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**SPOJENÉ STÁTY AMERICKÉ: MNOHO ROZDÍLNÝCH  
ZEMÍ V JEDNOM – AMERICKÁ KUCHYNĚ**

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**THE USA: MANY DIFFERENT COUNTRIES IN ONE –  
AMERICAN CUISINE**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

*V Plzni dne 26.června 2017*

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The topic of this undergraduate thesis is The USA: Many different countries in one – American cuisine. In my thesis I tried to summarize the main features of American cuisine. As the lighting guide of American melting-pot cuisine I have chosen Louisiana cuisine. In my opinion Louisiana cooking style represents the character of American eating habits and whole culture. I focused on iconic dishes, their history and contemporary style of serving. In the beginning I wanted to show the main influences of foreigner cultures as French, Spanish, African or Italian because each of them affected the choice of ingredients, mixture of seasoning and cooking techniques.

The thesis is divided into two main groups. The first one is about Louisiana cuisine and its history. The second contains information about food in the United States of America in general.

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## INTRODUCTION

In my opinion studying a foreigner language means also studying the culture of the country. And part of the culture is definitely also its cuisine. It is not only food, it is the way people live their lives, celebrate their holidays and meet as a family around the table. American food has become one of the most studied, written-about and argued-over part of American culture. American gastronomy is not only junk food although many people think so. Fast food is one, but not the only part of the American cuisine, other meals can be very sophisticated. US cookery covers a huge amount of meals from hot dogs and hamburgers on one side to the steamed lobster and eggs Benedict on the other side. We can say that most Americans have not yet discovered the richness of their own culinary heritage simply because it is so voluminous. Nowadays many people follow a healthy lifestyle and this phenomenon has an impact on the eating habits. There is a world-wide expansion of vegetarian way of eating. Reasons for this lifestyle are various. Some people are not persuaded about the necessity of consuming animal proteins. They replace it by for example legumes, which contain plant proteins. Some people are not willing to support the meat production industry, they find slaughterhouses to be cruel and inhumane. Others maybe simply do not like the taste of meat. The number of vegans also grows. Vegans refuse to consume not only meat but also all the food that comes from animals – milk, eggs, fat. A special form of vegans are those who eat only raw food, that means the food which was not exposed the temperature higher than 42 °C. All these new types of catering of course influence not only American cuisine but also the eating habits all around the world. In American cuisine we can observe various influences of other cuisines – the world famous ones or some minor. There are many well-known delicacies like turkey, apple pie, egg Benedict or cookies. The American gastronomy is so voluminous that it is impossible to cover everything. That is why I was looking for an example that could represent American cuisine as a whole. I have found it in Louisiana cuisine. It is a region where all various foreigner influences met and created rich and tasty fusion of Cajun, Creole, French, Spanish and Italian eating habits. Fusion that could be compared to the way America works, symbol of melting pot. This work should be an excursion to American kitchens – the traditional and symbolic heart of home, the place which is linked with humankind's discovery

of cooking food with fire. I am asking: What does contemporary American cuisine look like? What are the new trends?

In my thesis I would like to focus on one of the examples of American melting-pot cuisine. Louisiana Creole cuisine is a good example where are visible elements of cosmopolitan culture and various foreigner influences – especially French and African, but also Italian and Spanish. Of course, these impacts are obvious not only in gastronomy – Louisiana is a special mixture of cultures and that is why we can call it the essence of everything that makes America being America. We can talk about famous gumbo, the traditional dish of Louisiana, where the foreigner elements are evident not only in the dish itself but also in the language. The word gumbo comes from African word that has been brought to the US by African slaves. In fact we can compare American cuisine to gumbo – many, for the first look, disparate ingredients but in the end harmony and reconciliation in every single plate. So slavery has brought African components. But what about the others? Before Louisiana started to be a part of the United States in 1803 when this region was sold to the US in Louisiana Purchase, it was colonized over a century by the French and later by the Spanish. Creoles were descendants of the settlers of colonial Louisiana especially around New Orleans. Cajun cuisine is mainly based on French cuisine but there are ingredients and cooking methods added from local resources – like holy trinity for example. In Louisiana soul food is very popular and has always been. It is cooking habit of African-American offsprings of slaves and it is based on economic cooking. It is possible to say that it is similar to Southern American cuisine but it has its roots in Western Africa. This cooking style works with rich flavors and cheap ingredients.

## **CULTURAL BACKGROUND**

### **Native Americans in Louisiana**

Even before the new settlers came into New World, this region was also a homeland of native Americans. The most common ingredient they used was a maize which was a dried corn. They looked for wild fruit, wild onions, wild garlic and pumpkins, they were fishing and what is remarkable they used a bear fat which was their only frying medium. They were excellent farmers and they preferred cyclical agriculture. Their favourite crop were “three sisters“ - corn, beans and squash – which are ideal companion plants. That means that they



grow well when they are grown together. Louisiana was home for five groups of native Americans by mid 1500's. The groups were these: the Chitimachas and the Houmas in the delta area, the Natchez in the center of the region, the Choctaws near the Mississippi river and the Caddos in the northwest. Every group had their own culture, language and also cuisine. Tribes settled near the water were focused on fishing and hunting waterfowls which represented the main part of their animal proteins. Choctaws and Caddos combined three sisters agriculture with hunting in the plains. The Natchez's culture was the most highly developed. In 1539 when Spanish explorer Hornando de Soto started his expedition in this area, he was astonished by by their advanced civilization. When settlers came into the New World the Natchez had already had organized settlements similar to small villages, they lived in a precise social structure, trade organizations and central government. Their diet was based on river fish, woodland foraged foods and cultivated crops. Although we can find many differences among eating habits of these tribes, for all of them corn represented the primary starch. Corn became an important ingredient for early French residents as well. This is the short description of the situation before the Europeans came into the New World. They have been influencing the region till nowadays. In my thesis I would like to write a few words at least about the main ones.

