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## What Sergio García's and Paula Deen's Racism really tell us

Both Sergio Garcia and Paula Deen, despite differences in age, sex, and nationality, drew upon a limited knowledge of slave custom to express demeaning visions of blackness, which made light of or sanitized the brutality and institutionalized deprivations of slavery.

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Scene One: *Sergio Garcia, Tiger Woods and "fried chicken"*: The 33 year old, white, Spanish pro-golfer Garcia was on stage at the European Tour awards dinner in late May. In the midst of what has been called "an ongoing spat" with Tiger Woods, when asked during the U.S. Open by Steve Sands of the Golf Channel, in jest, if he would be inviting Woods over for dinner, Garcia responded, "We will have him round every night. We will serve fried chicken."

Scene Two: Paula Deen and the "true Southern wedding": The 66 year old white, American Deen and her brother Bubba Hiers are being sued by a white female employee, Lisa Jackson. Jackson who works at their jointly owned restaurant "Uncle Bubba's Seafood and Oyster House" filed a discrimination lawsuit alleging that racist behaviour was common. Specifically, while Deen was actively planning her brother's wedding in 2007, Jackson alleges that Deen stated "What I would really like is a bunch of n.....s to wear long-sleeve white shirts, black shorts and black bow ties...now that would be a true Southern wedding, wouldn't it?"

I would like to suggest that these two *scenes*, one by a 30-something, Spanish professional athlete and one by a 60-something, American celebrity chef, demonstrate the similarities within white stereotypes of blackness and the dangerous combination of white ignorance and fantasies about slavery that exist within both European and Euro-American communities across age, sex and geography. In Deen's rescheduled appearance on the Today Show (26 June 2013), Matt Lauer seemed mainly focused on the issue of her loss of celebrity endorsements (she has already been dropped by the Food Network and Smithfield Foods) and her use of the "N" word; an accusation which Deen denies except for one incident 30 years ago.

Indeed, the “N” word is without parallel as a term of racial hatred. There is arguably no equivalent term for whites, Asians, Natives or other racial groups with the same amount of venom and violence. That is because the term was a part of the strategy of dehumanization used to terrorize blacks within enslavement and it came to be synonymous not just with blackness but with the colonial assumptions of African racial inferiority, pathology, immorality and inhumanity through which slavery was justified. So in other words, the “N” word, as used historically by whites, became a tool of white supremacy.

But in Lauer’s close focus on money and the “N” word, he largely overlooked what to me is a much more revealing aspect of Deen’s alleged misdeeds – her nostalgia for plantation slavery. Both Deen’s and Garcia’s racist behaviours are haunted not only by the specter of slavery, but by the complex place of food, and “hospitality” within slavery and how they were wielded as tools of marginalization and privilege. Both Garcia’s “fried chicken” comment and Deen’s desire to be entertained by an all-black, wait staff dressed in black and white derive from their knowledge of how food and sociability were defined and harshly circumscribed by the imposed racial limits of slavery. And while Deen’s and Garcia’s statements reveal that they have some knowledge of these histories of forced deprivation and cultivated privilege, it is not only the nature of their desires, but who is and is not included, that renders their understanding of this tremendously painful part of our shared history so disturbing.

Food was a large consideration for enslavers. It was a part of the way that they created and performed social hierarchies between themselves and their enslaved black property. But the politics of food on a plantation or in any slave-holding context were complex and, from our perspective today, bizarre. Slave owners obviously did not feed their enslaved people the same foods, which they and their white families consumed. Cost effectiveness became an urgent concern in the feeding and maintenance of the enslaved. Plants like the starchy breadfruit were deliberately transplanted to the Caribbean to feed enslaved people. As such, in plantation contexts “slaves” were often sustained on carbohydrate-rich diets, which were consistently lacking in protein and key minerals and vitamins. Nutritional deficiencies and a host of connected diseases were commonplace. In places like Jamaica where planters routinely owned hundreds or thousands of acres of land, the enslaved were made to farm substandard plots of land during their “free time” in order to grow provisions like yam and corn that they used to feed themselves. This meant that after working 16 to 18 hour days, six days a week, they would walk the 5 to 10 miles to their provision grounds to farm on their one “day of rest,” Sunday.

Accordingly for the enslaved, meat or protein of any kind was a luxury. Instead, they most often had access to only the cheapest forms of livestock, and in the case of the American South, that was often the chicken (scene one). In places like the Caribbean, pig feet, ox tail, chicken neck, and even the intestines (tripe) were taken by the enslaved when the slave owners disposed of them and ingeniously transformed into extraordinary dishes that are today largely considered delicacies. Meanwhile, slave owners dined on choice cuts of expensive meats, prepared for them and served to them by the those they enslaved (scene two).

Garcia's "invitation" to Tiger Woods to dine on fried chicken was a racist slight intended to point out Tiger's blackness as a sign of slave ancestry and diminished worth. Deen's fantasy of a "true southern wedding" reconstituted the racial segregation of slavery by dressing up the desired all-black "help" in ways that would entertain and delight the presumably all-white guests. In both scenes, blacks are relatable to "slaves" for the purpose of white pleasure or ridicule.

Both Garcia and Deen, despite differences in age, sex and nationality, drew upon a limited knowledge of slave custom to express demeaning visions of blackness, which made light of or sanitized the brutality and institutionalized deprivations of slavery. While their actions were without a doubt racist, for me, the larger question is what they reveal about the simultaneity of white nostalgia for and ignorance of slavery – a very dangerous combination.