

Ethnic Restaurants in Florida

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Over the past three decades Florida has evolved into one of the most ethnically diverse states in the nation. As early as the 1930s there were small ethnic enclaves scattered about the state. In Tampa there was Ybor City, which was as much Italian as it was Spanish and Cuban. In Miami, a few blocks west of downtown had acquired the name "Little Havana," although its total Latino population was extremely small. Key West had a Bahamian and Latino minority; Tarpon Springs had a concentration of Greeks. Jews, particularly retirees, had begun to settle on Miami Beach and to a smaller extent the Shenandoah district of Miami.

It was not until 1959, when Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba, that the number of foreign-born residents of the state began to grow rapidly, and the share of those born abroad who were from Latin America and French and English speaking Caribbean nations began its phenomenal growth. First huge numbers of Cubans went into exile, most settling in Dade County. Then political unrest and desperate poverty elsewhere in the Caribbean Basin and in Mexico drove hundreds of thousands more to leave, a significant share choosing Florida as their home.

Between 1970 and 1990 the number of foreign-born living in Florida increased threefold and during that period their distribution from among the world's nations was also greatly altered. In 1970 the foreign-born constituted 8 percent of the state's population, compared to 13 percent in 1990. In 1970, among the foreign born, Europeans held a 41 percent share, but by 1990 their share had fallen to 18 percent. During the 20-year period the share of people from within the hemisphere, excluding Canada, increased from 41 percent to 56 percent, while that from all other nations from 10 percent to 22 percent. Among the 22 percent who came from "other" nations the greatest number were from the Philippines, followed by Chinese from China, Vietnam, Hong Kong and

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Taiwan, and people from India and Pakistan. The 2000 census certainly will reveal that the share of the foreign born in the state's population has grown appreciably from what it was in 1990, while within that group the share of European-born will be even lower.

During the 1990s the United States sustained the longest period of economic expansion in its history, resulting in a large increase in per capita disposable income. Many sectors of the nation's economy expanded commensurate with the economic growth, including restaurants. Today Americans eat out far more frequently than they did even ten years ago. In addition, they have become far more adventuresome in the cuisine they appreciate. Today, in all cities, there is a much greater variety of restaurants to choose from than previously. The distribution of ethnic restaurants, however, often does not reflect the share of the various ethnic groups within a community. Instead, it is a reflection of what type of food the American public is enthusiastic about at a particular time and place.

Since the nineteenth century ethnic restaurants have been popular throughout the nation. In part this has been due to the relatively low amount of capital needed to start them. Labor rather than land (rent) or capital continues to be the biggest investment a person makes in starting a little restaurant. The Chinese were among the first who became identified with restaurants, but later this extended to embrace Italians and Greeks as well. In the case of the Chinese, although their dishes bore little resemblance to those popular in China, they were able to offer the public a cheap rice-based cuisine that became very popular. The Italians were equally successful with pastas and pizzas. The Greeks, however, while offering Mediterranean food in their restaurants, usually provided more traditionally American dishes as well. Some cuisines have only had a brief popularity. A good example is Vietnamese, which, in Florida enjoyed considerable popularity in the 1980s, but declined in the 1990s. Perhaps the decline might result from the Vietnamese entering more remunerative employment, or because they converted their restaurants to Chinese cuisine. Even today, a period of enormous immigration to the United States and one in which large restaurant chains take an ever growing share of the restaurant dollar, one can see the effects of migration in the growing variety of small, family restaurants within the nation's cities and towns.

This brief study seeks two audiences. First, it hopes to interest those who want to know the difference in the distribution of ethnic

and specialized restaurants between 20 of Florida's largest metropolitan areas. Among these 20 metropolitan areas there is a great variation in the character of their populations, as well as their economies. Some have very large ethnic populations, for example Dade County (Miami) and its Latinos or Broward (Fort Lauderdale) and Palm Beach (West Palm Beach) counties and their Jews. Others have populations that are heavily Southern such as Marion (Ocala), Duval (Jacksonville) and Escambia (Pensacola). Then there is Orange (Orlando), which is the state's major tourist destination, attracting over 35 million visitors annually. The second audience the theme hopes to interest is secondary school teachers. I believe that a class in social studies would greatly benefit from a unit based on understanding what types of restaurants are found in the community in which the school is situated, and why their owners chose the location within the city. This might entail student interviews with restaurant owners, consultation of census publications, map work, and other activities.