### **French influence**

France has a major and lasting influence on Louisiana. The city of New Orleans, found in 1718, was named after the French duke of Orleans. French colonists came with high standard of their food. Yeast bread and thickened sauces were on the repertoire of every cook or housekeeper. France belongs to strong food culture so French settlers continued in preparing mayonnaise or holandaise sauce as they were used to do at home. Although France is the example of the strong food culture, their people are characterized also by creativity in the field of cooking. They combined their national cooking heritage with the new conditions and also with the new available local ingredients. This combination caused the formation of contemporary sophisticated culinary habits in Louisiana. The French brought yeast bread and

various sauces and learned to use Native Americans products in their kitchens. One of the most popular combination of flavor in French cuisine is mirepoix – it is a mixture of rough-cut onions, carrots and celery. It is a combination often used to make the base of stocks and simmered dishes. And that is how holy trinity became into being. Holy trinity is a mixture of green bell peppers, celery and onions. The taste of carrots had to be substituted by green bell peppers because of the climate conditions and the quality of soil. Today the holy trinity is a base of many typical Louisiana dishes. It brings the authentic taste to soups, composed and stewed dishes. Another example of French influence is the usage of roux. Roux is a traditional thickening method by fat and flour mixed together and the representative example of Louisiana cuisine – gumbo – always contains roux. France enriched American cuisine in many ways like mirepoix, roux and cooking with vine. On the other hand French settlers learned from Native Americans new ways of cooking as well. For example seafood. France as a Catholic nation had many religious fast days during the year when eating meat was forbidden. As seafood was tolerated in Old World English cuisine the French quickly got fond of it as the full-fledged substitution for meat. As we can see both cuisines enriched each other. Today we can still observe French influence not only in the kitchen but also in the field of language. I would like to mention one example as the argument of accepting French language: etouffee. Etouffee is the traditional dish made of shellfish and rice and it never accepted any English name. The word etouffee means smothering in English but it is still used in its French form.

### **African influence**

In 1719 the first two ship with 450 slaves of African origin landed in Louisiana. Their arrival meant the beginning of massive and strong-arm migration of Africans. The phenomenon of slavery made possible large scale cultivation of cotton, rice and sugar cane. Slaves from Africa not only knew very well how to grow rice it also how to cook it. Slavery did not bring only human tragedy but also changed definitely the topography of the region. Slave labor was used to create huge agricultural fields to facilitate agriculture in greater amount. African slaves also changed Louisiana cuisine. They started to add ingredients and use their cooking methods which they were used to apply in Africa. Even the language of cooking in Louisiana is filled with African words. Let's mention gumbo once again. As I wrote above the word gumbo comes from African word. Also the key ingredient – okra – comes from Africa. Okra, also known as ladies' fingers, is nutritious vegetable of green color. The pods of okra used in the

kitchen are very low in calories (about 30 kcal per 100 g of okra). Okra is also considered to have a blood glucose lowering impact. In Louisiana African slaves did the most of cooking. Both men and women took job as cooks in rich families and in New Orleans restaurants and they put their knowledge and habits into their cooking. So early Louisiana cooking was, it is possible to say, mostly black cooking. When we can say that French influence has brought new ways of using fat, roux and wine, we can say that African slaves added master skill in using seasoning and spices. Talking about cooking by African slaves and their enriching American cuisine we cannot omit gumbo as the representative example of Afro-American fusion and it is often cited as an example of melting-pot character of Louisiana cuisine. Okra comes from Africa as well as the word gumbo. The roux is added from French cuisine, recipes for gumbo are in the most of Creole cookbooks and it is popular mainly in Louisiana. Isn't it a guiding light of fusion?

### **Spanish influenced**

In 1762 the Seven Years' War was over and France had to pay war reparations, that is why Louisiana was removed from France and it was given to Spain. Next forty years Louisiana was under Spanish rule. Although Spain banned the import from France, Louisiana received French goods and wine through other countries. That is how Louisiana and France stayed in touch over the years of Spanish rule. The contact and flow of the French goods was not interrupted and plus the Louisiana culture and cuisine was enhanced by the influence of Spain – new ingredients, cooking techniques and taste preferred in the south of Europe. The biggest acquisition was probably the usage of tomatoes. Tomatoes were popular in Italy and Spain. The rest of the world believed that this red and juicy vegetable is poisonous. Tomatoes had to travel from the New World to Europe and back to become attractive. Spanish also got fond of aubergine and bell peppers. During this era paprika found the way to Louisiana kitchens and started to help adding the color and flavor to Louisiana food. When we consider the short time Louisiana was under Spanish rule, it is intriguing how Spain managed influence Louisiana cooking. After forty years France received Louisiana back and after a month, in 1803, this region became part of the United States of America during Louisiana Purchase.

## **Italian influence**

In late 1800's Louisiana was exposed to the wave of Italian immigrants that were attracted by the warm climate and business opportunities. In New Orleans many grocery shops, sandwich shops, restaurants and bistros were opened and kept by Italian settlers. The fusion of American and Italian cuisines led into special cooking habits that were based on Louisiana traditional seafood and local ingredients and seasoning used in Italy. Italians brought parmesan cheese, anchovies and thick, spicy tomato sauce. Anyway the biggest benefit is definitely fact that Italian pasta acclimated in Louisiana kitchens. The parmesan cheese was introduced at first as the addition to pasta with tomato sauce. Later even other types of cheese started to be used in Louisiana – for example mozzarella or provolone. They are served with pasta or in sandwiches. Nowadays these types of cheese are popular world-wide and they were integrated into many dishes, not only Italian ones.

