

## A tale of two chefs: Marcus Samuelsson and Roblé Ali

Written by Alex Kellogg and Alyse Shorland, CNN  
Thursday, 15 March 2012 20:31

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(CNN) - Marcus Samuelsson and Roblé Ali are two different chefs.

Samuelsson, 41, is an established name amongst foodies and the proprietor of Red Rooster, a renown Harlem restaurant.

Ali, 27, is an up and coming chef and animated reality-show star who works full time as an established caterer.

Samuelsson has made a name for himself embracing his identity as both a black chef and a Swedish immigrant to the United States, but younger chefs like Ali find themselves pushing back against being known simply as a “black chef.” Ali, who’s still building his brand, was frustrated when a blog author unexpectedly labeled him a “hip-hop chef.”

“Who takes you serious when you’re the hip hop chef?” said Ali. “And why am I the hip hop chef, because I’m black? I’m not break dancing.”

For decades, many African Americans were reluctant to enter a profession they associated with servitude and slavery. Cooking was reminiscent of second-class citizenship, and antiquated images of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben dominated the nation’s associations of blacks and kitchens.

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“George Washington had a slave chef, as did Thomas Jefferson. It ain’t nothing new,” said Jessica Harris, a culinary scholar and the author of books on the foods of the African Diaspora. “I think that has lifted in many families, but I don’t think that it has lifted in all African-American families.”

In recent years, African Americans have begun to trickle into the field in growing numbers.

Samuelsson is now one of the most recognizable chefs in the world, with several PBS and Food Network specials. He has opened six restaurants, written a slew of bestselling cookbooks and won several cooking awards, including the coveted James Beard Award, the Oscars of the food industry.

This June, he will publish a memoir, “Yes, Chef”.

“I’ve never discussed race in Harlem,” he joked. “Of course I can identify as a black man. Absolutely.”

Samuelsson was born in Ethiopia and raised in Sweden by his adoptive parents. He later came to the United States, settling in Harlem seven years ago. In 2010 he opened the Red Rooster, a hip, soul food-inspired restaurant that blends his European background with African-American traditional cuisines.

“It’s inspirational to young black chefs, to just anybody that’s a person of color in cooking, to see another person of color doing it like that,” said Ali, the star of Bravo’s “Chef Roblé & Co.”

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