

## From Marginalized to Mainstream: African American Food Memoir Cookbooks

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African American books on personal food memories came into publication first in the 1970's, and they flourished in and after the 1990's. There have since been numerous African American food memoirs published and African American cookery books have become a mainstream element of popular literature. Those cookery books are cookbooks with recipes, but they are not the usual practical how-to cookbooks. Most of the descriptions in these books are not merely about cooking, but also about the authors' memories surrounding food. They often incorporate the words "recollections," "remembrances," and "memoirs" in their titles. In recent years, though the form of memoir has been historically marginalized, it has particularly grown in esteem and is appreciated by contemporary writers for its sincere depictions of life. Helen M. Buss states that writing about one's personal history according to one's own memory is a creative act of "self-making as a process of *performing* the self" and "repossessing" the world (Buss 12-14). Therefore, the flourishing trend of African American food memoirs allows cookbook writers to praise their everyday life experiences of the past and represent themselves and their relationships with others in their communities through their work of cookbooks. Thus, the writers represent their private food experiences to the public as African American "heritage" in their cookbooks. This essay explores the evolution of the publication of African American cookery books and the contents of food memoirs including discussions of those works to uncover the reasons for which they are valued, thereby bringing food memoirs from

marginal to mainstream culture. By looking at the history of African American cookbooks and analyzing contemporary African American food memoirs, this essay discusses the use of the memoir form for cookbooks as an effective format to represent the collective identity, community, and tradition of the African Diaspora.

Doris Witt, the author of *Black Hunger: Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity* explains in her book about African American culinary history and historical debates regarding their food tradition that the Civil Rights movement and the rise of Black Power “contributed to the celebration of foods previously stigmatized because of their association with the slave diet” including such famous “soul foods” as fried chicken and collard greens (6). As for “soul food,” she points out that its rise in popularity “clearly exemplifies the cultural logic of black middle-class expansion after World War II” and that “the connection between black women and food, which culminated in the rise of ‘soul’ during the late 1960’s, underwrites ongoing debates about the substance and boundaries of ‘American’ personhood” (7). She finds that “soul food” contains “within its overt inscriptions of class and race, covert inscriptions of sexuality and gender” (15).

In the 1990s, “soul food” became commercialized and experienced a revival. The revival of African American food as popular culture produced famous Harlem chef Sylvia Woods’ canned soul food products, “chitlin drive-throughs” based in Atlanta, and vegetarian soul cafes in New York City, Washington D.C. and other urban areas (Witt 6-7). She argues that there was diversity and vitality in the tradition of African American culinary history which she values the phenomenon and writing on soul food as they opened the debate over African American history during that time(Witt 220). There are many cookbooks with “soul food” in the title that were published during the 1960’s, and the emergence as well as subsequent main-

streaming of food memoirs can be understood in the context of the discovery and revival of interest in African American food tradition and its historical meaning. Controversial public debates about African American food image is one motive for writers to produce more “soul food” cookbooks detailing their food tradition and also to continue to define and experience food in their own ways within family experiences in memoir form. Food memoir writers Norma Jean Darden and Carol Darden clarifies their motive in writing their book, *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine: Recipes and Reminiscences of a Family* (1994): “We felt it was time to capture that elusive magic, strengthen family ties, and learn more about our ancestors’ history and tradition” (13). As they indicate, this trend of passing down family tradition and culture brought African American food memoirs into the mainstream, interpreted as writers’ intentions to write about their personal experiences as a contribution to their history as well as to explore people’s interest in discovering their histories and realities.

According to *Chronological Bibliography of Cookbooks by African Americans* compiled by Doris Witt and David Lupton, it is evident from the titles of cookbooks that the characteristic of mainstream African American cookbooks has evolved from practical to memoiristic, especially in those that came into publication around and after 1990.<sup>1</sup> African American cookbooks compiled here are from 1800 to present. From the beginning of the cookery movement to until around 1960, most cookbooks were practical how-to books and one historical cookbook was also listed in this period as emphasizing the aspect of a record. Practical books include Franklyn H. Hall’s *300 Ways to Cook and Serve Shell Fish: Terrapin, Green Turtle, Snapper, Oysters, Oyster Crabs, Lobsters, Clams, Crabs, and Shrimps* (1901), Carrie Alberta Lyford’s *A Book of Recipes for the*

