

JAMBALAYA BY ANY OTHER NAME

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Cajun and Creole food exploded into the American culinary consciousness in the mid-1980s after Chef Paul Prudhomme awakened a generation's taste buds with his instant classic, 'Blackened Redfish.' Soon restaurants serving these cuisines began popping up across the country and around the globe. Even more widespread, Cajun-style dishes were added to the menus of otherwise pedestrian restaurants and chain-eateries. A wealth of cookbooks followed. Recipes such as gumbo, crawfish étouffée, jambalaya, and red beans with rice became indelibly stamped onto the dining landscape, along with the 'blackening' of virtually any foodstuff – a takeoff on Chef Paul's seminal recipe.

Prior to this sudden awareness of the exciting foods of New Orleans and its environs, Louisiana cooking was largely ignored outside of the South. Indeed, other than in relation to the American Civil War, Southern history and foodways garnered little attention in academic circles. As a result, there was scant background and knowledge of Cajun and Creole foods and culture to support greater-America's newfound fondness for the flavours of the region. People could ascribe any attributes or history they desired to the dishes being served, and oft-repeated folklore became 'fact.'

One such dish that continues to confound the historian is jambalaya. I first ran into the mystery of its origin while researching the history of the Acadians and the evolution of Cajun cuisine. Though jambalaya was not central to my thesis, I found myself captured by the quest and intrigued by the myriad stories that I found. Eventually I concluded that I had to get back to the main point of my work, leaving my curiosity about this dish unquenched. Recently the essay 'Who Saved Jambalaya' (*PPC* 80) was brought to my attention, re-whetting my interest in the subject.

Cookbook writers often state that ‘jambalaya’ comes from the French *jambon* (‘ham’) and an African word for rice, given variously as ‘*ya*,’ ‘*aya*’ or ‘*yaya*’. This is also the story told by modern New Orleanians. It has proven impossible to verify this derivation. Sources fail to mention from which of hundreds of African languages these words are supposed to come. While ‘*ya*’ is the word for sorghum in Mambili and Grusi-Lyela, not one of ‘*ya*,’ ‘*aya*,’ nor ‘*yaya*’ have appeared as words for ‘rice’ in my survey of major African languages. Furthermore, the various African words that do mean ‘rice’ do not resemble any of these sounds. I am unable to prove a negative, so this theory cannot be finally discarded, but it seems to be legend, not fact.¹

In 1931, William A. Read, PhD, professor of English Language and Literature at Louisiana State University published his work on the French language spoken in Louisiana. He classified each word by origin, including ‘jambalaya’ with words from Africa. This is probably the result of the common myth stated above. In spite of his categorization, in the text he calls it a ‘Spanish-Creole dish’, then goes on to say, ‘I can suggest no plausible source for *jambalaya*. Can it be related to Congo *chimbolo*, *zimbolo*, “bread”, “biscuits”?’² I find it interesting that a professor at LSU would be so confused; listing it as African, calling it Spanish-Creole, and finally admitting that he doesn’t know from whence it came.

Another, and I believe more plausible, suggestion is proposed by Alan Davidson in *The Oxford Companion to Food*, ‘[jambalaya]... probably came from the period of Spanish rule in Louisiana, and represents a slurring together of *jamón* [ham] and *paella*.’³ A number of other authors share this notion.⁴

My biggest problem with both of these proposals is the emphasis on ham as a source for the name. Reviewing recipes dated from 1849 to the present shows that while ham is usually an ingredient, a great many recipes leave it out, and there are certainly versions of paella and pilau that include ham but are not called ‘jambalaya.’ More importantly, while ham and pork products add a delicious

element to jambalaya, they are hardly the dish's defining feature. It is difficult to imagine a cook of the past naming a rice dish after the incidental inclusion of ham. Furthermore, following the model of most French and Spanish recipe names, were a novel pilau or paella with ham created, it would have likely been named '*pilau au jambon*', or '*paella con jamón*', not '*jambon pilau*' or '*jamón paella*.'⁵

While culinary writers have one set of ideas, lexicographers seem to have another. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces 'jambalaya' to Provençal.⁶ *Jambalaia* (note the 'i' instead of 'y') *jabalaia*, and *jambaraia* appear in *Lou Tresor dou Felibrige ou Dictionnaire Provençal-Français* by Frédéric Mistral, a French-Provençal dictionary published in 1878.

