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Foodways (Re)Presented: How San Francisco Bay Area Organizations Reconstruct
Narratives about Race, Health, and Food

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

by

Marilisa Cristina Navarro

Committee in Charge:

Professor Curtis Marez, Chair
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Professor Julie Guthman
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2017

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2017

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Foodways (Re)Presented: How San Francisco Bay Area Organizations Reconstruct Narratives about Race, Health, and Food

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This project analyzes how San Francisco Bay Area community-based projects use visual imagery to respond to higher rates of Black and Latinx food-related chronic illness, particularly type 2 diabetes and premature death. I argue that community-based projects produce counter-narratives to representations of Blacks and Latinxs as pathological and instead produce images that portray these communities as healthy, vibrant, and life-sustaining through nutritious food consumption. Using cultural studies and discourse analyses, I analyze a public service announcement, short films, and cookbook photographs. I recognize how marginalized groups reframe contemporary food-related discourses through affects of desire, sensuality, and life.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Foodways (Re)Presented: How San Francisco Bay Area Organizations Reconstruct
Narratives about Race, Health and Food

by

Marilisa Cristina Navarro

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2017

Professor Curtis Marez, Chair

In *Foodways (Re)Presented: How San Francisco Bay Area Organizations Reconstruct Narratives about Race, Health, and Food*, I analyze how black and Latinx community-based organizations respond to disproportionately higher rates of diet-related illness, particularly type 2 diabetes and premature death, through visual productions. There exists a struggle over how to represent food and cultural identity in visual spaces, including advertising, social media, blogs, websites, and cookbooks. I argue that the realm of the visual allows community-based organizations to intervene on pathologizing

images that produce communities of color as inherently unhealthy and/or improper consumers. Instead, these case studies emphasize black and Latinx communities as life-sustaining rather than death-producing. Using cultural studies and Foucaultian discourse analysis, I examine a public service announcement, a short film, food desert videography, and cookbook photographs to reveal how they contest power relations, food and health inequities, and produce counter-narratives. These visual representations make structural critiques, engage affect and aesthetics, showcase images of life and vitality, and emphasize contemporary and historical healthy food practices within communities of color. I argue that black and Latinx communities produce their own knowledge about food, race, gender, sexuality, class, and health and claim a stake in contemporary food justice politics. By taking an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach, this project intervenes in the fields of ethnic studies, food studies, feminist science and technology studies, public health, geography, and sociology.

Introduction: Can You Picture This? Food Imagery, Diabetes, and Racial Constructions

The San Francisco Bay Area and Measure D

In November of 2014, the city of Berkeley, California passed Measure D, which added a one-cent tax per ounce to sugar sweetened beverages to distribution companies. Measure D, otherwise known as the Sugary Drink Tax, added the tax to beverages such as sodas, energy drinks, and coffee syrups. The ballot initiative raised health concerns as the justification for the soda tax. In particular, the links between the consumption of sugary, fried, and high caloric foods and beverages and the rise in type 2 diabetes among communities of color was named a crisis among public health professionals, geographers, sociologists, community members, and chefs.

While opponents of Measure D (primarily soft drink corporations) argued that the tax that would be passed onto consumers, mostly black and Latinx working class folks, supporters of Measure D also argued that the tax would have disproportionate impact on black and Latinx communities, but in such a way as to reduce consumption of “junk foods” and, therefore, decrease the higher rates of type 2 diabetes among these communities. The largest and most vocal organized supporter of Measure D was known as Berkeley versus Big Soda, comprised of health and medical professionals, political officials, food justice activists, educational organizations, and community members. Supporters hoped that the tax would raise awareness, raise money for community programs that fight against the marketing campaigns of sugary beverage companies, and

reduce the consumption of sugary beverages.¹ Those in favor of the 2014 soda tax legislation proposed Berkeley's Measure D was a form of protection for communities of color in particular, who are disproportionately exposed to higher rates of sugary beverages due to soft drink company advertisement and the higher quantities of sugary beverages sold in working class communities, primarily communities of color. After the soda tax passed, low-income Berkeley neighborhoods decreased their consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages by 21% and increased their consumption of water by 63%.²

The co-constitutive nature of notions of health and racial difference was not only part of the discourse surrounding Measure D but was also part of the visual landscape. As a critical component of its campaign, Berkeley versus Big Soda used imagery that drew from already existing narratives that construct notions about food and health along racial lines. They include images of fast food, sodas, potato chips, and liquor stores, particularly in low-income communities of color. They also include images of people gardening, sharing a meal, and buying fresh produce at a local farmers market. I view the images of fast food, on the one hand, and the images of food justice, on the other, as engaging in direct conversation about food access and health equity and the distinctions of these along racial lines. While the images filled with high caloric, fried, and fast foods point to the lack of access to nutritious foods in low-income communities of color, the images of farmers markets and urban gardening bring attention to concerted efforts and engaged

¹ "Frequently Asked Questions About Berkeley's Soda Tax." *Berkeley vs. Big Soda* 2015. Web. September 7, 2016.

² Howard, Jacqueline. Do soda taxes work? Experts look to Mexico for answers. CNN.

² Howard, Jacqueline. Do soda taxes work? Experts look to Mexico for answers. CNN. *Cable News Network* November 1, 2016. Web. April 28, 2017.

responses within those very same communities. These images saturate contemporary discussions on food equity and food justice and provide a particular window for analyzing the relationship between food, health, and racial constructions.



Image 1. Berkeley versus Big Soda, Coke bottle



Image 2. Berkeley versus Big Soda, McDonald's



Image 3. Berkeley versus Big Soda, Sodas



Image 4. Berkeley versus Big Soda, Grocery Store



Image 5. Berkeley versus Big Soda, Measure D³

³ Images obtained from Berkeley vs. Big Soda Facebook page, March 15, 2017.

Images 1 through 3, located on the Berkeley versus Big Soda Facebook page, are visual representations used by the campaign to construct particular narratives of sugary, fried, and high caloric foods. In particular, Image 1 focuses on the body, as a tan-skinned woman opens what appears to be a bottle of Coca-Cola. Her face is not shown, forcing the viewer to focus on the opening of the bottle and the effects of consuming the sugary beverage on the body itself. Image 2 focuses on the site of the community, showing advertisements for McDonald's in a particular Bay Area neighborhood. Two black youths and one older black man walk in front of a McDonald's that advertises "\$1 Any Size" for soda, McCafe coffees, and sweet teas. This image points to the overabundance of cheaply priced sugary beverages in low-income communities of color. Image 3 highlights the food object itself: soda. This picture shows a snapshot of a number of sugary beverages sold at a typical convenience store, including sodas, sugar-sweetened coffee drinks, iced teas, and more. The beverages themselves are highlighted as a means to convince viewers of their ill health effects.

Images 4 and 5 act as counter-images to images 1 through 3. Also on the Berkeley versus Big Soda Facebook page, they demonstrate responses to sugar-sweetened foods in the region. In Image 4, a man who appears to be an employee sits in the aisle of a grocery store while placing fresh strawberries on the shelf. To his immediate left and behind him on his left are an abundance of blueberries, strawberries, cabbage, carrots, and other produce. This image promotes the idea that fresh produce is available in the Bay Area, countering the overabundance of fast, fried, and high caloric foods. The close up of the shot enhances the impression that a great deal of produce is available, encouraging the

viewer to feel that s/he has options for purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables. In image 5, children of color are shown to be vulnerable through the question, “Whose life will *your* vote change?” This question places a sense of responsibility onto the voter/consumer, who is hailed as responsible for the future of these young children. The youth are smiling, as they are pictured in close proximity to one another and surrounded by oversized images of a strawberry, a pea pod, a peach, an orange, blueberries, carrots, and other produce. The children’s joy is linked to their proximity to fresh fruits and vegetables. The picture of a ballot box in which the soda tax is being supported suggests that Measure D will lead to greater access of and higher consumption of fruits and vegetables, which will in turn result in happy, healthy children of color.

Berkeley’s Measure D⁴ ignited public conversation about the ways in which food consumption converges with race, class and health in the San Francisco Bay Area. In particular, the imagery elucidated narratives about type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and other diet-related illnesses within black and Latinx communities. The visual representations spotlighted sodas, sugary beverages, and high caloric, fried foods and pointed to broader concerns about communities of color, food consumption and public health. I argue that this kind of visual imagery of food, health, and race generally focuses

⁴ While the soda tax legislation focused quite a bit on obesity, as do other representations that I discuss in this dissertation, I focus specifically on type 2 diabetes and vulnerability to premature death because of their unequivocal rootedness in health. Scholars have argued that discussions on the “obesity epidemic” are fundamentally about normativizing bodies, ensuring workplace productivity in a capitalist consumer market, and arbitrary constructions through medicalized diagnoses. For more critiques of the “obesity epidemic,” see Lauren Berlant’s “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)” (2007) in *Critical Inquiry*, Anna Kirkland’s *Fat Rights* (2008), Julie Guthman’s *Weighing In* (2011), and Melina Packer’s “Soda Policies and Social Anxieties” (2016) in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*.

on three particular sites as points of intervention: the body, the community, and the recipe. Therefore, in this project I also highlight those sites to analyze how community-based projects re-present notions of race, health, and food through visual representations. I focus on the black woman's body as the basis for thinking through bodily pathology; food deserts as the community site for structural and environmental critique; and the recipe as the site where black and Latinx foods are constructed as life-sustaining.

Images centered on the body, the community, and the recipe are the basis for the themes I explore in *Foodways (Re)Presented*. I analyze how visual representations are a critical component of contemporary discourses on food, race, and health. In particular, I analyze how food imagery stands in for racialized representations and meanings, as a cultural signifier of both good and poor health for black and Latinx peoples. I also examine how black and Latinx community projects respond to such narratives through their own visual representations. I argue that visual representations of the body, the community and food are particularly revealing mediums to analyze how race, gender, sexuality, and class are constructed in contemporary discourses on health. The current trend of food representations in popular culture has gained a great deal of traction, especially for its relationship to communities of color. However, little to no research has been completed on how visual imagery works alongside contemporary discourses and disproportionate food access to construct ideas about racial, gender, and sexual difference. I argue that contemporary discourses about black and Latinx communities and food consumption works in tandem with visual imagery to imbue bodies, communities, and foods with racial meaning. In other words, these discourses and representations are

not simple reflections of an already existing material reality, but in fact construct a reality in which food-related items produce racial knowledge.

Given recent concerns about type 2 diabetes as a particular health risk for black and Latinx communities, there has been a rise in community-based responses to diet-related health inequities. The Centers for Disease Control report that in 2011, type 2 diabetes was 77% higher among blacks and 66% higher among Latinxs than their white adult counterparts.⁵ Blacks and Latinxs are twice as likely to develop and die from type 2 diabetes as are their white peers.⁶ In 2014, one out of every twelve adults in California had diabetes, with the vast majority being cases of type 2 diabetes.⁷ The sites that I analyze, a public service announcement, short videos, and cookbook photographs, tackle type 2 diabetes as a significant health issue that is, in part, the basis for their food justice work.

This project engages in an analysis on three levels by focusing on structural inequities, discourses and representations. On the one hand, I recognize the many structural obstacles to good health, including unequal food access, the rise of factory farming, and official and unofficial food policies that have constructed black and Latinx foods as unhealthy. On the other hand, I highlight how everyday people use their power to enact change, by producing counter-narratives, strengthening access to quality, nutritious foods, and privileging subjugated knowledges. By intervening in the circulation

⁵ National Diabetes Fact Sheet, 2011. *Centers for Disease Control*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2011. Web. September 9, 2016.

⁶ September 2014. Burden of Diabetes in California. California Department of Public Health Chronic Disease Control Branch. Web. September 13, 2016.

⁷ September 2014. Burden of Diabetes in California. California Department of Public Health Chronic Disease Control Branch. Web. September 13, 2016.

of pathologizing images, black and Latinx communities construct themselves as engaging in life-sustaining, rather than death-producing, food practices. In this way, food is a medium to analyze how race, gender, sexuality, and class are constructed through material objects.

In *Foodways (Re)Presented*, I analyze how food is situated within racial power relations and contested identities.⁸ The public service announcement, short videos and cookbook photographs respond to the discourses of public health, geography, sociology, and slow foods in relation to communities of color, consumption, and health. I examine both the discourses developed about black and Latinx communities and type 2 diabetes as well as the representations that these communities produce in response. I explore how they use visual imagery to produce community-based and communal notions of life, hope, and healthy bodies of color, countering current representations of black and Latinx communities and type 2 diabetes. In particular, I argue that they use sensual representations to imagine alternative understandings of black and Latinx communities and food consumption.

In the next section, I survey the literature on the prevalence of type 2 diabetes in black and Latinx communities and discuss it in relation to Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism as characterized by vulnerability to premature death. The section that follows discusses the literature on health as a social phenomenon that is determined by social class, job, and other social factors, rather than determined by individual choice. I then move into a discussion on the prevalence of food justice work in the San Francisco

⁸ Slocum, Rachel and Arun Saldanha. 2013. *Geographies of Race and Food: Fields, Bodies, Markets* Eds. Rachel Slocum and Arun Saldanha. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.

Bay Area and argue that the Bay is a key site for movements on health, race, and food given its long history in activism and food work. I survey the methods that I use, namely discourse and cultural studies analyses. Through discourse analysis, I examine how the body, the community and the recipe are understood in relation to black and Latinx consumption. Cultural studies enables me to analyze the visual representations that community-based organizations construct to contest notions of black and Latinx pathology, decay, and death. Finally, I discuss how sub-arguments within each chapter connect with my overarching argument.

Type 2 Diabetes and Premature Death

Public health literature recounts the higher rates of type 2 diabetes among blacks and Latinxs than their white counterparts nationally.⁹ For instance, African Americans are almost twice as likely to contract type 2 diabetes as are whites. While the prevalence of diabetes for whites is 10.2%, for Latinxs that number increases to 16.9% and that number jumps to 50% for Latina women age 70 and 44.3% for Latino men age 70-74.¹⁰

⁹ Harris, M, RC Eastman, CC Cowie, KM Flegal, and MS Eberhardt. 1999. Racial and ethnic differences in glycemic control of adults with type 2 diabetes. *Diabetes Care*. 22(3): 403-408. Steyn, NP, J Mann, PH Bennett, N Temple, P Zimmet, J Tuomilehto, J Lindström, and A Louheranta. 2004. "Diet, nutrition and the prevention of type 2 diabetes." *Public Health Nutrition*. 7(1A): 147-165. Pp. 148; Fukuoka, Yoshimi, Caryl L. Gay, Kevin L. Joiner, Eric Vittinghoff. Available online May 2015. "A Novel Diabetes Prevention Intervention Using a Mobile App: A Randomized Controlled Trial with Overweight Adults at Risk." *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*; "Sugar Showdown: Vote on San Francisco soda tax draws near." *PBS Newshour*. KQED. October 11. 2014. Web. May 6, 2015; "Prevent Type 2 Diabetes." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. N.p. February 9, 2015. Web. June 16, 2015; "Live Empowered/African American Programs." *American Diabetes Association*. American Diabetes Association. 2015. Web. June 18, 2015; "Latino Programs." *American Diabetes Association*. American Diabetes Association. 2015. Web. June 18, 2015.