*Cooking School* (1921), and Edith Ballard Watts' *Jesse's Book of Creole and Deep South Recipes* (1954). Among these books *The Historical Cookbook of the American Negro* (1958) was published by the National Council of Negro Women is unique for this time period in that the historian Mary R. Beard encouraged the National Council of Negro Women to publish the book as she considered it to be "what we consider a new unique and 'palatable' approach to history" (1). This book is a historical record of cooking furnished with accounts, drawings and pictures important to African Americans. Its unique index is listed by recipes associated with historical events and people, such as the "Howard University 'Charter Day' Cookies and Punch," and "Dr. and Mrs. Booker T. Washington Anniversary Cake" indicate; rather, it is affluent with visual materials and episodes such as "Photograph of Abraham Lincoln and Sojourner Truth" and "Photograph with Signature of Phillis Wheatley." This book paved the way for African Americans to associate with and discover their food in the context of their cultural history.

In 1960's and 1970's, the influence of the Black Power movement encouraged African Americans to discover their food tradition; consequently, many cookbooks appeared that were titled with "soul" or "soul food" (eight titles out of fifteen books during the 1960's) and cookbooks with personal memories surrounding food (food memoirs) were soon published. Vertamae Smart Grosvenor's *Vibration Cooking, or the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl* (1970, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1986, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1992), and Norma Jean Darden and Carole Darden's *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine: Recipes and Reminiscences of a Family* (1978, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1982, 3<sup>rd</sup> 1994) were first published in this period and became very famous, thus making one's way into publishing multiple editions.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1980's, there was an increasing number of cookbooks pub-

lished with more titles addressing mothers/grandmothers. This indicates that the matrimonial connection is appreciated in the context of African American cooking tradition. Such books include Georgia H. Carter's *The Best of Granny* (1980) and *The Second Best of Granny: Family Recipes* (1986), Eunice Moor-Johnson's *From My Mama's Kitchen* (1983) and Ethel Dixon's *Big Mama's Old Black Pot Recipes*. This trend of evaluating the maternal connections may have led to the creation of food memoirs. Usually, personal history comes with memories of family members, therefore the exploration of family recipes lead to the discovery of personal memories based on which the writers create cookbooks using a useful form of memoir.

In and after the 1990's, the publication of food memoir books flourished more than ever before, though some notable ones published earlier were also made into multiple editions in the 1990's. This trend continues to grow in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such books include John Pinderhughes' *Family of the Spirit Cookbook: Recipes and Remembrances from African-American Kitchens* (1990), *The Black Family Reunion Cookbook: Recipes and Food Memories* (1991, 1993), *The Black Family Dinner Quilt Cookbook: Health Conscious Recipes and Food Memories* (1993, 1994), *Celebrating Our Mother's Kitchens: Treasured Memories and Tested Recipes* (1994) by the National Council of Negro Women, Tani D. Sanchez's *Meals and Memoirs: Recipes and Recollections of African Americans in Tucson, Arizona* (1993), Thelma Williams' *Our Family Table: Recipes and Food Memories from African American Life Models* (1993), Dori Sanders' *Country Cooking: Recipes and Stories from the Family Farm Stand* (1995), Shange Ntozake's *If I Can Cook, You Know God Can* (1998), Joyce White's *Soul Food: Recipes and Reflections from African-American Churches* (1998), Monique Y. Wells' *Food for the Soul: A Texas Expatriate Nurtures Her Culinary Roots in Paris* (2000), Patty Pinner's

*Sweets: A Collection of Soul Food Desserts and Memories* (2003) and many more books are forthcoming.

The boom in publishing African American food memoirs has attracted and encouraged the attention of critics which is partly due to the thriving of memoir form. Many memoirs have recently been published, and the number continues to grow—it has approximately tripled from fifty years ago (Gilmore 1). Though the memoir form itself has been historically marginalized in the fields of history and literature, memoirs have since garnered the academic interest of feminist scholars interested in autobiographical writings. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain the growing academic interest in women’s autobiographical writing, describing the memoir form as “the result of an interplay of political, economic, and aesthetic factors. As they point out, the growth of gender, ethnic, and area studies programs to address the interests of new educational constituencies has created a demand for texts that speak to diverse experiences and issues.” More, the publishers also discovered that publishing women’s life stories was profitable (Smith and Watson 5). bell hooks positions the significance of African American writings as a site of experimentation and creative strategies. She notes that “constantly faced with the paucity of nonbiased information about our lives as black women and men, it is both reassuring and affirming that we are witnessing a resurgence of interest in autobiographical narratives by African Americans” and that “experimental memoirs have become the cultural sites for more imaginative accountings of an individual’s life” (quoted in Quashie 10). Marion Kraft also talks about contemporary African American women writers’ use of the autobiographical form to express the culture and history in which African Americans can “incorporate their collective experience into the particularities of their individual stories” (Kraft 100).

