bread, cut into 1/2-inch cubes (about 4 cups)

8 slices day-old French

1/2 cup raisins, or

more if desired

Sprigs fresh mint, for

garnish (optional)

For the spiced cream

1/4 cups heavy cream

1/2 teaspoon ground

1/8 teaspoon freshly

grated nutmeg

1 cup heavy cream

1 cup half-and-half

2 teaspoons pure

vanilla extract

granulated sugar

1 tablespoon cornstarch

3 tablespoons bourbon

Preheat the oven to 350

with the butter.

1. For the bread pudding:

degrees and grease a 6-cup

2. Whisk the eggs, sugar,

cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla

and bourbon together in a

large mixing bowl until very

and mix well. Add the bread

and raisins and let the mix-

ture sit for 2 hours, stirring

occasionally. Pour mixture

into the prepared pan. Bake

until the pudding is set in the

center, about 55 minutes. Let

3. For the spiced cream:

Beat the cream with an elec-

tric mixer on high speed in a

large mixing bowl for about 2

minutes. Add the sugar, cin-

namon and nutmeg and beat

again until the mixture thick-

4. For the bourbon sauce:

Heat the cream, half-and-half,

vanilla and sugar in a sauce-

pan over high heat, whisking,

for 3 minutes. Dissolve the

cornstarch in the bourbon.

When bubbles form around the edges of the cream, whisk

in the bourbon mixture. As

the cream boils up, remove

continue whisking vigorously

until thoroughly blended and

slightly thickened. Place over

cream sauce; it's meant to be

5. To serve, cut the pudding

low heat and simmer for 1

minute. (This is not a thick

into 1-inch thick slices. Lay

each slice in the center of a

serving plate. Spoon some

of the bourbon sauce over

the pudding and top with the

spiced cream. Garnish with a

sprig of fresh mint and pow-

fairly thin.)

the pot from the heat and

ens and forms stiff peaks,

another 1 to 2 minutes.

cool for at least 5 minutes

before serving.

smooth. Add the half-and-half

(9-inch-by-5-inch) loaf pan

6 tablespoons

For the bourbon sauce

cinnamon

1/4 cup granulated sugar

Powdered sugar, for serving

MARDI GRAS

Continued from Page 1B Served on ordinary rice, this dish would be memorable. But I served it on John Besh's Basic Louisiana White Rice, which is so good you may never want to make plain white rice again. You begin by sautéing minced onion in butter, chicken fat or olive oil. The dry rice is then cooked in that mixture for a couple of minutes before you add chicken stock, a bay leaf and

a pinch of salt. You know how rice usually has little flavor of its own and acts merely as a pleasant background for other food? Well, this is the opposite of that.

Meanwhile, if you're going to have big fun on the bayou, you'll probably want to be doing it with jambalaya. Jambalaya is basically the New Orleans version of paella, the robustly seasoned national dish of Spain: rice simmered with broth, herbs, spices and an assortment of meats and fish.

Jambalaya traditionally has sausage and shrimp in it, as my grocery-store friend knows well, but I like chicken in mine, too. The more the merrier, I say. My version also incorporates the trinity, of course, along with a bay leaf, smoked paprika, celery salt, thyme and Creole seasoning, a blend that you can either buy in the store or easily make yourself.

In New Orleans, they add tomatoes to their jambalaya, which makes it Creole style. In Southwest Louisiana, they make it Cajun style, without tomatoes. I wanted a New Orleans Mardi Gras, so I used tomatoes. I like it spicy, too, so I used tomatoes with green chiles. Son of a gun!

It is a waste of a trip to New Orleans if you don't have oysters. Lots and lots of oysters. You can get them raw, you can get them grilled and you can get them fried.

I like them fried, but then again I also like them raw and grilled. But for my Mardi Gras feast, I fried them.

There are two secrets to making spectacular fried oysters. The first is soaking the oysters in a flavored buttermilk mixture before frying them. The second is coating them in a combination of flour and cornmeal, which gives them a highly satisfying crunch.

The subtle sweetness of the corn goes particularly well with the briny oysters, too.