JAMBALAIA, JABALAIA, JAMBARAIA (mot arabe), s. m. Ragoût de riz avec une volaille, macédoine, méli-mélo, cohue, v. *mescladisso, pelau*.

Aquéu jambalaia me remete en memèri

Ço qu'arribèt à-n-uno viélo serp.

F. PEISE.

Éro un jambaraia⁷ de facho de cenobre.

F. CHAILAN.⁸

[JAMBALAIA, JABALAIA, JAMBARAIA (Arab word), noun masculine. Stew of rice with fowl, mixed vegetables, mish-mash, rabble, see *melange, pilau*.

This rabble reminds me

Of the arrival of an old snake,

F. PEISE.

It was a mish-mash of red inebriated faces.

F. CHAILAN.⁹]

Unfortunately, Mistral did not give the dates of his sources, nor where they were printed. With considerable difficulty I was able to track them down and get them translated.

The first is from a poem by Louis Charles Felix Peise (b. Toulon,

1820), ‘*La Testo et la Coua de la Serp*’, from his book *Leis Talounados de Barjoman* (1865.) Mistral’s second reference is an even earlier work. Fortuné (Fourtunat) Chailan (b. Aix-en-Provence, 1801, d. Marseille, 1840) first published this line in *Leis amours de Vanus; vo, Lou paysan oou théâtre*, in 1837. It was repeated in a much longer and better-known volume, *Lou Gangui – Contes, Anecdotos et Facétios en Vers Prouvençaoux*, which was published in 1840 and went through several subsequent editions after the author’s death.

Excerpt from *La Testo et la Coua de la Serp*:

Mathiou me dis: — es un descaladaire!
Jacque me dis: — es eou qu’a tout sauva;
Mai tout aco s’acouardo gaire,
Entantou cadun saup coumo la barquo va.
Aqueou jambalaia me remette en memori
Ce qu’arribet à uno vieilho ser,
Quand sa coua vouguet ave l’er
De passar per davant. Veici touto l’histori:
La coua disie per sa resoun:
— L’a ben trouu long-temps qu’aco duro!

[Mathew said to me: He is a rioter!
James said to me: He was our safeguard;
But all that does not agree,
However each of us knows how the boat is going.
This rabble [*jambalaia*] reminds me
Of the arrival of an old snake,
When its tail wanted the air
To pass in front. Here’s the story;
The tail gave as argument
– It had been there for too long!¹⁰]

Excerpt from *Lou Gangui – Contes, Anecdotos et Facétios en Vers Prouvençaoux*:

A l’estanci plus haou fasien chavararin,

Aqui l'avié de toute de riche et mesquin:
Ero un jambaraya de fachos de cenobre*;
Coumo la chicarié qu'aven oou mes d'ootobre,
Touto sorto d'oussou li fasié son jargoun

(*) *Figures rouges, avinées*

[The upstairs neighbors were making a din
All kinds of people, rich and poor:
It was a mish-mash [*jambaraya*] of red inebriated faces*;
As in the song birds that we have in October,
All kinds of birds were singing

(*) *Red faces, inebriated*

It was exciting to see these full texts and discover that neither example used the word in a culinary sense. In both cases it indicates a mish-mash, rabble or mixture. One wonders then about Mistral's calling it a rice dish. As one of the premier Provençal scholars of his day, one can hardly dispute his knowledge of the meaning of a word. Yet he failed to produce a reference to either a recipe or other gastronomic usage.

Where did Mistral get the idea that '*jambalaia*' in Provençal was a food? Is it possible that the recipe was created in Louisiana and travelled to Provence? Was jambalaya as a dish both created and named in Occitania before ever making it to America, in spite of the lack of written recipes there? These are just a few of the questions that have plagued me.