Moreover, Kevin Quashie and Joyce Lausch state the importance of memory for African American writers in *New Bones: Contemporary Black Writers in America*, positioning that the concept as well as the construction of memory for examining contemporary self-hood in which they look at the relationship between memory and history, “memory is crucial because of the inaccurate histories that have been recorded about the lives of African Americans, and the contested nature of what is called ‘the Black experience’”(11). As they find, “the act of remembering is dynamic and fluid, always changing how the event or experience happened, giving new contours to the edges of the remembered thing” (11-12). Therefore, “memory then becomes political and necessary,” and “memory as a literary and psychic construct also facilitates the interest in the African Diaspora—the literal and emotional community of people of African descent, living wherever they do in the world, whose lives are linked by forced dispersion from their home land”(Quashie and Lausch 11-12). Thus, autobiographical writings including memoirs are appreciated as a form among contemporary African American writers.

The critics also began to pay attention to food memoirs within a cultural context in which they made those works even more valuable. In *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representation of Food, Gender, and Race* (2001), Traci Marie Kelly and Doris Witt introduce African American food memoirs. Kelly also examines cookbooks of food memoirs in her article “‘If I Were a Voodoo Priestess’: Women’s Culinary Autobiography” in which she values food memoirs as she thinks that women not only learn recipes, but they also uncover significant stories of women’s lives in the kitchen. She discovers in food memoirs “a power that we get from telling our stories through our recipes” and “another avenue to explore in the ongoing

effort to reclaim the words with which women have organized their lives and values” (252-253). Noticing that “a literary extension of this kitchen storytelling” has appeared on many bookstore shelves, she describes food memoirs as “a complex pastiche of recipes, personal anecdotes, family history, public history, photographs, even family trees,” and food memoir writers are “using that space to create nourishing meals, memories, and art” (252). Claiming the urgency to study food memoirs, she insists that “the important initial move is to recognize the validity and significance of culinary literature” as she believes that “it is essential, if we are going to understand the lives of women, to think seriously of this genre as both a literary and historical form,” since “one’s life story will be useful to others and will strengthen the community” (254).

She introduces Norma Jean Darden and Carole Darden’s food memoir, *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine: Recipes and Reminiscences of a Family*. In this elaborate memoir cookbook, the first page of the book begins by outlining family trees. The entries are divided by the name of family members and their pictures furnished with folkloric family biographical and historical information along with stories associated with certain foods and recipes. Each story contributes to memoiristic accounts of affectionate families. Under their mother’s section, “Mamie Jean Sampson Darden” entry, they present her characteristics:

...our mother was a rare combination of femininity and strength. She admired beauty in art and in nature and radiated a special beauty of her own. She was fond of poetry, of harp and organ music, and would sing in the oddest little voice (213).

Furthermore, through accounts associated with food, the stories of familial history are revealed:

For many years she had been childless, so when we finally arrived, she liked nothing better than feeding us. We were poor eaters, so she had to be creative with food, and she was. Surprises, sherbets, soups and basics—oh, what lovely treats we remember from Ms. Mamie Jean! (215)

The recipes are accompanied with elaborate descriptions of memoir accounts such as “Egg Surprise,” “Snow Ice Cream,” “Rose Petal Jelly,” and “Watermelon Cake.” This book has sold over 800,000 copies since its publication at Amazon.com. Many readers appreciate the stories of family and cultural history this book offers, as two reviewers Kimberley Wilson and P. L. Robinson, have commented.<sup>3</sup>:

“Spoonbread is more than a cookbook. It’s the story of a remarkable family. The reader will learn more about black history from this cookbook than many people will from their history books in school” (Wilson).

