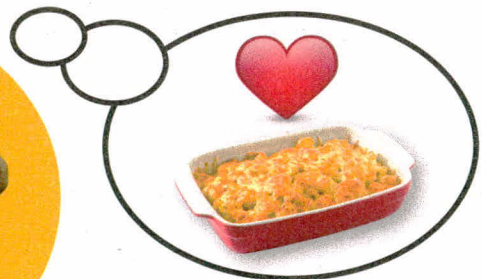


Mac and Cheese MANIA

How a fancy dish from Europe became an all-American classic BY ALLISON FRIEDMAN

The silverware sparkled. The candles glowed. Delicious smells filled the dining room. It was February 1802. President Thomas Jefferson was having a dinner party at the White House.

Soon, the table was loaded with good food. There was tender beef, roast turkey, and a soup



with rice. But that night, Jefferson was serving something extra special. He had discovered this **exotic** dish in France. It was a treat often made for kings and queens: macaroni and cheese.

Fancy Food

Jefferson wasn't the first person to enjoy mac and cheese. The first recipes were written in Italy in the 1300s. From there, the dish spread across Europe.

In the late 1700s, rich American travelers sampled mac and cheese in Europe. Jefferson was one of those travelers. For five years, he lived and worked in France. James Hemings—his **enslaved** Black cook—went with him. Hemings's job was to learn how to cook like the French.

When Hemings came back, he trained other chefs at Jefferson's home. Mac and cheese became a regular at Jefferson's dinners. But most Americans didn't start eating it until much later.

Hard Times

By the 1930s, American cooks had changed the mac and cheese recipe. They made it with cheap American cheddar instead of fancy Italian Parmesan. And this was a good thing.

In the 1930s, Americans needed cheap meals. The U.S. was in the middle of the **Great Depression**. Millions of people were out of work. Mac and cheese was the perfect food for hard times.

Thanks to a pasta salesman in St. Louis, Missouri, it was also easy to make. The salesman attached packets of Kraft grated cheese to boxes of noodles. He called it a "meal kit." Leaders at the Kraft company heard about



YUM!

This ad from 1948 shows Kraft Dinner as a quick, easy, and tasty meal.

the salesman's idea. They turned his creation into a new product called "Kraft Dinner."

To struggling families, Kraft Dinner seemed like a small miracle. It was a filling dinner for four people that you could make in minutes. And it cost only 19 cents! In the first year alone, the company sold 8 million boxes.

An American Favorite

Today, Kraft sells nearly a million boxes a day. And mac and cheese is loved by people across the country. You can buy it at a corner store for \$1. You can order it topped with lobster at a fancy restaurant. There's even a National Macaroni and Cheese Day—July 14!

Start planning your celebration now. •

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How are the histories of these two foods alike? How are they different?

Teachers: Find our Compare and Contrast Skill Builder at [scholastic.com/action](https://www.scholastic.com/action).

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