somewhere and found things you never expected?
  - Have you discovered what they teach you in school and/or at home is not the whole story but only one part?
  - Have you ever gone someplace new and avoided all the usual tourist spots to find another layer of the city you were in?
2. In “Beyond the Tree Line” (pp. 121–122), Rashad Frazier talks about his love for the outdoors and how it helps him to escape the tensions brought on by decades of oppression, and how it buoys him to continue on in spite of it. In it he asks, “Where do we go to recharge our batteries? Where do we go to heal? Where do we go to disconnect so that we can reconnect?” (p.122).
  - How would you answer Frazier’s questions?
  - Did it surprise you that there might be outdoor places where Black people may feel uncomfortable, or that may cause anxiety today?
  - Do you feel that “the wilderness makes you better?” (p. 122). Why?
3. Summer Sewell reminds us in her essay “Beautiful Coffee to the People” (pp. 123–124) that coffee, a product which originated in Ethiopia, has been marketed as a white person’s drink. She points to Keba Konte, who is trying to rectify this perception.
  - Can you think of other foods, drinks, or cultural objects that have originated in Africa but have had that identity removed?
  - If so, have you seen any attempts by the Black community to rectify that perception?
  - Prior to reading Sewell’s essay, have you been aware of products whose cultural identity may not match their origin??





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## Chapter 4: Land, Liberation, and Food Justice

1. In Monica M. White, Ph.D.'s essay "Feeding Ourselves in Dangerous Times: Lessons of Love, Food & Freedom Farmers" (pp 142–144), her characters state, "Food ... is necessary for survival. With the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, I returned to Sunflower County and realized that the right to vote was insufficient to a healthy, happy, whole life. Voting alone does not include the right to accessing nutrient rich food, safe and affordable housing, healthcare, and a quality education. "Participating in food production, distribution, and preparation allows you to build the capacity to provide for your community, and a well-fed community can do lots of things." (pp. 143–144)
  - Have you seen evidence of individual participation in food production, distribution, and/or preparation in your community?
  - Are you aware of any organizations in your area that help those with food insecurity?
  - Do you have farming collectives in your community?
  - If so, have they enriched the communities which they serve?
2. Dara Cooper talks about freedom dreaming in her essay "Black Food as Resistance: Land, Justice & Black Liberation" (pp. 144–146). She paints a picture of when she has felt the "most free": being in open land with other Black people involved in food justice communities, sharing food, storytelling, debate, and music. She says they were "... nourished, held, felt safe, and cared for, and we focused on the highest interest of the collective ... The taste of that vision felt delicious." She then describes the antithesis—a reality for Black people of what she terms "nutritional violence and food apartheid—separate and unequal food sources that have left so many Black communities devastated."
  - How do you feel about her use of the term "nutritional violence" against Black people via the food system? Did it surprise you?
  - How do you think we can make the food system equal for all?
3. Gabrielle Eitienne takes us with her as she returns home in her essay "Reflection of a Garden Chile on the Village and Homestead." (pp. 147–150). In it she states, "Another lesson I learned was how to reimagine the word wealth." (p. 149).

She then tells a story that gives us a picture of this lesson learned.

  - How did you interpret this picture?
  - What are some non-fiscal representations of wealth?



- What else can give wealth?
  - How do we let others know the value of that wealth?
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## Chapter 5: Black Women, Food, and Power

1. Tracye McQuirter's passion about being a vegan is clear in her essay "Call to Action: It's About Your Greens, Not Your Genes" (pp. 170–171). In it she expresses her passion for sharing how becoming vegan is essential to changing "the health paradigm of Black women" enabling them to "live longer healthier lives." (p. 171).
    - Have you considered becoming vegan or have you been vegan at some point in your life?
    - What were the driving factors for you?
    - What were the benefits and pitfalls you encountered?
  2. In "Creating Sacred Space as Part of the Black Food Ritual" (pp. 175–177), Jocelyn Jackson instructs the reader in a ritual that is designed to help people connect with their past, bring this past to the present, and share it with those who are important in their lives. Jocelyn states that "Black food isn't just ingredients and recipes and stories. It is also the spiritual practices and sacred spaces created when cooking and gathering together around these foods. It is the permission and invitation to feel welcome. It is the opportunity to honor our ancestors and our Afro futures." (p. 177)
    - How has food connected you with your past and present?
    - Have you had meals where you could tell the food was made with love? Or was it just something to keep the hunger away?
    - Have you made meals that gave you joy? How so and in what ways?
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## Chapter 6: Black, Queer, Food