“This book also reflects the pride and love of a family for not only food but also for one another...the autobiographical features on family members will make you reflect on your own family.... very touching.... ‘Spoonbread’ is truly a labor of love for food and especially FAMILY!” (Robinson)

As these reviews indicate, readers enjoy and evaluate both the folkloric and autobiographical features of the book as well as its recipes. Norma Jean Darden and Carol Darden suggest in the preface to the 1994 edition of their book that every African American should have stories of life that deserve documentation and organization. Furthermore, as oral history is fragile, it should be made concrete by all methods available with a sense of urgency, which should start with creating a family tree that led them to a central theme of cooking. They argue that “particularly for African Americans who despair at the loss of so much of our history through the ‘peculiar

institution' of slavery, the task of restoring that history is an imperative in which we all should practice" (11). This book provides family folklore, as it connects, for example, the family's funeral rituals of food to the African customs for the deceased. It refers to the tradition of ancient Africa in which neighborhood people give the family of the deceased not only food, but also important things such as clothing and household items in an attempt to make up for the loss. Darden clarifies that their personal experience is at the same time communal:

Everyone has some form of a *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine* that deserves documentation and organization. The easiest place to begin is to create a family tree. This used to be done as a matter of course through the recording of deaths and births in the family Bible. Our family tree led us to a central family theme—cooking— which then became the key to our family history. For each family the key is different, and we hope that reading this book will inspire you to find your own (10).

Thus, they are conscious of compiling not only books of recipes, but also the book of memories surrounding those recipes. In *From My People: 400 Years of African American Folklore*, Daryl Cumber Dance describes the significance of family folklore for African Americans and the ways in which those stories of customs are shared among family and relatives to pass them down to younger generations of each family tree:

...folklore is its creative expressions of a common past. As raw experiences are transformed into family stories, expressions, and photos, they are codified in forms which can be easily recalled, retold, and enjoyed. Their drama and beauty are heightened, and the family's past becomes ac-

cessible as it is reshaped according to its needs and desires (Zeitlin, quoted in Dance 356).

Darden's food memoir fulfills all these elements and makes up perfect family folklore. Kelly positions that in "*their story*, the detailed focus is on the individual family members and traditions that make them who they are" (italics Kelly's, 260-261):

This cookbook was meant to do far more than sing praise and show the hardships of one black family in the South. In the biographies of the individuals, the Dardens instill history by giving examples and explanations of customs and rituals. By this act, the Dardens reveal that their cookbook was meant to reach a wider audience than cooks of the southern United States (261).

As Kelly states, the autobiographical self is represented to "claim for herself a sense of place, heritage, and history that may not be otherwise articulated" in this kind of food memoir. Furthermore, "using recipes as a framework for discourse of the self allows the author to construct milieu for others as she sees fit," therefore giving "a place to articulate alternative voices and viewpoints," which is "a natural extension of an oral storytelling tradition that has been playing itself out for generations in our very own kitchens" (266-267).

Witt also takes up Vertamae Smart Grosvenor's food memoir and analyzes her paradoxical diasporic black identity from the anecdotal work, in her article, "'My Kitchen Was the World': Vertamae Smart Grosvenor's Geechee Diaspora."<sup>4</sup> Witt introduces Grosvenor as a "popularizer" of culinary ritual and a nationally distributed cookbook writer. She has been a longtime commentator on National Public Radio (NPR) and the host of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) series of the mid-1990's, "The Americas' Family Kitchen" (228). Her book is different from a standard book, which is "memorable as

a hybrid cookbook” and “part autobiography, part travelogue, part culinary anthropology, part social history, part political commentary.” Witt pays attention to the unique index of her book, such as “The Demystification of Food,” “Birth, Hunting and Gator Tails,” “The Smarts, the Ritters, and Chief Kuku Koukoui,” “First Cousins and the Numbers,” “Forty Acres and a Jeep,” “Taxis and Poor Man’s Mace,” and “White Folks and Fried Chicken” (230-231). Witt points out that Grosvenor “provides an especially apt opportunity to consider the ramifications for feminist work on race of a critical theory that celebrates cultural syncretism over cultural isolation” (229). She posits that “Grosvenor’s importance for the history of women and food surely lies in her effort to negotiate the imperatives of race, gender, and class difference in a way that speaks to black women’s historical experience of subordination in U.S. society while also locating their lives and cultural innovations in a broader, potentially more liberatory, global framework” (246).