The data used were obtained from the Yellow Pages found in AltaVista, an Internet search engine. The AltaVista Yellow Pages classifies restaurants by their type for all of Florida's metropolitan areas. In most cases these metropolitan areas are similar to the U.S. Bureau of the Census's Metropolitan Statistical Areas. Thus, for example, Miami includes all of Dade County and Fort Lauderdale all of Broward. Unfortunately, there was no standard classification for all cities, some using different categories than others. However, there was enough similarity in the classifications between all of the cities, with the exception of Miami, that I felt virtually all the restaurants would fit comfortably in one of the dozen categories used in the table (Table 1), which represent a condensation of those of the Yellow Pages.

All metropolitan areas had a separate category for pizza parlors, which were not included in the study. Neither were fast food restaurants such as McDonald's, Wendy's or Burger King. Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants were not included with southern USA restaurants, nor were Taco Bell and similar fast food restaurants included within the Latino category. However, Olive Garden, Cracker Barrel, Don Pablo's, Sonny's Real Pit Bar-B-Q, and several other dinner houses and family restaurant chains found in Florida cities were included in the categorization.

The total number of restaurants that fit within all twelve categories was first summed. Then the share of each was calculated. All categories that were at least one standard deviation or higher than

the average for the state was then identified, and were indicated on the table by bold letters. The results appear, to the author, with but one exception, to be interpretable. The one exception was Miami. The Yellow Pages of the AltaVista computer search engine, and all others consulted, did not identify many Latino or Spanish restaurants in Miami. This, to me, was most unusual. I then made a search for some well-known Cuban restaurants that I am familiar with. In the case of the AltaVista Yellow Pages, excluding Taco Bells, there were only 111. Among those 111, most were Mexican. Even the Versailles, arguably the most famous Cuban restaurant in Miami, was placed in the Yellow Pages "general" category. I can find no explanation for the Yellow Pages of Miami to identify as Latino so few restaurants. If the classifications are the restaurant owners' choice, perhaps many Latin restaurant owners in Miami believe, at least in their community, their restaurants are "general."

With the exception of Miami, the majority of Latino restaurants in Florida have a Mexican cuisine. Although greatly altered to meet regional tastes throughout the nation, chili has enjoyed great popularity for generations. However, for the last 20 years there has been an enormous increase in the popularity of other Mexican dishes, also transformed to conform more to American tastes. Most Mexican restaurants are small family businesses, where the owner and employees work long hours providing cheap food and drinks (primarily margaritas) and earn small profits. Such restaurants should do well in all communities, but especially where there is a large population with comparatively small disposable income.

In Florida Latino restaurants compose an unusually large share of ethnic restaurants in Fort Myers, Fort Walton Beach, Lakeland, Naples, Tallahassee, and Tampa-St. Petersburg. Despite the results of the Yellow Pages data, Miami also belongs among this group. These metropolitan areas do not conform economically to what I had anticipated. Tallahassee has a large student population with low disposable income, but so does Gainesville, yet Tallahassee among its ethnic restaurants has an unusually high percentage of Latino and Gainesville does not. Naples, the metropolitan area with the highest per capita income in the state, also has a large share of Latino restaurants, but so does Lakeland, where the per capita disposable income is much lower.

Oriental restaurants, which include Chinese, Japanese, and those that specialize in other East Asian food, are the most popular in Florida. Nearly one-third of all ethnic restaurants (31.2 percent) fit

Table 1
Percentage of Different Categories of Ethnic Restaurants among the Total Ethnic Restaurants in Florida Metropolitan Areas

	Bradenton	Daytona B	Ft. Laud	Ft. Myers	Ft. Pierce	Ft. Walton	Gainesville	Jacksonville	Lakeland	Melbourne
Middle East, India	0.004	0.010	0.014	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.009	0.013	0.000	0.014
Latino + Spain	0.148	0.073	0.115	0.180	0.112	0.310	0.152	0.097	0.241	0.120
W.I. nonSpanish	0.004	0.031	0.020	0.008	0.006	0.034	0.000	0.013	0.011	0.000
Southern USA	0.090	0.357	0.301	0.123	0.359	0.000	0.332	0.410	0.230	0.335
Creole, New Orleans	0.012	0.003	0.005	0.008	0.000	0.034	0.005	0.007	0.000	0.005
Italian	0.242	0.248	0.163	0.189	0.194	0.034	0.157	0.152	0.138	0.196
French, Gourmet	0.078	0.035	0.050	0.041	0.029	0.034	0.000	0.030	0.000	0.038
Brit. Isles, W&N Europe	0.012	0.017	0.007	0.008	0.012	0.000	0.005	0.013	0.011	0.019
Oriental	0.369	0.192	0.317	0.402	0.265	0.517	0.313	0.261	0.368	0.249
Vegetarian	0.000	0.010	0.002	0.000	0.024	0.000	0.018	0.002	0.000	0.010
Greek, East Europe	0.041	0.021	0.000	0.041	0.000	0.034	0.009	0.004	0.000	0.014
Kosher	0.000	0.000	0.007	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
% restaurants ethnic	0.186	0.356	0.117	0.167	0.243	0.104	0.227	0.326	0.163	0.244

Bold numbers identify where ethnic restaurants are at least one standard deviation or higher than the average for the state.

