

I cannot believe my sheer luck in getting the opportunity to interview Michael W Twitty! Well, luck and a year of trying. The man is BUSY.

In 2017, Michael published a watershed book called *The Cooking Gene*. It's an amazing work of research - into folklore, into genealogy, into history, and deeper into his career of choice, Southern foodways and their connection to Africa. This is a sneaky peek into the nature of our conversation, which was almost two hours long and which I am editing into two separate episodes.

Enjoy this preview of who Michael is and what's on his mind, then buy his book at his blog, [afroculinaria.com](http://afroculinaria.com).



Hello, and welcome to From Paper To People, the genealogy podcast that's an interfamilial broadcast. I am Carolynn ni Lochlainn, your hostess with the mostest, and I am SO excited to be presenting this sneaky treat to you today as a robust start to Season 4!

A few weeks back, I had the honor of interviewing Michael W Twitty. But it wasn't really an interview - it was much more of a conversation. Michael is so welcoming - he just embraced me and treated me like an equal from the jump, even though I was SERIOUSLY fan-girling the entire time.

Michael is the author of "The Cooking Gene," 2017's breakout culinary history and memoir, a truly fresh and exuberant tapestry of subjects woven in a way that family historians, folklorists, ethnoculinarians and genealogists will understand. And the writing itself? It is absolutely delectable.

"The Cooking Gene" includes some recipes, but it's so much more than a cookbook. It's so

good, in fact, that it won not one, but TWO James Beard awards in 2018. James Beard awards are given yearly (and not easily, I might add – remember that I’m a publisher’s kid) for cookbooks and other non-fiction food- or beverage-related books that are published in the United States. Michael won in two separate categories – “Cookbook of the Year” AND the “Writing” category, in addition to being nominated in the “Foodways” category.

“The Cooking Gene” is a vivid documentation of Michael’s Southern Discomfort Tour, an opportunity Michael created for himself to work with a traditional documentary genealogist, and with DNA, to investigate family folklore in the face of that evidence, and to learn from whom he is descended, both Black and White. Then, he visited the places that his ancestors owned, or where they were enslaved. He even turned his hand to his enslaved ancestors’ work, to understand and appreciate the lives that they lived.

Michael met living White and Black cousins, and paid respects to his deceased, enslaved ancestors, all as a part of healing and reclamation, even completion of self in the face of a life constantly assaulted by racism in America. The Southern Discomfort Tour has also helped illuminate Southern cuisine for his readers, a foodway that has always been debated and claimed by Whites while owing much of its origins to the enslaved cooks and chefs who created meals for their enslavers using African herbs, spices, plants, and expertise.

“The Cooking Gene” is an astonishingly lyrical yet absolutely unflinching examination of Michael’s personal roots – his childhood, his culinary and even religious trajectory (Michael is an adult convert to Judaism), and his descent from American enslavers and the American enslaved alike. And with all of that, he shows his readers why he does what he does for a living – working for social justice using food, bringing back heirloom seeds that had an indelible impact on Southern cooking and that originated in Africa, and generally calling bull pucky on fantacists who claim to know more than they do about the complexities of Southern history, racial interrelatedness, and food heritage.

It took me a year to get on Michael’s calendar, so I lucked into being able to publish these

episodes during Black History Month. But you KNOW that every day is Black History Day, every week is Black History Week, and EVERY MONTH is Black History Month. We had no pre-interview. We just started TALKING. Here's the beginning of what he had to say - and this is an outtake, so you won't hear it again in the upcoming episodes:



Do you want to know what happened next? Good! We talked for almost two hours, so there's plenty more. This is just the teaser, my pumpkins. The next two episodes of the podcast will be ALL MICHAEL TWITTY, the full discussion.

In the meantime, get to know Michael better. "The Cooking Gene" is an astonishing work, and I encourage you to buy it from any Black-owned or small brick-and-mortar store you can. I'll provide [a link to Afroculinaria's purchase page](#) in the shownotes.

Michael also has a new book that you can pre-order on Kindle entitled "Rice: a Savor the South® cookbook," which is part of the multi-author Savor the South series.

Otherwise, study up at Michael's website, [afroculinaria.com](http://afroculinaria.com). He's on Twitter as [@koshersoul](https://twitter.com/koshersoul), an account that never ceases to make me laugh, think, co-sign, and keep me on the path. Get to know him, because I'm editing our discussion in its entirety now, and you'll hear them soon.

Thanks so much for listening, and remember: do your work, don't be a Jeffrey, take down all the folklore you can from your elders, and above all, Expect Surprises!



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If you want to be on the podcast from ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD using the Zoom platform and a good mic and earphones (how about that Family Cookbook series??), you can contact me at <https://bit.ly/2Kxb6rm>.

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