

Teodoro A. Leo

Sociology of Food

9/11/19

For three of my four years at Flagler I have found myself driving toward Atlanta with a packed Jeep full of my friends and a portion of their belongings as we try to dodge a hurricane. Last week was no different. Once again, I was in my Jeep heading to Atlanta—this time I felt like a professional. Water—check, sandwiches—check, extra pairs of boxers (who knows how long we are going to be gone— not making that mistake again)—check.

As we continued on our six hour journey to a city that we have become so familiar with my twin brother and I began to discuss all the wonderful places we had eaten over the years. “let’s go to that little taqueria outside the SCAD campus—maybe we can meet up with that girl Amber—she still goes there right?” as the hours passed we went on and on about all the food. At one point I said “Honestly, Atlanta is one of the hottest food cities right now—we should try and eat at a new spot every time we go out.”

So there we were criss-crossing Atlanta to try and make our hurrccation a food tourism experience. A peanut butter Insomnia cookie at one o’clock in the morning, freshly baked ballon bread at a Greek restaurant owned by two immigrant brothers, or the locally famous drink “the chilly goat”—a frozen dark chocolate mocha from a local coffee shop called Dancing Goats. Everything we ate was delicious but the one thing that reminded me why I love the power of food came from a discrete Korean deli.

We were walking around some random street in Atlanta when my brother and I decided it was time for lunch—so we opened up google and typed “places for lunch.” A plethora of places popped up—every type of cuisine imaginable—ranging from 1 to 5 stars at varying price points. I was saying how I wanted something quick—made a comment how I wish we could just hit a bodega so we could eat something quick and fast. A local place—no linen napkins or fancy NYT reviews hanging on the wall. I just wanted real food—made by real people—for real people. “How about this Korean deli.” my brother suggested so we walked in to this discrete deli—hand written signs both in

English and Korean talked about the \$9.99 lunch special which was a turkey club with potato chips. Styrofoam cups, family photos, and those grab and go sets of utensils—the ones with a fork, knife, napkin and salt and pepper in them filled the store. The place was not dirty—but it was not immaculate. It was a deli—it provide food to anyone who came in. It didn't matter who you voted for in the last election, what God you prayed to, or who you loved—it was your local corner deli—it was home.

As I was looking at the menu I saw a small, roughly written sign saying “Korean BBQ” and then a bunch of Korean underneath it with pictures of my options. As I was investigating the sign a guy my age came in through the back entrance—His girlfriend followed behind and he turned toward the kitchen and kissed and hugged the women cooking.

Instantly I could tell they were family—The guy was wearing a Georgia Institute of technology sweatshirt, his girlfriend carrying a notebook and a few textbooks. They had just gotten out of class—and they were here for a home cooked meal. The guy quickly “placed and order”—if that is even possible to do when your mom is cooking and she immediately went to work. I looked at Greg—he looked at me—and without missing a beat we turned to the older women checking us out and said “will have what they are having!”

She punched in our order handed us a ketchup top with a number written in sharpie and she said smiling “when ready we will bring to you.” We sat patiently as we awaited our Korean lunch special. Thinly sliced beef with fresh vegetables and a side of white steamed rice. An older African-American man was bringing the food to the makeshift tables—I watched as he interacted with the other workers—years of communicating with smiles and emotion rather than the broken english and language barriers.

I watched him take meal after meal to every type of person this world offers. When he was walking toward the owners son he jumped up out of his seat and grabbed the food out of the older gentleman's hand like many would do for their grandparents or aunt. I heard the banter back and forth between them—this was a relationship that had grown over many years and when they reached the table where

the girlfriend was waiting the older gentleman smiling didn't miss a beat—"I thought I told you to go out and get yourself a real man."

Finally, it was my turn and suddenly my sense of smell was overrun by teriyaki sauce and charcoal. It was a mixture of every single part of the animal—bones with fat and small amount of meat; something you had to pick up with your bare hands and pull off like a cave man. Thinner slices of juicy beef. Nothing was wasted—every bite I took and piece I found on my dish was better than the last. The vegetables still crunchy yet bursting with flavor—the white rice simple yet such a complicated item to get right—was perfect.

As my tastebuds were experiencing flavors it had never experienced before I was looking around the deli at the history and stories that hung on the walls. This place was built out of necessity I thought—They cooked in Korea and when they got here to the States that is exactly what they turned to so they could provide that better life they set out to achieve. Their son was living proof of that success. He was sitting across from me wearing a Georgia Tech sweatshirt laughing and smiling with his girlfriend with a busy Atlanta street behind him.

The food I was eating was real food—made by real people—Immigrants who came to this country for a better life not for themselves but for their children and their children's children. It reminded me why I fell in love with cooking in the first place—The power that cooking has—the ability to bring people together, share cultures, and open peoples eyes to someone who does not look like you. You could taste it in the food—it was made with purpose. There are delis, gas stations, and landscaping business around the country built around this idea—and they should be welcomed and celebrated in this country.