The problem with oysters is that they can be hard to find in the middle of the country. I bought mine at Whole Foods, though seafood stores should have them,

Dessert was a difficult choice, because New Orleans is famously home to an impressive number of great desserts — beignets, pralines, Bananas Foster, pecan pie and king cake, among others. After relatively little thought, I chose bread pudding. With bourbon cream sauce. And spiced whipped cream. You can see why it did not take much thought to choose it.

This is one of those cases where the whole is better than the sum of its parts,



Christian Gooden/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

soft, about 5 minutes. Add

bay leaf, 2 teaspoons of Cre-

ole seasoning, thyme, celery

salt, smoked paprika and rice;

cook 2 minutes, stirring. Add

tomatoes and broth. Bring

to a boil, lower temperature

Jambalaya, with shrimp, chicken and sausage, is a classic Mardi Gras dish.

which is astonishing because each part is amazing in its own right.

The bread pudding itself is rich and creamy, with bourbon, brown sugar, cinnamon and vanilla, flavors that elevate any custard. Slightly stale bread is soaked in this cream-andegg mixture for two full hours before cooking, so when it is baked the cubes of bread form a homogenous, delectable loaf.

The pudding would be exceptional on its own, but then you spoon a sweet cream sauce over it. The sauce is thickened with cornstarch dissolved in bourbon, which is an absolutely brilliant idea by the recipe's author, Emeril Lagasse, one of New Orleans' most celebrated chefs.

The bread pudding with the bourbon cream sauce by themselves would have been enough. But then Lagasse kicks it up another level, so to speak, by topping it with whipped cream spiced with cinnamon and a hint of nutmeg.

If you closed your eyes, you'd swear you're in New Orleans.

RED BEANS AND

Yield: 8 servings

2 onions, diced 1 green pepper, seeded and diced

1 rib celery, diced 2 tablespoons rendered bacon fat or other flavorful fat such as

duck fat or olive oil 1 pound dried red kidney beans

2 smoked ham hocks 3 bay leaves

1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper 3 green onions, chopped Salt and pepper

Vinegar-based hot sauce, such as Tabasco or Crystal 4 cups cooked Basic Louisiana White

Rice, see recipe

heat.

1. Sweat the onions, bell peppers and celery in the rendered bacon fat in a heavy soup pot over medium-high

2. Once the onions become translucent, add the kidney beans, ham hocks, bay leaves and cayenne, then add water to cover by 2 inches.

3. Increase the heat and bring the water to a boil. Cover the pot, reduce the heat to low, and allow the beans to slowly simmer for 2 hours. Periodically stir the beans to make sure they don't scorch on the bottom of the pot, adding water if necessary, always keeping the beans covered by 1 inch or more of water.

4. Continue cooking the beans until they are creamy and beginning to fall apart when they're served.

5. Remove the ham hock meat from the bones, roughly chop it and add it back to the pot of beans.

6. Stir in the green onions and season heavily with salt (beans need a lot of salt), black pepper and hot sauce. Serve with white rice.

> Recipe from "My New Orleans: The Cookbook" by John Besh

JAMBALAYA

1 pound andouille

Salt and pepper

sausage, sliced

4 boneless, skinless

2 cups diced onion

1 cup diced celery

1 bay leaf

chicken thighs, cut

1 large red bell pepper, diced

into 1-inch pieces

4 garlic cloves, minced

seasoning, see note

1 teaspoon dried thyme

3/4 teaspoon celery salt

2 teaspoons Creole

1 1/2 teaspoons

2 cups uncooked

smoked paprika

long-grain rice

2 (10-ounce) cans diced

tomatoes and green

chiles, such as Rotel

3 cups chicken broth

1 pound peeled raw

1/2 cup chopped

fresh parsley

shrimp, deveined

4 chopped green onions

Note: Creole seasoning is

available in the spice aisle

of many grocery stores, or

you can make it yourself by

combining 1 teaspoon onion

powder, 1 teaspoon garlic

powder, 1 teaspoon dried

oregano, 1 teaspoon dried

basil, 1/2 teaspoon dried

thyme, 1/2 teaspoon black

pepper, 1/2 teaspoon white

enne pepper, 21/2 teaspoons

paprika and 1 1/2 teaspoons

1. Heat oil in a large Dutch

oven or stock pot until hot;

add sausage and cook until

stirring frequently. Season

chicken with salt and pep-

until browned on all sides,

stirring frequently. Add onion

2. Add celery, red bell pep-

per and garlic, and sauté until

and cook, stirring occasion-

ally, until brown, about 15

minutes.