One also has to wonder where Mistral got the idea that the word was of Arabic origin. Charles Perry, noted scholar of Arab cuisine, considered the issue for me and concluded that there is no viable source for '*jambalaia*' in Arabic. He suggests that Mistral was probably guessing.¹¹ Considering the size of the dictionary (two volumes of 1200 pages each), one can certainly forgive the occasional error. Perhaps Mistral knew that *jambalaia* was a type

of pilau and that pilau came to Provence from Persia. Thus he may have assumed that the word ‘*jambalaia*’ came from there as well. Unfortunately there appears to be no way to uncover how he came to his conclusion.

Mistral also defines a word ‘*jambineto*’:

JAMBINETO, s. f. Sorte d’étuvée, de fricassée, faite avec des oisillons.

Dei paire leis enfant farien de jambineto.

F. CHAILAN.¹²

[JAMBINETO, noun feminine. A type of étouffée, fricassee, made with birds.

The father of the children made the *jambineto*.

F. CHAILAN.¹³]

This same word appears in an even earlier Provençal dictionary, *Dictionnaire de la Provence et du Comté-Venaissin*, published in 1785:

JAMBINETTO, s. f. Pronon. long. Fricassée, ragoût, sort d’étouffée faite avec de petits oiseaux pris au nid, & cuits dans un pot avec du lard.¹⁴

[JAMBINETTO, noun. Feminine. Second to the last syllable pronounced long. Fricassee, ragout, type of étouffée made with small birds taken from their nest, & cooked in a pot with pork belly.¹⁵]

What is this bird fricassee? I am unable to find a recipe for it, nor any other reference to this word in any source. Clearly from the dictionaries’ descriptions this is not jambalaya. However, it is another Provençal dish with a ‘jamb-’ name, but only a minor relationship to ham. It is possible that *jambineto* is the ancestor of ‘*jambonette*’, a French dish of smothered chicken leg and thigh which is undoubtedly named for ‘small leg,’ not ham.

What of the uses of the word in the English speaking world?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* says:

jambalaya Also **jambalayah**, **jambolaya**. [Louisiana Fr., f. Provençal *jambalaia*.] A dish composed of rice together with shrimps, chicken, turkey, etc. Also *fig.*

1872 *New Orleans Times* 28 June, Those who brought victuals, such as gumbo, jambalaya, etc., all began eating and drinking. 1905 'O. Henry' in *Munsey's Mag.* July 467/2 Terrapines,...jambolaya, and canvas-covered ducks. 1916 *Dialect Notes* IV. 269 The show was a regular jambalaya of stunts. 1949 B. A. Botkin *Treas. S. Folklore* iv. i. 552 Louisianians [grow lyrical] over the superiorities of the Cajun and Creole cuisine—gumbo, jambalaya, bouillabaisse. 1961 *Listener* 14 Dec. 1050/2 *Jambalaya*...is based on a creole mixture of ham chunks, prawns, and rice, highly flavoured and simmered in chicken stock. 1973 L. Hellman *Pentimento* (1974) 78 The dinner was wonderful: jambalaya, racoon stew, and wild duck.

Here too the word refers to both the dish and a figurative use as 'mish-mash' or 'mixture.'

However, it turns out that the *OED* missed a printed reference 23 years older than its earliest source. In the May 1849 issue of *American Agriculturist* there was published a recipe entitled 'Hopping Johnny (jambalaya),' submitted by Solon Robinson while in Alabama, March 25, 1849:

Hopping Johnny (jambalaya).—Take a dressed chicken, or full-grown fowl, if not old, and cut all the flesh into small pieces, with a sharp knife. Put this into an iron pot, with a large spoonful of butter and one onion chopped fine; steep and stir it till it is brown; then add water enough to cover it, and put in some parsley, spices, and red pepper pods, chopped fine, and let it boil till you think it is barely done, taking care to stir it often, so as not to burn it; then stir in as much rice, when cooked, as will absorb all the water;

which will be one pint of rice to two of water; stir and boil it a minute or so, and then let it stand and simmer until the rice is cooked, and you will have a most delicious dish of palatable, digestible food.¹⁶

It is strange that the author titled the recipe ‘Hopping Johnny (jambalaya).’ This is clearly jambalaya and not a ‘Hopping John’, which would be made of rice with peas, chickpeas or beans.

