



The President's Kitchen Cabinet: The Story of the African Americans Who Have Fed Our First Families, from the Washingtons to the Obamas

Adrian Miller

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James Beard award-winning author Adrian Miller vividly tells the stories of the African Americans who worked in the presidential food service as chefs, personal cooks, butlers, stewards, and servers for every First Family since George and Martha Washington. Miller brings together the names and words of more than 150 black men and women who played remarkable roles in unforgettable events in the nation's history. Daisy McAfee Bonner, for example, FDR's cook at his Warm Springs retreat, described the president's final day on earth in 1945, when he was struck down just as his lunchtime cheese souffle emerged from the oven. Sorrowfully, but with a cook's pride, she recalled, "He never ate that souffle, but it never fell until the minute he died." A treasury of information about cooking techniques and equipment, the book includes twenty recipes for which black chefs were celebrated. From Samuel Fraunces's "onions done in the Brazilian way" for George Washington to Zephyr Wright's popovers, beloved by LBJ's family, Miller highlights African Americans' contributions to our shared American foodways. Surveying the labor of enslaved people during the antebellum period and the gradual opening of employment after Emancipation, Miller highlights how food-related work slowly became professionalized and the important part African Americans played in that process. His chronicle of the daily table in the White House proclaims a fascinating new American story.

The President's Kitchen Cabinet: The Story of the African Americans Who Have Fed Our First Families, from the Washingtons to the Obamas Details

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From Reader Review The President's Kitchen Cabinet: The Story of the African Americans Who Have Fed Our First Families, from the Washingtons to the Obamas for online ebook

Jessica says

I really enjoyed Miller's presentation for the Culinary Historians of Chicago, so I checked the book out from the library. Turns out, I'm really only interested in the highlights.

This book is very well researched (and there's pictures!), but just a tad too dry for me. I defied Nancy Pearl's 50 page guideline, read to page 90, watched my TBR pile grow exponentially, and bailed.

Stacy says

This book was incredibly fascinating. It delved into the history of a part of the White House few people seldom think about. Back to the days of George Washington, through successive Presidents, as far as documentation allowed, it looked at the cooks/chefs/domestic help of the Presidents and First Family. The majority of the domestic staff has historically all been African American, and even while still slaves, were known for their culinary prowess. Favorite recipes for many of the Presidents/First Families are also included, as well as anecdotes from inside the various staff themselves about the Presidents. I enjoyed this book much and look forward to trying some of these epicurean delights. My thanks to the author, publisher and NetGalley for a copy of the book.

Kristine says

The President's Kitchen Cabinet by Adrian Miller is a free NetGalley ebook that I read in early February.

Miller explores the dynamic between presidents being on 'our level' or approachable versus being extraordinary and having fancy, elite tastes through recipes and the full, detailed histories of African Americans on staff with the White House (stewards, travel cooks on trains and ships, valets, chefs, and assistant cooks). Among these stories are scarcely-retold facts, such as the President being responsible for paying the salaries of his personal staff until the era of Harry Truman when the federal budget would allocate for it, Taft really loving apples, the tipping of White House staff being allowed until the Eisenhower presidency, the concept of a 'less-er-pe' (a secret recipe being pared down to not include key ingredients before being publicly offered and published), Jimmy Carter really hating green peas, and Air Force One offering perpetually soggy fries.

Bonnye Reed says

GNAB I received a free electronic copy of this memoir from Netgalley, Adrian Miller and University of North Carolina Press in exchange for an honest review. Thank you all, for sharing your hard work with me.

This is an excellent look back through time to the Presidential staff who have provided for the First Family's needs and wants with heart and loyalty and personal sacrifice over the last 250 years. Some were slaves - their names are mostly remembered. Many who served since Lincoln cannot be named, but all are honored in this excellent history.

