



Episode #12

Black History Month 2024

Host: Vicki Guinn

Guests: Andre Cole, Emmanuel Dempsey

Vicki Guinn:

Hello everyone. This is Vicki Guinn with Legacy Health's Engaging our People podcast. Each year the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History chooses a different theme for Black History Month. And for 2024, it is African-American's influence on the arts in the United States. That is from visual to performing arts, fashion, dance, cooking, and more. As Black people, we have used our creative outlets to preserve and share our history and empower our communities. And speaking of history, here's a little for you, Carter G. Woodson came up with the idea of Black history celebration in 1926. Mr. Woodson was born in 1875 to freed Virginia slaves, and he went on to earn a PhD in history from Harvard. He chose February because of the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, a former slave and activist. So during our Engaging Our People podcast, you're going to hear from a couple of artists.

I interviewed Andre Cole, Executive Chef at Legacy Emmanuel. Andre's culinary is vast, he can cook everything, even his favorite cheesecake. But for Black History Month, we're going to talk about the creativity behind soul food. You see, soul food is embedded in the African-American culture, and it originated in the Southern United States during slavery, when people were given scraps or meager food rations, and they were creative in making these ingredients taste good. Little did they know that their talent and expertise with seasonings and cooking techniques would create down home cooking that has passed through many generations.

And let me give you a bit more history. In 1962, Poet and Civil Rights Activist Amiri Baraka published his essay called Soul Food. It was an argument against critics claiming that that African-American culture had no cuisine. Well, that's not true. And that same year, Sylvia's Soul food restaurant in Harlem, New York opened and yes, I have been there. You get off on the subway stop at 125th and you're there. So thank you in advance for listening, and please enjoy our guest.

And first, what drew you to cooking? That's my first question.

Andre Cole:

My mother, my mother.

Vicki Guinn:

I hate to cook my mom. Your mom?

Andre Cole:

Yeah. I grew up every holiday, her and my aunt would come over and it'd be using the big orange Betty Crocker cookbook making cookies, fudge, sweet potato pies, baking everything under the sun. So that's what really kind of sparked my passion.

Vicki Guinn:

And what made you pay attention? Because I didn't.

Andre Cole:

Because it was fun. And I didn't want to go outside and cut grass with my father. So it's safer place in the house, you get all to sample everything, and it just starts learning. And then you grow up and maybe mom working more. So like, "I'm hungry, so let me get in here and try something."

Vicki Guinn:

Wasn't that funny either you were out cutting the grass or you were inside.

Andre Cole:

Correct.

Vicki Guinn:

That was the choices in my household, you weren't sitting around.

Andre Cole:

No ma'am, you was going to help somebody.

Vicki Guinn:

You was helping somebody.

Andre Cole:

Pretty much your choice in most cases. But yeah, you got to get up and do something.

Vicki Guinn:

So when did you take over in the kitchen? When did you say, "Mom, let me try this"?

Andre Cole:

When she let me.

Vicki Guinn:

When did she let you operate the stove and the oven? That was a big rite of passage.

Andre Cole:

I think she saw the progression from taking over. I will never take over her sweet potato pie or her chocolate chip cookies, but especially meals throughout the week. And then I think around 20, I got my first chance to do the turkey for Thanksgiving. And I did that and I never stopped-

Vicki Guinn:

How was it?

Andre Cole:

For good or bad. It was great, it was great. It was a great turkey, enough for after that I was preparing every holiday meal to this day.

Vicki Guinn:

You got the job every year, huh?

Andre Cole:

Yes ma'am, whether I wanted it or not.

Vicki Guinn:

So how did you create? Tell me about your creativity, because you were just saying that you can wake up and you can write down a recipe. Where does that come from?

Andre Cole:

I credit that to my OCD, honestly. I think about food nonstop, YouTube food videos, even if they're not talking, I watch Korean food factories, anything food related, and it just always inspires or you learn something new or you say, "Hey, maybe I can make that work at work."