Table 1 (continued)
Percentage of Different Categories of Ethnic Restaurants among the Total Ethnic Restaurants in Florida Metropolitan Areas

	Miami	Naples	Ocala	Orlando	PanamaC	Pensacola	Sarasota	Tallahassee	Tampa-St.P.	WPB	Average
Middle East, India	0.026	0.010	0.005	0.020	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.021	0.014	0.008	0.008
Latino + Spain	0.156	0.192	0.153	0.134	0.152	0.128	0.145	0.189	0.179	0.084	0.153
W.I. nonSpanish	0.023	0.020	0.005	0.015	0.040	0.017	0.004	0.021	0.013	0.007	0.015
Southern USA	0.292	0.061	0.315	0.372	0.470	0.385	0.089	0.147	0.190	0.283	0.257
Creole, New Orleans	0.023	0.000	0.009	0.015	0.007	0.068	0.036	0.021	0.009	0.003	0.014
Italian	0.098	0.404	0.176	0.128	0.126	0.060	0.238	0.147	0.164	0.246	0.174
French, Gourmet	0.038	0.061	0.000	0.042	0.007	0.017	0.077	0.011	0.027	0.056	0.034
Brit. Isles, W&N Europe	0.006	0.020	0.005	0.011	0.013	0.009	0.012	0.000	0.012	0.018	0.011
Oriental	0.324	0.212	0.306	0.249	0.179	0.299	0.359	0.432	0.341	0.278	0.312
Vegetarian	0.006	0.000	0.019	0.005	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.005
Greek, East Europe	0.000	0.020	0.009	0.011	0.007	0.017	0.040	0.011	0.051	0.013	0.016
Kosher	0.009	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.001
Total	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1
% restaurants ethnic	0.092	0.196	0.230	0.302	0.341	0.202	0.189	0.187	0.220	0.300	0.237

Bold numbers identify where ethnic restaurants are at least one standard deviation or higher than the average for the state

within this category. They, like Latino restaurants, constitute a large share of all ethnic restaurants in towns of radically different socio-economic character. In Fort Walton Beach, a tourist and military community, the Oriental restaurants' share of total ethnic restaurants rises to over half, while in the university town of Tallahassee it is 43 percent. However, in Sarasota, a tourist town whose resident population has a high per capita income the share is unusually high as well. Several cuisines clearly have a strong geographical orientation within Florida. For example Creole cooking, whose origin is in Louisiana, is especially popular in the Gulf Coast cities of Fort Walton Beach, Pensacola, Sarasota, and Tallahassee (Tallahassee is 20 miles from the coast). Greek restaurants, to a degree, also show a geographical origin related to the early concentration of Greeks in the state, which was in the Tampa area. Today Greek restaurants figure of relatively high importance among ethnic restaurants in Bradenton, Fort Myers, Fort Walton Beach, Sarasota, Tampa-St. Petersburg, and Daytona Beach. Restaurants that specialize in southern cuisine should be most popular in Florida cities with large concentrations of southerners. Although Jacksonville, Ocala, Panama City, and Pensacola lend support to this supposition, unusually high concentrations of restaurants with this cuisine in Fort Lauderdale, Ft. Pierce, Melbourne, Miami and Orlando undermine it. Kosher restaurants, obviously, are found where there are large concentrations of observant Jews (Fort Lauderdale and Miami). Within the twelve restaurant categories used in this study, kosher restaurants depend the most on an ethnic clientele.

Gourmet restaurants, which include all that describe themselves as French, should figure prominently among ethnic restaurants in tourist cities and those with high per capita income. This was mostly true, since Orlando, Fort Lauderdale, Fort Myers, Naples, Sarasota and West Palm Beach had relatively high percentages of gourmet restaurants. Conspicuously absent from the group was Miami, although I am confident that it should have been included if the same criteria had been used for the classification of its restaurants as the others.

This brief study has only delved superficially into the mysteries of why some Florida communities have higher shares of some types of ethnic restaurants than others do. Whereas it is suggested that for some categories there is an element of geography to their distribution (Creole), and for others there is concentrations of ethnics (Jews), and tourists (Gourmet), there are many exceptions, how-

ever, that undermine these generalities. It is hoped that the table will stimulate the interest of those who are especially interested in dining out to gain more insights into the distribution of these restaurants. For social science teachers, the hope is that some will be galvanized to write a teaching unit that will incorporate geographical, social and economic elements to explain the distribution of ethnic and specialized restaurants in their communities.