¹⁰ Moulton, Anthony, Ann Albright, Edward D. Gregg, and Richard A. Goodman. 2013. "Law, Diabetes, and the Public Health Epidemic." *American Journal of Preventative*

In the past decade there has been a surge of type 2 diabetes in children and youth, which has historically been a health condition that primarily affected adults. The rates of type 2 diabetes are higher in youth of color ages 10-19 than among their white peers in the same age group.¹¹ In particular, black and Latinx children, experience higher rates of type 2 diabetes than their white peers.¹² The growth of type 2 diabetes among children of color has been labeled “a serious public health problem” by a member of the California Department of Public Health and is considered a major concern by many medical professionals.¹³

The consequences of not addressing type 2 diabetes have elicited widespread concern. Some of the more serious effects include “glycemic, blood pressure, and lipid control” as well as heart failure, renal failure, stroke, vascular disease, “blindness, hypertension, heart disease, kidney disease, lower-extremity amputation, and complications during pregnancy.”¹⁴ Communities of color are also more likely to

Medicine. 45(4): 486-493. Pp. 489; Steyn, NP, J Mann, PH Bennett, N Temple, P Zimmet, J Tuomilehto, J Lindström, and A Louheranta. 2004. “Diet, nutrition and the prevention of type 2 diabetes.” *Public Health Nutrition*. 7(1A): 147-165. Pp. 157; Stark Casagrande, Sarah, Catherine C. Cowie, Saul M. Genuth. 2014. “Self-Reported Prevalence of Diabetes Screening in the U.S. 2005-2010.” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 47(6): 780-787.

¹¹ National Diabetes Fact Sheet, 2011. *Centers for Disease Control*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2011. Web. September 9, 2016.

¹² Dabelea, Dana, David J. Pettitt, Kenneth Lee Jones, and Silva A. Arslanian. 1999. Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus in Minority Children and Adolescents: An Emerging Problem. *Endocrinology and Metabolism Clinics of North America* 28(4): 708-729.

¹³ Rosenbloom, AL, JR Joe, RS Young, and WE Winter. 1999. Emerging epidemic of type 2 diabetes in youth. *Diabetes Care*. 22(2): 345-354; American Diabetes Association. 2000. Type 2 Diabetes in Children and Adolescents. *Pediatrics* 105(3): 671-680.

¹⁴ Moulton, Anthony, Ann Albright, Edward D. Gregg, and Richard A. Goodman. 2013. “Law, Diabetes, and the Public Health Epidemic.” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. 45(4): 486-493. Pp. 489; Steyn, NP, J Mann, PH Bennett, N Temple, P Zimmet, J Tuomilehto, J Lindström, and A Louheranta. 2004. “Diet, nutrition and the

experience higher rates of complications with type 2 diabetes, leading to increased ailments among communities of color with diet-related illnesses.¹⁵ As one medical journal states, “African Americans have 2-4 times the rate of renal disease, blindness, amputations, and amputation-related mortality of non-Hispanic whites. Similarly, Latinos have higher rates of renal disease and retinopathy. Diabetes age-adjusted mortality rates (per 100,000) in California in 1998 were 60 for Latinos, 98 for African Americans, compared to 38 for non-Hispanic whites.”¹⁶ According to the Centers for Disease Control, type 2 diabetes is “a leading cause of kidney failure, nontraumatic lower limb amputations, and new cases of blindness among adults in the United States” as well as heart disease and stroke.¹⁷ Those who have type 2 diabetes are also more likely to experience hypertension than those without diabetes, which can increase one’s risk for cardiovascular and renal disease.¹⁸ Type 2 diabetes has also been linked to blood

prevention of type 2 diabetes.” *Public Health Nutrition*. 7(1A): 147-165. Pp. 157; Stark Casagrande, Sarah, Catherine C. Cowie, Saul M. Genuth. 2014. “Self-Reported Prevalence of Diabetes Screening in the U.S. 2005-2010.” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 47(6): 780-787

pp. 781; “Eye Complications” and “Foot Complications.” *American Diabetes Association*. November 1, 2013. American Diabetes Association. July 9, 2015.

¹⁵ Peek, Monica E., Algernon Cargill, and Elbert S. Huang. Oct 2007. “Diabetes Health Disparities: A Systematic Review of Health Care Interventions.” *Medical Care Research Review* 64(5): 101s-156s.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ National Diabetes Fact Sheet, 2011. *Centers for Disease Control*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2011. Web. September 9, 2016.

¹⁸ UK Prospective Diabetes Group. 1998. Tight Blood Pressure Control and Risk of Macrovascular and Microvascular Complications in Type 2 Diabetes: UKPDS 38. *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 317(7160): 703-716.

vessel disease, nerve damage, hearing impairments, skin conditions, and possibly Alzheimer's disease.¹⁹

These higher rates of chronic conditions and illnesses and higher rates of preventative mortality make diet-related conditions an urgent concern for communities of color.²⁰ As a result, type 2 diabetes has been labeled a major public epidemic and crisis, particularly as a cause of premature death, for black and Latinx communities.²¹ Type 2 diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the U.S. In addition, those with diabetes are two times as likely to die as are their same age peers who do not have diabetes.²² Latinxs and blacks are twice as likely to develop type 2 diabetes and to die from it as are their white peers.²³

The growth of type 2 diabetes is thought to result primarily from the consumption of the Standard American Diet (SAD), which started around 1950. The SAD is defined as “the consumption of calories from refined carbohydrates, fatty meats, and added fats, and

¹⁹ “Symptoms and causes.” Type 2 Diabetes. *Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research*. 2016. Web. September 9, 2016.

²⁰ Steyn, NP, J Mann, PH Bennett, N Temple, P Zimmet, J Tuomilehto, J Lindström, and A Louheranta. 2004. “Diet, nutrition and the prevention of type 2 diabetes.” *Public Health Nutrition*. 7(1A): 147-165. Pp. 149.; Zhou, Xiaohui, Ping Zhang, Lawrence Barker, Ann Albright, Theodore J. Thompson, and Edward Gregg. 2014. “The Lifetime Cost of Diabetes and Its Implications for Diabetes Prevention.” *Diabetes Care*. 37(9): 2557-2564. Pp. 2558; Moulton, Anthony, Ann Albright, Edward D. Gregg, and Richard A. Goodman. 2013. “Law, Diabetes, and the Public Health Epidemic.” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. 45(4): 486-493. Pp. 486.

²¹ Wood, M.V. Carbonated Clash: A New Book Predicts Berkeley's Soda Tax Will Spread Elsewhere. California Magazine. *Cal Alumni Association*. November 3, 2015. Web. September 16, 2016. Guthman, Julie. 2014. *Antipode*. “Doing Justice to Bodies? Reflections on Food Justice, Race, and Biology.” 46(5): 1153-1171. Montoya, Michael. 2011. *Making the Mexican Diabetic*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

²² National Diabetes Fact Sheet, 2011. *Centers for Disease Control*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2011. Web. September 9, 2016.

²³ September 2014. Burden of Diabetes in California. California Department of Public Health Chronic Disease Control Branch. Web. September 13, 2016.

that lacks many nutrients found in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. This dietary pattern, which also includes excess sodium intake, has been blamed for contributing to our staggering levels of obesity as well as diet-related diseases and conditions such as type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and heart disease.”²⁴ The SAD is lacking in a number of nutrients, which results in diet-related illness and higher rates of mortality. Consuming the appropriate amounts of fiber, grains, fruits, and vegetables decreases chances of chronic disease, including stroke, type 2 diabetes, particular cancers, heart disease, obesity, and improved insulin production.²⁵

The consensus in the medical and public health communities is that type 2 diabetes is largely preventable through increased physical activity and improved nutrition.²⁶ In particular, the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages,²⁷ including soft drinks, fruit drinks, energy and vitamin water drinks, which are high in sucrose, high fructose corn syrup, and fruit juice concentrates is discouraged as they are “the largest contributor to increased sugar intake in the US diet.”²⁸ Since the early 2000s, a number of

²⁴ Grotto, David and Elisa Zied. 2010. The Standard American Diet and Its Relationship to the Health and Status of Americans. *Nutrition in Clinical Practice* 25(6): 603-612.

²⁵ Grotto, David and Elisa Zied. 2010. The Standard American Diet and Its Relationship to the Health and Status of Americans. *Nutrition in Clinical Practice* 25(6): 603-612.

²⁶ Moulton, Anthony, Ann Albright, Edward D. Gregg, and Richard A. Goodman. 2013. “Law, Diabetes, and the Public Health Epidemic.” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. 45(4): 486-493. Pp 488; Karin M. Nelson, Gayle Reiber, and Edward J. Boyko. 2002. Diet and Exercise Among Adults with Type 2 Diabetes. *Diabetes Care*. 25(10): 1722-1728.

²⁷ Schulze, Matthias B., JoAnn E. Manson, David S. Ludwig, Graham A. Colditz, Meir J. Stampfer, Walter C. Willett, Frank B. Hu. 2004. Sugar-Sweetened Beverages, Weight Gain, and Incidence of Type 2 Diabetes in Young and Middle-Aged Women. *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. 292(8): 927-934.

²⁸ Malik, Vasanti S. and Frank B. Hu. 2012. Sweeteners and Risk of Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes: The Role of Sugar-Sweetened Beverages. *Current Diabetes Reports*. 12(2): 195-203

long-term medical studies have found that the consumption of these sugar-sweetened beverages result in higher rates of type 2 diabetes.²⁹ Other foods that are highly correlated with type 2 diabetes are fried foods, processed foods, and foods high in saturated fats.³⁰ One epidemiological article argues, “Generally, studies show that dietary patterns characterized by whole grain, fruit/vegetable, and low-fat dairy intake are inversely associated with type 2 diabetes risk. Analogously, dietary patterns characterized by high intake of red or processed meats, refined grains, fried foods, and foods containing high amounts of added sugars are associated with greater type 2 diabetes risk.”³¹

As a result of the food access issues that are correlated with higher incidences of type 2 diabetes and disproportionate access to nutritious foods in communities of color, race is cited as a risk factor for diagnosis. Studies have demonstrated that proximity to fast food restaurants typically correlates with higher instances of type 2 diabetes.³² One research study found that while most fast food restaurants are located in white neighborhoods, fast food chains located in mostly black neighborhoods are more likely to

²⁹ Malik, Vasanti S. and Frank B. Hu. 2012. Sweeteners and Risk of Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes: The Role of Sugar-Sweetened Beverages. *Current Diabetes Reports*. 12(2): 195-203; Nettleton, JA, PL Lutsey, Y Wang, JA Lima, ED Michos, DR Jacobs, Jr. 2009. Diet soda intake and risk of incident metabolic syndrome and type 2 diabetes in the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis (MESA). *Diabetes Care*. 32(4): 688-694.

³⁰ Montonen, Juken, Paul Knekt, Tommi Härkänen, Ritva Järvinen, Markku Heliövaara, Arpo Aromaa, and Antti Reunanen. 2005. Dietary Patterns and the Incidence of Type 2 Diabetes. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 161(3): 219-227; Krishnan, Supriya, Patricia F Coogan, Deborah A Boggs, Lynn Rosenberg, and Julie R Palmer. 2010. Consumption of restaurant foods and the incidence of type 2 diabetes in African American women. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 91(2): 465-471.

³¹ Nettleton, Jennifer A., Lyn M. Steffen, Hanyu Ni, Kiang Liu, and David R. Jacobs, Jr. 2008. Dietary Patterns and Risk of Incident Type 2 Diabetes in the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis (MESA). *Diabetes Care* 31(9): 1777-1782.

³² Stender, S, J Dyerberg, and A Astrup. 2007. Fast Food: unfriendly and unhealthy. *International Journal of Obesity*. 31: 887-890.

market to black children than those in white neighborhoods are to market to white children.³³ In addition, fast food restaurants disproportionately market to poor children and children of color broadly. One university research study found that “fast food chains in predominantly black neighborhoods are 60 percent more likely to advertise to children than in predominantly white neighborhoods.”³⁴ Another study found that the large numbers of fast food restaurants in black and Latinx communities and limited access to nutritious foods in these communities results in “food-related death and disease.”³⁵ In addition, fast food marketers use particular tools to cater to Latinx youth, including Spanish language advertisements, music, Latinx spokespersons, and other connections to Latinx culture to try to sell their products.³⁶ People of color are also less likely to be screened for diabetes.³⁷ Blacks and Latinxs are the racialized groups most likely to be hospitalized for diabetes-related illnesses in Alameda County.³⁸ Chronic diseases such as

³³ Khazan, Olga. Fast Food Chains Disproportionately Target Black Children. *The Atlantic*. November 13, 2014. Web. September 13, 2016.

³⁴ Ferdman, Roberto A. The disturbing ways that fast food chains disproportionately target black kids. *The Washington Post*. November 12, 2014. Web. September 13, 2016.

³⁵ Freeman, Andrea. 2007. Fast Food: Oppression through Nutrition. *California Law Review* 95(6): 2220-2260.

³⁶ N.A. Fast Food Companies increasingly Target Latino, Black Kids with Marketing for Unhealthy Food. *Latina Lista*. November 6, 2013. Web. September 13, 2016.

³⁷ Stark Casagrande, Sarah, Catherine C. Cowie, Saul M. Genuth. 2014. “Self-Reported Prevalence of Diabetes Screening in the U.S. 2005-2010.” *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 47(6): 780-787

³⁸ 2014. Alameda County Health Data Profile, 2014: Community Health Status Assessment for Public Health Accreditation. Community Assessment, Planning, and Education Unit. *Alameda County of Public Health*. 2014. Web. October 14, 2016.

type 2 diabetes have been cited as the leading cause of death and disability in Alameda County.³⁹

Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism is particularly fitting for my analysis of food, race, and health. Wilson argues, "Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."⁴⁰ Gilmore's understanding of racism builds on Foucault's biopolitics as well as social scientific arguments that racism is structural and thus irreducible to interpersonal conflicts.⁴¹ Gilmore's definition aptly describes how racism affects life chances and quality of life. Community studies scholar Julie Guthman specifically connects Foucault and Gilmore's work to the study of food by arguing that the effects of racism are made material in biological vulnerabilities to disease and premature death as is outlined in the work of food justice advocates.⁴² In other words, unequal access to nutritious foods for black and Latinx communities can and often does result in poor health and premature death. I build on Gilmore's work by arguing that the denial of access to nutritious and healthy foods for black and Latinx communities is a form of structural racism. That these communities experience higher and disproportionate access to health equities through lack of food access is a result of multivalent iterations of structural racism. My focus on

³⁹ 2014. Alameda County Health Data Profile, 2014: Community Health Status Assessment for Public Health Accreditation. Community Assessment, Planning, and Education Unit. *Alameda County of Public Health*. 2014. Web. October 14, 2016.

⁴⁰ Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2007. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* Berkley, CA: University of California Press, p. 28.

⁴¹ Guthman, Julie. 2012. Doing Justice to Bodies? Reflections on Food Justice, Race, and Biology. *Antipode*. 46(5): 1153-1171; Howard Omi and Michael Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States, From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York, NY: Routledge.

