

ABSTRACT

Black Foodways and Cultural Resiliency
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Black Foodways and Cultural Resiliency applies folk and folklore methodologies to the study of African American health practices in Washington D.C. Through community events and online publication of original research drawn from the stories of residents, the project fosters learning and public engagement at the intersection of health and humanities. The project responds to the application prompt of “lore” by promoting storytelling and community engagement as a methodology for documenting cultural resiliency inherent in African American food practices.

Food is central to memorials and community gatherings in Black diasporic cultures. Dishes using staples like okra, black-eyed peas, and yams can trace their roots back to West Africa. Food practices of African Americans migrating from the American South to Washington D.C. demonstrate the mobility and sustainability of cultural knowledge. While African American food – often fried, sugary, or grease laden - may be judged unhealthy by some, the serving and sharing of food has united Black communities in times of economic and social strife.

The research project focuses on how storytelling and oral histories document the use of food for: 1) community building; 2) healing the sick; 3) sharing rumors and recipes and 4) maintaining family and community legacies. The project investigator will research food lore archived in the People’s Archive at the MLK Library in Washington D.C. Additional data collected through focus groups, interviews and a community forum will be shared on a public website and through a hybrid webinar event.