As it is obvious Louisiana cuisine is full of foreigner influences. Louisiana cuisine is similar to its traditional dish – gumbo. It is full of taste, full of different ingredients and still delicious and harmonic.

## **LOUISIANA CUISINE**

To describe all the types of American cuisine would be very extensive. That is why this work will be focused only on one of them – on Louisiana cuisine – as a good example of a cuisine that sits on a crossroads of a huge variety of influences realized by immigrants. Louisiana is said to be the state of pelicans, great food and jazz music. It has also several nicknames as Bayou State, Pelican State or Child of Mississippi. Louisiana is situated in the southern region of the United States. Baton Rouge is the capital but probably the most famous city is New Orleans. Louisiana is named after French king Louis XIV. who reigned in France from 1643 to 1715. Louisiana is bordered by the Gulf of Mexico in the south, by the state of Mississippi in the east, by Arkansas in the north and Texas in the west. The surface could be divided into two parts – an area of high or hilly land in the north and the alluvial along the coast. In Louisiana there is a humid subtropical climate with long, hot and humid summers and short, mild winters. This nice climate is unfortunately affected by tropical cyclones and hurricanes. . The average number of tornadoes is 27 per year. It was in 2005 when the

devastating hurricane Katrina hit southeastern Louisiana and flooded 80 % of New Orleans and caused over 1 500 fatalities.

Louisiana is home of many different cultures, especially remarkable are the descendants of Louisiana Creoles. It is a well-known fact that Louisiana eating habits are mostly based on French cuisine. Except of this main French role it is possible to observe the influences of Spanish, Indian, Caribbean, Portuguese, Greek, Canarian, German, Italian and Irish cooking culture. Creole cuisine is a mix of these cuisines and food typical for people who lived in the region before Louisiana Purchase in 1803 when Louisiana was sold to the United States. To understand Louisiana culture it is necessary to explain the main key words – especially “*creole*“ and “*cajun*“. What is Creole culture? Creole culture is an amalgamation of French, African, Spanish and native American culture. It is a mixture of different eating habits, attitudes and tastes. We can say that Louisiana Creoles are those families who lived in Louisiana prior to the Louisiana Purchase. As they were a part of French and Spanish colony they were influenced in all aspects of every day live – mainly linguistically and culturally. Creole is also a language. It is of course based on French. Cajun means Acadian. 22 parishes in Acadia – that was the beginning of Cajun culture. It is generally accepted that Cajuns are descended from the Acadians who were deported from l'Acadie and subsequently settled in Louisiana. People of Acadian descent born in Louisiana were identified by others, and identified themselves, as Creole (since they fell under that definition) in addition to Cajun. The main difference between Creole and Cajun is situated in cuisine. Both cuisines are similar and both of them have a recipe for gumbo, jambalaya and etouffee and so on. The main difference is in the ingredients. Cajuns do not use tomatoes for example. In fact, tomatoes are one of the main keys to distinguish between Cajun and Creole cuisine. Cajun food is also considered to have a “country“ character (it is based on ingredients you can find in the garden - like onions, peppers and celery) and Creole is said to be “city“ food – more refined and more European. That is for theory. But what is typical Louisiana Food? What are the icons in Louisiana cuisine?

Speaking about Louisiana Creole cuisine, we cannot omit: grilled oysters, Po' Boys, beignets, muffuletta, red beans and rice, gumbo, pralines, boudins, BBQ shrimps, jambalaya, etouffee and many more. Let's have a look at least at some of them.

## LOUISIANA CUISINE ICONS

### Grilled oysters

In the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century oysters were a common dish for poor people. As the time passed by and oysters were becoming more and more popular and their number decreased, their price increased and they moved to kitchens of upper classes. Today it is a synonym for sumptuous delicacy. Most of the species are suitable for consumption. The smaller ones are eaten raw without any heat treatment and the bigger ones are usually grilled, stewed or even fried. Frying is popular especially in southern part of the United States. Eating raw oysters bears a risk of infection by bacteria *Vibrio Vulnifus* that can be fatal in case of weak immunity. Grilled oysters are served seasoned with garlic butter, soya sauce or shallot, onion, parsley, Pecorino cheese and paprika. There are even some recipes with barbeque sauce. Shucking oysters can be dangerous. It is necessary to work with a sharp oyster knife and that is why it is handy to use chain-mail gloves to protect one's hands. At the end there is a reward



– a delicious and healthy dish.

Picture 1 (SOURCE [www.dishmaps.com](http://www.dishmaps.com) access date 09/09/2014)

## Po' Boys

This sandwich has an interesting history. The full title is “poor boy“ but the word “poor“ is naturally shortened in Louisiana dialect to “po““. The recipe is associated with New Orleans restaurant owned by Benny and Clovis Martin, brothers and former tram conductors. In 1929 in New Orleans a four-month strike against streetcar company began. Martins brothers offered their former colleagues sandwiches for free. Martin's called the strikers “poor boys“ and that is how the sandwich came into being. Here is the quotation of Benny Martin: *“We fed those men free of charge until the strike ended. Whenever we saw one of the striking men coming, one of us would say: “Here comes another poor boy“. Between 900 and 1100 loaves of bread were used every 24 hours and the restaurant was opened 24 hours a day. On a Carnival day over 3 000 loaves of bread were used.“* (SOURCE [www.poboyfest.com/history](http://www.poboyfest.com/history) n.d.)

The sandwich itself consists of meat – usually a sloppy roast beef or fried seafood that means shrimp, crawfish, oysters and crab. It is served with lettuce, tomatoes, onions, pickles and mayonnaise in a baguette. It is obvious that French cuisine has an impact here – for Louisiana people often use baguettes instead of bread. There are also other variations known which are served with fried chicken breast and French fries.



