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Hit Makers
Derek Thompson

Atlantic senior editor Derek Thompson puts pop culture under the lens of science to investigate what every business, every artist, every person looking to promote “brand me” is after: what makes a hit a hit.

Hit Makers is a groundbreaking investigation into the most valuable currency of the 21st century: people’s attention. With incisive analysis and captivating storytelling, Atlantic Senior Editor Derek Thompson uses the tools of economics to reveal the secrets of what makes a hit a hit.

Drawing on ancient history and modern headlines—from vampire lore and Mickey Mouse to Facebook and Fifty Shades—Thompson offers practical lessons for how anybody can make a hit and become a smarter consumer of culture. In doing so, he shows how the universe of attention is connected. An investigation into the science of musical hooks uncovers the secrets of today’s best speechwriters. A biography of a legendary industrial designer finds a four-letter code that can help anybody sell the most complicated ideas to a mass audience. Hit Makers not only investigates the cultural phenomena that make up headlines. It reveals the desires that make us all human. Hits enchant us, but they also hold up a mirror to our nature.

We are living through an industrial revolution in attention. We used to simply play the hits. Now the hits play us back. Film, music, and media companies are using new tools to learn what makes their consumers tick. Hit Makers pulls back the curtain on this new world order to make all of us smarter about what people want and how things catch fire.

From the dawn of Impressionist art to the future of Snapchat, from small-scale Etsy entrepreneurs to the origin of Star Wars, Derek Thompson leaves no pet rock unturned to tell the fascinating story of how culture happens—and where genius lives.

DEREK THOMPSON is a senior editor at The Atlantic magazine, where he writes about economics and the media. He is a regular contributor to NPR’s “Here and Now” and appears frequently on television, including CBS and MSNBC. He lives in New York City.
THE BRAIN DEFENSE
KEVIN DAVIS

Murder in Manhattan and the Dawn of Neuroscience in America's Courtrooms
KEVIN DAVIS

isbn: 9781594206337
price: $28.00
on sale: 2/28/2017
In 1991, the police were called to East 72nd St. in Manhattan, where a woman’s body had fallen from a twelfth-story window. The woman’s husband, Herbert Weinstein, soon confessed to having hit and strangled his wife after an argument before dropping her body out of their apartment window to make it look like a suicide. The 65-year-old Weinstein, a quiet, unassuming retired advertising executive, had no criminal record, no history of violent behavior—not even a short temper. How, then, to explain this horrific act?

Journalist Kevin Davis uses the perplexing story of the Weinstein murder to present a riveting, deeply researched exploration of the intersection of neuroscience and criminal justice. Shortly after Weinstein was arrested, an MRI revealed a cyst the size of an orange on his brain’s frontal lobe, the part of the brain that governs judgment and impulse control. Weinstein’s lawyer seized on that discovery, arguing that the cyst had impaired Weinstein’s judgment and that he should not be held criminally responsible for the murder. It was the first case in the United States in which a judge allowed a scan showing a defendant’s brain activity to be admitted as evidence to support a claim of innocence.

The Weinstein case marked the dawn of a new era in America’s courtrooms, raising complex and often troubling questions about how we define responsibility and free will, how we view the purpose of punishment, and how strongly we are willing to bring scientific evidence to bear on moral questions. Davis brings to light not only the intricacies of the Weinstein case but also the broader history linking brain injuries and aberrant behavior, from the bizarre stories of Phineas Gage and Charles Whitman, perpetrator of the 1966 Texas Tower massacre, to the role that brain damage may play in violence carried out by football players and troubled veterans of America’s twenty-first century wars. The Weinstein case opened the door for a novel defense that continues to transform the legal system: Criminal lawyers are increasingly turning to neuroscience and introducing the effects of brain injuries—whether caused by trauma or by tumors, cancer, or drug or alcohol abuse—and arguing that such damage should be considered in determining guilt or innocence, the death penalty or years behind bars. As he takes stock of the past, present and future of neuroscience in the courts, Davis offers a powerful account of its potential and its hazards.

Thought-provoking and brilliantly crafted, The Brain Defense marries a murder mystery complete with colorful characters and courtroom drama with a sophisticated discussion of how our legal system has changed—and must continue to change—as we broaden our understanding of the human mind.