1. Savannah Shange, Ph.D. charges the reader to find the passion/mode of liberation that fits them. In her essay Nectarines for Dinner: The Politics of Black Queer Taste (pp. 208–209) she expresses that being vegan and queer opens her up to more opportunities and experiences, and they are liberating. She goes on to say that these may not be what is right



for everyone but lists some other ways to break away from the expected and do your own thing, such as “eating locally, maintaining zero waste household, or ensuring that every dollar you spend goes to someone who makes a fair wage ... mutual-aid projects ... community-based safety protocols ... moving off the grid.” (p. 209)

- Do you feel a need to break away from what society is expecting of you?
  - If so, what expectations bother you?
  - Do you have a passion for any of her listed causes?
  - How do they resonate with you?
2. In “To Act Beyond Circumstance” (pp. 214–217), Leigh Gaymon-Jones writes, “Identifications falsely generate a sense of knowing about something that is often so personal, unique, and even evolving; that false sense of knowing impedes possibility and imagination” (p. 215). Her friend Jas states that “Identity is something I relate to in terms of how I locate myself in the world and informs how I build and sustain relationships” (p. 216). To this Gaymon-Jones reflects, “It seems, then, that the utility of naming, of self-location, is twofold: 1. Embedded in the act of self-location is the practice of self-inquiry and discovery; 2. Self-identification serves as a siren to comrades to connect and build collectively.” (p. 216)
- Would you like to share how you see your identity or how you self-identify?
  - Does your identity change over time, or is it based upon place and company?
3. In “To Act Beyond Circumstance”, Moretta Browne shares, “I find so much inspiration in nature right outside my door ... I see the tithonia that we planted for the monarchs. I think about our plant-cestors. They were here before us, and there’s been all this time and trauma, and they’re still here. How can I do that? What can I learn from the monarch butterfly? I want Black people to be able to do that. Sit and be still and reground.” (p. 217)
- Do you think we can learn from flora and fauna?
  - What can we learn from them?
4. Zoe Adjonyoh reminds us in “Queer Intelligence We Mobilize Through Food” that “Queer people hail from every region, every state, every city; we exist across religion, race, and class. We are not a monolith.” (p. 221) and yet “Food has become a vehicle through which the queer community has found community, sought visibility, championed diversity, and encouraged activism.” (p. 222). This brings us back to Gaymon-Jones’ look at identity and so many of the other writers look at food bringing people together.



- Do we sometimes assume that everyone who lands under a label is identical? Do we forget to look closer to see who they are individually?
  - How can we stop ourselves from over-generalizing people?
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### Interlude: Radical Self-Care

1. adrienne maree brown gives an overview of why this next section of the book is important in her essay “Caring for the Whole Through This Black Body.” She tells about growing up and gradually realizing that “some aspect of my inherent self was offensive. To strangers.” (p. 240). She also realized that she is not alone, but she is a part of a community that needs her and its health is dependent on each of its members’ health. She states that running away is not the answer. Instead, she explores that each individual needs to stop focusing on what the white community thinks of you, be it good or bad, but to focus on what is good for you. She explores how letting go of the outside world is a difficult thing to do, and that putting yourself first for some people is not second nature.
    - How do you care for yourself?
    - Do you do it often or is it few and far between?
    - How does it help you when you do it?
  2. In the essay “Medicinal Plants” (p.256), Kanchan Dawn Hunter describes plants as allies to humans.
    - Would you agree with this?
    - She also says that “Growing our own plant medicine is a way to imprint our particular healing needs on the plant that we are bringing into our bodies. Plants feel our energy and are affected by our intentions.” (p.256)
    - Do you think that plants can feel our energy and grow accordingly?
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### Conclusion: Black Future