Picture 2 (SOURCE [www.onlyinyourstate.com/louisiana](http://www.onlyinyourstate.com/louisiana) access date 28/02/2016)

## Beignets



Picture 3 (SOURCE [www.louisianacooking.com](http://www.louisianacooking.com) n.d.)

Beignets are another example of a clear French influence on Louisiana cuisine, the word “Beignets“ is a French word for “fritter“. This New Orleans fried sweet specialty is made of breaded dough. Little squares are fried in oil and then powdered with sugar or covered with some kind of icing or filled with fruit filling. Beignets are connected with Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras, also called Shrove Tuesday, is a feast beginning on or after Christian feasts of the Three Kings Day. It is celebrated in a form of carnival. The title comes from French and means “Fat Tuesday“. It reflects the fact that it is the last day of rich, fatty dish before the traditional ritual fasting. The very similar recipes for beignets appear in both cuisines – in American as well as in the French one. Patently this dish comes from upper class because frying is an extremely expensive technique requiring lot of fat.

## Muffuletta

Muffuletta is one of the iconic and identifiable dishes in New Orleans. It is also another nice example of the fact that Louisiana cuisine is full of fusions. This recipe has originated in Italy and they were exactly Italian immigrants who brought this kind of sandwich to Louisiana.





Picture 4 (SOURCE [www.seriousseats.com](http://www.seriousseats.com) n.d.)

The food was made of Sicilian sesame bread and it is still like that. So what is muffuletta? The round bread is similar to foccacia, a famous Italian flat pizza style bread. The sandwich is filled with Italian salami, ham, minced garlic, olive salad and cheese. The key ingredient is definitely the olive salad which gives the dish a special flavor. . The sandwich was invented in 1906 in the Italian market the Central Grocery on Decatur Street, owned by Italian immigrant Signor Lupo Salvatore. He started to sell these sandwiches for the men who worked in local wharves. Marie Lupo Tusa, the daughter of the inventor, writes in her cookbook *Marie's Melting Pot*: *“One of the most interesting aspects of my father’s grocery is his unique creation, the muffuletta sandwich. The mufuletta was created in the early 1900’s when the Farmers’ Market was in the same area as the grocery. Most of the farmers who sold their produce there were Sicilian. Everyday they used to come of my father’s grocery for lunch. They would order some salami, some ham, a piece of cheese, a little olive salad, and either long braided Italian bread or round muffuletta bread. In typical Sicilian fashion they ate everything separately. The farmers used to sit on crates or barrels and try to eat while precariously balancing their small trays covered with food on their knees. My father suggested that it would be easier for the farmers if he cut the bread and put everything on it*

*like a sandwich; even if it was not typical Sicilian fashion. He experimented and found that the ticker, braided Italian bread was too hard to bite but the softer round muffuletta was ideal for his sandwich. In very little time, the farmers came to merely ask for a “muffuletta” for their lunch. “*

(SOURCE [www.whatiscookingamerica.net](http://www.whatiscookingamerica.net) n.d.)

Today muffuletta is considered to be an iconic dish for New Orleans and whole Louisiana. Muffulettes became not only a food, but also a tourist attraction especially during Mardi gras.

### **Red beans and rice**

Red beans and rice is Louisiana dish traditionally served on Monday. The reason why is pragmatic. Monday was always a laundry day. Housewives had to wash every single piece of clothes by hand so there was not much time left for cooking. It is clear they needed something that could be cooked with minimum attention and care. Red kidney beans were brought to America during Haiti’s slave rebellion. In that time beans had to be soaked in water over night so women simply set the beans on the cooker with fresh water and waited until they were smooth and then they added “trinity“ – a typical Creole/Cajun cooking base made of onions, celery and bell peppers.



Picture 5 (SOURCE [www.marthastewart.com](http://www.marthastewart.com) n.d.)

Today it is not necessary to let the beans in the soak over night. On every package there is a manual how to make it quicker. Sometimes cooks throw a ham bone or pork bone from the previous day dinner into the water so that beans can obtain the flavor of the ham. Red beans are seasoned by salt, pepper, cayenne, garlic and bay leaves parsley and thyme. Meats like ham, sausages (especially andouille) or tasso ham are frequently used in this dish.

### **Gumbo**

Taking about Louisiana cuisine gumbo is undoubtedly the most favorite and also most famous dish in this region. Here is one of many quotations about Louisiana gumbo:

*“What is New Orleans? New Orleans is Creole gumbo, filé gumbo, cowan gumbo, chicken gumbo, smoked sausage gumbo, hot sausage gumbo, onion gumbo.”*

(Kermit Ruffins, New Orleans vocalist and trumpeter)

According to Online Etymology Dictionary Gumbo is: “*Soup thickened with okra, 1805, from Louisiana French, probably ultimately from Central Bantu dialect (compare Mbundu ngombo "okra"). Also used for "the creole patois of Louisiana" (1838).*” (SOURCE [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com) n.d.)

Gumbo is considered to be quintessential example of melting-pot character of Louisiana cuisine and it is also called “the greatest contribution of Louisiana kitchens to American cuisine“. The name derives from the word “*ki ngombo* or “*qingombo*“ which means okra in Niger – Congo languages. Many slaves spoke this languages and that is how it came to Louisiana. Okra, also called lady’s fingers, is the main, key ingredience. Okra comes probably from West Africa, Ethiopia and South Asia. Raw okra has about 90% of water, 2 % of protein, 7 % of carbohydrates and a negligible amount of fat. No authentic gumbo can be cooked without it. As in Europe okra is not very popular it could be surprising in how many ways it could be used. The seeds can be roasted and ground and use as the substitution for non-caffeine coffee. The raw okra leaves can be eaten as a salad rich in vitamin B1, B2, K and C. Okra can be even fried, which is definitely the least healthy way of cooking, or eaten raw. Only a year ago it was almost impossible to buy raw okra in the Czech republic. Nowadays there are several shops where okra can be bought – some specialized shops in Prague, Makro and SAPA – the Asian market in Prague – so gumbo could be cooked in the Czech republic as well since the other ingredients are commonly available.