**KEVIN DAVIS** is a Chicago-based journalist and author of *Defending the Damned* and *The Wrong Man*. His award-winning writing has appeared in *USA Today*, *The Chicago Tribune*, The Utne Reader, Chicago Magazine, The Rumpus, *Writer’s Digest*, and other publications; he is a former staff reporter for the *Sun-Sentinel* in South Florida and is an editor at the *American Bar Association Journal*. 
IRRESISTIBLE

ADAM ALTER

THE RISE OF ADDICTIVE TECHNOLOGY AND THE BUSINESS OF KEEPING US HOOKED

ADAM ALTER

isbn: 9781594206641
price: $27.00
on sale: 3/7/2017
In our lifetimes, behavioral addiction may prove to be one of the most important fields of social, medical, and psychological research. The very idea of addictive behaviors is only decades old, but the risk is already universal: in today’s world, we are all potential addicts. The incredible significance and danger of this is only just beginning to be understood. Adam Alter is at the cutting edge of the research, and although we don’t know what price we or future generations will pay if we continue down this path, it is clear the consequences could be huge and severe.

Addiction, of course, isn’t new, but it isn’t just harmful substances that people become dependent on these days, it is technology and online social activities, too. In fact, the very inventions and devices that we use in the hope of making our lives better and more enjoyable, and which have come to define our social lives—Netflix, Twitter, wearable tech—are not as benign as we think. Technology companies and marketing corporations have teams of engineers and researchers devoted to the question of how to keep us glued to the screen. They know how to push our buttons, how to get us hooked—and to do so without us suspecting a thing.

Tracing the very notion of addiction through history right up until the present day, Alter shows that we’re only just beginning to discover the tip of the iceberg of the epidemic of behavioral addiction gripping society. This goes to the core of who we are. He takes us inside the human brain at the very moment we switch on a game on our smartphones, or share a photo on Instagram in the hope of people “liking” it. But more than that, he heads the problem off at the pass, letting us know what we can do to step away from the screen. He lays out the options we have address this problem before it truly consumes us. After all, who among us hasn’t felt the terrible compulsive power of Facebook, video games, or simply checking your phone!

Adam Alter is an Associate Professor of Marketing at New York University’s Stern School of Business, with an affiliated appointment in the New York University Psychology Department. He is the author of the New York Times bestseller, Drunk Tank Pink: And Other Unexpected Forces That Shape How We Think, Feel, and Behave, and has also written for the New York Times, New Yorker, Atlantic, WIRED, Slate, Huffington Post, and Popular Science, among other publications.
Marina Willett, M.D., has a problem. Her husband, Charlie, has become obsessed with H.P. Lovecraft, in particular with one episode in the legendary horror writer’s life: In the summer of 1934, the “old gent” lived for two months with a gay teenage fan named Robert Barlow, at Barlow’s family home in central Florida. What were the two of them up to? Were they friends—or something more? Just when Charlie thinks he’s solved the puzzle, a new scandal erupts, and he disappears. The police say it’s suicide. Marina is a psychiatrist, and she doesn’t believe them.

A tour-de-force of storytelling, *The Night Ocean* follows the lives of some extraordinary people: Lovecraft, the most influential American horror writer of the 20th century, whose stories continue to win new acolytes, even as his racist views provoke new critics; Barlow, a seminal scholar of Mexican culture who killed himself after being blackmailed for his homosexuality (and who collaborated with Lovecraft on the beautiful story “The Night Ocean”); his student, future Beat writer William S. Burroughs; and L.C. Spinks, a kindly Canadian appliance salesman and science-fiction fan — the only person who knows the origins of *The Erotonomicon*, purported to be the intimate diary of Lovecraft himself.

As a heartbroken Marina follows her missing husband’s trail in an attempt to learn the truth, the novel moves across the decades and along the length of the continent, from a remote Ontario town, through New York and Florida to Mexico City. *The Night Ocean* is about love and deception—about the way that stories earn our trust, and betray it.

**PAUL LA FARGE** is the author of the novels *The Artist of the Missing* (1999), *Haussmann, or the Distinction* (2001), and *Luminous Airplanes* (2011), as well as *The Facts of Winter* (2005), a book of imaginary dreams. His stories and essays have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper’s*, *The Believer*, *McSweeney’s*, *Nautilus*, *Conjunctions* and elsewhere. He has won the Bard Fiction Prize, two California Book Awards, and the Bay Area Book Critics’ Award for fiction. In 2013-14 he was a fellow at the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the New York Foundation for the Arts.
The year is 1995, and email is new. Selin, the daughter of Turkish immigrants, arrives for her freshman year at Harvard. She signs up for classes in subjects she has never heard of, befriends her charismatic and worldly Serbian classmate, Svetlana, and, almost by accident, begins corresponding with Ivan, an older mathematics student from Hungary. Selin may have barely spoken to Ivan, but with each email they exchange, the act of writing seems to take on new and increasingly mysterious meanings.