We tend to think of the staff at the Whitehouse as a small, limited force. We tend to not think of staff for Airforce One, Camp David and our president's actual homes. These folks, too, exist and are honored in the second half of the book. All staff are vetted by the Secret Service, pass stringent background checks and for the most part are underpaid. Thank you, Adrian Miller, for allowing us to see behind the curtain.

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University of North Carolina Press

Mary Sanchez says

The author brings to light the contributions African Americans have made to the White House and its residents--especially concerning the eating and drinking habits of the first families and their guests from George Washington to Barack Obama.

One would think it's a privilege to be a chef in the White House, but the author points out the many challenges the position entails. "Long hours, high pressure, the small work space, and less pay offset the prestige factor."

The details in the book make you feel like a fly on the White House wall, where you are privy to little known facts simmering away in the kitchen. I wish there had been more written about the latter day presidents and I'm wondering what is happening in the Trump White House kitchen. Hope there's an addition to this book.

Mandy says

i loved this! miller's book offers exactly the kind of history i prefer: focused on a single topic throughout time (as opposed to a specific period or event); well-researched; full of exciting anecdotes, yet connected to larger socio-cultural trends; and balanced between serious issues (racism, in this case) and levity (so many food puns!).

i like knowing that george washington's favorite slave and cook, hercules, successfully escaped on gw's birthday; that zephyr wright, the cook for lbj's family, was influential in his signing of the civil rights act; etc.--but mostly i appreciate having awareness now of the profound influence that african american cooks, chefs, ushers, stewards, and flight attendants had (and continue to have) on our presidents.

Gretchen says

well written, accessible, important. can't recommend this enough even though if you weren't sure if george washington was a dong before reading you'll definitely know he was a dong after reading.

Julie Bestry says

What's the opposite of damning with faint praise? Praising with faint damnation? I really wanted to give this five stars -- I'd definitely grant it 4 1/2 for the deep dive into a lineage of Americans whose history has been ignored, but the writing is just a tad dry, academic, and remote for my tastes. At the risk of sounding sexist, you can tell that a man wrote this. It lacks a passion or empathy. You can tell Miller is wise and kind, but when George Washington's beloved cook Hercules escapes the bonds of slavery, the focus is on GW's petulance without any exultation for Hercules' freedom. (Surely, president or no, Washington is the villain in this anecdote, but the reader has to do all the heavy lifting!)

Miller's content is INCREDIBLY well-researched in an area where few if any researchers have investigated, but his writing style, reportorial with occasional bemusement, seems a better fit for discussing plants or microeconomics than food, politics, and the lives of African-Americans from the post-colonial era to the Civil War to Jim Crow to the 21st century. In particular, he speaks of the lives of slaves with a muted detachment. That Miller is African-American makes this detachment feel all the more puzzling.

Reading this book left me hungry -- for more about African-American cooks, for more about the Federal period and the life of African-Americans in Philadelphia and Washington, about the staff of the White House (both antebellum and post-war). I realize that Miller was limited by the dearth of biographical resources of many of 18th and 19th century African-Americans, and he created a rich tapestry with what he had; seeing the relationships between the presidents and their chefs/cooks/stewards was fascinating. I love history, particularly presidential history, and this book interwove political insights and personal biographies in a compelling way. I had never given a thought to dining on the presidential trains and yachts (!) or even much about Air Force One. (I was surprised that no mention was made about research into how the senses of taste are dulled in the air and how AF1 stewards accommodate for that.)

I liked how Miller chose to categorize the chapters rather than sticking with a purely chronological telling, and I appreciated the blending of the personal, political, historical, and culinary. I just wish Miller had put as much of his heart as his intellect into the book, and it occurs to me that, given that the book was published by the University of North Carolina Press, it's possible that the academic editorial slant was imposed from above.

Jim Razinha says

Fascinating inside look from someone who was on the inside. Not too deep, but definitely well-researched. Remains of the Day, Upstairs Downstairs. Curious what impact the current regime has on the staff...