Picture 6 (SOURCE [www.toriavey.com](http://www.toriavey.com) n.d.)

Gumbo has a rich history which dates back to the 18th century and French cooking methods (in bouillabaisse for example) are visible. So in the past gumbo was a simple soup made with meat and vegetables. As okra was common vegetable available in late summer people added it into the soup and discovered that it brings not only a new flavor but also adds a texture. Later they added local seafood and filé powder. It is a dish based on strong broth of meat or shellfish and “holy trinity“ – a vegetable trio already mentioned in the part talking about red beans and rice – celery, bell peppers and onions. Gumbo is a thick, dark soup cooked of mixture of rice, vegetables and meat or seafood. The specific thing with gumbo is the consistence – it is thickened either with okra or filé powder which is made of leaves of sassafras tree.. Most of gumbos are thickened twice – once with dark oil-based roux and then with okra (or filé powder). There are many gumbo recipes, one can put almost anything in, so gumbos are divided into three categories: Seafood gumbo, Poultry and sausage gumbo and rare Gumbo Z’Herbes. Seafood gumbo contains a combination of shrimp, crawfish, oyster or

crab and it is usually thickened with okra. Poultry and sausage gumbo is made with chicken or turkey and pieces of andouille or other smoked sausages. This type is often thickened with filé. Z'Herbes is not a very common type of gumbo, it does not contain any meat or animal products and so it is suitable for vegetarians and vegans.



Picture 7 (SOURCE [www.louisianacooking.com](http://www.louisianacooking.com) n.d.)

### **Jambalaya**

Jambalaya is another distinctive dish very distinctly influenced by French cuisine. It is another example of melting pot of cuisines and cultures. The word Jambalaya comes from French word *jambon* that means ham and *Aya* which is African word for rice. According to Online

Etymology Dictionary Jambalaya is: *“1849, from Louisiana French, from Provençal jambalaia “stew of rice and fowl.”*

Jambalaya originated around the bayou in the region of Southern Louisiana which was poor opposed to other parts of Louisiana. The reason is clear – jambalaya is unexpensive and delicious dish stewed in one pot. In fact it is a dish similar to Spanish paella, Provençal Jambalaya or Italian risotto – it is a mixture of meat, vegetable and rice. In Jambalaya we can find many ingredients specific for Louisiana cuisine like “holy trinity“ (onion, celery and green bell pepper), seafood, rice, both and sausages. There are as many recipes as there are families in Louisiana, every family cooks according to their own recipe. That means that one can eat jambalaya in Louisiana every day and it always tastes different. In general it is possible to say that jambalaya is a one-pot dish and it contains rice, protein and spices. The most popular meat for jambalaya is chicken and smoked sausages.



Picture 8 (SOURCE [www.bbc.goodfood.com](http://www.bbc.goodfood.com) n.d.)

There are two main categories of jambalaya: Cajun and Creole. The difference is in the choice of ingredients, cooking techniques, order of adding ingredients and in a using of tomatoes. Creole jambalaya, also known as red jambalaya, contains tomatoes. The preparation of the dish starts with quick frying of trinity, after that the meat is added and later vegetable

and seafood. It is cooked together until it is well done and finally the rice is added. Cajun recipe does not include tomatoes, the dish has brown color. The cooking starts with browning of the meat so that it is caramelized, after that the meat is removed and set aside. Then trinity and vegetable like half chopped onions, red or green bell peppers or chopped celery are cooked and when everything is soft, seasoning and meat are added back. The rice is put inside uncooked and the pot is covered, the liquid is absorbed and the rice is done. As mentioned above Louisiana cuisine is affected by French, African and Carrabian influences. That makes its dishes interesting, full of taste and unusual. And jambalaya is one of the guiding lights of the fusion cuisine.

### **Boudin sausages**

The word *boudin* comes from Anglo-Norman word for “*bloody sausage*“. Boudins are another iconic thing about Louisiana region. Boudins have long and rich history in Cajun culture and dates back to 1800's. At that time a famous exploring team Lewis and Clark received a buffalo boudin from French trapper Toussaint Charbonneau.



Picture 9 (SOURCE [www.cajunboudinrail.com](http://www.cajunboudinrail.com) n.d.)

The boudins we know nowadays are the result of poor Cajuns who changed the recipe and substituted some ingredients, especially meat of course. They found the way how to use leftover scraps of pork and intestines and so contemporary boudins came into being. Boudins can be eaten like a sausage – that means just to bite it – or squeeze the filling out by teeth.



Simple boudin is made of cooked pork scraps, onions, rice and seasoning. The dish is usually eaten without the casing, with white bread and yellow mustard or hot sauce.

## **FOOD AS A PART OF THE CULTURE**

There is no one particular American common cuisine. The way Americans eat depends mainly on the geographical location and the influence of immigrants. The melting pot – as the USA is often called - is full of various fragments from different cultures. According to: the most favorite foreign cuisine in the USA is Chinese, the second is Mexican and the third is Italian. “A majority of Americans (77 percent) eat ethnic food while dining out at least once a month, and more than one-third (38 percent) order ethnic food weekly, according to Technomic, a Chicago-based research firm.”By this source the preferences of trying foreign cuisines are rising. People like experimenting with exotic flavors and if they find it delicious then they often keep discovering particular national food and sometimes they even try some other related cuisine e.g. Asian – Japanese/Chinese or European – French/Spanish and so on. The ability to prepare authentic foreign dishes depends on the availability of the authentic ingredients. The early immigrants had a limited access to the ingredients from their homeland so they were forced to replace at least some of them. That led to the development of new hybrid cuisines.