⁴² Guthman, Julie. 2014. *Antipode*. "Doing Justice to Bodies? Reflections on Food Justice, Race, and Biology." 46(5): 1153-1171.

how communities of color respond illustrates how black and Latinx communities take an active role in eradicating premature death through food inequities and stake a claim in health and vitality by producing life.

Health as a Structural Condition

The social scientific analyses of health instruct us to understand health not as a set of individualized choices and practices, but rooted within structural logics of racism, sexism, classism, environment, and political economy. Social science scholars argue that individual and group health patterns result from politics, political economy, and the environment.⁴³ In addition, political ecologies of health take a holistic approach to health. Brian King argues that the research on social analyses of health (as opposed to medical models of health) “have been important in broadening the concept of health beyond the absence of disease; rather, health is understood as the relationship of people to their environments in addition to their physical and emotional well-being.”⁴⁴ In this way, health is not simply about the absence of illness, but about understanding what makes populations vulnerable, ensuring that opportunities for healthy choices are equally available to all, and recognizing how capacities for health are constrained and enabled by social forces.

Health is not simply shaped by individual choices but is primarily shaped by structural factors, including income, level of education, employment, and lack of quality

⁴³ King, Brian. 2010. Political ecologies of health. *Progress in Human Geography*. 34(1): 38-55.

⁴⁴ King, Brian. 2010. Political ecologies of health. *Progress in Human Geography*. 34(1): 38-55, p. 41.

medical care.⁴⁵ For instance, high poverty rates are correlated with decreased life expectancy. In high poverty regions, visits to the emergency room for diabetes are two to four times higher than in affluent neighborhoods. Youth in high poverty neighborhoods die at almost three times the rates of their affluent peers. High poverty young and middle-aged adults die at two and half times the rates of their peers in affluent neighborhoods.⁴⁶ In addition, racial segregation also leads to health disparities, particularly as it relates to employment and educational opportunities.⁴⁷

The Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) in the San Francisco Bay Area has engaged in a series of studies on health discrepancies in the region. Alameda County houses the cities of Alameda, Albany, Berkeley, Dublin, Emeryville, Fremont, Hayward, Livermore, Newark, Oakland, Piedmont, Pleasanton, San Leandro, and Union City as well as the unincorporated communities of Ashland, Castro Valley, Cherryland, Fairview, San Lorenzo, and Sunol in the San Francisco Bay Area. The ACPHD argues that in addition to the medical model causes of poor health, one must also account for socio-ecological bases for health discrepancies. A 2008 report argues that discriminatory beliefs, institutional power and social inequities must also be dismantled in order to produce health for all.⁴⁸ As the article states,

⁴⁵ Marmot, Michael. 2005. Social determinants of health inequalities. *The Lancet*. 365(9464): 1099-1104.

⁴⁶ 2014. Alameda County Health Data Profile, 2014: Community Health Status Assessment for Public Health Accreditation. Community Assessment, Planning, and Education Unit. *Alameda County of Public Health*. 2014. Web. October 10, 2016.

⁴⁷ Williams, DR and C. Collins. 2001. Racial residential segregation: a fundamental cause of racial disparities in health. *Public Health Reports* 116(5): 404-416.

⁴⁸ 2008. Life and Death from Unnatural Causes, Introduction. *Alameda County Report*. Alameda County Public Health Department.

Research is amassing nationwide which establishes that health outcomes are linked to place (where people live) and the level of resources and opportunities for health available to them based on race, income and education. Low-income people and people of color are more likely to be burdened by poor environments, which often include substandard housing, poor schools, and pollution. These are some of the disparate community conditions that have direct and profound consequences on residents' health.⁴⁹

The per capita income of Alameda County in 2010 was \$32,398 with 22.8% of the families and individuals whose income was beneath the poverty line in the previous twelve months.⁵⁰ Between 2000 and 2010, the population of people of color in Alameda County grew from 59.1% to 65.9%. Blacks and Latinxs in Alameda County have some of the lowest rates of attaining a bachelor's degree. The history of racial segregation that has led to poor health in the region includes redlining, racial predatory lending by banks, white flight, disinvestment in the region, blockbusting, and displacement as a result of highway construction, and urban renewal projects. In Alameda County, high poverty neighborhoods are primarily and disproportionately comprised of blacks and Latinxs, who make up 34% of the population of the county, while making up 63% of the population of high poverty regions, and 71% of very high poverty areas.⁵¹ In addition, in Alameda County there are lower rates of supermarkets and an overabundance of liquor stores relative to affluent neighborhoods. According to the California Health Interview Survey, blacks and Latinxs are less likely to consume fruits and vegetables than their

⁴⁹ 2008. Life and Death from Unnatural Causes, Introduction. *Alameda County Report*. Alameda County Public Health Department, p. 6-7.

⁵⁰ "Demographics." Alameda County, CA. County of Alameda, CA. 2010. Web. October 10, 2016.

⁵¹ 2014. Alameda County Health Data Profile, 2014: Community Health Status Assessment for Public Health Accreditation. Community Assessment, Planning, and Education Unit. *Alameda County of Public Health*. 2014. Web. October 10, 2016.

white and Asian counterparts and are also more likely to consume sugar-sweetened beverages.⁵² In other words, many black and Latinx people living in the Bay Area experience poor health due to food unequal access and other social forces.

Food Justice and the Bay Area

I situate *Foodways (Re)Presented* as a study within the field of food justice. I follow the definition of food justice presented by scholars Alison Alkon and Julian Agyeman, who argue, “The food justice movement combines an analysis of racial and economic justice with practical support for environmentally sustainable alternatives that can provide economic empowerment and access to environmental benefits in marginalized communities.”⁵³ As an extension of the environmental justice movement, the food justice movement argues that race and class-consciousness are inherently connected in struggles for food equity. Food deserts, or regions lacking in nutritious, quality, and fresh produce and/or have an overabundance of fast foods, liquor stores, and corner markets, are disproportionately located in low-income and community of color neighborhoods. This reality demonstrates that black and brown bodies do not have some sort of pathological desire for so-called junk foods, but are often limited to what is readily available. As such, food is a critical medium to understand how race determines access to resources.

⁵² 2014. Alameda County Health Data Profile, 2014: Community Health Status Assessment for Public Health Accreditation. Community Assessment, Planning, and Education Unit. *Alameda County of Public Health*. 2014. Web. October 12, 2016.

⁵³ Alkon, Alison Hope and Julian Agyeman. 2011. Introduction: The Food Movement as Polyculture. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, p. 6.

Communities of color are often treated as objects to be taught, rather than understood as informed, active participants in social change. I highlight the work of community-based organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area that emphasize food justice work that promotes life through representations and food access. The Bay Area has long been recognized for its multi-faceted and long-standing relationship to food activism. While Chef Alice Waters, journalist Michael Pollan, and nutritionist Marion Nestle are well-known food activists who are heralded as *the* leading voices in Bay Area food politics, the project focuses primarily on how those working in community-based programs on the ground intervene in discussions of race, health, and food. As Garret Broad argues, community-based responses to unequal food systems must include the voices and experiences of communities of color.⁵⁴ Although alternative food justice organizations have been growing, there has been little scholarly research done on how these projects engage visibility as a critical component of their food justice work. I analyze how community-based projects make important interventions using imagery.

Food justice projects in the region provide useful context for situating this dissertation. Perhaps the most well-known such project is the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense's School Breakfast Survival Program in Oakland in the 1970s for working class black elementary school children to ensure a nutritious breakfast (discussed in depth in chapter 3). Its focus on providing access for black youth was a food justice issue, aimed at producing racial equity through food access. Other local, community-based projects have engaged in food justice work efforts many years. Some food justice

⁵⁴ Broad, Garrett. 2016. *More than Just Food: Food Justice and Community Change*. University of California Press.

organizations include the Oakland Food Policy Council, Phat Beetz, People's Grocery, Planting Justice, Community Food and Justice Coalition, Food First, Urban Tilth, Berkeley Food Pantry, and the Berkeley Student Food Collective. These and many other food justice organizations work to create an equitable food system for the poor and for working class communities of color in the Bay Area. They engage race-based approaches to address the material effects of institutional racism, creating legacies of disempowered communities empowering themselves. This long history of food activism in the San Francisco Bay Area makes it a unique and fitting place to situate this research project.

Given the strong response by Bay Area community organizations to Berkeley's Measure D, it is important to recognize how community-based organizations respond to food-related health conditions. Berkeley's strong history of social activism, from the Free Speech Movement to anti-war protest, has also been true of much of the rest of the Bay Area and has made the Bay a leader in tackling social issues.⁵⁵ The literature on type 2 diabetes and communities of color focuses primarily on health problems, health risks, and deaths. The accomplishments of these food justice organizations in addressing such health conditions is often not afforded the same level of public attention as efforts by white observers.

Foodways (Re)Presented focuses on community-based projects that address the disproportionately higher rates of type 2 diabetes among black and Latinx groups in their communities. I argue that these community projects recognize the material inequities that produce disproportionate health inequalities while simultaneously denaturalizing the

⁵⁵ State of Health. "In Berkeley, Soda Tax Measure Is New Front in Social Activism." KQED News. *KQED Inc.* October 20, 2014. Web. March 17, 2017.

notion that blacks and Latinxs are inherently prone to premature death by focusing instead on life-sustaining efforts. Emphasizing the material inequities while simultaneously addressing them is work that is intertwined for these organizations, which is important because it focuses not only on how groups are understood but also on producing life for communities who are vulnerable to premature death.

Methods: Food and the Visual

I center the visual because I argue that there exists a struggle over *how* to document food. The preponderance of food imagery in visual spaces has become ubiquitous. Today's digital age has increased the imagery of foods, beverages, and food-related objects in social media, including sites like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Twitter.



Image 6. Food Porn.



Image 7. Food Porn, Julianne Hough.



Image 8. Food Selfie.

This imagery aestheticizes food and makes it available to be viewed and consumed by countless people at a rapid pace. The above images are a result from a Google search using the terms “food porn” and “food selfie,” demonstrating the commonality of close ups of dishes, images of people with food and friends, or photos of people literally putting food in their mouths. The circulation of food imagery is part of a broader public

discourse in which digital images of food are also identity markers.⁵⁶ Additionally, digital worlds of food abundance obscure the reality of food insecurity, food scarcity, and food deserts that face poor peoples and working class communities of color. These kinds of images suggest that nutritious food is ample and even excessive; that food consumption is solely a matter of individual pleasure; and that food is absent of politics. They create discursive and ideological spheres in which food is taken for granted in its abundance. I focus on how the food imagery of community-based black and Latinx organizations produces a different type of food politics—one in which food photography and videography are both an artistic visual aesthetic as well as political choices that highlight racialized food inequities and counter-narratives.

Very little work has been written about the relationship between food, health, race, and visual representations. While there exists a small number of scholarly articles on the relationship between technology and health,⁵⁷ few analyze the relationship between technology, health, race, and representation. K. Wayne Yang has argued that the use of new digital technologies allows for grassroots organizing and mobilization through mass communication.⁵⁸ Visual studies scholar Ricardo Dominguez's work emphasizes the ways in which technology is used to counter oppressive forces and create wide-scale

⁵⁶ Tomkins, Kyla Wazana. 2012. *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*. New York, NY: New York University.

⁵⁷ Paul, Serene S., Anne Tiedemann, Leanne M. Hassett, Elisabeth Ramsay, Catherine Kirkham, Sakina Chagpar, and Catherine Sherrington. 2015. "Validity of the *FitBit* activity tracker for measuring steps in community-dwelling older adults." *BMJ Open Sport and Exercise Medicine* 1(1): 1-5; Gusmer, RJ, T.A. Bosch, A.N. Watkins, J.D. Ostrem, and D.R. Dengel. 2014. "Comparison of FitBit Ultra to ActiGraph GT1M for Assessment of Physical Activity in Young Adults During Treadmill Walking." *The Open Sports Medicine Journal* 8:11-15.

⁵⁸ Yang, K. Wayne. 2007. Organizing MySpace: Youth Walkouts, Pleasure, Politics, and New Media. *Educational Foundations* 21(1-2): 9-28.

social change, particularly in relation to racial inequalities.⁵⁹ Ethnic studies scholar Curtis Marez analyzes how farm workers (primarily working class people of color) in the mid to late 20th century used visual technologies to undermine agribusiness and fight for fair wages, working conditions, and dignity. I follow Marez's lead in arguing "that visual fields are partially constituted by forms of socially and historically produced perceptual mapping that in turn shape the construction of historical realities."⁶⁰ Similarly, in *Foodways (Re)Presented*, I reveal how the visual creations produced by community projects are constituted by the "perceptual mapping" of contemporary discourses in public health, the social sciences and the Slow Food movement. These visual creations are counter-narratives that shape how these communities imagine and therefore construct their own histories and futures. Marez also states, "I argue that for farm workers, cameras became important means for constructing an oppositional brown aesthetic dedicated to visually redefining reality."⁶¹ In the 1900s farm workers used visual technology innovatively, to present a counter-narrative to agribusiness's portrayal of farm workers as dangerous and combative in the context of ongoing labor conflicts. I follow Marez's approach by analyzing how community-based organizations creatively use visual

⁵⁹ Dominguez, Ricardo. *Illegal Knowledge: Strategies for New Media Activism*. Electronic Book Review. *Open Humanities Press*. 2003. Web. October 12, 2016; Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0/B.A.N.G. Lab: Transborder Immigration Tool. Hemispheric Institute Encuentro. *Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics*. 2016. Web. October 12, 2016; Edward. "Ricardo Dominguez." *The Guardian*. *UCSD Guardian*. April 12, 2010. Web. October 12, 2016.

⁶⁰ Marez, Curtis. 2016. Introduction: Farm Workers in the Machine. *Farm Workers Futurism: speculative technologies of resistance*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 7.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 32.

technologies to create counter-narratives that contest popular depictions of black and Latinx communities as inherently prone to premature death.

The visual productions that I highlight engender an affect that emphasizes health, life and vitality, rather than death and pathology, within black and Latinx communities. Seigworth and Gregg argue that affect's power lies in "affect as potential: a body's *capacity* to affect and to be affected."⁶² Affect is the body's recognition of sensation, feeling, and perception through the body. Teresa Brennan defines affects as a physiological shift that has material, physiological and energetic effects. Affect speaks to the emotive sensations the body registers and suggests that the body is always in formation, contestation, and is never fully complete.⁶³

Affect, however, is not simply an individual phenomenon, but rather a shared experience. Affects are transmitted socially and culturally, rather than individualized and personal.⁶⁴ Kathleen Stewart defines ordinary affects as "public feelings" that are broadly circulated while simultaneously making up intimate lives. Unfixed and unbounded, affects provide potential ways in which to know and relate. She argues that affects are "a problem or question emergent in disparate scenes and incommensurate forms and registers; a tangle of potential connections. Literally moving things - things that are in motion and that are defined by their capacity to affect and to be affected - they have to be

⁶² Seigworth, Gregory J. and Melissa Gregg. 2010. An Inventory of Shimmers. *Affect Theory Reader* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 3.