Vicki Guinn:

Tell me what you think about food as art. What does that mean to you?

Andre Cole:

I believe it literally is the same thing. I believe if it had a better shelf life, like a painting, there would be museums for that.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh, that's interesting, yeah.

Andre Cole:

Because a pot of nice beans that you put on at six o'clock in the morning and by dinner they're ready and perfect, it looks good in the pot, but until you gussy it up on somebody's plate, that full effect won't be present.

Vicki Guinn:

What kind of beans?

Andre Cole:

So especially at home, I like to make the plates and garnish them how I like to when you get it.

Vicki Guinn:

That's part of the art and the presentation.

Andre Cole:

It is. It's like that final piece. You can make it good and everything, but just like Bill Cosby said, you can put a steak on a garbage can and it's not going to present the same way.

Vicki Guinn:

What's your favorite beans?

Andre Cole:

Honestly, pinto.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh yeah.

Andre Cole:

My mom love red beans, but I'm a pinto man.

Vicki Guinn:

Pinto beans.

Andre Cole:

Yes ma'am.

Vicki Guinn:

And they cook in that gravy?

Andre Cole:

All day on a Sunday. I still use a little pork when I cook for myself.

Vicki Guinn:

Yes, indeed.

Andre Cole:

And my two kids. And I put it on at six o'clock in the morning and it's just low and slow all day long. I'm talking 12 hours until dinnertime. Beans are still whole, haven't broke down, the potluck has just reduced a little.

Vicki Guinn:

You'll have people drooling on this podcast. So what is it about, and that was the Sunday meal?

Andre Cole:

Yes, ma'am.

Vicki Guinn:

What is it about Sunday in Black homes and cooking that type of food, that soul food?

Andre Cole:

Well, those are those memories. Those are those just how we grew up. It's love, it's memories, it is spending time with grandma or mom and then actually seeing people enjoy what you spent all day preparing.

Vicki Guinn:

Do you kind of sit back and look at their face?

Andre Cole:

Absolutely, absolutely. I hear every comment, I see every eyebrow or every gesture that, "Wow, this is good."

Vicki Guinn:

Does that make you feel good?

Andre Cole:

Absolutely. That's what it's all about to me.

Vicki Guinn:

Say more.

Andre Cole:

If I just wanted to feed somebody, I'd pop a Totino's or something, but it is literally about that.

Vicki Guinn:

It's about feeling good and seeing the family?

Andre Cole:

Feeling good and feeling good sometimes require you to make other people happy and a nice plate of home-cooked meal would definitely put a smile on somebody's face.

Vicki Guinn:

So there's this kind of shift toward, and particularly I think about soul food, heart-based cooking rather than head-based cooking. What is heart-based cooking to you? You kind of described it a little bit.

Andre Cole:

Heart-based is literally soul food to me. That's what I pull from those memories, those Sunday meals, those barbecues, all that. I remember even making a slab of ribs, I remember when I first got a chance to make ribs, whether they turned out good or bad, it's more like sparks that innate feeling in your heart. For me, head-based cooking is more like now you know you don't need to be eating all this. But let me see, I tend to go with more moderation, so I like to keep soul food what it is, because those are the feelings that I get from it. Head-based is more, instead of feeding my mama salt pork or fat back, I'm going to switch it to a smoked turkey. But as much as everything else I can keep the same, I'm going to keep it the same because this is what I remember, this is what sparks those feelings. When somebody who ain't never had your cooking and they taste your greens and they slap the table, throw their head back and they say, "This is just like how big mamma made," that's what I want.

Vicki Guinn:

That's the highest compliment you can give, huh?

Andre Cole:

I tell cook them I'll cook like this for you for another three months because it's all in moderation. But I like to keep those dishes as whole as possible. And then when it's time to eat healthy the next day, that's when we go and have a grilled chicken breast, a little broccoli salad, and keep it moving like that. That way we can enjoy that meal in it's fullest the next time. I'm not going to use margarine for the cornbread or make vegetarian greens. And not that you can't make a good version, but it doesn't spark those memories, most of that love that made you fall in love with that dish in the first place.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh yeah. And you said the right thing, it's in moderation. So it's not a staple anymore, it's not gone, but when we get it, those memories...

