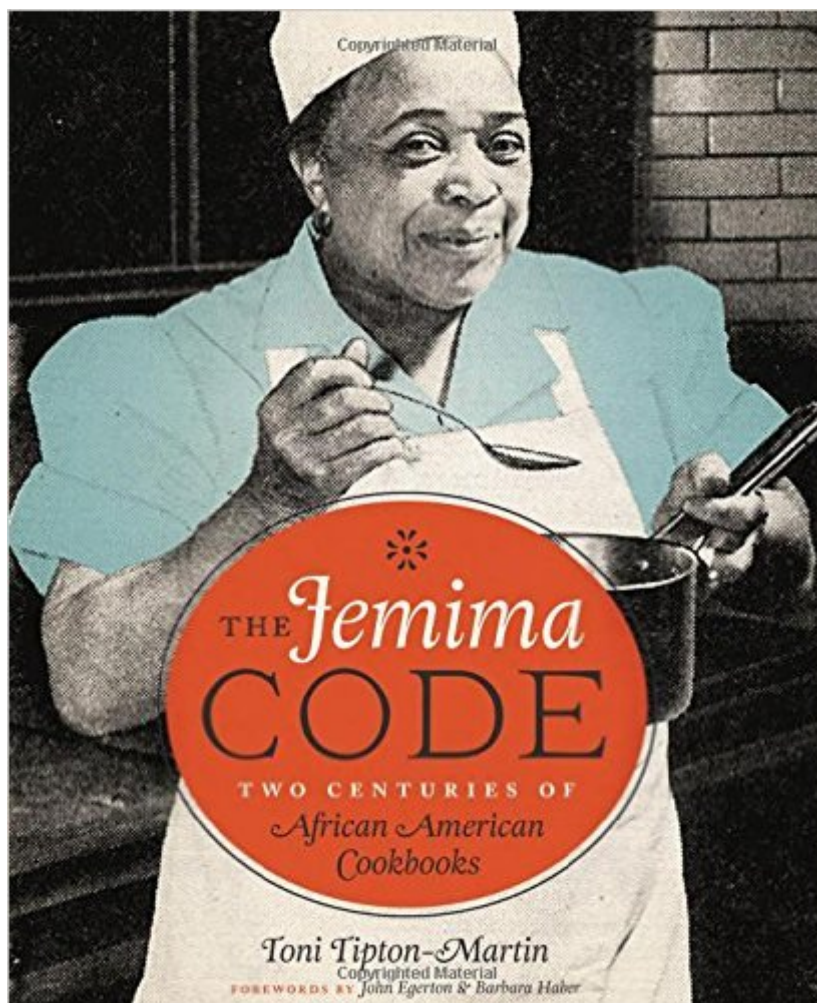


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# The Jemima Code: Two Centuries Of African American Cookbooks



## Synopsis

Winner, James Beard Foundation Book Award, 2016 Art of Eating Prize, 2015 BCALA Outstanding Contribution to Publishing Citation, Black Caucus of the American Library Association, 2016 Women of African descent have contributed to America's food culture for centuries, but their rich and varied involvement is still overshadowed by the demeaning stereotype of an illiterate "Aunt Jemima" who cooked mostly by natural instinct. To discover the true role of black women in the creation of American, and especially southern, cuisine, Toni Tipton-Martin has spent years amassing one of the world's largest private collections of cookbooks published by African American authors, looking for evidence of their impact on American food, families, and communities and for ways we might use that knowledge to inspire community wellness of every kind. The Jemima Code presents more than 150 black cookbooks that range from a rare 1827 house servant's manual, the first book published by an African American in the trade, to modern classics by authors such as Edna Lewis and Vertamae Grosvenor. The books are arranged chronologically and illustrated with photos of their covers; many also display selected interior pages, including recipes. Tipton-Martin provides notes on the authors and their contributions and the significance of each book, while her chapter introductions summarize the cultural history reflected in the books that follow. These cookbooks offer firsthand evidence that African Americans cooked creative masterpieces from meager provisions, educated young chefs, operated food businesses, and nourished the African American community through the long struggle for human rights. The Jemima Code transforms America's most maligned kitchen servant into an inspirational and powerful model of culinary wisdom and cultural authority.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**Background:** Toni Tipton-Martin is an award-winning food and nutrition journalist. She grew up in sunny L.A., California and despite her southern born relatives and their cooking, she herself couldn't create soul food dishes. She admits this because of the negativity surrounding black women and the [soul] food they worked hard to create to feed their families (and their employer's families). Because southern food is often associated with African-American (who are often stereotyped as naturally gifted in food, but uncreative, and simple), poverty, and ill-health, the author was disinterested in her cultural cuisine. This picture is slowly changing thanks to scholars and independent writers like the Southern Foodways' Alliance oral history projects that works to preserve America's southern/soul food and its complex history and its unknown artisans. After finishing college, she noticed the lack of black cooks in culinary tradition and decided to find them.

**The Book:** *The Jemima Code: Two Centuries of African American Cookbooks* is an anthology that covers over one hundred books written by African-American women, on behalf of African-American (some cooks were illiterate), and some African-American men. It is the most comprehensive book on cookbooks written by people of African descent written to date. At a time where white "lard-core" male chefs and old-fashioned southern meals are all the rage, Tipton-Martin's book sets the record straight on who really created these 'what old is new' again food fad. The book is broken into 13 parts: Forward by John Egerton, Forward by Barbara Haber, Introduction, 19th century cookbooks - Breaking a Stereotype.

I feel like you can't fully understand the importance of this book without understanding how the very existence of this project makes a statement. That a publisher got behind the notion of presenting these unsung American cooks in a way that lives outside of the narrow box of blackness the food world is normally comfortable with suggests a change in tide and suggests the decades of work people like Toni Tipton Martin have put into American foodways is finally breaking through!!! The Jemima Code is many things. It's a celebration of American cooking, it's a manifesto that charges the culinary community to rethink its -isms, and it's a love letter to the cooks, chefs and entrepreneurs that helped shape the palate of America. When you dive into these stories you are experiencing a carefully curated, immaculately styled and edited platform that strives to restore dignity to men and women who history constantly marginalizes. Through selfless and painstaking sacrifice Toni Tipton Martin had bequeathed us a magnificent record of the deep roots black people have planted in the

relatively new soil of American cooking. This work is the record of the legacy of the black hand in American foodways and makes the case that the foundation we build upon is largely the work of these black bodies. One of my favorite tenets of this book is that the collection isn't about shame or blame or any other such negativity, it's about the truth and letting history and these 150+ black lives breathe and circulate. What Toni Tipton Martin has done here is presented the space for this glorious story to unfold through time and simply allows the reader to reconsider images, tropes, and simple untruths in a fresh and unique way.

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