⁶³ Seigworth, Gregory J. and Melissa Gregg. 2010. An Inventory of Shimmers. *Affect Theory Reader* Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Teresa Brennan. 2004. Introduction. *The Transmission of Affect*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

⁶⁴ Brennan, Teresa. 2004. Introduction. *The Transmission of Affect*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

mapped through different, coexisting forms of composition.”⁶⁵ By using visual aesthetics to frame and reframe black and Latinx food practices, the examples I analyze engage the intimate site of food consumption and the body within a broader political field of food justice. They appeal to the ephemeral – desire, disgust, death, and life – not simply to reflect what is within the fields of food justice, but also to offer potentialities of what could be. In this way they produce racialized fantasies through aesthetic productions.⁶⁶ The imagery produces an affect, which then has the possibility of affecting cognition, knowledge, and, ultimately, action. In doing so, these sites reframe blacks and Latinxs as engaging in healthy food practices. They produce life, both materially and representationally in a social context in which people of color are prone to premature death.

The videos and images that I analyze use the visual to produce affect in order to construct the body of color as one of life and vitality. This project follows studies of affect of work that is politically engaged and critiques power that seeks to repress that which lies outside of the norm. These scholars write about the materiality of quotidian experiences—understood as collective experiences rather than individual ones—and address affective experiences, actions, and engagements that lie exist outside of the norm.⁶⁷ The affect produced in the images and videography acts a form of potentiality, as possibilities for life and living that are not understood as potentials for death, but for capacities for health, vigor, and healing.

⁶⁵ Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 3-4.

⁶⁶ Kheshti, Roshanak. 2008. “Inversion, Significance, and the Loss of the Self in Sound” *Parallax* 14(2):68-77.

⁶⁷ Seigworth, Gregory J. and Melissa Gregg. 2010. *An Inventory of Shimmers. Affect Theory Reader* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Because affect privileges the body, it is a useful framework to consider an analysis of the politics of race, food, consumption, and health. While analyses of food would seem to naturally emphasize the senses of taste and smell, I highlight how visibility has become increasingly important in constructing disgust, desire, and sensuality in relation to food consumption. It is through the sense of visibility that affect is registered, produced, and responded to in the sites I analyze.

The senses, typically considered individualized, in fact engage socially constructed meanings, hierarchies, and relationships. The senses are lived through the human body with historical and political meanings. The sensual revolution in the humanities and social sciences refers to the recent turn in many academic fields to study the senses in relation to social theory, knowledge, power, and as something that exceeds the individual's experience. The sensual revolution analyzes both corporeal life, or how life is experienced through the body, as well as how ideologies are conveyed through sensory values and practices.⁶⁸ David Howes argues, "The 'senses,' in fact, are not just one more potential field of study, alongside, say, gender, colonialism, or material culture. The senses are the media through which we experience and make sense of gender, colonialism, and material culture."⁶⁹ In other words, the senses are a vital component of how we understand and experience the world in which we live.

I analyze these visual creations through the lens of cultural studies. I read the sites as texts of political contestation that work through how they understand and re-present

⁶⁸ Howes, David. 2005. Introduction: Empire of the Senses. *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. New York, NY: Berg Publishers.

⁶⁹ Howes, David. 2005. Introduction: Empire of the Senses. *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. New York, NY: Berg Publishers, p. 4.

narratives about themselves through the production, consumption, and circulation of their visual texts as well as how it is implicated in power relations.⁷⁰ Rather than think about culture as a realm distinct from politics or the everyday experience, culture is better understood as “a site of social differences and struggles” where manifestations of power and inequality are negotiated.⁷¹ In this way, cultural studies analyzes power relations and creates possibilities for social change. Cultural studies examines the “political nature of representation itself, about its complexities, about the effects of language, about textuality as a site of life and death.”⁷² Questions about who gets represented, how, and why are also related to questions about power, desire and pleasure, race, gender, class, and sexuality.⁷³ The public service announcement, short films, and cookbook photos contend with questions about who get represented and how. In turn, they produce their own representations about black and Latinx food consumption to produce ideas about healthy bodies, community engagement, and subjugated knowledges. Through these texts, they claim a stake in the public discourses on food documentation and consumption, health, and racialized difference.

While I highlight particular visual productions, I do not herald them as perfect counterpoints. These sites contain their own problematic elements. Stuart Hall states, “Popular culture is neither, in a ‘pure’ sense, the popular traditions of resistance to

⁷⁰ Johnson, Richard. 1986-1987. “What is Cultural Studies Anyway?” *Social Text* 16: 53 and 58.

⁷¹ Johnson, Richard. 1986-1987. “What is Cultural Studies Anyway?” *Social Text* 16: 39.

⁷² Hall, Stuart. 1992. “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies.” *Cultural Studies* eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 277-294. Pp. 282-285.

⁷³ Hall, Stuart. 1992. “Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies.” *Cultural Studies* eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 277-294. Pp. 283 and 286.

[imposed elite] processes; nor is it the forms which are superimposed on and over them. It is the ground on which the transformations are worked.”⁷⁴ As the space where struggles over production, dissemination, and appropriation of cultural forms occur, visibility in relation to food consumption is a form of popular culture that is fraught with contradictions and problematics.⁷⁵ Yet, analyzing these images and videos allows a window into the ideology, subjectivity, and discourses of community-based organizations in relation to self-representation.⁷⁶ I highlight their usefulness in order to recognize the work being done by communities of color, which is all too often overlooked. Rather than idealize these visual texts as either forms of resistance or critiquing them as securely maintaining traditional forms, I understand them to be spaces through which contestations over health, gender, race, consumption, and life and death ensue. These sites construct realities and imagine subjectivities, ideologies, possibilities, and narratives through the politics of representation.⁷⁷ In doing so, they claim a stake in the public discourses on food documentation, consumption, health, and racialized difference.

In addition to the textual analysis of the imagery, I also analyze the discourses used by the fields of public health, geography, sociology, and slow foods as backdrop for what these community-based projects are working against and within. I follow in the tradition of Michel Foucault, who argues that representation is about a production of

⁷⁴ Hall, Stuart. 1981. “Notes on Deconstructing ‘The Popular.’” *People’s History and Socialist Theory*. London: Routledge, p. 228.

⁷⁵ Hall, Stuart. 1981. “Notes on Deconstructing ‘The Popular.’” *People’s History and Socialist Theory*. London: Routledge, p. 227-228.

⁷⁶ Johnson, Richard. 1986-1987. “What is Cultural Studies Anyway?” *Social Text* 16: 62 and 67.

⁷⁷ Hall, Stuart. 1992. “What is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” *Black Popular Culture*. Seattle: Bay Press, p. 32.

social knowledge, institutional power, and shared practices and that discourse is the means through which all of those are made meaningful.⁷⁸ Foucault's emphasis on relations of power views discourse as a system of representation, rather than language itself. As articulated by Stuart Hall, Foucault understood discourse as "...a group of statements which provides a language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment...Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But...since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do—our conduct—all practices have a discursive aspect."⁷⁹ I explore the discourses of fields invested in contemporary food politics and how these fields situate type 2 diabetes, food, and black and Latinx communities in relation to notions of bodily health, community, and culinary and consumptive practices. Foucault argues that discourse should always be constructed in relation to material conditions, as discourses have no meaning outside of the structural conditions in which they are produced.⁸⁰ Thus, I not only explore how these community-based projects respond to particular discourses, but also how these counter-narratives are tied to the material conditions that produce the larger narratives in the first place. In other words, I demonstrate how the material conditions of food inequities are inherently connected to narratives and counter-narratives, making them mutually constitutive, rather than distinct. By doing so, I recognize how power circulates not only through institutions (from above) but also through everyday people and organizations (from below).

⁷⁸ Hall, Stuart. 1997. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

⁷⁹ Hall, Stuart. 1997. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, p. 44.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

This dissertation follows the work of feminist science and technology studies (FSTS) scholars who argue that bodies are “boundary projects” which “emerge at the intersection of biological research and writing, medical and other business practices, and technology.”⁸¹ In other words, bodies are constructed through scientific study *and* discursive social narratives to produce meanings about those bodies. Similarly, I argue that knowledge about type 2 diabetes and blacks and Latinx is produced through scientific research and social discourses that produce these bodies as diseased, deficient, and bad consumers. It is vital to understand “how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life.”⁸² My analysis of literature from public health, geography, sociology, and slow foods provides a current example of how scientific institutions have overdetermined notions of race and gender within the so-called neutral site of scientific knowledge production. I contribute to FSTS literature by demonstrating that we must consider the ways that race and gender are mutually constitutive categories of differentiation that must be considered in relation to one another.

By focusing on structures, discourses and representations, I recognize how understandings of food, race, and health circulate at a large scale and how these broad understandings shape the thoughts, actions, and experiences of everyday people. For that reason, I do not present “factual” accounts of black and Latinx foodways. Instead, I analyze how discourses and representations about how blacks and Latinxs eat shape what

⁸¹ Haraway, Donna. 1988. “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575-599. Pp. 595-596.

⁸² Haraway, Donna. 1988. “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.” *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575-599. Pp. 578 and 580.

we come to “know” about blacks and Latinx health in addition to producing understandings about racial difference and consumption. For this reason, the other component of this dissertation project sheds light on and analyzes how blacks and Latinxs in turn produce their own knowledge about their communities, health, and food consumption. In focusing on how communities of color create their own epistemologies about food, race, and health, I show how these groups intervene in common-sense depictions of food, health and race.

Chapter breakdown

Foodways (Re)Presented is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 “Feeding the White Gaze: Modern Consumption in the New Racial Order” highlights how consumption, foodways, and the mouth are sites of racialization. I analyze historical imagery of particular food items in relation to blacks and Mexicans and argue that the white gaze has produced black and Mexican consumption as unhealthy, primitive, and pathological. Perceived as threats to the modern racial order, blacks and Mexicans were imagined as either docile, subservient figures or as wild, primitive bodies and improper consumers that needed to be controlled. Historically, food came to stand in for these racialized constructions and many of the racialized meanings associated with particular food items continue to exist today.

In the second chapter, “What’s on Her Plate? Black Feminism and the Politics of Food Respectability,” I juxtapose two texts: “Purest Poison,” a video public service announcement (PSA) by The Bigger Picture, a San Francisco Bay Area youth organization, and “The First Lady Introduces Let’s Move!” a short promotional film by the Let’s Move campaign highlighting the work of former First Lady Michelle Obama. I

situate this chapter in the field of public health and the politics of respectability in relation to black feminism. Both videos center the figure of the black woman as the groundwork for thinking through health, ability, and food consumption. “Purest Poison” reinforces historical narratives about black femininity as pathological by associating images of so-called junk foods and their ill effects, with imagery of black women as diseased. “The First Lady Introduces Let’s Move!” shows imagery of Michelle Obama with fresh fruits and vegetables to construct her as a healthy and respectable figure, in order to contest problematic racialized representations of the first black family in the White House, including associations with watermelon and fried chicken. I argue that the imagery used in the short film and public service announcement proves how black women are imagined as the boundary in relation to health, the body, and food consumption.

Chapter 3 “Growing Justice in a Food Desert” moves from the site of the body to the site of the neighborhood community. Chapter three builds on the previous two chapters by analyzing how space is a vital component in constructing the relationship between food and race. I offer an overview of food desert videography, exploring how these videos offer a structural critique of the food desert. I then examine two videos on West Oakland’s food desert, which highlight the limited amounts of nutritious foods available and the overabundance of fried, high caloric, and high sugar foods. In particular, I emphasize a video by Mandela Foods Co-Op, a retail store that contributes to community health by bringing fresh, quality produce to West Oakland, as the only full-service grocery store in the neighborhood. I argue that the genre of food desert videography enables food justice activists to make vital critiques about structural

inequities and align themselves with historical anti-racist food justice efforts. It is this documentation that makes apparent issues of food insecurity as well as interventions being made.

In chapter 4 “Radical Recipe: Eating as Racial Politics” I analyze recipes and photographs in two cookbooks rooted in food justice for black and Latinx communities: *Afro Vegan* by eco-chef Bryant Terry and *Decolonize Your Diet* by race scholars Luz Calvo and Catriona Esquibel. Chapter four builds on the previous chapters by moving from the historical imagery, the body and geographic space to the recipe as a site for analyzing how race is constructed through food. In this chapter, I analyze how cookbook photos highlight particular black and Latinx ingredients, seasonings, and flavors as medicinal and act as a direct counter to health disparities among communities of color; foods that have historically been disavowed as insignificant or unhealthy. The authors participate in the aesthetic appeal of the cookbook photograph genre to produce desire, but do so through a politicized and racialized framework, arguing that particular black and Latinx ingredients are inherently nutritious and life-sustaining. In privileging ingredients and seasonings that were passed down from their grandmothers, these cookbooks legitimate subjugated women of color epistemologies. I argue that by framing eating as a mode of racial politics, *Afro-Vegan* and *Decolonize Your Diet* counter the Eurocentrism of the white, Slow Food movement.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I analyze how food signifiers get mapped onto the bodies, communities, and foods of black and Latinx people in both ideological and material ways. Rather than imagine the short films, public service announcement, and cookbook

photographs to perform a perfect politics of how food justice *should* be done, I understand them to be examples of possibilities of how food justice *can* be done. Interestingly, the discourses of public health, geography, sociology, and slow foods are not conservative in the sense of blaming the individual for her food choices. Instead, these are liberal critiques that put primary responsibility on the environment in which food is produced, marketed, sold, and consumed. Yet, I point to how even liberal accounts are embedded in racialized discourses of pathology, deficiency, colonialism, and white supremacy that inevitably position blacks and Latinxs as improper consumers.

I focus on the narratives, experiences, and histories of communities of color in order to decenter whiteness and white supremacy as standards of normativity and value. The experiences and voices of communities of color are rarely heralded as valuable or historically archivable. By highlighting how black and Latinx peoples are making changes, even when problematic, I give credence to the power of communities of color to produce knowledge. Situating the fields of public health, geography, sociology, and Slow Foods in conversation with literatures on food justice, race and gender, and science and technology studies enables an interdisciplinary approach to this project. Through this approach I explore intersections of food, race, health, and technology in a unique and innovative way. As such, this project makes interventions in the fields of ethnic studies, gender studies, feminist science studies, public health, geography, sociology, food studies, and food justice studies.

I write *Foodways (Re)Presented* as someone who has a deep respect and appreciation for the efforts made and work done in public health, food studies, and Slow Foods, as they work to account for and eradicate differential health outcomes. In different

ways, each of these fields points to injustices in order to create a more equitable outcome when it comes to food, health and communities of color. I commend their efforts to eradicate inequities and investigate why these differences exist. However, far too often, their findings result in reductive, inaccurate, paternalistic, and even racist understandings. My goal in this dissertation is to recognize some of the ways in which they perpetuate problematic constructions of racial difference, while engaging in seemingly objective work. By privileging the voices of communities of color, who are more spoken about than heard, I valorize practices of self-affirmation, community building and life-sustenance in ways that are both problematic and transgressive. I believe that critical thinkers in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities must work together to produce analyses and knowledge across these fields, rather than as disparate entities.