1. Selassie Atadika’s essay “Millet Salad: How One Simple Dish Holds the Promise for the Future of Black Food” (pp. 272–273) shows us that industrial corporate businesses are not just affecting the way we eat here in America, but also in far- off lands with long histories of



growing, selling, buying, and cooking local. This impact is changing what people grow and eat, thus leaving behind traditions and identities. Atadika decided to fight to bring one traditional staple back.

- Can you think of any staples we have left behind? Why were they left behind?
- How might we give it a new life?

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## Suggested Additional Activities for Libraries and Book Clubs

Here are some ideas for group activities that the themes of Bryant Terry's *Black Food*.

- Host a potluck meal using recipes from the book.
- Host a food plant seedling swap.
- Glenn Lutz gives us a list of questions in “Questions: We’re All Just Figuring It Out” (pp. 247–249). Make a copy of those questions, cut them apart and hand them out to the members of your group. Ask them to read their question aloud and answer it. If your group is small, give each person more than one question so that they can choose which one they feel comfortable answering.
- Kanchan Dawn Hunter gives instruction on how to grow and dry your own herbal tea in her essay “Medicinal Plants” (p. 256). Bring in supplies for your group to start growing their own herb garden and spend time doing it together.



## Biography – Bryan Terry

Bryant Terry is a James Beard and NAACP Image Award-winning chef, educator, and author renowned for his activism to create a healthy, just, and sustainable food system. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of 4 Color Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House and Ten Speed Press, and he is co-principal and innovation director of Zenmi, a creative studio he founded. For the 2022–2023 academic year Bryant is an artist fellow/visiting scholar at University of California, Berkeley as a member of the second cohort of Abolition Democracy Fellows. Since 2015 he has been the chef-in-residence at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco where he creates public programming at the intersection of food, farming, health, activism, art, and culture. *San Francisco Magazine* included Bryant among its 11 Smartest People in the Bay Area Food Scene, and *Fast Company* named him one of 9 People Who Are Changing the Future of Food. In regard to his work, Bryant’s mentor Alice Waters says, “Bryant Terry knows that good food should be an everyday right and not a privilege.”

His sixth book, a collection of recipes, art, and stories, entitled *Black Food: Stories, Art, and Recipes from Across the African Diaspora* was published by 4 Color Books/Ten Speed Press in October 2021. It went on to be the most critically acclaimed American cookbook published that year, landing on lists by *The New Yorker*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Boston Globe*, *The Washington Post*, NPR, *Los Angeles Times*, *Food52*, *Glamour*, and many other publications. *Vegetable Kingdom*, Bryant’s fifth book, was published by Ten Speed Press/Penguin Random House in February 2020 in the midst of a pandemic and went on to be a commercial and critical success, winning an NAACP Image Award (Outstanding Literary Work), being nominated for an International Association of Culinary Professionals Award (Health & Nutrition), and being named one of the best cookbooks of the year by *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, *Vogue*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Forbes*, *Food & Wine*, and many other publications. His book *Afro-Vegan* was published in 2014. Just two months after being released, it was named one of the best cookbooks of 2014 by Amazon. *Afro-Vegan* was also named one of the best vegetarian cookbooks of all time by *Bon Appétit*. Bryant is also the author of the critically acclaimed *Vegan Soul Kitchen: Fresh, Healthy, and Creative African-American Cuisine*, which was named one of the best vegetarian/vegan cookbooks of the last 25 years by *Cooking Light* magazine.

Bryant graduated from the Chef’s Training Program at the Natural Gourmet Institute for Health and Culinary Arts in New York City. He is a former Ph.D. student who holds a Master of Arts in history with an emphasis on the African Diaspora from New York University, where he studied under Historian Robin D.G. Kelly. He lives between Oakland and Napa Valley, California with his wife and two daughters.