I find it interesting that the use in the *American Agriculturist* as a culinary term postdates the non-culinary use found in Provence by nine years, but pre-dates Mistral’s reference to the word as a food by 29 years. Since there is no telling how long any given word has been used in spoken language before it appears in print, the proximity of all these dates leaves us with a completely inconclusive muddle (a jambalaya perhaps!)

I was discussing the problem with a colleague recently when the word ‘jumble’ was mentioned. She suggested to me that it was ‘absurd’ to think that ‘jumble’ could be in any way related to ‘jambalaya.’ On reflection I have concluded that it is a possibility must be considered. The mere fact that the words sound similar is certainly insufficient grounds for relatedness. However, given that the figurative use of ‘*jambalaia*’ in Provençal means the same thing as ‘jumble’ in English, it becomes much harder to ignore a possible connection.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* says of ‘jumble’ that it is ‘... Known only from the 16th c., and without cognate words. Prob. onomatopœic: cf. *bumble, fumble, mumble, rumble, stumble, tumble*.¹⁷ In other words, they don’t know its origin. Since there has been significant trade, royal intermarriage, and conflict between England, France and Spain throughout the ages, it is in no way inconceivable that the word ‘jumble’ travelled south from England with plenty of time to be turned into ‘*jambalaia*’ by the early nineteenth century. Or, perhaps ‘jumble’ and ‘*jambalaia*’ are cognates, sharing some common, now lost, source.

Meanwhile, since *jambon/jamón* is in no way the defining element of jambalaya, couldn't '*jambalaia*' as a dish easily be a 'jumbled paella' or a 'jumbled pilau'? In fact, being a mixture of rice, meats, and vegetables, a Provençal chef, cook, or homemaker could have used the name '*jambalaia*' on the word's own merits without the necessity for reference to an earlier rice dish.

As for recipes published in cookbooks, the earliest I have found appeared in *What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking* (1881):

Jumberlie – A Creole Dish. Take one chicken and cut it up, separating every joint, and adding to it one pint of cleanly-washed rice. Take about half a dozen large tomatoes, scalding them well and taking the skins off with a knife. Cut them in small pieces and put them with the chicken in a pot or large porcelain saucepan. Then cut in small pieces two large pieces of sweet ham and add to the rest, seasoning high with pepper and salt. It will cook in twenty-five minutes. Do not put any water on it.¹⁸

This is a surprising recipe in many ways. First, its author was not from Louisiana. Current research indicates that she was born a slave in South Carolina, moved to Mobile, Alabama after emancipation, and finally settled in San Francisco, California, where she published her book.¹⁹ Second, while a good many jambalayas call for tomatoes, I have not seen another, modern or period, that calls for so many and relies on their juices for cooking the rice. Had she not specified that no water be added, I would have assumed that it was omitted in error.²⁰ All other jambalaya recipes use either water or stock.

Given Fisher's relocations and the odd nature of the recipe, it is hard to say where it might have originated. It may be significant that Solon Robinson's 1849 recipe was said to have come from Alabama, and Fisher lived there for a time as well. Unfortunately, this is another clue that has been lost.

The first recipe to be found in a New Orleans cookbook is provided by Lafcadio Hearn in his *Creole Cook Book* (1885):

Jambalaya of fowls and rice.

Cut up and stew a fowl; when half done, add a cup of raw rice, a slice of ham minced, and pepper and salt; let all cook together until the rice swells and absorbs all the gravy of the stewed chicken, but it must not be allowed to get hard or dry. Serve in a deep dish. Southern children are very fond of this; it is said to be an Indian dish, and very wholesome as well as palatable; it can be made with many things.²¹

His suggestion that jambalaya came from the Native Americans is probably a mistake. It is possible that he got this impression from jambalaya-like dishes made with hominy instead of rice. In her 1930 master's thesis, *Some Things That Belong to the Early Days of Lafayette Parish*, Ann Spotswood Buchanan complains that published cookbooks were full of errors, stating that 'Creole cook books, arranged to meet present day needs do not tell the whole story of Creole and Acadian cooking. They do not... [indicate] that *la sagamité*, not rice, was used in jambalaya.'²² If some New Orleans Creole families made jambalaya with *sagamité*, a type of Native American hominy, that could explain Hearn's belief that his rice-based jambalaya derived from a Native American creation.