Foodways (Re)Presented demonstrates how visual imagery of food is deeply racialized in relation to the body, the community, and the recipe. Through food imagery, national narratives about racial differences are constructed and contested. These narratives function in direct relation to how black and Latinx communities have been denied easy access to nutritious foods on a material basis as well as how black and Latinx bodies are ideologically constructed as always already unhealthy, improper consumers. This research project has implications for the fields of science and technology studies, sociology, geography, health sciences, environmental justice, and studies on race and gender. Interdisciplinary and intersectional, *Foodways (Re)Presented* works across disciplinary boundaries to connect analyses of scientific and social scientific knowledge production, structural inequities, racially-infused discourses, and visual forms of representation.

Chapter 1: Feeding the White Gaze Modern Consumption in the New Racial Order

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze how the mouth has been a site of racialization, both in terms of discourses and the food consumption of blacks and Mexicans. I explore how historical imagery of blacks and Mexicans has produced those bodies as pathological and death-producing. In upcoming chapters I argue that blacks and Mexicans use visual imagery to construct their relationship to food as one of life and vitality, rather than one as pathology and death. In order to situate those analyses, in this chapter I analyze historical visual representations of blacks and Mexicans and food.

I argue that the white gaze has historically racialized blacks and Mexicans through visual imagery of food items and discourses about food and health. I focus on how food images construct blacks and Mexicans as improper racial Others whose association with particular food objects is the basis for their caricature and for constructing them as improper, unhealthy consumers. I argue such images show blacks and Mexicans as threats to the white racial order, on the one hand, and as caricatures who can be properly controlled, on the other. I suggest that the juxtaposition of these images provides insight into the white gaze which understood non-whites as undermining the racial regime at a time when these groups were gaining more rights, but also able to be controlled in order to appease fears. Food was an important medium through which this juxtaposition was imagined, as it provided an obvious connection to the body.

In the section that follows, I outline Frantz Fanon's analysis of the black body in the white gaze. I employ this use of the gaze and his discussion of the mouth as jumping

off points to argue that the mouth and consumption are sites of racialization, particularly for blacks and Mexicans. In the following section, I highlight Aunt Jemima, Rastus, and Uncle Ben, figures of subservience and docility within a social context in which black freedom was imagined as a threat to the racial order. The next section highlights the particular food objects that stand in for black racial Otherness: watermelons and fried chicken. Used to construct blacks as thieves, manipulators, and simple-minded, racialized images of watermelon continue today. I then bring attention to examples of how food advertising has constructed black bodies in problematic racialized ways. The section that follows provides a historical overview of how Mexican and Mexican American foodways have been constructed as primitive, premodern, and therefore, unhealthy, through Americanized food programs. These programs demonstrate that health is a concept that is always politically contingent as well as racialized. The final section focuses on advertisements of Mexican and Mexican American consumption. In these images, Mexicans and Mexican Americans are conceptualized as bandits, liars, cheats, lazy, and over the top. These constructions continue to perpetuate and influence contemporary racialized notions of Mexicans.

The White Gaze and Consumption

“Look! A Negro!” Franz Fanon’s often-quoted phrase from his seminal *Black Skin, White Masks* is the exclamation of a young, white boy to his mother, which demonstrates how the white gaze objectifies and subordinates the black body. Frantz Fanon argues that the lived experience of being black is a dialectic that is always in relation to the existence of whites and in which blackness is constructed as nothingness,

or “a feeling of not existing.” He states that this constricting gaze shapes black consciousness by denying any sense of humanity to black bodies, black consciousness, and the black experience. This white gaze constructs blackness as primitive, inferior, and dangerous. It is the white gaze of the black body that perpetuates ideas about racial Otherness. Fanon affirms, “I was responsible not only for my body, but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered by blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all else, yes, above all, the grinning *Y a bon Banania*.”⁸³ Fanon references an advertisement for Banania brand chocolate and banana powdered breakfast drink, sold widely in France since before the early 20th century that is useful for thinking through the relationship between food, the white gaze, and visibility.

The original image featured a Senegalese tirailleur, or infantryman recruited from the French colonies for the French Army in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the Banania advertisement, the soldier is in uniform, wearing a red and blue fez. His wide grin marks his pleasure in consuming the Banania as well as in serving France as a colonial empire. Images 9a and b and 10b are images of the ad. Image 10a is a contemporary image in which the phrase, “Y’a bon Banania” has been removed from the ad.

⁸³ Fanon, Frantz. 2008. “Chapter 5: The Lived Experience of the Black Man.” *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York, NY: Grove Press, p 92 and 118.



a.



b.



a.



b.

Image 10. Y'a bon Banania.

The phrase is a form of pidgin French created by the French Army for its Senegalese soldiers who were thought to be incapable of learning proper French.⁸⁴ The phrase “Y’a bon Banania” means “Me like Banania” or, translated to an American context for the English language translation of *Black Skin, White Masks*, “sho good eatin.” The phrase was part of the advertisement from 1915 to 1977; even when the phrase was no longer in

⁸⁴ The language of hatred. *Word histories: facts, opinions, creations*. October 31, 2013. Web. April 19, 2017.

usage, copyright fees for the slogan were still being paid by Nutrimaine, the manufacturing corporation that bought the breakfast drink from Unilever in 2003. Groups from former French colonies in the Caribbean, Guyana, and Réunion filed a suit in Paris in 2006, threatening to sue Nutrimaine for the advertisement, arguing that it is racist, offensive, demeaning, and “The brand conveys a pejorative, degrading and racist image towards people of black colour whom it portrays as ill-educated, inarticulate and barely able to string together three words of French.” While the company refused to change the associated imagery, it did stop usage of the phrase “Y’a bon Banania,” arguing that the slogan, and not the imagery, was the offensive component of the ad.⁸⁵

The Banania ad speaks to the ways in which images in food advertisement have been used as a site of racialization, particularly as a means to demean and degrade people of color through a colonial gaze. That the advertisement imagines the Senegalese infantrymen as wide-grinned, well-behaved subjects of colonial power is reminiscent of American advertisements that perpetuate similar imaginaries in relation to food, including Aunt Jemima and syrup, Rastus and Cream of Wheat cereal, and Uncle Ben and rice. Late 19th century images of blacks with bulging white eyes, wide grins filled with stark white teeth and bright red lips devouring watermelon similarly marked U.S. blacks as docile colonial subjects.

Drawing on Fanon, I argue that food imagery both manifests and manages white racial anxieties. Fanon, for example, emphasizes the boy’s fear. Fanon begins to tremble with cold, but the boy who sees his tremble interprets his actions as a tremble of rage and

⁸⁵ Banania no like racism- tweaks ad slogan. Expatica. *Expatica Communications*. February 2, 2006. Web. April 19, 2017.

exclaims to his mother, “Maman, the Negro’s going to eat me.” In this way the white gaze overdetermines the experiences of blacks as racial Others, particularly through fears about black consumption or as the threat to white existence. The reference to cannibalism is a distinct marker of how the pathology of blackness is associated with the mouth and (improper) consumption. Kyla Wazana Tompkins discusses how eating and the mouth are important sites of racialized consumer fantasy in trade cards of the late 19th century.⁸⁶ Images of eating and biting in Gilded Age trade cards expressed both white fascination with and fear of blackness. She states, “...the world of commodity advertising invited the white consumer to try on—or to consume—new selves.”⁸⁷ Following Tompkins’ lead, I argue that eating and the mouth are sites of racialization and explore how food is the medium through which both the docility and threat of black and Mexican bodies are imagined. Racial fear is both expressed and contained through imagery of black and Mexicans as docile and subservient. In such images black and Mexican bodies are not only imbued with racialized meanings but they come to represent “bad foods” themselves—foods that are the source of bodily, community or national destruction. Food advertising and imagery around people of color and food becomes the measure of proper and improper consumption, producing a healthy or unhealthy national body.

Aunt Jemima, Rastus, and Uncle Ben

⁸⁶ Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. 2012. “What’s De Use Talking ‘Bout Dem ‘Mendments?” *Racial Indigestion* New York, NY: New York University Press.

⁸⁷ Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. 2012. “What’s De Use Talking ‘Bout Dem ‘Mendments?” *Racial Indigestion* New York, NY: New York University Press, p. 162-163.

Alice Deck's writing on the figure of Aunt Jemima offers a useful optic to understand how representations of black bodies and food are transformed in the white gaze from threats to the racial order to docile caricatures. Deck argues that the figure of the black mammy cook in the early 20th century, such as Aunt Jemima, served as fetish in American popular culture. Citing M.M. Manring's book *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*, Deck argues that Aunt Jemima advertisements after the Civil War acted as extensions of a white imaginary that positioned black women's bodies as laboring for whites not primarily for financial compensation, but for the pleasure of nurturing whites. Aunt Jemima became the authority on cooking, which enabled her to pass along her success in the kitchen to the 1920s white wife whose role it was to cook and cater to her husband.⁸⁸ These images were overwhelmingly shaped by the politics of race, gender, and class.

As Deck argues, "The imaginary Old South did not disappear after the Civil War, primarily because of ad campaigns that featured people like Aunt Jemima and Rastus, the black man on the Cream of Wheat cereal box, who were so dedicated to domesticity in the service of white people; hence the Old South was a New South only in its desire to share its culture with northern white entrepreneurs and to forget any cultural and political differences that may have led to the Civil War."⁸⁹ In this way, the threat of black newfound freedom was transformed into obsequiousness through the tropes of Aunt

⁸⁸ Deck, Alice. 2001. "Now Then—Who Said Biscuits?" The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1905-1953. *Kitchen Culture in America*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 69-93.

⁸⁹ Deck, Alice. 2001. "Now Then—Who Said Biscuits?" The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1905-1953. *Kitchen Culture in America*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 76.

Jemima and Rastus whose sole purpose was to nurture the health of whites. These figures did not want to experience the joys of newfound freedom—instead, they desired simply and solely to provide emotional and physical nourishment for white women and families.



Image 11. Aunt Jemima and Rastus.⁹⁰

These early 20th century depictions of Aunt Jemima and Rastus demonstrate how the Jim Crow white gaze took the threat of newly freed blacks and refigured them as docile, illiterate, and subservient through food. Deck states that in some of the first images of Aunt Jemima, her body is figured as overwhelming: “Mammy’s large breasts, muscular arms, and wide hips signifying a unifying of male and female sexualities,” but in later years yields a much smaller physical presence in order to allow space for the white woman cook to become as expert at cooking as Aunt Jemima.⁹¹ Similar to Fanon’s argument in relation to the imagery and ideology of “Y’a bon Banania,” “Me like Banania” or “sho good eatin,” black consciousness is non-existent, as black bodies are present for the gratification of whites. It is the nourishment and health of whites that sustains Aunt Jemima and Rastus.

⁹⁰ Rothenberg Gritz, Jennie. New Racism Museum Reveals the Ugly Truth Behind Aunt Jemima. *The Atlantic* April 23, 2012. Web. April 23, 2017.

⁹¹ Deck, Alice. 2001. “Now Then—Who Said Biscuits?” The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1905-1953. *Kitchen Culture in America*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 70.

Deck argues,

The fetishization of the cook in American advertising for cooking and baking products reinforced the social position of white middle-class America as higher than that of black people, because it conveyed the idea that the black woman as the superior cook was actually a labor-saving device for whites. As she did during slavery, the black cook pictured in ads for baking products continued to serve white society's needs. During the 1920s, it was a combined need for the white woman to emerge as a good cook who remained at home and a determination to keep the black woman in a lower social status symbolized by her reduced size on material objects such as the packages containing pancake flour.⁹²

In this way, the representations of Aunt Jemima and Rastus in the early 20th century were not simply advertisements for pancake mix. Rather, these images produced ideas about the changing racial order, particularly in relation to where black women and men fit. The imagery of black women as servants to white women had the specific intention of maintaining racial and gender subordination through notions of food, nourishment, and physical and emotional fulfillment.

The figure of Aunt Jemima was born in 1890 from a minstrel song, "Old Aunt Jemima," and she was portrayed in the advertisements by Nancy Green, a former slave from Kentucky. Chris Rutt, the managing editor of the *St. Joseph News-Press* in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Charles Underwood, his business partner, employed Green to act the representative face for the instant pancake and waffle mixes. Aunt Jemima's image continued in the early 20th century with a variety radio show of the same name and

⁹² Deck, Alice. 2001. "Now Then—Who Said Biscuits?" *The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1905-1953. Kitchen Culture in America*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 80.

in the 1950s and 1960s she embodied American ideals of family, wholesomeness, and carefree simplicity, particularly during the Cold War.⁹³

The 1940s saw the rise of another loyal, subservient black figure: Uncle Ben for the Uncle Ben's Converted Rice Company. The image of Uncle Ben built on 19th century images of minstrelsy of the "elderly, nonthreatening black man in American culture."⁹⁴

The authors state, "As was the case with Aunt Jemima, the Uncle Ben character was part of a general trend among American advertisers to use pickaninnies and black aunties and uncles in marketing campaigns."⁹⁵ Like his predecessors, Uncle Ben acted in service to whites, making life simpler through his easy-to-prepare instant rice. It was not until the early 2000s that Uncle Ben's image changed, when he "became" the CEO of the company.

These figures represent how the threat of blackness was countered through imagery of black subservience that beckoned to an antebellum past. Aunt Jemima, Rastus, and Uncle Ben were not only submissive and obedient figures, but also acted as representative of particular food items themselves. Therefore, the foods themselves were viewed as nourishing the physical appetites of those who consumed the pancakes, cream of wheat, and/or cereal.

⁹³ Behnken, Brian D. and Gregory D. Smithers. 2015. Marketing Discrimination. *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to the Frito Bandito* Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

⁹⁴ Behnken, Brian D. and Gregory D. Smithers. 2015. Marketing Discrimination. *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to the Frito Bandito* Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, p. 32.

⁹⁵ Behnken, Brian D. and Gregory D. Smithers. 2015. Marketing Discrimination. *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to the Frito Bandito* Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, p. 32.

Thieving Coons, Chicken, and Watermelon

In the late 19th century, representations of blacks as thieves and buffoons were associated with food objects, namely watermelon and fried chicken. William Black of *The Atlantic* argues that the trope of blacks liking watermelon was a response to recent black freedom. He states that after emancipation, newly freed slaves profited from watermelon sales, which provided a means for financial self-sufficiency and angered whites who were opposed to blacks' new freedom. "Free black people grew, ate, and sold watermelons, and in doing so made the fruit a symbol of their freedom. Southern whites, threatened by blacks' newfound freedom, responded by making the fruit a symbol of black people's perceived uncleanness, laziness, childishness, and unwanted public presence."⁹⁶ While watermelon had previously associated these qualities with Italian and Arab peasants, it was only after Emancipation that it came to take on a black racial connotation. Black sale and consumption of watermelons was viewed as a threat to whites' power. Imagery of blacks relishing watermelon was used to demonstrate how blacks were ill-equipped for their newfound freedom. This resulted in the watermelon construct in which blacks were viewed as childish, irresponsible figures whose primary preoccupation was the consumption of watermelon to satisfy their insatiable appetite.⁹⁷

During Reconstruction and Jim Crow, images of the blacks as watermelon-eating buffoons were common in an effort to infantilize and to demonstrate why blacks should not be freed from slavery. The figure of the singing, dancing, carefree coon, Jim Crow,

⁹⁶ Black, William. How Watermelons Became a Racist Trope. *The Atlantic*. December 8, 2014. Web. March 29, 2017.