Andre Cole:

Right, and that's what you want. And knowing you cannot have this every week, even every month for some people. So everybody's different and you have to understand that. But at the same time, you can have some, you just got to have the amount that you know should be having.

Vicki Guinn:

My sister gave me a pork ham hock the other day, I hadn't seen one in a while because I used smoked turkey and I text her and I said, "This is the most beautiful piece of meat I've seen in a while." It was just perfect, it was perfect. But you're right, I was moderation. And I was sitting there thinking, "What am I going to create with this? What am I going to put around this ham hock?" Because I only get one twice a year maybe, and I'm going, "I'm going to use this." So tell me about the backyard barbecue and cooking.

Andre Cole:

Oh, that's 4th of July, my family, 4th of July was it. Over auntie's house with 30 kids, a big bouncy house and Andre's on the grill.

Vicki Guinn:

So Andre, okay, you got to tell folks what time do you get up and get on the grill?

Andre Cole:

Oh, I'm an early riser, so it depends. If I'm at home, I'll be on the grill by eight o'clock, somebody else depends on-

Vicki Guinn:

I remember my uncles

Andre Cole:

Yeah, just low and slow.

Vicki Guinn:

That's right.

Andre Cole:

You just keep going back, checking on it and little picnic table kickback. And then you have a good conversation or play a game of dominoes-

Vicki Guinn:

That's right.

Andre Cole:

And that's what it's all about. Homemade mac and cheese on the side and maybe add a little greens in there, salad.

Vicki Guinn:

How many cheese did you put in your mac and cheese?

Andre Cole:

Let's see.

Vicki Guinn:

Give us a secret.

Andre Cole:

Got a little American because it's that binder that kind of makes that creaminess, a little American, whether it's Velveeta, whatever. And people, they don't believe that.

Vicki Guinn:

That's Patti LaBelle.

Andre Cole:

I'll make you some mac and cheese, you'll be a believer. Shredded cheddar. And then what else? What you got. Sometimes you can switch stuff up. So if I got the money, then I'm going to get some provolone, some Gouda, maybe a little smoked cheddar.

Vicki Guinn:

Ooh, a little boujee mac and cheese, all right.

Andre Cole:

But if not, I do some straight cheddar and American and it'll be just as good.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh my goodness. Because that's the question, who make the mac and cheese? And it better be good. So food is like other kinds of art, art is about senses and it just resonates with you. And I'm just sitting here just drooling over and the pictures are flooding back in my mind of what that food meant. And I'm just so envious because I'm not that creative because a lot of this is creativity. And you talked about that cookbook, I had that cookbook and it was a baseline.

Andre Cole:

Yes ma'am.

Vicki Guinn:

And you built off that.

Andre Cole:

Exactly.

Vicki Guinn:

And that's what my mother was. She always had that Betty Crocker cookbook. But then I asked her when she's cooking, I go, "Mom, how many tablespoons?" "Until it look right." "How in the world do you...?" "Oh, taste it." I was her sous chef growing up.

Andre Cole:

Yeah, ditto.

Vicki Guinn:

"Taste it, see if it tastes right." "What am I tasting?" "You'll know if it tastes right."

Andre Cole:

Exactly.

Vicki Guinn:

What does that mean?

Andre Cole:

And you will. It means what it means to you. Is it too salty? You add a little more water. Does it not have enough flavor? You go through all the same seasonings and you dun-dun, dun-dun, you know? Until you feel that it's right. And that's the beauty of cooking. I'm a big baker, I love to make cheesecakes, bread, stuff like that, but that is more of a science. You better follow that recipe or it ain't going to come out exactly how you want it. Cooking is open to your interpretation.