At the end of the school year, Ivan goes to Budapest for the summer, and Selin heads to the Hungarian countryside, to teach English in a program run by one of Ivan’s friends. On the way, she spends two weeks visiting Paris with Svetlana. Selin’s summer in Europe does not resonate with anything she has previously heard about the typical experiences of American college students, or indeed of any other kinds of people. For Selin, this is a journey further inside herself: a coming to grips with the ineffable and exhilarating confusion of first love, and with the growing consciousness that she is doomed to become a writer.

With superlative emotional and intellectual sensitivity, mordant wit, and pitch-perfect style, Batuman dramatizes the uncertainty of life on the cusp of adulthood. Her prose is a rare and inimitable combination of tenderness and wisdom; its logic as natural and inscrutable as that of memory itself. The Idiot is a heroic yet self-effacing reckoning with the terror and joy of becoming a person in a world that is as intoxicating as it is disquieting. Batuman’s fiction is unguarded against both life’s affronts and its beauty—and has at its command the complete range of thinking and feeling which they entail.

Elif Batuman has been a staff writer at The New Yorker since 2010. She is the author of The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books and the People Who Read Them. The recipient of a Whiting Writers’ Award, a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers’ Award, and a Paris Review Terry Southern Prize for Humor, she also holds a PhD in comparative literature from Stanford University.
The story of Adam and Eve has stood at the center of every conversation about men and women in Western civilization for the last 3,000 years. It has been both a source of division between the sexes and a model for how relationships can survive temptation, transgression, loss, and pain. For some this story is mere fantasy, and for others it’s a fact. But for all of us, the story of the Bible’s first couple has shaped how we live today.

From the author of the bestselling Walking the Bible, The First Love Story traces the legacy of the most famous couple in history to answer the question: Are Adam and Eve merely the cause of sin, degradation, and mistrust between the sexes, or might they be a source of unity and resilience—and even perhaps inspiration for our relationships?

Traveling across the globe and through history, from archaeological digs in Israel and a women’s rights protest at the Western Wall, to the supposed sight of the Garden of Eden in modern-day Iraq and the London of Milton’s Paradise Lost, Bruce Feiler examines how our love life, our sex life, our domestic life, and our spiritual life are inextricably linked to the first pages of the Bible. Whether we’re debating equal pay, the chore wars, the sinfulness of sex, or the nature of marriage, we are influenced to an astonishing degree by what happened in Genesis between Adam and Eve, God and the serpent—and how centuries of religious leaders interpreted or manipulated these events to preserve their power.

But their story does not merely demonstrate something about who we are, it also gifts us with practical wisdom about how we might live our lives. BruceFeiler’s book reveals that the first man and the first woman matter because they introduced the idea of love into the world, and their enduring love provides a roadmap for how we can persevere together and fight off the forces of alienation and selfishness that risk tearing us apart.

Bruce Feiler is one of America’s most popular voices on family, faith and survival. He writes the “This Life” column about contemporary families for the Sunday New York Times and is the author of five consecutive New York Times bestsellers, including Walking the Bible, Abraham and Where God Was Born. He is the writer/presenter of the PBS series “Walking the Bible” and “Sacred Journeys with Bruce Feiler.”
The US tax code is a total write-off. Overstuffed with loopholes and special interest provisions, it works for no one—except tax lawyers, accountants, and corporations, that is—certainly not me and you. Not for the first time, we have to tear it up and start over. That happened in 1922, and again in 1954, and again in 1986. There’s a pattern here; we reach this point every 32 years. Which means the next complete re-write of the tax code is due in 2018. Can we write a new tax code that is fair and simple? Can we cut tax rates and still bring in the revenue required? In fact, we can—by learning from the world’s other democracies. Around the world, wealthy democracies, from Estonia to New Zealand to the UK, have all reformed their tax codes, while the US has languished. With his penchant for making complex subjects accessible and even fun, T. R. Reid travels the world in order to find out what makes for good taxation (if that’s not an oxymoron!) and brings that knowledge home.

