

## FROM YORUBA TO NEW ORLEANS

*The Divine Yam*

By Kiel Adrian Scott

The world's highest population of twins are of the Yoruba, found in West Africa's modern-day Nigeria. In every thousand births globally only thirteen are that of twins. For the Yoruba, however, there are forty twin births per every thousand.

Scientists searching for the reason why found that their diet of yams was to blame. It should have come as no surprise. For the Yoruba and so many other West Africans, the yam is a form of social currency; all food is. But the yam has saved lives when no other food could be harvested or found. It is even the cherished tuber of their Orisha gods. Their deities fight, lie, and even steal to possess it. Unsurprisingly, a chemical contained within it literally doubles life.

Yams, like the Orisha, have travelled everywhere the Yoruba have. Even here to New Orleans. They, like the Yoruba, the Igbo, Kongo, Ewe, Fon, and their ilk, were once carried across turbulent seas in the bowels of ships. Ships digesting their identities and carrying them away from everything they knew, and even themselves. The yams were not actually transported, of course; they travelled to our city only in the hearts of those brought and sold here. The yam was

longed for, and searched for endlessly. It was eventually found masquerading like Mardi Gras as the sweet potato.

Like so many of the Yoruba, I, too, am a twin. And sweet potato pie is my twin brother's and my favorite holiday dish. As children we couldn't resist it. In truth

we still can't. Over the holidays our mom still bakes one for him, one for me, and one for the rest of our family. Who could have known that what we were tasting, what we were longing for, perhaps even drawn to, was our ancestral home, and the divine yam that may have helped to bring us into being.



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*Kiel grew up in New Orleans, the grandson of Big Chief Donald Harrison, Sr. and community leader and activist Herreast J. Harrison. He is the identical twin to Grammy-nominated musician Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah.*



# Cara's Sweet Potato Pies

RECIPE FOR TWO PIES;  
FOR ONE PIE, CUT INGREDIENTS IN HALF.



Photo by Kenny Morrison

## INGREDIENTS

### Crust

2½ cups all-purpose flour + ½ cup  
as need to dust rolling surface

1 cup butter (unsalted, diced,  
and chilled)

½ teaspoon salt

4 tablespoons ice-cold water

Or buy premade 9-inch pastry shells  
from your grocer

### Filling

5-6 baked and peeled medium,  
orange flesh sweet potatoes (Garnet,  
Heirloom, Jewel, etc.)

3 large or 2 extra large eggs

⅓ cup heavy whipping cream

1 stick butter, softened

1 cup brown sugar, packed

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground nutmeg

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon cornstarch

1 heaping tablespoon all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon baking powder

## HOW TO PREPARE

### Crust

Dice butter into ½ inch pieces and place in freezer for about 10 minutes until very cold. Measure 2½ cups of flour and place in mixing bowl or food processor (save

other ½ cup to add flour as needed and to dust rolling surface). Add salt and whisk to blend with flour.

Once chilled, add cold butter. Using pastry cutter, cut butter into flour until a crumbly consistency is made. Put some muscle into it! *(Note: If using a food processor, pulse ingredients a few times to get the crumbly consistency.)* Add ice water one tablespoon at a time while continuing to cut through the dough until a ball of dough is formed and sticks to the pastry cutter. *(Note: For food processor, pulse, adding the ice water the same way, until you get a ball of dough that is slightly tacky to the touch but does not leave dough on fingers.)* If dough is sticky or gummy, add a little of the left-over flour, a half tablespoon at a time, and repeat the process until desired consistency.

Lightly flour rolling surface (so dough won't stick to it) and place one half of the ball of dough on top. Add a little more flour on top of the dough (for the same reason) and pat the dough down to about a one-inch thick disk. Flour your rolling pin and roll dough into a circle. If dough sticks to rolling pin, use wax paper between the two as so

not to add more flour to the dough. Flip the crust at least once and continue to roll it to about ¼ inch thick. Next, roll the crust into a tube and transfer to the pie pan. Press lightly into pan. Repeat process for second crust, if making two pies. Place crusts in refrigerator while making the filling.

### Filling

Place peeled baked sweet potatoes in a large bowl and smash them. The potatoes should yield about 5 cups. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Add soft butter to bowl and mix until dissolved. Add brown sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, egg, and vanilla extract and mix well with a hand mixer. Add dry ingredients, flour, baking powder, and cornstarch and mix until thick but smooth. Last, add the heavy whipping cream and blend until silky smooth, about 30 seconds. Pour into pie shells and spread evenly to edges. *(Tip: Wrap foil around the edges of the crust in the pan for the first 20 minutes of baking to keep crust from over browning.)*

Bake until pie has set and is lightly browned on top, about 45-50 minutes. Test readiness by sticking a toothpick into center of pie, which should come out almost clean. Cool and serve.