The cuisine of the United States of America reflects its history and cultural divergence. It is necessary to realize the journey that American gastronomy passed within its history. One fragment is the gastronomy of early Americans. Early native Americans had their own habits how to prepare their meals. These technologies have been blended with early European cooking methods. What do we know about native American's attitude? They consumed a variety of foods according to their place of living. Regional variations depended on regional availability of food resources. There are three main sources from which we can gather information but each of the sources contains some limits. In the first place it is the written evidence of the first people like settlers, missionaries and explorers. When the colonists came to the New World, they started to work on their farms. Their eating habits were very similar to their previous British cuisine. The only problem is that the new settlers usually stayed in coastal areas, so this source is more concentrated on eating habits of coastal habitats and people living by major watercourses. Later the new people came inland of course but by that

time the cuisine had already been influenced by the waves of impact from coastal regions. The second source is ethnography and oral tradition. We know ethnographic information from anthropologists who lived among native people and recorded their eating habits, diet, storage and everything that was connected with food. The last major source is archeology.

Archeologists analyze remains of food items like animal bones or seeds and modern methods like chemical analysis of human bones lead to precise information about former eating habits. It is impossible to find out everything but the science is in progress and the scientists know more and more as the time passes by.

American cuisine is divided into fifteen distinctive regional cuisines. Regional cuisine is a unified style of cooking of the people living in a culinary region. Each of them is unique, it contains its own techniques, ingredients and combinations. Every cuisine is based on an original mixture of history, geography and culture. History influenced the cookery because historical events have impact on different groups of people. Knowing the history of region helps to understand its eating habits. Geography is even more important – topography, soil type and climate are the key conditions for creating a cuisine. It is also the reason why the US cuisine is shattered into fifteen parts. The area is so huge and climatically various that it is impossible to consider it to be one undivided unit. We must take into account the presence of sea for example. It is natural that coastal cuisine is based on completely different ingredients than inland cookery. Food culture contains traditional combinations of ingredients, taste preferences and cooking technologies. People's attitudes about food determine which ingredients and cooking methods are accepted and favored. An attitude to food influences the amount of time, money and attention people are willing to spend on food and cooking. Attitudes are, in fact, even more important than ingredients because people hold beliefs and opinions on food without knowing why. It is a heritage of former generations. Food preferences and taboos are very strongly rooted in group's culture.

When talking about American cuisine and various influences of immigrants it is necessary to mention fusion. What is a fusion cuisine? *“Fusion cuisine is the deliberate combination of elements from two or more spatially or temporally distinct cuisines. Transcending conventional geographical and historical boundaries, it is a unique form of cuisine particular to today's postmodern world.”* (SOURCE [www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)). The fusion cuisine has its roots in France where elements of French and Japanese cooking were combined. Adam

Gopnik says that: *“Indeed, fusion cuisine has emanated primarily from the United States and Australia, but has spread to other parts of the world as well. Fusion cuisine may have taken off in the United States and Australia, because of those countries' short history relative to the rest of the world, their unique immigration histories, their lack of a cuisine that is clearly recognized by other parts of the world, and, most importantly, their lack of a culinary tradition.”* To be concrete we can mention an example of fusion in American gastronomy – Californian-style pizza. It is a pizza that combines Italian thin crust and Californian filling. This dish is attributed to the chef Ed LaDou, also called “Prince of Pizza“.

We can distinguish two groups of cultures according to their attitude toward food: strong food cultures and minimized food cultures. Strong food culture is simply positive in their attitude about cookery. They often think of food, they talk about it a lot. It is an important part of their lives. Such people enjoy food and do not regret the time they spend on preparing the meal. They carefully plan menus for their family and spend a high percentage of their income on food. These people also prefer local cookery and local ingredients. They also give a high social status to those who grow and cook food. Minimize food cultures believe that food is only a fuel for their body. They do not care about cooking and gastronomy. They focus their energy on some other part of their life which is in their opinion more crucial. Another point of view we can mention is the willing to try new things. Here we distinguish two groups of people – a culinary liberal and a culinary conservative. One who is a culinary liberal is willing to try new recipes and cooking technologies, he or she is not afraid of new ingredients even if they are strange or exotic. These people are also usually more adventurous in other elements of everyday life. A culinary conservative may be described as a person who is un-willing to experiment in the kitchen. These people prefer to prepare meals they are familiar with and they believe that foods of their own food culture are superior to all others. They are often cautious of other aspects of their life. According to these theories we can say that the American society is culinary liberal and strong food culture.