Grosvenor must have found that writing her experience would contribute to African American culture and demystify “culinary imperialism:”

...this culinary imperialism that this country—the Western world has, well that’s French, you know. I mean, you can’t own...eggs belong to the world. So just because a thing is a soufflé, I mean, that’s just how they deal with it, but other people do other things with it. Things just as good. (Pinderhughes 193)

She writes in one of the subtitles in her book “The Demystification of Food” that “in reading lots and lots of cookbooks written by white folks, it occurred to me that people very casually say Spanish rice, French fries, Italian spaghetti” though “there is no reference to black people’s contribution to the culinary arts” (Grosvenor 1970:13).

Therefore, she intended to write her memoir cookbook to “demystify food” thus presenting African American’s culinary contributions more evident.

Gamal Abdel-Shehid also values food memoir writers as they generate new excitement around lifestyle cultures. He argues that these new memoirs add “a very anthropological and stereotypical approach to ethnic and social difference which is still dominant within much contemporary writing on food” (456-457).<sup>5</sup> He discusses food memoirs and their relationship to memory:

...the soul food memoir reveals the existence of an axis of memory which allows us to understand food, and more importantly, our lives far beyond the stereotype. This axis remembers food and its centrality to black popular culture through the primary logic of a retracing...Moreover, these memoirs allow for a special re-writing of black histories and popular culture from the point of view of the body, where food, needless to say, occupies a central place (457).

He explains that this characteristic of representing memory emerges strongly in Shange’s *If I Can Cook/ You Know God Can*:

Shange’s memoir looks at how food works in the making of black pleasure and pain in the Diaspora. Shange’s meditation and her questioning of the meaning of hunger suggest that there is something vital in trying to recover histories of food, and the history of black attachments to these foods, as part and parcel of the story of blackness in the current context. At the level of form, Shange’s immeasurable contribution is to be able to offer a culinary re-reading of black popular culture (457).

Shange criticizes that African American culinary history have often been distorted and underevaluated until recent years. She says

that “[T]hese perusals of history, literature, vernacular, culture, and philosophy, ‘long with absolutely fabulous receipts (Charlestonian for recipes), are meant to open our hearts and minds to what it means for black folks in the Western Hemisphere to be full’ (3). Abdel-Shehid explains food and its central “attempt to replace what has been lost through exile, dislocation, and displacement.” Therefore, “the soul food memoir acts as a way to remember racism and displacement and the role of food in the fight against it” as “remembering food is inseparable from remembering, and resisting the parochialism of hostile countries”(460). These studies made on food memoirs verify that African American food memoirs are worthy of academic attention.

Since African American cookery book sales were profitable for the publishing industry around the 1980’s and 1990’s, African American juvenile cookbooks have also adopted a memoir style which contributed in passing down culinary culture to the next generation. *Food in Grandma’s Day* (1999) is a memoir cookbook illustrated with many pictures of food and family in which the author Jeraldine Jackson who is a grandmother of eleven grandchildren tells the story of her girlhood life in the 1940’s with recipes. The table of contents includes such entries as “Feeding a Big Family,” “Mama Lou,” “My Responsibilities,” “A Different Kitchen,” “Rationing for War,” and “Digging for Victory.” As a girl, the author explains her supporting role in her big family, her memories of her mother/grandmother and the different styles of cooking, preparation and preservation of foods for the war. The publication of juvenile memoir cookbooks also proves the popularity and African American contribution to culinary history and memoir.

However, not all attentions to these memoir cookbooks have been positive, as the celebration of women in memoir cookbooks for

their cooking is targeted by feminists as an exploitation of women and a restriction of the female gender role. They argue that these books risk relegating the women's role to one that is principally consumed with domestic labor. Abdel-Shehid problematizes that "the glorification of women in the soul food memoir has one potential problem—which is that by positioning women in this way, there is a risk of reproducing patriarchal norms and stereotypes about black women as always nurturing, and or always relegated to the kitchen" (459). Nonetheless, he still acknowledges the importance of food memoirs because they represent "a crucial genre to address questions of memory, the gendering of the past, and the remembering of people and places" at the same time questioning "what it means to locate and/or dislocate one's self" (459-460).