He was not alone in this notion. In 1875 the *New-Orleans Times* published an article where the author makes a rather extraordinary claim for the Native American roots of jambalaya:

We have seen it spelled in French *jumbliade*; but the dish is of Indian origin; nearly all of the old travelers describe it. It was originally made of *zizania aquatica*, or wild rice, one of the native cereals of America, and of several varieties of beans or *frijoles* as the Mexican Indians call them.²³

However, what is described here *is* a Hopping John, not a jambalaya, since it is a rice and bean dish.

Recipes for jambalaya continued to appear in every Cajun and Creole cookbook published, from *The Picayune's Creole Cookbook* (1901),²⁴ through community cookbooks too numerous to list, Paul Prudhomme's books²⁵ that helped to popularize Cajun food in the 1980s, and on to the present day. It has simply become one of the main dishes of the Cajun/Creole canon.

None of which nails down the root of either the word or the food. From where could it have come? There are several possibilities, some more likely than others. Either the word and the dish evolved together, or separately. The recipe might have been created or named in Europe, Africa, or America, and the creators might have been French, Occitan, Spanish, Acadian, Native American or African.

If jambalaya started in America, or if it was African and brought with slaves to the Americas, it would have had to have travelled to Provence before the publication of Mistral's dictionary in 1878. In fact, it is probably fair to suggest this needed to have happened well before that date for Mistral to have been unaware of its origin. It is hard to make concrete statements about the word, since '*jambalaya*' could have been in use in a figurative sense in Provence, and then been applied to the dish by French Occitan speakers in Louisiana.

Still, it seems unlikely to me that jambalaya was named in the Americas. The migration of peoples was primarily from the Old World to the New. Furthermore, printed recipes in cookbooks did not exist in America early enough for the dish to have travelled to Europe in print form. 'Carolina Gold' rice was a preferred rice in Paris in the late eighteenth century, with hundreds of tons being exported to Europe annually.²⁶ Recipes for rice cookery could have travelled from the US to Europe with the grain, but we don't find recipes called 'jambalaya' in either the Carolinas or Paris, though recipes for pilau do exist.²⁷ All told, an American or African birthplace for jambalaya is hard to substantiate.²⁸

Let us suppose that jambalaya was created and named in

Provence. Given this assumption, how did it get to Louisiana?

We begin with the Cajuns and the long-held belief that jambalaya is their dish. How would they have brought it to their new homeland?

The ancestors of the Louisiana Cajuns were French émigrés who arrived in 'Acadiana' (north-eastern Canada) in 1604. Rice couldn't have been growing at those latitudes, so, even if it was acquired through trade, it was unlikely to be a significant part of their diet. Moreover, most Acadian settlers came from along the French Atlantic seaboard, not the Midi.²⁹ Thus, jambalaya probably would not have been known to them early in the seventeenth century when they left for Canada. Perhaps they learned of it after their expulsion, *la Grand Dérangement*, in 1755.³⁰

A possibility is hinted at by Karen Hess in *The Carolina Rice Kitchen*. She indicates that Provençal Huguenots emigrated to the Carolinas and suggests that they brought the recipe for pilau with them. Could they have brought the pilau called '*jambalaia*' as well? Some Acadians were deported to the Carolinas. Perhaps they learned the recipe and the name while there, before continuing on to Louisiana. Given the presence of cookbooks in the Carolinas containing pilau recipes but lacking any for jambalaya, this seems unlikely. Still, it can't be ruled out. If it were known that Abby Fisher got her recipe during her formative years in South Carolina, that would be significant evidence for this theory.

Another group of Acadians made it back to France before returning to the American continent and settling in Louisiana. This is another unlikely route, since virtually all Acadian refugees lived on the Atlantic coast of France, before going to Louisiana roughly 20 years later.³¹

Still another group of Acadians were deposited on the French island of Santo Domingo (modern day Dominican Republic and Haiti,) which they then left along with French nationals during the slave uprising of the 1790s. If jambalaya had previously been brought to the island, either Acadian or French refugees could then

have carried jambalaya with them during this wave of immigration into New Orleans. One nice aspect of this avenue for transmission is that it could help explain the confusing claims of African ancestry, since African slaves, French Creoles, and Acadians could all have enjoyed forms of jambalaya if they existed in the Caribbean.