Vicki Guinn:

How do you feel when you're in the kitchen?

Andre Cole:

Happy.

Vicki Guinn:

Is that your happy place?

Andre Cole:

Yes, absolutely. Whether I'm doing the dishes, getting ready to cook or cooking, it's just my happy place.

Vicki Guinn:

And what other-

Andre Cole:

I know it's weird.

Vicki Guinn:

No, no, no, no, no. I have a cousin who's a chef and she's the same way. And I admire her because I run from kitchens. I mean, I like them and I like cooking, I like cookbooks and I like cooking stores, Williams and Sonoma, I just love it. You act like, I mean you think I cook.

Andre Cole:

I will break the bank in places like that. I try to avoid as much as possible.

Vicki Guinn:

It's just beautiful. It just does something to you when you see this beautiful cook-

Andre Cole:

It's just something different and new and maybe top shelf in this one balsamic. And that's where the creativity comes. You have to actually see stuff to be inspired by it. So I take trips to Seattle all the time just to go to the market and see what they have from smoked sea salt to a new fish that I've never seen, it's all interesting. And truffle pasta I try to get some as much as I can.

Vicki Guinn:

Well, so we talked a lot about cooking soul food and the Black experience. Tell me more about the cooking and what it means for us culturally.

Andre Cole:

I think it's all combined. I think it's what we touched on at the beginning, it is that innate feeling. You can really sit down with a plate and depending on who made it, it can remind you of people you've loved in your past. And that's why I feel like it's held such a high place in the Black community. And that's anything. You can cook chitlins, there's people in America that will cook chitlins, you put a bowl in front of them and they going to remember who made they first batch of chitlins, who made they best batch of chitlins, who made they last batch of chitlins. And it just goes from there.

Vicki Guinn:

That is true because Ms. Harkness made me some chitlins about 20 years ago, that's the last chitlins I ever got. And I talk about them to this day.

Andre Cole:

Really?

Vicki Guinn:

Yes.

Andre Cole:

You miss your chitlins?

Vicki Guinn:

I miss my chitlins.

Andre Cole:

Girl why you don't go make some chitlins?

Vicki Guinn:

I can't make chitlins, not in my kitchen.

Andre Cole:

I saw a bucket of chitlins for \$80 the other day. Ain't no way.

Vicki Guinn:

That's why I don't make chitlins.

Andre Cole:

Ain't no way.

Vicki Guinn:

When did soul food get so expensive?

Andre Cole:

When they knew they could make money off it, that's it.

Vicki Guinn:

Exactly right. When did oxtails get expensive?

Andre Cole:

\$20 for four piece of oxtail.

Vicki Guinn:

Come on now. Come on. Wasn't that cheap growing up?

Andre Cole:

And that's where the creativity, that's where you like, "Ooh, I can't do that. I got four people in my house and my 18-year-old son alone will eat three packs and that ain't going to happen, so can I be creative with something else? Let me get this cheap piece of pot roast."

Vicki Guinn:

Throw a hotdog in there.

Andre Cole:

And braise this down and it'll be just as good, but save you a couple dollars. So it's that creativity.

Vicki Guinn:

Is it still the same since soul food has gone mainstream?

Andre Cole:

Absolutely.

Vicki Guinn:

There's people who don't look like us cook a lot of soul food, which is fine. Has it changed for you or is it still big mamma's cooking to you?

Andre Cole:

No, it has not changed one bit for me. I do back off a little just because everything in moderation. But no, I try to keep every dish that I learned how to make exactly the same.

Vicki Guinn:

Do you name your dishes?

Andre Cole:

No, I don't go that far.

Vicki Guinn:

Does somebody else name your dishes? You see, I got Aunt Sammy's potato salad. No, it's Aunt Sammy's fried chicken, my momma's potato salad. We got those names in our family.

Andre Cole:

Oh really?

