



Soul Food Junkies

Film Study Guide

Director: Byron Hurt

2012 | Documentary | 64 Minutes | US | English | Unrated

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/soul-food-junkies/>

Synopsis: Food nourishes us and keeps us alive. It's pleasurable and it's comforting. It signifies home and family. And soul food, which occupies a special place in African American culture, enjoys all of those positive attributes. But can too much of it make you sick and even kill you? *Soul Food Junkies* asks this question and others as it explores the history of soul food, its place in African American culture, and its effects on the health of African Americans. Framing the film around his father's love of eating and subsequent illness and death, filmmaker Byron Hurt tells the story of soul food, from its origins during the days of slavery to presentday modifications in traditional cooking. Many of the items that are considered soul food staples, such as yams, corn, and the lowest-quality pork, were once the sustenance of slaves. Over time, dishes made with these items morphed into Southern cuisine, as survival food became a delicacy enjoyed by others.

Post-Screening Discussion Questions

1. What are some of your memories, feelings, or other associations with food? How do they compare with those expressed in the film?
2. Why are eating habits so hard to break? Do you think it's possible to be addicted to a specific food or to food in general? Explain.

3. Some people feel that using healthy substitutes in soul food (e.g., smoked turkey instead of pork fat to flavor greens, or herbs instead of salt) changes the nature of soul food, making it less authentic, even robbing African American culture of one of its defining characteristics. How would you respond to this criticism?
4. Is eating just a matter of personal behavior and preference? When do eating habits—or the effects of eating habits and food choices—step over into the public realm?
5. Do governmental or other public agencies have a role in guiding or responsibility to guide what or how people choose to eat? Defend your position. What about public figures, such as Dick Gregory (who appears in the film) or Michelle Obama? How influential can they be in promoting a healthy lifestyle?
6. The film talks about the intersections of food and politics, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. Do you feel that there are connections between food and politics today? How are they connected?
7. Do you feel that food deserts, that is, areas that lack markets selling healthy foods, are responsible for the poor nutrition found among many low-income African Americans? What are some other reasons for their poor nutrition?
8. What can local governments do to create better access to healthy foods for low-income populations? What can residents of a locality do to obtain better food options in their community?
9. How much of a role should schools play in establishing good eating habits?
10. Does your community provide ways for people to learn about good nutrition? If not, how could the community create opportunities for this kind of learning?