Célestine Eustis in *Cooking in old Créole Days: La Cuisine Créole à l'Usage des Petits Ménages* (1904), gives a recipe for 'Jumballaya a la Creole' including a cryptic note that 'The St. Domingo Congris is like the Hopping John.'³² This comment is all the more confusing because she gives no recipe for 'St. Domingo Congris' (which is presumably a red beans with rice dish), and makes no mention of either *congris* or jambalaya in the Hopping John recipe that she does provide. Nonetheless, this does imply that she saw a connection between Jambalaya and Santo Domingo. But Eustis must have been as confused as I am, as she went on to give another recipe entitled 'Jumballaya – A Spanish Creole Dish.'³³

Perhaps it *is* Spanish Creole. The French ceded Louisiana to Spain in 1764, though this was largely an administrative ruse to keep the territory out of British hands. Spain sent governors to administer the area, and there were undoubtedly Spanish settlers, though by and large Spain took a *laissez faire* attitude towards its new subjects.³⁴ Spanish control was not long lived. In 1800 Spain returned the territory to France under the Third Treaty of San Ildefonso.³⁵

If jambalaya came to America with the Spanish, I would suspect Catalan ancestry, due to the connection between Catalan and Occitan languages and the fact that a dialect of Occitan was spoken in the Aran Valley region of Catalonia. Thus, the peoples of the north-east of Spain could well have shared *jambalaia*, both as a food and a figurative expression, with those of the Midi, and could have brought it to Louisiana during Spanish rule.

Finally, what about the French Creoles living in and around New Orleans? This population consisted of comparatively wealthy émigrés who moved to Louisiana in search of agricultural riches.

Frequently they brought with them household servants including their chefs. Those from the Midi could easily have brought jambalaya and other rice preparations with them. These recipes would have been quickly adopted, adapted, and built upon in their new homes, as long grain rice was readily available in the US – initially from Carolina and then from Louisiana itself. The people of the Midi had an existing preference for long grain rice,³⁶ so they would have been quite at home with the varieties they found in the New World.

The implications from cookbooks are telling. Printed recipes for pilau in Provence and the Carolinas are all mildly spiced, as are many of the early American jambalaya recipes. It is only later that spicy Cajun jambalaya evolved. This may be a hint that African and South American influence was not present at jambalaya's birth, and suggests a straight lineage from Arab pilau, to Provençal pilau, to Provençal *jambalaia*, to Louisiana jambalaya.

Other groups have made their home in and around New Orleans. Central and South Americans of various ethnicity influenced the cuisine of the region. Germans in large numbers relocated to the area, as well as waves of Italians and Sicilians.³⁷ However, since none of these groups has ever been implicated in the creation of jambalaya, it is probably safe to assume that they were not its forbearers.

If jambalaya was born in Europe and then carried to Louisiana, why then was it orphaned. Who can say? Louisiana developed into a major rice-growing region, providing cheap and plentiful grain which became a large part of the local diet. The dish itself evolved there from a rather bland pilau into a rich and spicy creation. Further, it was widely regarded as a dish into which all sorts of leftovers could be added, helping to stretch food budgets. Thus it was assured a lasting place in Louisiana kitchens.

In the Midi, rice growing never succeeded on any real scale, so most rice was imported. It continued to be used, but it is easy to see how any individual recipe could have been discarded, or how the

name '*jambalaia*' could have been dropped while pilau continued on. The loss of the word in particular could have been caused by the actions of the French government in suppressing regional languages and dialects after the French Revolution and then further during the Third Republic (post 1880).³⁸ In spite of Mistral's efforts to revitalize Provençal and Occitan through his *Félibrige* movement, for generations these languages were discouraged, ridiculed, and legislated against. French language names for dishes and ingredients undoubtedly supplanted local terms throughout France, not just in the Midi.