Vicki Guinn:

Oh yeah, oh yeah. Oh yeah, I had to call my brother one time, "I got momma's potato salad," and he go like, "Mm-hmm, we'll see," he goes, "Yeah, it's close."

Andre Cole:

Now my momma will be like, "I got Andre's ribs." But I myself, I don't name it.

Vicki Guinn:

You see, because we know that, don't we?

Andre Cole:

Yes ma'am.

Vicki Guinn:

You go to a potluck, you know who cooked it, "Oh, this is Andre's stuff."

Andre Cole:

Absolutely. And that's what you want. And that's that feeling, that's that love. If somebody can pick up a rib and say, "Andre did this," and just know and they go back for more, what else are you asking for? Because you ain't charging, you ain't asking for money.

Vicki Guinn:

They're not. So what do you want your legacy to be or what do you see, a restaurant, a cookbook or what's going on with all this cooking?

Andre Cole:

Ooh, that is a good question. I'm not sure. I tend to think more of a small restaurant. Maybe after my kids grow up and get out the house, I need something a little more stable. I don't feel comfortable right now. I am kind of thinking about cheesecakes again. I did have a little cheesecake business. Thinking about expanding my mom's cookie business, she started a cookie business right before the pandemic.

Vicki Guinn:

Oh really?

Andre Cole:

Best chocolate chip cookies in this city. So thought about working with her on that and just something manageable. I don't think I want a brick and mortar. I don't think how much time you really have to put

into those businesses at this stage of my life is where I want to put all my time. I'd rather spend it with my family and friends, but I do want something with my name on it in a controlled way.

Vicki Guinn:

So when your children are grown or grandchildren or great-grandchildren, they go, "Oh, that was Great-Grandpa Andre's rib recipe."

Andre Cole:

I got all of them written down for my kids.

Vicki Guinn:

You do?

Andre Cole:

Yes ma'am.

Vicki Guinn:

And they do get passed down through the generations, right?

Andre Cole:

I'm writing it because I did have some information, recipes passed down to me, handwriting very hard to read or something. But I like to just log it more clean and I got a folder just for my kids.

Vicki Guinn:

Really?

Andre Cole:

Yes, ma'am, I do.

Vicki Guinn:

I have my mom, my mom passed away 17, 18 years ago, but anyway, I have her recipe card. Remember those little?

Andre Cole:

Yes, ma'am. Little index cards?

Vicki Guinn:

Yes.

Andre Cole:

And those are the ones that I received as well. A little grayish bluish tin box, nothing but recipes.

Vicki Guinn:

Isn't that something? That handwriting. And my mother has a lemon jello cake recipe written down that she probably wrote when I was a child and it just faded. But I would never get rid of that.

Andre Cole:

Right. Why would you?

Vicki Guinn:

Pass it down to my daughter.

Andre Cole:

That's the basis of soul food cooking, right?

Vicki Guinn:

There you go.

Andre Cole:

Those memories, those passing down.

Vicki Guinn:

Well, thank you Andre.

Andre Cole:

Thank you, Vicki,

Vicki Guinn:

Thank you for joining us. I know you want to get back down and cook for the masses here at Legacy Health.

Andre Cole:

I definitely want to.

Vicki Guinn:

Well, I know you cook for a living, but it sounds like cooking is your passion, you enjoy it. And cooking is a way, particularly in the Black culture, it brings us together.

Andre Cole:

Yes, absolutely.

Vicki Guinn:

Thank you Andre for that mouth-watering podcast. You are truly a culinary artist. Talking to Andre about food was like sitting around the kitchen table at your grandma's house or your auntie's house and just talking about who cooks what better than the other person.

Anyway, for those foodies listening, you'll find food carts and maybe a bricks and mortar restaurant around the metro area with variations of soul food. For some of those who want to create their own, I have a couple of cookbooks in my kitchen. One is Spoon Bread and Strawberry Wine, I have a couple by singer Patti LaBelle, and of course I have the famous Sylvia's Family Soul Food Cookbook.