⁹⁷ Black, William. How Watermelons Became a Racist Trope. *The Atlantic*. December 8, 2014. Web. March 29, 2017.

and dandy were tropes that imagined blacks as non-threatening figures.⁹⁸ “Coon songs” were one form of performance through which this occurred. James H. Dormon argues, “Virtually all ‘coons’ stole chicken and watermelons, of course; this was perhaps the single most enjoyable and profitable enterprise they shared. But the presumption is that they had also stolen whatever else they happened to possess.”⁹⁹ The relationship between the black body, watermelon and chickens was characterized by immoral, indecent, and deplorable behavior. It became justification for why blacks should be kept in subservient social positions and understood as always a potential threat. In addition, “coon cards” or racist postcards/trade cards were circulated in the mid-nineteenth century with images of blacks consuming watermelon as part of the caricature, exaggerated red, oversized lips, stark whites of eyes, and extremely dark skin.¹⁰⁰



Image 12: Watermelon Coon.

⁹⁸ Dormon, James H. 1988. Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks: The “Coon Song” Phenomenon in the Gilded Age. *American Quarterly* 40(4): 450-471.

⁹⁹ Dormon, James H. 1988. Shaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks: The “Coon Song” Phenomenon in the Gilded Age. *American Quarterly* 40(4): 450-471, p. 456.

¹⁰⁰ Johnson, Theodore. African Americans and the Watermelon Stereotype. *The Huffington Post*. April 12, 2013. Web. March 26, 2017.

Kyla Wazana Tompkins writes that nineteenth century trade postcards of blacks consuming watermelon represent how whites attempted to define black desire and consumption. She states, “The black mouth continues to serve as a proxy for the white mouth, for white *feeling*, but it also metonymizes the presence of the black consuming public...”¹⁰¹ Tompkins argues that the trade cards spoke to the racial anxieties and the racial ambivalence of whites: desire for and aggression toward the black body, recognizing the black body as consumer and consumed, constructing the black body as both racially and physically healthy and unhealthy.¹⁰²

The blackface minstrel performance was a site in which blacks were showcased as chicken and watermelon thieves. Eric Lott and Michael Rogin both point to how blackface minstrelsy was a contradictory, complex site in which whites engaged in racial fantasy through their performance. They argue that minstrelsy expressed racial desire to “try on” blackness as well as an aversion to it.¹⁰³ Lott calls minstrelsy “an encapsulation of the affective order of things in a society that racially ranked human beings. What the minstrel show did was capture an antebellum structure of racial feeling...”¹⁰⁴ Rogin argues that blackface allowed white immigrants who were trying to assimilate, such as Jews, the ability to showcase their whiteness, through the performance. In addition, it allowed the white working class to work through intragroup conflicts, to make fun to the

¹⁰¹ Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. 2012. “What’s De Use Talking ‘Bout Dem ‘Mendments?” *Racial Indigestion* New York, NY: New York University Press, p. 148.

¹⁰² Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. 2012. “What’s De Use Talking ‘Bout Dem ‘Mendments?” *Racial Indigestion* New York, NY: New York University Press.

¹⁰³ Lott, Eric. 2013. Introduction. *Love and Theft*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Rogin, Michael. Blackface, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice” *Critical Inquiry* 18(3): 417-453, p. 421.

¹⁰⁴ Lott, Eric. 2013. Introduction. *Love and Theft*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, p. 6.

middle and upper classes, and to advance economically as performers. As an ambiguous site, blackface was a form of rebellion amongst white, working class men.¹⁰⁵

The early 20th century also constructed blacks as chicken and watermelon thieves in silent films. Through an analysis of how early American cinema coincided with the Great Migration, Jacqueline Stewart argues that silent films were a complex and contradictory site in which blacks were seen and therefore, represented, but also where blacks protested problematic and racist imagery. In doing so, blacks disrupted white hegemonic silent film formations. Stewart also argues that the inclusion of blacks in cinema speaks to how whites would “see and recognize blackness—and thereby control and contain it—at a moment when African Americans were vocally and visibly challenging their prescribed role in American society.”¹⁰⁶ Silent film was an ambiguous space in which power was both enacted and subverted.

The watermelon-eating genre of the late 19th and early 20th century silent films was presented as authentic behavior of blacks who were animalistic and beckoned a desire for previous life on the plantation. Silent films also provided whites with an outlet to reinscribe racialized notions that were already popularized and a voyeuristic mode of surveillance. In particular, blacks were represented as engaging in theft of chicken and watermelon when not being surveilled by whites, understood as one of the many insidious effects of the end of slavery. In fact, the stereotype was so pervasive that often blacks were not shown engaging in the act of stealing, but found enjoying the spoils of

¹⁰⁵ Roediger, David. 2007. *White Skins, Black Masks: Minstrelsy and White Working Class Formation Before the Civil War* *The Wages of Whiteness* New York, NY: Verso.

¹⁰⁶ Stewart, Jacqueline. 2005. *Mixed Colors: Riddles of Blackness in Preclassical Cinema. Migrating to the Movies*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, p. 50.

their thievery, consuming chicken and watermelon that was assumed to have been stolen from a white person. However, their immoral behavior did not go unpunished, as they were often caught or punished for their bad behavior in these films.¹⁰⁷

My interest is specifically related to the way in which watermelon and chicken came to stand in as the quintessential black foods. Their pervasiveness in minstrel performances was so extreme that even today, more than a century later, watermelon and fried chicken continue to be racialized as black foods in such a way as to take on a life of their own (discussed in more detail below). In particular, watermelon and fried chicken act as a referent for blackness in that they are the evidence of the theft, immorality, and pathology of black bodies. These foods became cognitively and affectively associated with pathological blackness. In this way, food is not just a marker of blackness, but watermelon and fried chicken become inherently tied to blackness' pathology, even when the bodies and the food are not visually depicted together.

The association between blacks and watermelon continues to contemporary instances, particularly in relation to the election of the nation's first black president, Barack Obama. In 2009 the then-mayor of Los Alamitos, Dean Grose, in Orange County, California emailed an illustration to businesswoman and city volunteer Keyanus Price in an email titled "No Easter Egg Hunt This Year."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Stewart, Jacqueline. 2005. *Mixed Colors: Riddles of Blackness in Preclassical Cinema. Migrating to the Movies*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

¹⁰⁸ CBSNEWS. Mayor Hits Rough Patch Over Watermelon Pic. *CBSNews.com*. February 29, 2009. Web. March 30, 2017.



The image that was sent to Keyanus Price from Mayor Dean Grose's personal e-mail account. /
www.OCREGISTER.COM

Image 13. Dean Grose's "No Easter Egg Hunt This Year."¹⁰⁹

The image depicts a large watermelon patch in front of the White House. The bright green fruit stands out the forefront of the picture, particular as its color contrast with the red flowers and white structure. While the White House usually stands out as vast and large in most images of the President's home, in this image, the watermelon patch takes up as much space as does the White House, as the fruit grows abundantly and excessively.

In 2014, when Obama was elected to his second term as President, *Boston Herald* cartoonist Jerry Holbert also drew familiar tropes of the black body and watermelon consumption. The cartoon, titled "White House Invader Got Farther Than Originally Thought," was published in the newspaper in September of 2014.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Image obtained from www.cbsnews.com on March 30, 2017.

¹¹⁰ Taibi, Catherine. Newspaper Apologizes for Offensive Obama Cartoon, But Keeps It Up Anyway. *The Huffington Post*. October 1, 2014. Web. March 30, 2017.



Image 14. “White House Invader Got Farther Than Originally Thought.”¹¹¹

The cartoon makes fun of Omar Gonzalez, a man who had broken into the White House on September 19, 2014 and who was caught and arrested by federal authorities.¹¹² In the cartoon, the intruder has made it all the way into the President’s personal bathroom and bathes in the tub as Barack Obama brushes his teeth. While cleansing himself in a bubbly, sudsy bath, the intruder asks Obama gleefully, “Have you tried the watermelon flavored toothpaste?” Obama, brushing his teeth and holding a toothpaste bottle while wearing striped pajamas, appears shocked and dismayed, presumably at the intruder’s presence as well as his intimate knowledge of the toothpaste flavor on the premises. While cartoonist Holbert claimed that he was not drawing on historical racialized depictions of watermelons and black bodies, rather a result of a toothpaste flavor his son’s girlfriend had left at his house, this cartoon plays upon those tropes as watermelon is naturalized in its association with the first black president.

¹¹¹ Image obtained from www.huffingtonpost.com on March 30, 2017.

¹¹² White House intruder ‘made it to East Room.’ BBC News. *BBC*. September 30, 2014. Web. March 30, 2017.

The February 2010 Compton Cookout was a watershed moment on the campus of the University of California, San Diego and became the impetus for widespread university mobilization because of the performance of blackface minstrelsy at a fraternity party. A racially-themed party thrown by campus fraternity Delta Sigma Phi off university grounds, the Compton Cookout encouraged its participants to engage in blackface minstrelsy and cultural appropriation of black urban cultural aesthetics. The Facebook invitation requested that participants mock and mimic what is imagined to be black urban attire, language, and behavior for men and women.

In particular, the final section of the Facebook “invitation” to the Compton Cookout signaled the available foods including: “40’s, Kegs of Natty, that purple drank—which consists of sugar, water and the color purple, chicken, coolade, and of course watermelon.” These foods became a distinct and significant marker of racial-gendered difference. Sugary beverages, alcoholic drinks, fried chicken, and watermelon—foods historically perceived as abject and stereotypical black foods—are highlighted in the invitation as quintessential black urban foods. The representation of these foods cannot be disentangled from the way in which the “invitation” named its representation of black urban culture a “monstrosity”—something that was both appropriated and eschewed by partygoers. The trope of blacks consuming watermelon is changed from the plantation via the minstrel show to the black urban environment through a university fraternity party. That the event was entitled a “cookout” demonstrates how tropes of blacks consuming watermelon continue today but in innovative forms.



Image 15. University of California, San Diego: Compton Cookout.

While the fraternity that hosted the Compton Cookout was comprised primarily of Asian students, the event demonstrates how the white gaze of black pathology through consumption of improper foods remains current and constructs notions of bodies, place, and space. The event's representative foods are associated with Compton, California, once largely a working class black region, but, now primarily a working class Latinx city.¹¹³ Compton's history and notoriety as a working class community of color associated with gangs, drugs, violence, and with limited economic resources is correlated with the limited availability of fresh fruits and vegetables and the overabundance of sugary, high caloric, fried and fast foods.¹¹⁴ The UCSD Compton Cookout forces us to contend with the ways in which older discourses about blacks' improper consumption continue to be perpetuated.

¹¹³ "Quick Facts Compton City, California." *United States Census Bureau*. U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Web. May 20, 2016.

¹¹⁴ Jennings, Angel. "Compton gets taste of healthier eating with new farmers market." *Los Angeles Times* September 14, 2013. Web. May 23, 2016; Paulas, Rick. "Where are L.A.'s Food Deserts?" *KCET KCETLink Media Group*. March 15, 2013. Web. May 23, 2016.

Black bodies and pathological consumption

More contemporary advertising images use food to produce racialized notions of blacks as docile. In *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to the Frito Bandito*, authors Brian D. Behnken and Gregory D. Smithers discuss racialized representations in advertising, among other forms of popular culture and mass media. In the 1930s, Maxwell House coffee used an image of a waiter in blackface to sell its coffee, quoting the commercial, “Golly, Mis’ Maria, folks jus’ can’t help havin’ a friendly feelin’ for dis heah coffee.”¹¹⁵



Image 16. Sanka Advertisement.¹¹⁶

In the ad, two “black” waiters pour coffee for a seated white woman. Their blackface makeup—black skin, red lips, and white teeth—stands in stark contrast to their colorful shirts and ties and white aprons. The waiters smile as they prepare coffee for their

¹¹⁵ Behnken, Brian D. and Gregory D. Smithers. 2015. Marketing Discrimination. *Racism in American Popular Media: From Aunt Jemima to the Frito Bandito* Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, p. 27.

¹¹⁶ Image obtained from Buzz Feed: “20 of the most racist vintage ads” July 12, 2013.

customer, who smiles at them in turn. This advertisement again beckons an antebellum past where blacks were imagined to be happy in subservient, docile positions, nourishing whites through food.

A 1950s ad for Virginia Gentleman and Fairfax County Bourbon also demonstrates nostalgia for colonial America. In the advertisement, two white men dressed in 18th century clothing including waistcoats and breeches. A black male servant holds a tray with two glasses filled with bourbon and a bottle of bourbon as well.



Image 17. Virginia Gentleman and Fairfax County.¹¹⁷

This ad beckons to colonial United States, in which blacks were servants for whites and properly in their place.

¹¹⁷ Some vintage cultural appropriation. *Found in Mom's Basement*. February 13, 2017. Web. April 21, 2017.

A 1976 advertisement for McDonald's uses linguistic constructions to racialize black bodies in relation to food. In the ad, a black family sits in a McDonald's booth, comprised of a mother, a father and two sons. The family smiles as the younger son, approximately age five or six, playfully leans into the next booth, where a black man holding a hamburger and drink, smiles at the young boy. The text reads, "Do your dinnertimin' at McDonald's. When you're looking for a different place to have dinner, check out McDonald's. You don't have to get dressed up, there's no tipping and the kids love it. You can relax and get down with good food that won't keep you waitin'. Dinnertimin' or anytimin', going out is easy at McDonald's. We do it all for you."



Image 18. Dinnertimin' at McDonald's.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Image obtained April 21, 2017 from Buzz Feed: "20 of the most racist vintage ads" July 12, 2013

In this ad, the family appears wholesome and happy, an early rendition of the soon-to-be Cosby type of family. The ad caters to the black family by trying to appeal to a sense of black culture through the southern-inspired language. In particular, the phrases “you don’t have to get dressed up” and “there’s no tipping” rely on tropes of blacks as informal, unable to act appropriately in formal settings, and cheap tippers, constructions intended to pathologize black bodies.

The food that is probably most associated with blacks and poor health is soul food. “Soul food,” a term coined in the 1960s, is rooted in the southern cooking of slaves during U.S. chattel slavery.¹¹⁹ As scholars from various disciplines have demonstrated, African chattel slaves had very limited options for food and food was closely regulated. White slave owners restricted slaves from using ingredients that were considered staples in plantation households, such as salt, pepper, yeast, and cheese, as well as luxury items, including almonds, raisins, currants, citrons, cinnamon, and cloves.¹²⁰ Whites kept for themselves the cuts of meat that were considered most desirable and had slave chefs prepare dishes for slaves masters and their families such as roasts, steaks, and pork chops. Fieldworker slaves were allowed to use the parts that whites discarded and considered undesirable, such as chitterlings (chitlins) and ham hocks, and “slaves had to chop what

¹¹⁹ Whit, William C. 2007. “Soul Food as Cultural Creation.” *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture* ed. Anne L. Bower. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

¹²⁰ Yentsch, Anne. 2007. “Excavating the South’s African American Foodways.” *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture*. Ed. Anne L. Bower. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

meat they had into small pieces and use it in stews, soups, or other mixed dishes.”¹²¹

Whereas white slave masters discarded particular parts of the animals, slaves ate the pig in its entirety, including stomach, ears, feet, brains, back fat, as well as other parts.¹²²

Thus, slaves were forced to be creative in their meal preparation, as what is now known as “soul food” was a combination of traditional foods and cooking techniques from African foods and spices, Native American foods and spices, and leftover foods considered inedible to whites.