So byzantine are the current statutes that by the government’s own estimates, Americans spend six billion hours and ten billion dollars every year preparing and filing their taxes. In The Netherlands it takes fifteen minutes! Brilliantly successful American companies like Apple, Caterpillar, and Google pay effectively no tax at all because of loopholes which allow them to move profits offshore. Indeed, the dysfunctional tax system has become so easy to dodge that it is a major cause of economic inequality, as Warren Buffett and Thomas Piketty have pointed out. But it doesn’t have to be this way, the ever-intrepid Reid proves, crisscrossing the globe, from the Czech Republic to Mexico. Doing our taxes may never be America’s favorite pastime, but it can and should be so much easier.

Based on an astonishing collection of letters and diaries harvested by Andrew Carroll and the Center for American War Letters over many years, *My Fellow Soldiers* tells the story of the American experience in World War I with General John Pershing in the foreground against a landscape of extraordinary voices, to convey the grassroots perspective of American doughboys, war nurses, and their families with extraordinary intimacy and power.

Andrew Carroll’s portrait of General Pershing, the US Commander in Europe, is a revelation. The scope of the challenge facing Pershing in World War I, and his ultimate mastery of it, were truly remarkable. Leading a military force that on the eve of its entry into the war was downright primitive compared to the European combatants, the general surmounted enormous obstacles to command 1.5 million American soldiers to decisive victories.

But Pershing himself—often misunderstood as a starchy, even wooden leader—concealed inner agony from those around him: almost two years before the US entered the war, his beloved wife and three young daughters perished in a house fire; only his six-year-old son Warren survived. Even as Pershing steered the American war effort, he wrote his son heartfelt letters from the front. Before leaving for Europe, Pershing also had a passionate romance with George Patton’s sister, Anita. But once he was in France, Pershing fell madly in love with a young painter named Micheline Resco, whom he later married in secret.

Woven throughout Pershing’s story are the voices and experiences of an extraordinary group of American men and women, gathered from a stunning cross-section of stories and letters gathered by Carroll, from both the famous and unheralded, including Harry Truman, Ernest Hemingway, Teddy Roosevelt, and his youngest son Quentin. If Pershing provides the heart of this story, the chorus of these “lesser-known” voices that enfold it make the high stakes of this epic American saga piercingly real. Never before has the war’s profound impact on America been conveyed with such humanity and emotional force.

**ANDREW CARROLL** is the creator of the Legacy Project, which archives wartime correspondence, and *War Letters*, which sold more than 300,000 copies and inspired an acclaimed PBS documentary. Other *New York Times* bestsellers include *Letters of a Nation* and *Behind the Lines*. Carroll’s *Operation Homecoming* inspired an Emmy-winning documentary. He lives in Washington, D.C.
AN AMERICAN SICKNESS

ELISABETH ROSENTHAL

ISBN: 9781594206757
PRICE: $28.00
ON SALE: 4/11/2017
An American Sickness
Elisabeth Rosenthal

An award-winning New York Times reporter, Dr. Elisabeth Rosenthal reveals the dangerous, expensive, and dysfunctional American healthcare system, and tells us exactly what we can do to solve its myriad of problems.

It is well-documented that our healthcare system has grave problems, but how, in only a matter of decades, did things get so bad? Dr. Elisabeth Rosenthal doesn’t just explain the symptoms, she diagnoses and treats the disease itself. Rosenthal spells out in clear and practical terms exactly how to decode medical doublespeak, avoid the pitfalls of the pharmaceuticals racket, and get the care you and your family deserve. She takes you inside the doctor-patient relationship, explaining step-by-step the workings of a profession badly lacking transparency. This is about what we can do, as individual patients, both to navigate a byzantine system but also to demand far-reaching reform.

Breaking down the monolithic business into its individual industries—the hospitals, doctors, insurance companies, drug manufacturers—which together comprise our healthcare system, Rosenthal tells the story of the history of American medicine as never before. The situation is far worse than we think, and has become like that much more recently than we realize. Hospitals, which are managed by business executives, behave like predatory lenders, hounding patients and seizing their homes. Research charities are in bed with big pharmaceutical companies, which surreptitiously profit from the donations made by working people. Americans are dying from of routine medical conditions when affordable and straightforward solutions exist.

Dr. Rosenthal explains for the first time how various social and financial incentives have encouraged a disastrous and immoral system to organically spring up in a shocking short space of time. The system is in tatters; but we can fight back. An American Sickness is the frontline defense against a healthcare system that no longer has our wellbeing at heart.

