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FOOD

Chicken Gizzards Help Tell the Story of a People at Chicago's Virtue

by Chandra Ram — MARCH 8, 2019



Virtue Chicken Gizzards PHOTO: COURTESY VIRTUE

t **Virtue**, the newish Southern restaurant in Chicago, Chef/Owner **Erick Williams'** food is his side of a conversation with each diner. The topic on the table: the evolution of Southern cuisine during the Great Migration of the early 20th century, when millions of African-Americans left the rural South for the jobs and other opportunities in the industrial Northeast and Midwest. If you're lucky, the discussion starts with a plate of fried chicken gizzards with dirty rice and gravy. Williams turns this usually homey dish into something elegant, tossing the gizzards in cornmeal to ensure an especially crunchy crust, and mixing the pureed livers into a not-so-dirty dirty rice boasting enough richness to make your eyes roll with glee. Thin slivers of pickled celery add brightness to both the appearance and the flavors of this dish, which shares space on a menu offering airy biscuits; butter-doused, crispy-edged cornbread; whole roast quail stuffed with black-eyed peas and blackened catfish with Carolina Gold rice and barbecued carrots. The Great

Migration has been credited for the Harlem

A Renaissance and the creation of Chicago's blues music scene; restaurants like Virtue are another positive outcome.



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