Furthermore, as Karen Hess eloquently pointed out, Provence, and indeed the whole of the Midi, was largely ignored by intellectuals of northern France. Recipes from the region frequently went unrecorded: 'The northern disdain for the cuisines of the Midi... is responsible for the abysmal ignorance of all but the most picturesque meridional dishes on the part of the establishment.'³⁹ Thus, *jambalaia* in Provence could have come and gone without notice.

So what of this jambalaya about the origin of jambalaya? Is it French, Spanish, African, American, or American Indian? Though I am convinced that the word originated in Provence, I would like to suggest that the dish belongs to all of these groups. I suspect that if you could take a time machine back to the American south of the mid-nineteenth century, you would find a wealth of dishes involving rice and a variety of other ingredients, all prepared in similar ways, with similar flavours, differing primarily in name. Interviewing the cooks, some would tell you that the dish was called 'pilau,' others would name it 'jambalaya.' Some might call it 'hopping john,' whether or not it contained peas or beans. Still others would refer to it as 'paella,' and you might even hear of it as '*arroz con pollo*.' Many would have no particular name for it at all, simply referring to it as the dish mama always made to use up leftovers.

Depending on where any individual learned the recipe, they

would have different folk stories to support their idea of its origins. Spanish Creoles would tell you that it was a take on paella, using tomatoes to colour the rice instead of saffron. Africans, and those who had African cooks, would point to the long history of rice cultivation on the West African coast and invoke a tale of 'yaya' being rice. American Indians undoubtedly would speak of jambalaya-like dishes with either wild rice or hominy. French Creoles from the Midi would confidently report that their *jambalaia* travelled with them from France, and might well claim that they handed it on to their Cajun cousins. Those same Cajuns might then tell you with equal assurance that they invented it to use the rice they found when they arrived in their *nouvelle Acadie*.

When any of these groups came together around a cook-pot, they would have recognized a common way of putting together rice, meats, and vegetables, regardless of the name. So, too, they would likely have puffed out their chests claiming the original version as their own, proudly telling their folk history as proof.

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NOTES

1. There are some African languages in which 'ay', and 'yaya' are words for certain grasses. 'Ay' in the Wolof language refers to *Echinochloa Pyramidalis*, a weed grass that infests cultivated areas. 'Yaya' in Kissi is another weed and pasture grass, *Digitaria Horizontalis*. Similar words such as 'yayanga,' 'yayángán,' and 'yayagol' refer to other weed and fodder grasses in a variety of languages. Finally, 'ya' in Mambila, and 'yá' or 'yala' in Grusi-Lyela refer to the grain sorghum, *sorghum bicolor* (Burkhill, 1994. Vol II:224, 228, 235, 245, 248–254,

- 348–355, 632–633). Though no one would confuse sorghum for rice, they are both edible grains. Thus, it is possible that through miscommunication between Louisianans and African slaves, the idea could have been started that ‘*ya*’ meant ‘rice.’
2. Read, 123.
 3. Davidson, 122.
 4. Among them Karen Hess in *The Carolina Rice Kitchen*, Peter S. Feibleman’s *American Cooking: Creole and Acadian, Cajun-Creole Cooking* by Terry Thompson, etc.
 5. For example, note recipes with names such as ‘*riz aux courges*,’ ‘*pilau de cailles*,’ and ‘*arroz con pollo*.’
 6. *Oxford English Dictionary*, VIII:185.
 7. Mistral quotes Chailan with the word spelled ‘jambaraia.’ However, in his book *Lou Païsan au Tiatre*, Chailan uses the spelling ‘jambalaia’. In *Lou Gangui – Contes, Anecdotes et Facétios*, he spells it ‘jambaraya’ in an otherwise identical block of text.
 8. Mistral, 152.
 9. Translation by Andrew Sigal.
 10. Translation kindly performed by René Merle, with edits by Andrew Sigal.
 11. Email conversation with Charles Perry, 3/5/2007.
 12. Mistral, 152.
 13. Translation by Andrew Sigal.
 14. Société de Gens de Lettres, 388.
 15. Translation by Andrew Sigal.
 16. *American Agriculturist*, 161. Thanks go to Barry Popik and his BarryPopik.com web site for bringing to light this previously undiscovered reference.
 17. *Oxford English Dictionary*, VIII:304–305.
 18. Fisher, 57–58.
 19. Brower, 2007.
 20. When I first saw this recipe I imagined that it would not work; that there simply wouldn’t be enough liquid. However, on trying it I was surprised to find that not only was there enough, there was too much, requiring me to overcook the rice to dry it to the point of being a jambalaya and not a soup. I am disappointed to report that the result was far from delicious. It basically tasted like dried tomato rice soup with boiled chicken and ham in it. Tolerable, but not great.
 21. Hearn, 106.
 22. Buchanan, 27.
 23. *The New Orleans Times* – supplement, pg. 2. Again, thanks to Barry Popik for discovering this reference.
 24. Picayune, 181–182.