per, add to pot and cook

browned on both sides,

pepper, 1/2 teaspoon cay-

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

2 tablespoons canola oil

to low, cover and simmer 15 minutes, stirring frequently. 3. Stir in shrimp and parsley. Cook until shrimp are pink and curled, from 2 to 5 minutes depending on their size. Stir in chopped green

 Recipe by Daniel Neman (Creole seasoning recipe adapted from allrecipes.com)

BASIC LOUISIANA WHITE RICE

Yield: 6 servings

onions and serve.

1 tablespoon chicken fat, extra-virgin olive oil or butter

1 small onion, minced 1 1/2 cups long-grain

white rice 3 cups chicken stock

1 bay leaf 1 to 2 pinches salt

1. Put the fat, oil or butter and the onions into a medium saucepan and sweat the onions over moderate heat until they are translucent, about 5 minutes. Pour the rice into the pan and stir for 2 minutes. Then add the chicken stock and bring to a boil. Add the bay leaf and the salt.

2. Cover the pan with a lid, reduce the heat to low and cook for 18 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat, fluff the rice with a fork, and serve.

 Recipe from "My New Orleans: The Cookbook" by John Besh

FRIED OYSTERS

Yield: 3 servings

For the remoulade sauce

1 1/2 teaspoons Creole mustard, see notes

1/2 cup mayonnaise

1 1/2 teaspoons paprika

1 1/2 teaspoons white wine vinegar

1 1/2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce

Dash hot sauce Salt and pepper

For the oysters Peanut oil, for frying 3/4 cup buttermilk 1 teaspoon garlic powder 1 teaspoon paprika Dash hot sauce, such as Tabasco 1/2 cup cornmeal 1/2 cup all-purpose flour 18 shucked oysters, see notes

Notes: Creole mustard is available at most grocery stores, or you can somewhat re-create the flavor by mixing 11/2 teaspoons Dijon mustard with a dash of Worcestershire sauce and a dash of hot sauce.

Shucked oysters are oysters that have been removed from their shell; this requires a special shucking knife (a sturdy glove helps, too). Shucked oysters can also be purchased in a can; they are fine for frying.

1. To make the remoulade sauce, mix together the mayonnaise, mustard, paprika, vinegar, Worcestershire sauce and hot sauce in a small bowl until well combined. Season with salt and pepper. Serve immediately or cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until serving. 2. Heat about 3 inches of oil

in a pot to 350 degrees.

3. Whisk together the buttermilk, garlic powder, paprika and hot sauce in a bowl. Whisk together the flour, cornmeal, salt and pepper together in a separate bowl.

4. Add the oysters to the buttermilk and let soak. Then remove, letting the excess drip off, and dredge through the cornmeal mixture, tapping off the excess. Fry in the hot oil in batches, until golden and crisp, about 2 minutes. Remove to a paper towellined plate and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Serve hot with the remoulade sauce.

 Recipe by Patrick and Gena Neely, via Food Network

CLASSIC NEW ORLEANS BREAD *PUDDING WITH A BOURBON SAUCE*

Yield: 9 servings

For bread pudding 1 teaspoon unsalted butter

4 large eggs 1 cup firmly packed

light brown sugar 1/2 teaspoon ground

cinnamon 1/8 teaspoon freshly

grated nutmeg 1 teaspoon pure

vanilla extract 1/4 cup bourbon

2 cups half-and-half

dered sugar.

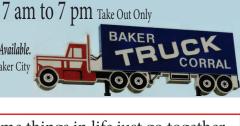
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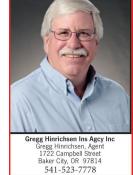
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