Dr. Elisabeth L. Rosenthal, a longtime New York Times senior writer, was born in New York City. She received a B.S. degree in biology from Stanford University, an M.A. degree in English literature from Cambridge University, and an M.D. degree from Harvard Medical School.
THE TINCTURE OF TIME

ELIZABETH L. SILVER

ISBN: 9781101981443
Price: $27.00
On Sale: 4/25/2017
Growing up as the daughter of a dedicated surgeon, Elizabeth L. Silver felt an unquestioned faith in medicine. When her six-week-old daughter, Abby, was rushed to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit with sudden seizures, and scans revealed a serious brain bleed, her relationship to medicine began to change.

The Tincture of Time is Silver’s gorgeous and haunting chronicle of Abby’s first year. It’s a year of unending tests, doctors’ opinions, sleepless nights, promising signs and steps backward, and above all, uncertainty: The mysterious circumstances of Abby’s hospitalization attract dozens of specialists, none of whom can offer a conclusive answer about what went wrong or what the future holds. As Silver explores what it means to cope with uncertainty as a patient and parent and seeks peace in the reality that Abby’s injury may never be fully understood, she looks beyond her own story for comfort, probing literature and religion, examining the practice of medicine throughout history, and reporting the experiences of doctors, patients, and fellow caretakers. The result is a brilliant blend of personal narrative and cultural analysis, at once a poignant snapshot of a parent’s struggle and a wise meditation on the reality of uncertainty, in and out of medicine, and the hard-won truth that time is often its only cure.

Heart-wrenching, unflinchingly honest, and beautifully written, The Tincture of Time is a powerful story of parenthood, an astute investigation of the boundaries of medicine, and an inspiring reminder of life’s precariousness.

Elizabeth L. Silver is the author of the novel The Execution of Noa P. Singleton, which has been published in seven languages. Her writing has been published in McSweeney’s, The Huffington Post, The Rumpus, The Millions, and elsewhere. She has worked as an attorney in Texas and California, and as an adjunct instructor of English literature and composition. She lives with her family in Los Angeles.
BEHAVE

ROBERT SAPOLSKY

BEHAVE
THE BIOLOGY OF HUMANS
at OUR BEST and WORST

ROBERT SAPOLSKY

isbn: 9781594205071
price: $30.00
on sale: 5/2/2017
Why do we do the things we do?

Over a decade in the making, this game-changing book is Robert Sapolsky’s genre-shattering attempt to answer that question as fully as perhaps only he could, looking at it from every angle. Sapolsky’s storytelling concept is delightful but it also has a powerful intrinsic logic: he starts by looking at the factors that bear on a person’s reaction in the precise moment a behavior occurs, and then hops back in time from there, in stages, ultimately ending up at the deep history of our species and its genetic inheritance.

And so the first category of explanation is the neurobiological one. What goes on in a person’s brain a second before the behavior happens? Then he pulls out to a slightly larger field of vision, a little earlier in time: What sight, sound, or smell triggers the nervous system to produce that behavior? And then, what hormones act hours to days earlier to change how responsive that individual is to the stimuli which trigger the nervous system? By now, he has increased our field of vision so that we are thinking about neurobiology and the sensory world of our environment and endocrinology in trying to explain what happened.

Sapolsky keeps going—next to what features of the environment affected that person’s brain, and then back to the childhood of the individual, and then to their genetic makeup. Finally, he expands the view to encompass factors larger than that one individual. How culture has shaped that individual’s group, what ecological factors helped shape that culture, and on and on, back to evolutionary factors thousands and even millions of years old.

The result is one of the most dazzling tours de horizon of the science of human behavior ever attempted, a majestic synthesis that harvests cutting-edge research across a range of disciplines to provide a subtle and nuanced perspective on why we ultimately do the things we do...for good and for ill. Sapolsky builds on this understanding to wrestle with some of our deepest and thorniest questions relating to tribalism and xenophobia, hierarchy and competition, morality and free will, and war and peace. Wise, humane, often very funny, Behave is a towering achievement, powerfully humanizing, and downright heroic in its own right.

ROBERT M. SAPOLSKY is the author of several works of nonfiction, including A Primate’s Memoir, The Trouble with Testosterone, and Why Zebras Don’t Get Ulcers. He is a professor of biology and neurology at Stanford University and the recipient of a MacArthur Foundation genius grant. He lives in San Francisco.
The Search for Simplicity and Unity in the Complexity of Life, from Cells to Cities, Companies to Ecosystems, Milliseconds to Millenia
The former head of the Sante Fe Institute, visionary physicist Geoffrey West is a pioneer in the field of complexity science, the science of emergent systems and networks. The term “complexity” can be misleading, however, because what makes West’s discoveries so beautiful is that he has found an underlying simplicity that unites the seemingly complex and diverse phenomena of living systems, including our bodies, our cities and our businesses.