Though some of the published contemporary food memoirs seem to subvert and balance the traditional idea of gender roles, John Pinderhughes' *Family of the Spirit Cookbook: Recipes and Remembrances from African-American Kitchens* (1990) is a collection of recipes and memories of the author's family and his friends. He cooks and compiles many male friends' recipes in his book.<sup>6</sup> In form of introduction he tells readers how he loves cooking and how naturally cooking came to him:

I love to cook. It's like therapy for me, getting in the kitchen, not thinking or worrying about anything else, just cooking. It's great (14).

My mother only had sons, so when she wanted some time off, we were expected to cook. She made sure both my brothers and I knew how to put something on the table for ourselves (14).

As in *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine: Recipes and Reminiscences of a Family*, Norma Jean Darden and Carol Darden empha-

size in their family folkloric memoir the ways in which men (fathers, grandfathers and uncle) willingly helped and participated in the family cooking by introducing their special roles. For example, they explain that their grandfather was very good at wine-making and introduce various kinds of wines he made for the family, such as strawberry, dandelion, blackberry, watermelon, and peach wines. Furthermore, “Uncle John” is described as delicious ice cream maker, devising ice cream flavors from various kinds of fruits available to them. Thus, male participation in cooking is positively represented in these contemporary food memoirs.

African American cookbooks and food memoirs are still flourishing at present. One of food memoir writer John Pinderhughes’ male friends shows diversity in African American cooking by introducing Caribbean style regarding that recipes and memories are “heritage” to pass on and share:

I keep the heritage. Carol [his wife] is also of Caribbean background, and we have a strong thing about our background and Caribbean flavors. My mother still involves herself in Caribbean—style cooking, and a lot of it I’ve gotten from her. It comes with the culture. We do it Caribbean style (279).

African American food is a prominent theme in other literary works of such esteemed writers as Ntozake Shange, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, Dori Sanders, Ralph Ellison, and other African American writers (Dance 425). In regard to Vertamae Smart Grosenor’s remark about nutritional problems and their historical roots in slavery, Doris Witt states that “the soul food fad of the Black Power era was problematic for culinary as well as sociopolitical history.” She discusses “the heterogeneity and vibrancy of writing about black American culinary traditions, writing which

preceded the emergence of soul food and especially which soul food helped generate in turn” and points out that “soul food has also worked to open up rather than foreclose debates over black culinary history.” In closing, she remarks that “this still-evolving cookbook bibliography will help fix the extensive history of African American writing about food in our memories for generations to come” (220). In this way, she identifies the significance of food memoirs in the context of their contributions to African American history. Now that even children have historical/memoir cookbooks to read, African American food memoirs have clearly made their way from marginal to mainstream. Norma Jean Darden and Carol Darden encourage readers as well to make their own family folklore book:

It’s important to see yourself as a history maker and history preserver. Keep journals, not only of joyous occasions, but of the difficult times as well—a record of how you coped and how a problem was solved. Encourage your children to keep diaries and photo journals as practice for the time when the responsibility of preserving a heritage will be theirs, and as a way to develop a love for that history (11).

African American food memoirs are a significant historical source of African American heritage and of a cultural history that has long been neglected in the U.S. history. Thus, with the writers’ motive to preserve “heritage,” they have shifted from those of margin to American mainstream culture. African American food memoir play an important role in representing the identity, community and traditions of the African Diaspora to African Americans and many other people around the world.

## Notes

1. The bibliography is compiled in Doris Witt’s *Black Hunger: Food and*

*the Politics of U.S. Identity.*

2. Vertamae Smart Grosvenor's *Vibration Cooking, or the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl* (1970, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1986, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1992), and Norma Jean Darden and Carole Darden's *Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine: Recipes and Reminiscences of a Family* (1978, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1982, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1994)
3. The hardcover, published in 1978, sold 781,076 copies, and the paperback, published in 1994, has sold 44,466 copies (indicated in 2003 at Amazon.com). The book received high rates by the reviewers. As of October 24, 2009, twenty-five people had given the book five stars, and two people had given it four stars, out of five stars (Amazon.com)
4. *Vibration Cooking, or the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl*, first printed in 1970, was reissued in 1986 and again in 1992. The paperback, published in 1992, has sold 508,187 copies (indicated in 2003 at Amazon.com).
5. Shange's book has sold 337,554 hardcover copies and 333,944 paperback copies (indicated in 2003 at Amazon.com).
6. The paperback in 2001 had sold 759,146 copies, and the hardcover in 1999 sold as many as 1,611,638 copies (indicated in 2003 at Amazon.com).

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