Today, typical soul food menu items include: “entrees (fried chicken, fried catfish, or chitlins), sides (black-eyed peas, greens, candied yams, and macaroni and cheese), cornbread to sop it up; hot sauce to spice it up; Kool-Aid to wash it down; and a sweet finish with a dessert plate of banana pudding, peach cobbler, pound cake, and sweet potato pie.”¹²³ Other typical dishes include fried pork chops, grits, okra, rice and sweet tea.

While it demonstrates slaves’ ingenuity and creativity, soul food was not always nutritious. Soul food’s legacies have persisted in its construction as unhealthy, particularly to members of the Nation of Islam in the 1960s and 1970s. In his book *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine*, Adrian Miller argues that soul food continues to be thought of as an unhealthy meal in an advertisement for the TBS show

¹²¹ Whit, William C. 2007. “Soul Food as Cultural Creation.” *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture* ed. Anne L. Bower. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, p. 51.

¹²² Whit, William C. 2007. “Soul Food as Cultural Creation.” *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture* ed. Anne L. Bower. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

¹²³ Miller, Adrian. 2013. What is Soul Food? *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine, One Plate at a Time*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, p. 4.

Are We There Yet? Soul food is referenced as “The number two cause of death of black men over forty!”¹²⁴ Miller also cites a *New York Times* study completed in the 1990s in which soul food and Mexican food were tied for second place as the most unhealthy food participants had come across. Miller describes soul food as connected to the following themes: “the centrality of pork, the low social status of blacks, racial stigma, resourcefulness, ingenuity, and communal spirit.”¹²⁵

Visual representations, in particular, depict soul food’s potentially debilitating effects, including the 1997 film *Soul Food*, in which the overweight matriarch of the family who cooks lavish soul food-filled family dinners on Sundays suffers from type 2 diabetes (presumably a result of her meals) and ultimately must have a leg amputated, suffers a stroke, and dies. Similarly, an episode of the comic strip turned animated television series *The Boondocks* offers a satirical analysis of the relationship between soul food, blackness, health and death that engages soul food’s pathological legacy. In the episode entitled “The Itis,”¹²⁶ the opening of a soul food restaurant in a contemporary setting initially offers a promising future for the community and for the black all-male family on which the series centers. As the episode goes on, however, the restaurant, also named The Itis, becomes a moral and financial blight on the community and begins to result in poor health, including obesity, heart attacks, and death and must be shut down.

¹²⁴ Miller, Adrian. 2013. What is Soul Food? *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine, One Plate at a Time*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

¹²⁵ Miller, Adrian. 2013. What is Soul Food? *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine, One Plate at a Time*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, p. 10.

¹²⁶ The Itis. *Boondocks*. YouTube. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. November 13, 2013. Web. April 1, 2017.

Soul food, in this episode, damages the body and the community, physically and metaphorically. Through this consumption of black foods, the characters produce their own bodies as ones marked for death.

“The Itis” conceptualizes soul food within the context of trans-Atlantic chattel slavery. The show is centered around the aptly-named Freeman family: Huey, the ten-year old leftist revolutionary protagonist; Riley, Huey’s eight-year old wanna-be gangster brother; and Granddad, the boys’ grandfather, who has moved the children from the South Side of Chicago to the fictitious Chicago suburb of Woodcrest. The satirical show plays with constructions of racial difference, stereotypes, and culture clash as the Freeman’s are one of the few black families in the predominantly white Chicago suburb. In this 2006 episode,¹²⁷ Granddad has been offered the position of chef at a restaurant under the ownership of white entrepreneur, Ed Wuncler. Granddad this restaurant calls The Itis. The restaurant’s name foreshadows future events, as the “the itis” is short for “niggeritis” or the notion that after a large, filling meal, blacks feel a sense of fatigue and have the desire to sleep. Throughout the episode, Huey debates with Granddad about soul food, which Granddad plans to serve at The Itis. Upon seeing the menu filled with soul food dishes for the restaurant for which Granddad will be the chef, including “sausage and waffle and fried chicken breakfast lasagna” and “bacon-wrapped chitlin stuffed catfish,” Huey exclaims, “Granddad, you can’t serve this. It’ll cause...death.”¹²⁸ Granddad accuses Huey of being a “white boy” for his rejection of soul food. At every opportunity, Huey tries to convince Granddad and others, including restaurant servers

¹²⁷ Retrieved April 18, 2013 from <http://www.boondockstv.com>

¹²⁸ Retrieved April 18, 2013 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ke9HIFyXSy0> (6:28-6:36)

and patrons, that soul food will kill them. Nonetheless, with the support of a local, money hungry white entrepreneur, The Itis opens successfully in the Woodcrest community with the purchase of seventeen pigs, seventy-five pounds of butter and one and half tons of grease. The restaurant becomes an immediate hit, filled with patrons from opening to closing. Lines form outside of the door and it is featured in front-page stories from local newspapers. The Itis innovatively provides beds for guests to sleep in, since they go into “the itis” after eating their meal and need to take a nap. As the episode continues, however, The Itis ultimately leads to the destruction of the Woodcrest community.



Image 19. Riley eating The Luther.

The Itis’ success results in the devastation of the mostly white, middle class, suburban community-- physically, economically, morally-- through the consumption of soul food. The restaurant’s patrons all become obese and slovenly homeless addicts, lose their work ethic, lose their jobs, and resort to criminality, violence, and begging on the street, not to survive, but in order to consume more of the addictive food. For instance, due to the heavily fried and high caloric foods, guests oversleep in the beds provided by The Itis, and lose their jobs, leading to lives of crime and poverty. Granddad and Ed

Wuncler decide to implement the use of hydraulics in the bed, in order to forcibly remove patrons and to make space for waiting guests. One month after The Itis' opening, the park across the street from the restaurant, Meadowlark Park, has its first mugging. The mugger attempts to run off, but after several feet, falls to the ground, panting, presumably as a result of his obesity from the overconsumption of soul food. The victim of the mugging calls the police, who take three hours to respond. Huey sums up the effects of The Itis on the Woodcrest community: "This was officially a bad neighborhood." Consuming abject black food, then, literally produces decay and pathology for both the individual body and for the community at large. However, it is not just the consumption of soul food that ruins the community. The area becomes a "bad neighborhood" as is demonstrated by Huey's observation that the restaurant, once situated between a day spa and coffee shop, is now between a Foot Locker and a liquor store. The success of black food, then, results in bodily and community decay.

The episode forefronts a white woman who falls victim to soul food's addiction. When we first meet Janet in the episode, she is thin, attractive, and young (Image 20). She flirts with Granddad, suggestively licking her lips while complimenting his food stating, "I'm sure that you'll be seeing a lot more of me."¹²⁹ She is presented as both sexually desirable and sexually available to Granddad, which is linked to her desire for soul/black food. Janet becomes addicted to soul food and shows up at the restaurant as Granddad is closing it one night. She implores Granddad for the restaurant's most popular meal, The Luther: a four pound burger with grilled cheese, fried onions, five

¹²⁹ Retrieved April 18, 2013 from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ke9HIFyXSyo> (10:00-10:40)

strips of bacon in between two Krispy Kreme doughnuts. She has become an unrecognizable monstrosity (obese, sweaty, beggar, addict, unkempt, slovenly, undesirable) by which even Granddad is repulsed, evidenced in Image 21. When Granddad refuses, as he is both disgusted and afraid of what Janet has become, she runs off, wailing into the night, appearing and sounding like an injured animal. Janet's overconsumption of soul food- and by extension blackness- damages the integrity of her body as a white woman. She is now an abject figure, her white femininity threatened by the contagion that is soul food.



Image 20. Janet before The Luther.



Image 21. Janet after The Luther.

As scholars of U.S. empire, nation, and colonialism have argued, the nation is often represented as and by the white woman. Thus, this scene might suggest that not only is Janet's body, as blond, blue-eyed white woman, threatened by soul food, but that

the nation is also threatened by the contagion of blackness. At the end of the episode, Janet is able to recuperate her position as white woman by undergoing two liposuction treatments and one emergency gastrointestinal surgery. She again becomes thin, attractive, and desirable. However, her stability as white woman, and the stability of the nation, continue to be threatened by her close relationship to blackness. At the end of the episode, Janet requests a final Luther burger and has a heart attack. Audience members never learn whether Janet survives, suggesting that the nation in its privileging of whiteness must always be vigilant regarding the threat of blackness.

The episode also indexes the irony that Mexican and Mexican laborers are often responsible for food preparation in restaurants, but are simultaneously excluded from food management and production decisions and whose culinary contributions and knowledge are made invisible. During the moment of the episode when soul food is explicitly considered in relation to New World chattel slavery, again we hear about soul food- and black culture by extension- as “destructive” in Huey’s phrasing. In a conversation between Huey, Granddad and Chico, it is Chico, a Mexican American laborer who works in the kitchen, who enlightens Huey and Granddad with a history of soul food’s origins. In this scene, the differential positioning of racial groups is highlighted. While Chico is apparently of a lower socio-economic class than Granddad, it is he who is more knowledgeable about soul food’s history.

I read this moment as pointing to the complex race relations between Mexicans and blacks in the U.S. Sandy Brown and Christy Getz argue that agricultural labor, primarily Mexican and Mexican American labor, is devalued in the United States. While Mexican and Mexican Americans make up most of the underpaid class in the food

industries, as agricultural laborers, cooks, bussers, and dishwashers, they are also the group that is least likely to have access to and enjoy the fruits of their labor, literally and figuratively.¹³⁰ In this episode, many of the kitchen staff are undocumented Mexican workers who had previously worked at the health food restaurant, but are kept as staff once *The Itis* opens, due to their cheap labor. The labor of Mexicans is abstracted, as it produces *both* the food for the health food restaurant *and* the “unhealthy” soul food to be distributed to the middle class white suburb. Additionally, the use of hydraulics in the beds also recognizes Mexican cultural presence in the production and consumption of suburban foods. This moment indexes broader U.S. debates about Mexican and Mexican American presence, culture, immigration, labor exploitation, and educational access. Moreover, this episode points to the ways in which Mexicans and blacks are positioned differently within U.S. racial formations and that the racialization of one group is always constituted through the racialization of other Others.

This clip also points to the lack of African American women in the episode. It is the black and Mexican men who come to share knowledge about soul food and its value. In other words, blackness and soul food are reserved for the space of the masculine. In the late 1960s, some Black Power proponents, such as LeRoi Jones, called for an embracing of soul food as an expression of cultural pride resulting from racial oppression. Simultaneously, however, soul food had many opponents, including Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad and comedian and social activist Dick Gregory, who considered soul food’s consumption racial genocide. In particular, soul food’s detractors

¹³⁰ Brown, Sandy and Christy Getz. 2011. Farmworker Food Insecurity and the Production of Hunger in California. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

associated it with the black slave mother, according to food and cultural studies scholar Doris Witt. This was partly because black women were thought to be the primary bodies creating and making soul food during chattel slavery, but also because soul food as the slave diet was conceptualized as impure and filthy by particular hypermasculine black nationalist groups, who also associated impurity and filth with lower class black maternity in particular.¹³¹

This 1960s time period overlaps with sociologist E. Franklin Frazier's articulations of black women's "strength" and "dominance" as pathological and castrating to black men.¹³² Recalling that context, Huey is seen reading Elijah Muhammad's *How to Eat to Live*, a two-part series on healthy eating for black communities that denounces soul food. It is noteworthy, then, that in the episode "The Itis," no black women are present in the creation, preparation, or even conceptualization of soul food or the restaurant's menu. The only moment when a black woman appears on the show is a reference to the 1997 film *Soul Food*. Again, we see the consumption of soul food represented as deadly and it is the black woman here who is responsible for producing her own body as one marked for death. "The Itis" then moves from the site of the personal (Big Momma) to the site of the public (the town of Woodcrest) as pathological in its interrogation of soul food.

This episode of *The Boondocks* illustrates how food itself becomes discursively marked as damaging to both the physical and communal body. More than simply

¹³¹ Witt, Doris. " 'Eating Chitterlings Is Like Going Slumming': Soul Food and Its Discontents." *Black Hunger*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999.

¹³² Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17(2): 64-81. 1987.

evidence of unequal food access between slaves and whites, soul food becomes a metaphor for pathology more broadly. Although soul food could be perceived as evidence of the morbidity of slavery as an institution, it is more often associated with the pathology of the black body and improper consumption. As a signifier of poor health, soul food illustrates how food is a site of racialization, particularly in terms of notions of health, pathology, and premature death.

Imperialism and Mexican Consumption

The history of how Mexicans and Mexican Americans are racialized in relation to foodways and consumption is shaped by U.S. imperialist discourses, ideologies and images. The construction of the dirty “beaner”¹³³ and “greaser” as pejoratives illustrates how food has been a site of racialization to construct Mexicans and Mexican Americans as primitive, dirty, and pathological. In the following section, I discuss three particular food sites in which Mexican food was constructed as unhealthy and nutritionally deficient: Americanization programs, the famous Chili Queens of San Antonio and Southwest and Tex-Mex foods. Within these spaces, foods and foodways from south of the border were imagined as unhealthy through the white gaze. Food reformers, members of the white and Mexican middle classes, political officials, health organizations, and others associated what they believed to be primitive food with Mexican Americans as uncivilized, immoral, hypersexual women, and dangerous threats. Building on Fanon’s discussion on the white gaze, I argue that images of Mexican and Mexican American

¹³³ Stavans, Ilan. On Becoming a ‘Beaner’: A Mexican American Story. *Forward* October 21, 2009. Web. May 13, 2017; Adam M. Croom. 2014. Spanish Slurs and Stereotypes for Mexican-Americans in the USA: A context sensitive account of derogation and appropriation. *Sociocultural Pragmatics* 2(2): 145-179.

food and foodways acknowledged these groups as largely deficient through visual productions and food-related imagery.

Making the Mexican American: Unhealthy Representations in Film and Home Economics Programs

Arnoldo de León argues that upon coming into contact with Mexicans in Texas in the mid-1800s, white settlers engaged in civilizing missions through notions of manifest destiny. He states that Americans moving into the West “felt a compelling need to control all that was beastly—sexuality, vice, nature, and colored peoples. Order and discipline had to be rescued from the wilds in the name of civilization and Christianity.”¹³⁴ The goal was to Americanize Tejanos and control the savage within. Prior to the 1845 annexation of Texas, Anglo settlers viewed Mexicans as primitive, savage, and uncivilized. In addition, Tejanos were seen as a threat to white civilization. In that era, Anglos characterized Mexicans as racially impure, heathen (Catholic), morally defective, overly sensuous women, and sexually perverse men.¹³⁵ These understandings extended to characterizations of Mexican and Mexican American foods and foodways.