### **Popular food in the United States of America**

What is a typical American food in general? What do the Americans like the best? Here is the list (SOURCE [www.travel.cnn.com](http://www.travel.cnn.com))

Here is the list of top five:

- Thanksgiving dinner
- Cheeseburger
- Reuben sandwich
- Hot dog
- Philly cheese steak

American people find the Thanksgiving dinner to be the best dish they have. Thanksgiving is sometimes called “Turkey day“. The first Thanksgiving took place in 1621, when 54 Pilgrims and 90 Wampanoag people celebrated the harvest. The dinner contained waterfowl, venison, fish and lobster, clams, berries, fruit, pumpkin, squash and also wild turkeys. Today the feast is celebrated every fourth Thursday in October. Contemporary Thanksgiving turkey is usually oven roasted with the filling of bread – based mixture with raisins and apples and roasted together with onions, carrots, celery chestnuts or other nuts, crumbled bacon or sausages and with herbs especially sage. There is no one precise recipe for turkey, I would compare it to Czech recipe for potato salad. Every family has its own ingredients and tricks how to make the best one. Nowadays there are also lots of alternatives – duck or goose, venison, ham, and sometimes the fowl typical for the region is served for the Thanksgiving dinner – for example a quail in Texas. Vegetarians or vegans would not eat meat so they celebrate the feast with tofu or wheat gluten or a meal made of lentils for example. In some Alaskan villages even whale meat is eaten. So much for proteins. But what about the side dishes? Thanksgiving dinner is a ritual and a specific celebration and people really care about the richness and variety of food. Beside the turkey there is a cranberry sauce – a sweet and sour dip to underline the flavor of meat. Then we can find mashed potatoes, gravy, winter squash and sweet potatoes. Fresh or canned corn is also popular as well as green beans. As a dessert various pies are often served – apple pie, pumpkin or pecan pie.



Pic

ture 10 (SOURCE [www.marthastewart.com](http://www.marthastewart.com) n.d.)

A cheeseburger. There are not many meals as typical for America as a burger. In the late 1920's a young chef in Pasadena, California overcooked a burger and he put a slice of cheese on it to cover his fault. And this is how a cheeseburger came into being. What is it made of? A bun, ground beef patty, cheese, vegetable (onion, lettuce, tomato, pickles and so on) and dressings (mustard, mayonnaise, ketchup), popular regional toppings may include avocado, guacamole or bacon and mushrooms. Every single ingredient has an impact on the taste of a whole cheeseburger. The main question is the choice of the cheese. In fast food restaurants some processed cheese is normally used. A better made cheeseburger often contains cheddar, mozzarella, Swiss, or even blue cheese or pepper jack. For the prize from six to nine dollars in average you can get a quick lunch and approximately 350 calories and 16 grams of fat in a fast-food restaurant, in a supersize burger you receive about 480 calories and 24 grams of fat.



Picture 11 (SOURCE [www.marthastewart.com](http://www.marthastewart.com) n.d.)

Next one in the top five chart is a Reuben sandwich, the nation's top hotel and restaurant sandwich. The combination of corned beef, sauerkraut, and Swiss cheese on Russian rye bread. Arnold Reuben said:

*“I’ll tell you about how I got the sandwich idea. I owned a delicatessen on Broadway and one day a dame walks in, one of the theatrical dames, and she’s down and out I suppose, and she asks me for something to eat. Her name was Anna Selos. Well, I’m feeling sort of good, so I figure I’ll clown around for the dame. That’s how it all came about. I’m clowning for the dame. Well, what do I do? I take a holy bread that I used to keep and grab up the knife and, you know, clowning like, I cut it right through on the bias. Then I take some roast beef, I don’t remember exactly what. But, anyway, I figure I’ll put anything on. So I take some meat and cheese and I slap it on, and I put on some spice and stuff and I make her up a sandwich; it was a foot high. Well the dame just eats it, that’s all. She must have been plenty hungry. And*

*when she gets through she says, “Mr. Reuben, that’s the best sandwich I ever tasted in my life.”*

(Source [www.whatscookingamerica.net](http://www.whatscookingamerica.net))



Picture 12 (SOURCE [www.marthastewart.com](http://www.marthastewart.com) n.d.)

Number four is a hot dog, the most typical fast food during sport matches. It is easy to make,



easy to eat – it is an ideal size to put into one's mouth.

Picture 13 (SOURCE [www.marthastewart.com](http://www.marthastewart.com) n.d.)

Anyway, just like other American food even the hot dog has a great variety. They can differ in shape, seasoning, spicing, topping and so on.

When traveling around the country you can find that while everyone is bonded by a pure love of hot dogs, conceptions of what a hot dog should actually look and taste like vary drastically. For example in Chicago you can buy a hot dog made of Vienna beef franks and poppy-seed bun, filled with pickle spears, tomato slices, celery salt, onion, mustard and sport peppers. In Seattle the frank is grilled, in Arizona it is served with jalapenos and in Washington D.C. The hot dog is almost over-sized spicy sausage with chili. Anyway, hot dog is probably one example of food that is so different in the Czech republic. We usually do not add any vegetables and pickles, in our country a hot dog means a frank in a roll with mustard or ketchup.

The fifth is a Philly cheese steak also known as Philadelphia cheese steak is a kind of



sandwich which comes from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Picture 14 (SOURCE [www.marthastewart.com](http://www.marthastewart.com) n.d.)



In fact it is another type of fast food and it consists of very thinly sliced beef – usually rib-eye or top round - and melted cheese. It is served in a hoagie roll.

The top five chart may be surprising because there are meals which may not be expected to occur there – like Philly cheese steak – while there are other meals that could be called American icons missing, for example Cobb salad is 47<sup>th</sup>. This garden salad full of fresh vegetable and proteins of a high quality is placed almost in the end of the list. What are the ingredients? It is simple – just use words EAT COBB (EAT COBB: Egg, Avocado, Tomato, Chicken, Onion, Bacon, Blue cheese) and add lettuce. Another characteristic meal is Jerky occupying the place number 44. And there are more. Pop corn, meat loaf, fried chicken, Buffalo wings, apple pie, cookies and pizza, all these icons did not reach the top of the chart.