The recipe selection was a nice touch. I might just try that eggnog...

I got this through NetGalley. I downloaded it for the advanced read last November, but somehow didn't get to it until now. Fortunately, I could still read the galleys.

Beatriz says

This book shows us a different view of the White House: the kitchen. The reader peeks in to learn about race relations, the role of Afro-Americans and the private lives inside the presidential house. It tells innumerable stories about the presidents, their families and the staff. To round it out, each chapter finishes with recipes (which are on my must-try list!).

A beautiful research work that brings these people to life.

I received an advance reading copy of this book from Netgalley.com.

Megan Rogers says

I got to 57% and then found myself no longer interested. I just skimmed the rest until I'd come upon an interesting story to read closer. This book was filled with interesting tidbits and facts but it was extremely unorganized and dully presented. This was an ARC from netgalley though, so perhaps it was reorganized and restructured before release.

D. says

The AMAZING Book Club of Doom book for August, 2018.

I really skimmed it more than read it. It didn't catch my interest the way I'd hoped, and then I needed to return it to the library.

Most members of the book club thought it got better in later chapters, for what it's worth.

Anna says

Did you know that John Adams was interested in a garden like the Obamas and that Johnson decided to cut out most of the cost of the food of his dogs because too expensive, and that black people at the White House lived/slept in the basement, now three rooms and that the White House was so warm until the 1950s - when air conditioned sorted out the problem - that all the Presidents during the summer-time decided to emigrate somewhere else?

That Lincoln didn't love to eat a lot and Eisenhower interested in choosing the best cook for the White House because someone who appreciated food?

Rich of anecdotes, The President's Kitchen Cabinet The Story of the African Americans Who Have Fed Our First Families, from the Washingtons to the Obamas by Adrian Miller on stores now it is truly interesting, fascinating and wonderful.

The author, Mr Miller works at the White House. The idea of writing a book all dedicated to the black cooks

and stewards who served the American Presidents and their history a recent idea.

The manuscript of this book firstly read by President Barack Obama.

Who works at the White House's kitchen? Have we ever thought at the food eaten by a President and his family? No. I mean: I haven't never taken in consideration this aspect of the "Living at the White House."

Maybe others have. But I hadn't.

Well, the book written by Adrian Miller, with a privileged look will not only reveal us from George Washington to Barack Obama what the various Presidents loved to eat, adding various and yummy recipes in the while but also a particularity maybe unknown that some of the most important stewards, cooks at the White House were black.

Black people in fact a strong reputation of being great cooks, the White House always more or less surrounded by a staff of great black men and women who served with great affection, love, sacrifice, because big families with a lot of guests is in a day a never ending work, the various Presidential Families.

Food it's another key for understanding the History of a country but also people, in this case the First Citizens and First Ladies.

Their moods, their tastes, their way of conducting the domestic daily-life.

Of course the Queen of the kitchen, with directions given to all the Kitchen staff department the First Lady but Eisenhower made a difference in this sense.

John Adams was the first President who desired to create a garden at the White House as said before strong and conscious of something: that a house without a garden is not a real house.

Barack Obama in recent years revived the tradition of John Adams one of the first Presidents of the USA, and in this case for pressing people: let's eat good quality food, the main message.

Who were the most representative stewards and cooks of the White House?

We will discover Fraunces for example the cook of George Washington.

This lady served this President for a long time. Once she died she was buried in a grave in the cemetery without any kind of name but it was built close to her a monument for remembering her.

Another steward important in a crucial moment of the USA Crump. Crump lived and served also during President Garfield. Surely this President would have marked his future as well.

The USA were still recovering after the shocking departure of President Lincoln when also Garfield seriously injured and well if you know History you know also the end of this story.

Crump was a great mediator with press. He was one of the few, with doctors, nurses and family members that could see everyday the President.

Pinckney the last one for a long time of black stewards, three generations in which stewards after him, just white.