Okay, wait, don't go away. I want you to hear from teenage artist Emmanuel Dempsey, also known as Manny. One of my colleagues, Thelma Hale, recently chatted with him. You see, a couple years ago we commissioned Manny to design a T-shirt for our Legacy Health Good in the Hood parade team. We heard about a local high schooler who creates Black art as a vehicle to promote social and cultural awareness throughout this community. You may see his work in a mural on a building around Portland, but you'll soon see his work at Legacy. You see, we've commissioned him to create a piece for our Randall Children's Hospital in honor of Black History Month 2024. So let's hear from the artist.

Emmanuel Dempsey:

The type of art that I do, I paint, I hand draw design and do digital art. I've always been one to do a whole lot of different styles, different medias, mostly because growing up I just liked, I would see something be like, "I want to try to do that," and then try to do it in my own style and then it would just make a whole new thing. And then I would just have all these different medias that I learned and just keep applying to them, keep adding to them, and then just keep getting all kinds of new stuff.

What inspired me to do my art was growing up, I always loved watching cartoons, but I never saw characters that looked like me represented me or even said things that I would say. And I asked my dad what was up with that and he just told me to make my own. So that was the branch to my creativity and my journey throughout art because I would start creating characters that would look like me, that would represent me, talk like me, put them in the stories that would relate to stories in my own life or stories that could happen in my life. And just being able to tell my story, my people's story through our lens that it's not really represented but needs to be represented.

I don't technically come from a generation of artists like me who paint and draw, but I do have creative family members on my mother's side down south. My aunt is a hairstylist and my papa, he is an architect and he builds clubs and buildings and party rooms and stuff. And just growing up, always going back down home to the south where places like where my soul resides and always seeing that, being around that, and I always represent that and represent them in my artwork to tell my side of the story and to tell that piece.

Through my art celebrating my culture is a big part of why I do it and the way I celebrate it is just showing the pure Black joy that we have when we get together. Media doesn't really show that or presents that as much, they just present a side of the community that's not really ideal or not what I've grown up or not what I've seen. I guess the impact that my art has had for me, I guess opportunities, multiple opportunities to work with companies, to work with other people, other artists, and to learn from other people and get a learning experience and to apply that to being young still and heading off to college and thinking about where I want to go. It's really helped me think about, "Okay, what do I want to do and how can I get there?" And I know who to reach out to if I have any questions. So I guess opportunities most definitely has been the impact that artists had along with being able to promote my story and to let people know that this is who I am and this is how it is.

Encouraging words that I have for other young Black artists is continue to do you. Don't ever shy away from who you are, what you do, showcase you, don't showcase anything else but who you are and what it truly is because I feel like a lot of the times you will be questioned for the things that you do or for the things that you wear or the things that you say, but always be proud. Most definitely be proud of who you are and be proud to showcase that and to just showcase the love that you come from and the

generations that you come from and the people that you come from. Because once you're proud of it and once you love it and once you show it and you embrace that, the rest of the community can embrace that and live that with you because at the end of the day, we are all we have. If everybody doesn't get it, your people will get it. So always stay true to who you are and continue to make that stuff.

Vicki Guinn:

Those were encouraging words from one of our community's brightest young artists. Thank you Manny, and we can't wait to see your artwork hanging at Randall Children's Hospital.

Thank you all for listening to our Black History Month Engaging our People podcast, where we share the contributions of two artists. Please read our online publications and look at our legacy social media post for other Black artists we're saluting this month. Also be sure and look at the Legacy Health diversity, equity and inclusion website for how Legacy is celebrating Black History Month around the community.

Speaking of artists, I have to give a shoutout to my colleague, Jonathan Stevens. He is the audio magician who records these podcasts. And so Jonathan, thank you so much, you do this and much more. Now this podcast is for all of us at Legacy and we value you and your feedback so please take a moment and send us an email at podcast@lhs.org and tell us about your ideals for stories or how we can better engage our people. Thank you again, be safe and be well.