

# A Cosmic Re-set

## FOR OUR NATION'S TABLE



By Jessica B. Harris

An international pandemic has sent us all metaphorically to our rooms to “think about it” in a cosmic re-set that is a combination punishment and blessing. The cosmos has forced us all to think about ourselves in new ways, in creative ways that can work to eliminate the ills that we have too long ignored and allowed to exist in our flawed hospitality system. While the list of the ills is long, at the top is the problematic nature of the system itself.

The hospitality sector is based on service which itself is all too often based on inequality and inequity. In this country, we must also factor in that for more than 200 years much “service” was about enslavement. Following that, it was about disenfranchisement. Yesteryear’s enslaved have been transformed into the black and brown people of today who still form the underpaid underpinnings of the industry. The equation has changed slightly, but the facts remain that the disparity of income and the lack of gratitude are woefully similar. As the French might say, “*Plus ça change, plus ça reste la même chose.*” (The more things change the more they stay the same.)

So, at this moment when we have been forced to rethink the direction of our industry, it’s time to truly use the cosmic re-set to reset our agenda. Let’s come together at this crossroads in history to reset the nation’s table to make sure that there are places at it for all. Let’s reset the table with an eye to and an awareness of past transgressions and future possibilities. As we reset the table, let us think of those people I’ve spent more than 40 years writing about. Let us think of their descendants in our kitchens, our dining rooms, at our take-out windows, and in the back and front of house with their mops and brooms and



Photo by Rog Walker/ Paper Monday

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busting suds as dishwashers. Let’s thank them appropriately, pay them decent wages on which they can...not simply survive...but thrive, and honor them in the dignity of their work. Let’s dedicate what will be the rebirth of our industry to that reset. It’s time for that...Indeed, it’s past time.

*This essay was adapted from Jessica’s acceptance speech for the 2020 James Beard Lifetime Achievement Award.*



# Vineyard-Style Leg of Lamb

*The Vineyard in question is not in Sonoma or Provence or even in New York State where I live, but Martha's Vineyard where I have summered for more than six decades. There, for almost 20 years, I celebrate my Francophilia by giving a Bastille Day celebration to which I invite friends and neighbors. Last year, I even managed to keep up the tradition by having a socially-distanced dinner at a friend's home that had more dining room windows than my own. They prepared the vegetables, but I made my lamb and we savored it at opposite ends of a long table thinking of better time and of how food can make even the worst of times a little bit better.*

## INGREDIENTS

- 1 shank end half, bone-in leg of lamb,  
4 to 5 pounds
- 1 cup dry red wine
- 8 large cloves garlic
- ½ teaspoon dried lavender buds
- 1 tablespoon fresh rosemary leaves
- 2 tablespoons sea salt
- 2 tablespoons mixed peppercorns  
*(Note: I add some grains of allspice,  
slivers of dried garlic and cubebs to  
my black pepper mix which already  
includes pink, green, white and black  
peppercorns, but it is not necessary)*
- 1 tablespoon dried rosemary
- 1 tablespoon dried thyme
- 1 tablespoon herbes de Provence



Photo by Kenny Morrison

## HOW TO PREPARE

Preheat the oven to 450°F. If the butcher has not already removed the fell (parchment-like membrane) from the lamb leg, trim it away along with all excess fat. Rub the lamb with the wine. Using the tip of a sharp knife, make 15 or so small incisions in the leg, spacing them evenly. Mince the garlic, lavender, and fresh thyme until you have a thick paste. Slip a bit of the paste into each of the incisions in the lamb. Place the sea salt, peppercorn mixture, dried rosemary, and herbes de Provence in a spice grinder and pulse until you have a coarse mix. Rub the mix all over the lamb, covering it evenly. Place a rack in a roasting pan, and place the lamb on the rack. Roast the lamb for 15 minutes, then lower the heat to 350 and continue to roast for 1 hour and 15 minutes or until a meat thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the roast comes out at 140 to 145 for medium-rare.

Allow the lamb to rest for 15 minutes, then carve long thin slices parallel to the bone and serve hot.

I serve my lamb with a fast, cheating mint jelly prepared by jazzing up the oh-so-green mint jelly that can be found at most supermarkets with a glug of good rum, minced jalapeño, and minced fresh spearmint.

## SPICY MINT SAUCE

- 1 jar (8 ounces) mint jelly
- ½ small jalapeño chile, seeded and minced, or to taste
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh spearmint
- 2 tablespoons dark rum

Mix ingredients to combine.