We meet again a black steward with Fields and more, because a lot of black people have marked the history of the White House.

Thanks to this book we will discover some presidential culinary curiosities.

Roosevelt started to appreciate pigs' feet and he was really fixated with this discovery: also when he met other Presidents of foreign countries he insisted for let them eat this dish.

Many many good and yummy recipes in the book.

For you

The White House Eggnog recipe.

This version from the recipe files of the late White House executive chef Walter Scheib.

Makes about 1 gallon

6–7 eggs (pasteurized if possible), separated

1 cup sugar

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup bourbon

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup Cognac

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup dark rum (Scheib recommended Meyers)

1 teaspoon salt

2 cups heavy cream

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

1 quart milk (or more if a thinner consistency is desired)

Freshly grated nutmeg, for serving

1. Combine the egg yolks and sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a whisk attachment and whip to ribbon stage (lemon yellow in color), about 5–7 minutes.
2. Add the alcohol, and mix well; and scrape sides of the bowl and mix again.
3. Pour the mix into a 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -gallon bowl and set aside.
4. In a separate clean mixer bowl using a clean beater, whip the egg whites and salt into very stiff peaks and fold them into the mixture in the bowl.
5. Wipe out the mixer bowl, pour in the cream and vanilla, and whip until very stiff peaks form. Fold this into the eggnog mixture.
6. Add the milk and whisk until smooth. This may take 3–5 minutes, as the meringue and cream must be mixed completely.
7. Transfer the mixture to a sealable container and refrigerate for 3–5 days. Serve very cold topped with a sprinkle of nutmeg.
8. If the foam rises from the eggnog mixture during refrigeration, reincorporate it by whisking right before serving.

and

Caroline Harrison's Deviled Almonds

The recipe created by Caroline Harrison.

Makes 4 servings

½ pound almonds, blanched

4 tablespoons butter

Cayenne pepper to taste

Salt to taste

1. Heat a large skillet over medium heat.
2. Add the almonds and butter and sauté the almonds until they are light brown.
3. Drain on paper towels.
4. Place the almonds in a cake pan and lightly season with cayenne and salt.
5. Serve hot.

Oh, and remember: don't try to send any kind of food as gift at the President, if tempted because if in the remote past it could be accepted now it is automatically thrown away.

I thank NetGalley and University of North Carolina Press for this book!

Kevin says

This is one of those fascinating little curiosities that pop up every so often. It's, well it's exactly as the title suggests, the story of African-Americans who have served US Presidents. Except it's far more than that too.

Rather apt for a book that talks about food, it's a bit of an acquired taste. Although it has a number of light anecdotes it's a fairly dense read really. Personally I found it a nice book to dip into alongside other reading. I think the reason I fatigued on lengthy sessions with this book is it can be somewhat back and forth, at least

in terms of Presidents.

It's worth persisting though. Aside from a few recipes I've not braved myself, there is an interesting chronicle of how Presidential dining has a wider impact. The attempts to impress foreign dignitaries while remaining an everyday American. The source of the budget for the kitchens. And for that matter the changing roles of the kitchens and the staff. The shifts between French and American wines. The evolution of Presidential transport.

Also, despite being slightly dense the book is oddly warm and comforting. Perhaps it's the familiar topic of food, or perhaps the humanity it gives these remotes historical figures. The wife enforcing a diet, the husband sneaking treats, the differing tastes. Sure, we all see the obligatory hamburger on the campaign trail, but there's nothing quite like the food people eat when not trying to impress for feeling part of their inner circle.

Different, and not for everyone, but if you like your food or your Presidential history - well worth picking up.

Mo Coghlan says

This is a great collection of stories about Presidents of the US and the chefs who worked for them. I really enjoyed the stories about the African Americans in the kitchen who influenced both policies and re-election of the presidents. And, there is nothing like hearing about a President's eating habits to give you that, "they're just like us" feeling of familiarity with such powerful people.