Fascinated by issues of aging and mortality, West applied the rigor of a physicist to the biological question of why we live as long as we do and no longer. The result was astonishing, and changed science, creating a new understanding of energy use and metabolism: West found that despite the riotous diversity in the sizes of mammals, they are all, to a large degree, scaled versions of each other. If you know the size of a mammal, you can use scaling laws to learn everything from how much food it eats per day, what its heart-rate is, how long it will take to mature, its lifespan, and so on. Furthermore, the efficiency of the mammal’s circulatory systems scales up precisely based on weight: if you compare a mouse, a human and an elephant on a logarithmic graph, you find with every doubling of average weight, a species gets 25% more efficient—and lives 25% longer. This speaks to everything from how long we can expect to live to how many hours of sleep we need. Fundamentally, he has proven, the issue has to do with the fractal geometry of the networks that supply energy and remove waste from the organism’s body.

West’s work has been game-changing for biologists, but then he made the even bolder move of exploring his work’s applicability to cities. Cities, too, are constellations of networks and laws of scalability relate with eerie precision to them. For every doubling in a city’s size, the city needs 15% less road, electrical wire, and gas stations to support the same population. More amazingly, for every doubling in size, cities produce 15% more patents and more wealth, as well as 15% more crime and disease. This broad pattern lays the groundwork for a new science of cities.

Recently, West has applied his revolutionary work on cities and biological life to the business world. This investigation has led to powerful insights into why some companies thrive while others fail. The implications of these discoveries are far-reaching, and are just beginning to be explored.

Scale is a thrilling scientific adventure story about the elemental natural laws that bind us together in simple but profound ways. Through the brilliant mind of Geoffrey West, we can envision how cities, companies and biological life alike are dancing to the same simple, powerful tune, however diverse and unrelated they are to each other.

GEORGEFREY WEST is a theoretical physicist whose primary interests have been in fundamental questions in physics and biology. West is a Senior Fellow at Los Alamos National Laboratory and a distinguished professor at the Sante Fe Institute, where he served as the president from 2005–2009.
The Potlikker Papers tells the story of food and politics in the South over the last half century. Beginning with the pivotal role of cooks in the Civil Rights movement, noted authority John T. Edge narrates the South's journey from racist backwater to a hotbed of American immigration. In so doing, he traces how the food of the poorest Southerners has become the signature trend of modern American haute cuisine. This is a people’s history of the modern South told through the lens of food.

Food was a battleground in the Civil Rights movement. Access to food and ownership of culinary tradition was a central part of the long march to racial equality. The Potlikker Papers begins in 1955 as black cooks and maids fed and supported the Montgomery Bus Boycott and it concludes in 2015 as a Newer South came to be, enriched by the arrival of immigrants from Lebanon to Vietnam to all points in between.

Along the way, The Potlikker Papers tracks many different evolutions of Southern identity—first in the 1970s, from the back-to-the-land movement that began in the Tennessee hills to the rise of fast and convenience foods modeled on Southern staples. Edge narrates the gentrification that gained traction in North Carolina and Louisiana restaurants of the 1980s and the artisanal renaissance that reconnected farmers and cooks in the 1990s and in the 00s. He profiles some of the most extraordinary and fascinating figures in Southern food, including Fannie Lou Hamer, Colonel Sanders, Edna Lewis, Paul Prudhomme, Craig Claiborne, Sean Brock, and many others.

Like many great provincial dishes around the world, potlikker is a salvage food. During the antebellum era, masters ate the greens from the pot and set aside the left-over potlikker broth for their slaves, unaware that the broth, not the greens, was nutrient-rich. After slavery, potlikker sustained the working poor, black and white. In the rapidly gentrifying South of today, potlikker has taken on new meanings as chefs have reclaimed the dish.

Over the last two generations, wrenching changes have transformed the South. The Potlikker Papers tells the story of that change—and reveals how Southern food has become a shared culinary language for the nation.

JOHN T. EDGE is a contributing editor at Garden & Gun and a columnist for the Oxford American. In 2012, he won the James Beard Foundation’s M.F.K. Fisher Distinguished Writing Award. He is director of the Southern Foodways Alliance at the University of Mississippi. Edge has written or edited more than a dozen books. He has served as culinary curator for the weekend edition of NPR’s All Things Considered, and he has been a regular columnist at the New York Times. Edge lives in Oxford, Mississippi, with his son, Jess, and his wife, Blair Hobbs.