25. Prudhomme, 1984:216–221 & Prudhomme, 1987:234–238.
26. Hess, 18–19.
27. As noted, Abby Fisher’s jambalaya recipe may have originated in South Carolina, but this is speculation.
28. A remote possibility is that the recipe for pilau was brought to North Africa by Arabs, that it somehow morphed into ‘jambalaya’ there, then migrated both south to West African and north to Occitania. From there, West African slaves could have brought it to the New World. This would explain its existence in both places without a direct link between Louisiana and the Midi. However, this possibility is so complex that I consider it highly unlikely, and there is no evidence for any such events.
29. They came predominantly from Atlantic provinces including Normandie, Perche, Poitou, and Anuis (Leistner 1986, 13).
30. Rushton, 51, 54–57.
31. Ibid., 57.
32. Eustis, 13.
33. Ibid, 14.
34. Rushton, 70.
35. Wikipedia.com., Third Treaty of San Ildefonso.
36. Hess, 71.
37. Folse, 7 & Thompson, 6–7.
38. Wikipedia.com, Frédéric Mistral.
39. Hess, 65.

Fast and casual is the name of the game at Rice & Roux, a laid-back Baton Rouge joint laying claim to some of the tastiest jambalaya in the state capital. There are three different varieties to choose from, chicken and sausage, pork and sausage or pastalaya, and the dish comes as a standard with Rice & Roux's hearty combo samplers alongside fellow Cajun and Creole classics like gumbo, boudin and crawfish pie. Better yet, Rice & Roux's takeout service and jambalaya by the bucket menu means guests can enjoy the tasty, traditional dish at home too. Rice & Roux, 2158 O'Neal Lane, Baton Rouge, LA, Hands-down the best jambalaya recipe! It is surprisingly easy to make, customizable with your favorite proteins (I used chicken, shrimp and Andouille sausage), and full of bold, zesty, Cajun jambalaya flavors that everyone will love. I thought it was time we revisit an old favorite recipe of mine here on the blog today, which I love all the more because it always reminds me of two of my favorite people - John and Cate's famous jambalaya recipe! For years, the three of us crossed paths at the coffee shop nearly every morning - giving each other groggy pre-caffeinated hugs, catching up on the past day's events, ruffling the heads of one another's pups, talking shop about all things small business, and finally settling in at nearby tables with our laptops to work for a few hours. Thibodaux Fontaineaux are indeed places, but Thibodaux Fontaineaux was the name of a man who married a girl named Yvonne in Thibodaux which he had been named after. Why is this relevant? He was the man who invented Crawfish Pie, File Gumbo and Jambalaya. +5. Disinterested bystander. 5 years ago. Fontenot, not Fontaineaux, is a very common surname in south Louisiana. Pronounce it exactly as heard in the song. +1. Like so many other great things, jambalaya is also the result of a collision of cultures. A single bowl reflects many of the numerous diverse cultures that planted roots in and around New Orleans in the 18th century. There's the recipe and technique adapted from the Spanish. In jambalaya, rice is cooked along with the other ingredients and is the most prevalent component in the finished dish. While gumbo and étouffée often include many of the same ingredients as jambalaya, they are entirely different dishes (gumbo is more like soup, and étouffée is more like stew) and are served with rice that has been cooked separately.