According to the chart Americans obviously love fast food which is a quick and relatively cheap way to satisfy hunger. On the other hand the United States of America are full of restaurants. To point to the best ones, and also the most expensive ones, there are several ways. It is possible to search a Michelin star. The history of Michelin guide and appreciating restaurants dates to 1900 when the first guide book was published in France. Over fifty years the Michelin guide was concentrated only on France, later it little by little covered Europe and in 2006 the first American Michelin guide focusing on New York city was published. In 1926 they started to send anonymous observers to restaurants to test their qualities. Michelin awards from 0 to 3 stars on the basis of anonymous reviewer. A reviewer has to have great taste and sense for a detail, he or she rates the technique and the presentation. They focus only on food and do not consider the interior of the restaurants. The reviewers award the stars as follows: One star means a very good restaurant in its category with food of a high standard. Two stars are the sign for an excellent cuisine and outstanding quality of served food. Three stars label exceptional cuisine and usage of superlative ingredients. To reach the award of three stars is extremely difficult, for example Michelin Guide to Chicago 2016 includes almost 500 restaurants but only two of them received the three-star award. Anyway, Michelin Guide is not the only indicator that the restaurant is of a high quality. Magazine Time declares ten best restaurants in the world. All of them are highly sumptuous and a meal for two costs there from 230 to 600 dollars. Two restaurants on this list are in the USA. The fourth place belongs to Eleven Madison Park in New York and the ninth place holds Alinea restaurant in Chicago.

What does this mean? The United States of America is a huge country and there is enough space for all various kinds of restaurants ranging from the luxury ones to the fast food and bistros. You always have many options to choose from. It is up to you, your taste and your financial resources what kind of restaurant you visit.

The United States of America is a huge country with unlimited possibilities. Food is part of our lives and popularity of gastronomy is rising. Talking about popular chefs in the USA would cover another thesis so I would like to mention at least three of them. Mario Batali – a clear instance of American dream. He was born in 1960 started his carrier as a dishwasher.



Picture 15 (SOURCE [www.therichest.com](http://www.therichest.com) access date 04/12/2013)

He is an owner of the owner of restaurants all over the world. He focuses on Italian cuisine and he has been awarded by Michelin star. He also often comes to TV cooking shows and his popularity is increasing.

Eric Ripert – the owner of Le Bernardin restaurants. He is a chef well known not only in the USA but all around the world. He was awarded by the maximum number of Michelin stars and by maximum points by The New York Times. He cooks mainly French cuisine and his speciality is seafood.



Picture 16 (SOURCE [www.therichest.com](http://www.therichest.com) access date 04/12/2013)

There are many other chefs who are popular because of their TV show or website. Gordon Ramsay (he comes from Britain), Martha Stewart or Sandra Lee – all of them made a fortune by cooking. People like watching cooking shows and we all got used to a comfort of sharing recipes on the Internet. Cookbooks are often best-sellers. Our society tends to improve preparing meal, try new flavors and recipes.

## CONCLUSION

When I said to my friends about the topic of my thesis they often said that there was no gastronomy in the USA. Food and cooking is my huge passion. I love cooking, baking and preparing food for my family and friends. And I wanted to show that American gastronomy does exist and it is colorful, rich and tasty. The US style of cooking enriched the world for plenty of dishes.

In my undergraduate thesis I have tried to show that contemporary American gastronomy does not consist only of junk and unhealthy food. American cooking is much richer and everybody can find his or her style of eating. I wrote about the most popular dishes and the chart confirmed that the Americans like rich and tasty food better than fast food sandwich. Thanksgiving dinner won the challenge for the most popular food.

I showed various influences from Europe and Africa that had a great impact on cuisine of Americans. The historical events brought new ingredients, new cooking methods and new attitudes to American kitchens. I tried to choose the most important influences and make a summary of changes brought by new settlers. As the topic is so wide I have chosen Louisiana cuisine as a bright example of fusion cuisine. Fusion is a process when two or more cuisines meet and influence one another. It is the way how modern gastronomy develops. Nowadays in global world distances are shorter. We can travel from one side of Earth to another very quickly. It is obvious that the world is becoming one big melting-pot. Only two years ago it was impossible to buy fresh okra in the Czech republic. Today it is available and if you want you can cook your own gumbo. American food found the way to Czech restaurants. Burgers and barbecue is more and more popular even in our country. In my thesis I focused on influences from other countries and historical events, that caused the mixture of eating and cooking habits. African, French, Italian and Spanish influence changed American gastronomy in a far-reaching way. We could compare American gastronomy to gumbo or salad – many ingredients that could have been considered to be heterogeneous but in the end there is a tasty and harmonic result.

The popularity of cooking is increasing. Our contemporary society is interested in new ways of preparing food. People are more and more excited about home cooking. The habit of our grandmothers are coming back. We cook dinners at home and enjoy family cohesion around the table. This phenomenon gives opportunity to various chefs and cooks who want to show

their art of preparing meals. Our society is coming back to kitchen and in my opinion it is a good direction. Eating together is definitely an unifying element and we need them as many as possible.

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## SUMMARY IN CZECH

Téma mojí bakalářské práce je: Spojené státy americké: Mnoho rozdílných zemí v jedné. Americká kuchyně. Ve své práci jsme se snažila shrnout hlavní rysy americké kuchyně. Jako zářný příklad americké kuchyně jsem zvolila louisianskou kuchyni. Podle mého názoru louisianský styl vaření reprezentuje povahu amerických zvyklostí spojených s jídlem a vlastně celou kulturu. Zaměřila jsem se na ikonická jídla, jejich historii a současný styl podávání. Na začátku práce jsem chtěla ukázat hlavní vlivy zahraničních kultur jako je francouzská, španělská, africká nebo italská protože každá z nich ovlivnila výběr surovin, směsi koření a postupy při vaření.

Tato práce je rozdělena do dvou hlavních částí. První je o Louisianě a její kuchyni a historii. Druhá pak obsahuje informace o jídle ve Spojených státech amerických obecně.