

## WHAT OR WHO IS CREOLE?

The term “Creole” has a different meaning when applied to food as opposed to ethnicity. Yes, Creole cuisine comes from Creole people – just like Italian food comes from Italians and Vietnamese food comes from the Vietnamese.

But who are the Creoles? What is the meaning of the word? Well, like we said before ... it’s complicated.

The word Creole, as an adjective, is defined as any product or tradition born of the mixing of French, Spanish, and African cultures in the New World. Hence, Creole cuisine.

But the definition of a Creole person is more elusive, more complicated, often mistaken. It is commonly tossed about casually in New Orleans, a blanket term to describe light-skinned African-Americans. This misses the mark by a wide margin.

Generally Creole is defined as a person born of European parents in America, specifically in French or Spanish colonies, particularly in and around Louisiana. They are first-generation immigrants.

The confusion comes from the second definition that dictionaries offer for the term to describe the dark-skinned descendants of the indigenous population of the West Indies, particularly Haiti, as opposed to Africans imported during times of slavery.

Two hundred years ago, the largest populations of both Creole populations in the New World merged in New Orleans, eventually intermingling and helping create the rich ethnic diversity that characterizes the city’s current population. In general, Creoles were residents of New Orleans and Cajuns were from southwest Louisiana.

Creole cooking has been influenced over the years by the Cajuns of southwestern Louisiana, the massive African population—both freed and enslaved, by the Native Americans who were here first, and later from waves of Haitian, German, Italian, English and Irish immigrants.

## THE PETTICOAT REBELLION.

Creole cooking comprises a veritable gumbo of cultures, nationalities and techniques, brought to bear upon the diverse and flavorful harvests, and bounties of the region’s fertile soils, lush forests, and abundant waters.

In the early 18th century, France dispatched its first shipload of women to its Gulf Coast settlements to provide wives for the male inhabitants, and ensure population growth in its valued territories.

Domestic bliss was short-lived, however, as the women quickly grew tired of the constant shortages of wheat, flour, vegetables, and herbs, forced to build their dietary regimens on the local corn.

By 1722, they’d had enough. Marching on the Governor’s residence in New Orleans, the women banged on pots and pans, demanding an audience—and more and better food. Hence was born the Petticoat Rebellion.

Governor Jean Baptiste Le Moyne was quick to find a solution. His housekeeper, a Madame Langois, was widely regarded as the colony’s finest cook. Le Moyne directed her to introduce them to the vast local resources and the techniques to bring out their finest flavors – file powder for what would become gumbo; ground meal to make hominy grits. And so on.

Thus was established America’s first cooking school. An anxious population was placated. And Creole cooking was born.

Yes, it’s a little more complicated than that, but historians do generally mark the Petticoat Rebellion as the seminal moment that established and disseminated a particular style of cooking that we now hail as the country’s most important contribution to the dining canon. It has changed often, evolved, matured, and blossomed over time.

It started evolving with first ships that docked in the vibrant port city and evolves today in the kitchens of celebrity chefs who continue to experiment, blend, fuse, and expand the notion of Creole cooking.

- Chris Rose

## MEATS, POULTRY *and* SEAFOOD

Like most aspects of Creole cuisine, the meat used in New Orleans' cooking is a considerable mix of what the European settlers were familiar with and what they found in the New World.

The original French explorers came with limited supplies aboard the small ships that brought them across the Atlantic. Subsequent voyages brought more supplies, both animals and plants, as well as the equipment to be used in their production.

While the first French settlers had cattle and pigs, they were more interested in breeding their stock than eating them. They did this quite efficiently. At the beginning of the 17th century there were less than 20 cattle in Louisiana, by 1746 there were an estimated 10,000 head.

German immigrants in the area, like other ethnic groups, formed their own community. Germantown was just upriver of New Orleans, and specialized in pig farming. This local abundance of pigs left a lasting effect on Creole cooking, in the abundance of pork products utilized in many dishes.

While cattle in Louisiana were supplemented by animals brought in from the already established settlements in the Caribbean, the Creoles also had ready access to native game.

Native Americans taught the new settlers how to survive in the unfamiliar, seemingly hostile area. From using sassafras to grinding cornmeal, hunting in the swamps, and fishing the bayous, the newcomers modified their familiar recipes and created new one from the bounty.

The cooks of New Orleans were exposed to both the salt water fish of the Gulf such as the pompano, as well as the fresh water fishes of the inland waterways. The native shellfish also became a centerpiece for Creole cuisine, from clams and oysters to crawfish, shrimp, and crabs.

While the European settlers brought chickens and other fowl with them, they also found plentiful birds in the area including turkey and quail, which were all incorporated into their culinary culture.







## Tujague's Restaurant BEEF BRISKET

For fix-it-and-forget-it ease, after the initial browning of the brisket it can be finished off in a slow cooker set to low for at least 8 hours, or until the brisket is fork-tender. In a hurry? Use a pressure cooker according to the manufacturer's specifications. In either case, remove the meat when it is cooked and thicken the sauce as directed below.

### SERVES 12 to 16

2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
a 5-pound beef brisket  
2 large onions, chopped  
4 cloves garlic, chopped  
2 large carrots, chopped  
2 cups chopped tomatoes  
2 stalks celery, chopped  
1 tablespoon chili powder  
3 bay leaves  
1 tablespoon chopped curly parsley  
1 tablespoon fresh thyme, chopped  
1 teaspoon allspice  
1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns  
1 teaspoon liquid smoke flavoring  
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar  
beef stock to cover

1. In a heavy pot or Dutch oven heat the oil over high heat, in it brown the brisket on both sides, and transfer the brisket to a plate.
2. Add the onion, garlic, and carrot to the pot and sauté, stirring, until browned. Return the brisket to the pot and add the tomatoes, celery, chili powder, bay leaves, parsley, thyme, allspice, peppercorns, liquid smoke, and balsamic vinegar. Add enough beef stock to cover the brisket and simmer, covered, for 3 hours. The brisket should be fork-tender but not falling apart. Remove the brisket and cut it into 1/4-inch slices or large chunks.
3. Increase the heat slightly to reduce the stock. When the stock has reduced by half, strain out any solids, discarding them, return the stock to the pot with the brisket, and heat through. Serve warm.

*Legendary Tujague's is the second-longest operating restaurant in New Orleans, dating from 1849. Over time, lunch at Tujague's came to mean a marvelous seven-course, liquor-fueled affair. In the early days, boiled beef brisket was one of only two entrées offered for lunch.*

*Tujague's Restaurant opened in 1856 and moved to Madame Begue's premises when she closed, so two of the first three restaurants in the city were at the same location, which can be a little confusing. What is clear, however, is that Tujague's still serves a fine example of the classic Creole meal of boiled beef.*

*Leftovers make magnificent roast beef po-boys — good enough to simply cook a brisket just for that pleasure. An added bonus is the liquid left behind, to strain and reserve, frozen, for later use as aromatic beef stock.*

## RED *and* WHITE HORSERADISH SAUCES

### RED HORSERADISH SAUCE

1 cup ketchup  
5 tablespoons prepared horseradish  
1 tablespoon salt  
1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper

Mix all ingredients together in a small bowl and refrigerate, covered, for at least 1 hour prior to serving.

### WHITE HORSERADISH SAUCE

2 cups heavy cream  
5 tablespoons prepared horseradish  
1 tablespoon salt  
1 teaspoon cracked black pepper

In a large bowl beat the cream until it forms stiff peaks. Fold in the horseradish, salt, and pepper and refrigerate, covered, for at least 1 hour prior to serving.