The origin of the use of the term “greaser” as a pejorative for Mexicans is unclear. de León argues that it is thought to have resulted from the associations between Mexican skin tone and the color of grease or possibly because their appearance was thought to be

¹³⁴ de León, Arnoldo. 1983. *Initial Contacts: Redeeming Texas from Mexicans, 1821-1836. They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, p. 1.

¹³⁵ de León, Arnoldo. 1983. *Initial Contacts: Redeeming Texas from Mexicans, 1821-1836. They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

“filthy, greasy.”¹³⁶ Others argue that the term originated because Mexicans greased their backs when unloading cargo or from notions of Mexicans as dirty with “unwashed, greasy black hair.”¹³⁷ This association was materialized in legal policy in the 1855 California Vagrancy Act, also known as the Greaser Act, which was an anti-loitering law that targeted Mexicans. Steven W. Bender argues, “Targeting the supposed ‘idle Mexican,’ this anti-loitering law was the precursor to modern laws directed at loitering, gang activity, and other apparently race-neutral offenses that in practice are often used to justify interrogatory stops of persons of color.”¹³⁸ In this way grease (a food item) was used to racialize Mexicans through law.

The greaser trope of the dishonest, conniving, corrupt, incompetent, and sleazy bandit, was made famous through silent Hollywood motion picture films. As Oscar Martinez argues, the greaser figure was in a series of early 19th century American films, including *The Greaser’s Gauntlet* (1908), *Ah Sing and the Greaser* (1910), *Tony and the Greaser* (1911), *The Greaser and the Weakling* (1912), and *The Girl and the Greaser* (1914) to name a few.¹³⁹ These images became troublesome to the nation of Mexico, in fact, which banned films that presented unflattering greaser and other stereotypical

¹³⁶ de León, Arnoldo. 1983. Niggers, Redskins, and Greasers. *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

¹³⁷ Bender, Steven. W. Preface. *Greasers and Gringos: Latinos, Law and the American Imagination*. New York, NY: NYU Press, p. xiii.

¹³⁸ Bender, Steven. W. Preface. *Greasers and Gringos: Latinos, Law and the American Imagination*. New York, NY: NYU Press, p. xiii.

¹³⁹ Martinez, Oscar. 2001. The Legacy of Oppression. *Mexican-origin People in the United States: A Topical History*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, p. 58.

Mexican characters in their films from 1922 to 1925.¹⁴⁰ Understandings of Mexicans as dirty and diseased was not only present in early 20th century film representations, but also in representations of food itself.



Image 22. *The Greaser and the Gauntlet*.

Like soul food, Mexican food is an amalgamation of a variety of foods, including foods indigenous to the Americas, such as beans, tomatoes, and corn, alongside the incorporation of European foods, particularly meat and wheat. Beans, tortillas and chiles were foundational to Mexican cuisine. The assumed inferiority of Mexicans and Mexican Americans resulted in the construction of their foods as also inferior, unhealthy, lacking in sufficient nutrients, overly spiced, and exotic. In turn, these food constructions came to stand in for ideological constructions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

Americanization efforts linked the consumption of Mexican foods with primitiveness, poor health, and morbidity. George Sanchez discusses Americanization programs geared toward U.S. Mexicans in Los Angeles from the late 1800s to the mid 1900s. In the early 1900s, President Johnson established the Commission on Immigration

¹⁴⁰ Delpar, Helen. 2002 Goodbye to the “Greaser.” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 12(1): 34-41.

and Housing, an organization that established a number of Americanization programs. The programs directed at Mexican American were primarily developed after World War I. Mexicans were thought to be assimilable, unlike the Chinese and Japanese. In particular, Mexican women were targeted for changes in diet and health. The foods that were the target of these programs were fried foods, rice and beans, and tortillas. Instead, they were encouraged to eat bread and lettuce and to use broiling as their primary method of cooking. The consumption of traditional Mexican food was associated with crime, laziness, and immorality. As George Sanchez argues, “Within the rubric of Americanization efforts, food and diet management became yet another tool in a system of social control intended to construct a well-behaved, productive citizenry... Teaching immigrant women proper food values became a route to keep the head of the family out of jail and the rest of the family off charity.”¹⁴¹

In *Americanization Through Homemaking* (1929), Pearl Idelia Ellis from the Department of Americanization and Homecooking of the Covina City Schools in Los Angeles attempted to assimilate Mexican American students and to reduce the amount of racism to which they were exposed by training them to cook and consume an American diet. She argued that the consumption of a traditional Mexican diet left the students malnourished, which she surmised would lead to criminal activity. She encouraged Mexican American female students to learn to cook American dishes. “Her pupils were taught to replace flavorful salsa and mole with a dull white sauce made of flour, milk, and fat. Traditional dishes such as the rich beef tripe stew of *menudo* were to be replaced by

¹⁴¹ Sanchez, George. 1993. Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant. *Becoming Mexican-American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, p. 102.

oyster, potato or celery soups. School lunches should consist of lettuce or cheese sandwiches made on bread and not tortillas...In her imagination, Mexican foods were not only unhealthy but criminal, making those who consumed them permanent pariahs.”¹⁴² In order for Mexicans to obtain full citizenship into American society, traditional Mexican diets had to be disavowed and replaced with Anglo American meals and foodstuffs.

In 1950s New Mexico, Edith M. Lantz who was a home economist working for the New Mexico Agriculture Extension Service (NMAES), a government health organization, argued that tortillas were nutritionally deficient and that adding nonfat dry milk would add calcium and protein intake, thereby bettering the diets of Mexicans in New Mexico. Monica Perales argues that home economics programs produced through the NMAES were not solely assimilating programs, but also “unwittingly privileged Hispana food knowledge and reinforced the nutritional and cultural value of New Mexican regional foods.”¹⁴³ In this way, the organization engaged in Americanization projects through the incorporation of Mexican culinary knowledge. While the goal of the organization was to assimilate and Americanize, it also emphasized particular local foods and food practices. For example, the consumption of the pinto bean was heralded in the 1918 circular *Pinto Bean* in an effort to encourage decreased meat consumption as a result of the war. Pinto beans, purslane and lamb’s quarters were emphasized for their nutritional value to both Mexican New Mexicans and Anglo New Mexicans. In addition,

¹⁴² Wallach, Jennifer Jensen. 2013. Chapter 7: Food Habits and Racial Thinking. *How America Eats*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

¹⁴³ Perales, Monica. 2016. The “New Mexican Way”: The New Mexico Agricultural Extension Agency, Hispanas, and Making a Regional Cuisine in *Latin@s’ Presence in the Food Industry* Lexington Eds. Meredith E. Abarca and Consuelo Carr Salas AR: University of Arkansas Press, p. 42.

foodways of New Mexicans in terms of drying meats and fruits were also heralded as a useful method. The NMAES' work proves that Americanization programs did not solely disavow Mexican culinary histories in their attempts at assimilation. Nonetheless, their programs used local women's knowledge in order to frame Anglos as the experts on nutritional health, food safety, and proper consumption.

Chile Queens and Health

Southwestern food was a particular site of the racialization of food through Tex-Mex foods. Tex-Mex foods, a fusion of Mexican and U.S. foods, have been incorporated by U.S. Anglo culture in such a way that pathologizes Mexican people, but uses this pathology as the basis for exploitation and appropriation. Norma Cardenas argues that Tex Mex food is associated with primitive traits that are then extended to Mexican people broadly.¹⁴⁴ Bentley asserts that Southwestern food has become mainstream because it beckons to a "romantic, sanitized version of the American Southwest" primarily through the chile. She states, "The chile pepper evokes nostalgic, half-fantasy images of slower, simpler, less cluttered time, evoking a Western spirit that nicely complements the idealized images Americans hold about the West."¹⁴⁵ While histories and experiences of indigenous, Mexican and Mexican American peoples are obfuscated, the chile is heralded as an icon of a happier, better past. The act of making Southwestern food mainstream while excluding Mexican bodies is manifested in discrimination against through federal policies such as the 1960s Bracero Program, the 1994 North American Free Trade

¹⁴⁴ There's more to Tex Mex than meets the palate. The Center for Humanities Newsletter. Oregon State University. Spring 2012. Web. May 11, 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Bentley, Amy. 2004. From Culinary Other to Mainstream America: Meanings and Uses in Southwestern Cuisine in *Culinary Tourism* Ed. Lucy Long. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, p. 214.

Agreement, California's Proposition 187 which denied social services to undocumented immigrants, and proposed English-only state measures suggest a sanitized version of Mexican and Mexican inclusion.

Tex-Mex dishes were based on norteño cuisine, or foods from Northern Mexico. Flour tortillas and beef distinguished norteño cuisine from food from other parts of Mexico, as did the larger portions and less spicy seasonings, influenced by the need to appeal to Anglo consumers.¹⁴⁶ Tex Mex dishes are a hybrid of Native American, African American, Spanish, Anglo, Mexican, and Tejano culinary histories.¹⁴⁷ One of the most well-known Tex Mex dishes is chili con carne, believed to have originated in the early 1800s and was primarily comprised of beef, oregano, red chili and cumin. In the 1880s, a group of local San Antonio Mexican women began selling the regional specialty of chili (the English spelling of "chile") con carne to locals and white American tourists in the outdoor plaza. They were known as the "chili queens" and became a staple in the San Antonio plaza for over 50 years.¹⁴⁸ They cooked the dish in large clay pots and reheated it over wood fires in open air plazas from morning until dusk.¹⁴⁹ They sold their chili in San Antonio's spaces of social interaction, including Military Plaza, the Municipal

¹⁴⁶ Wallach, Jennifer Jensen. 2013. Chapter 7: Food Habits and Racial Thinking. *How America Eats*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

¹⁴⁷ Cárdenas, Norma L. 2016. Queering the Chili Queens: Culinary Citizenship through Food Consciousness in the New Borderlands in *Latin@s' Presence in the Food Industry* Eds. Meredith E. Abarca and Consuelo Carr Salas. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press.

¹⁴⁸ Wallach, Jennifer Jensen. 2013. Chapter 7: Food Habits and Racial Thinking. *How America Eats*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

¹⁴⁹ Cárdenas, Norma L. 2016. Queering the Chili Queens: Culinary Citizenship through Food Consciousness in the New Borderlands in *Latin@s' Presence in the Food Industry* Eds. Meredith E. Abarca and Consuelo Carr Salas. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press.

Market House Square, Haymarket Plaza, and Milam Park.¹⁵⁰ These spaces saw the mixture of theatrical groups, musical venues, tourists, business persons and were sites of political and social interactions. Racist constructions of Mexican women as sexually available and servile were part of the interest of white men to the chili queens. In addition, they were constructed as “fiery,” “spicy,” and “dangerous.”¹⁵¹ Indeed, Cárdenas argues the contemporary “hot tamale” construction, “a reference for ‘hot-blooded, volatile, and sexually promiscuous,’” is synonymous with the Chili Queens for their supposed spicy food and personalities. They were racialized and gendered as sexually desirable and available, but also potentially dangerous. Jennifer Jensen Wallach argues that the chili queens may have exploited these sexist and racist stereotypes in order to continue their successful business enterprise and support their families.¹⁵²

In the early 1900s, health reformers argued that the open air nature of the chili queens’ business was a threat to health safety standards. Pilcher states that both Anglo progressive reformers and Mexican urban reformers wanted to change San Antonio from a colonial city to an efficient, modern, commercial city. As new immigrants entered San Antonio around the turn of the century, fears about the spread of disease swelled. Street vendors were a symbol of poor health to the San Antonio Mexican middle class as well as the government officials. Pilcher asserts, “Still living in jacales with dirt floors, the vast majority of West Side [San Antonio] residents had no running water or indoor plumbing.

¹⁵⁰ Jennings, Frank W. Popular Chili Queens Graced San Antonio Plazas. *Journal of the Life and Culture of San Antonio. University of the Incarnate Word*. ND. Web. May 12, 2017.

¹⁵¹ “The Chili Queens of San Antonio.” The Kitchen Sisters. 2011. Web. May 12, 2017.

¹⁵² Wallach, Jennifer Jensen. 2013. Chapter 7: Food Habits and Racial Thinking. *How America Eats*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Mexican Americans suffered five times the death rate from tuberculosis as Anglos and more than twice that of blacks. Malnutrition, diarrhea, and enteritis contributed to an infant death rate of 144 of 1,000 of live births among the Mexican community.”¹⁵³ Local authorities felt change was imperative. Chili Queens were ticketed by sanitation commissioner Henry F. Hein for “ ‘unsanitary’ dishwashing methods.”¹⁵⁴ In 1936, a group of local San Antonio residents, likely both white and Mexican, protested the chili stands and argued that it was a threat to the health of the community. For some, chili con carne in particular was thought to “pollute” the body due to its heavy spices and seasonings. Mayor C.K. Quin, the Taxpayers Association and the League of United Latin American Citizens agreed that the chili stands could continue but only if in enclosed spaces and subject to sanitation requirements.¹⁵⁵

The Chili Queens were moved to screened-in tents in 1936, which met the desires of health reformers who wanted to turn San Antonio into a modern, well-organized city. In addition, many middle class Mexican Americans did not approve of the Chili Queens, who they believed damaged notions of respectability, domesticity, and appropriate behavior. Given that the indoor tents limited the Chili Queens interaction with tourists, many left the business, while others left because of better paying work that resulted from

¹⁵³ Pilcher, Jeffrey. 2008. Who Chased Out the “Chili Queens”? Gender, Race, and Urban Reform in San Antonio, Texas, 1880-1943. *Food and Foodways* 16(3): 173-200, p. 189.

¹⁵⁴ Cárdenas, Norma L. 2016. Queering the Chili Queens: Culinary Citizenship through Food Consciousness in the New Borderlands in *Latin@s' Presence in the Food Industry* Eds. Meredith E. Abarca and Consuelo Carr Salas. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press.

¹⁵⁵ Pilcher, Jeffrey. 2008. Who Chased Out the “Chili Queens”? Gender, Race, and Urban Reform in San Antonio, Texas, 1880-1943. *Food and Foodways* 16(3): 173-200.

World War II.¹⁵⁶ In 1939, the new San Antonio city mayor Maury Maverick tried to enforce strict regulations on the Chili Queens in order to meet health standards, but maintain a good relationship with the Mexican community. He called for licenses and inspections of Chili Queens' food stands. Ultimately, the chili stands closed, as a result of the criminalization of those who did not meet the appropriate sanitary and licensure requirements and the changing economic environment.¹⁵⁷ By 1943, the Chili Queens were no longer selling chili in San Antonio. While the Chili Queens were once a historical staple in San Antonio, Wallach points to the irony that chili and outdoor cooking are now very much associated with masculinity, and have been relinquished of their association with working class Mexican women.¹⁵⁸ Cárdenas argues that chili was later culturally appropriated to represent U.S. masculinized nationalism and Texas solidarity.

The Chili Queens' success and decline represents competing interests: the survival of working class Mexican Americans families versus state-sponsored programs to produce white conceptualizations of health and modernity via food. Nonetheless, the presence of the Chili Queens in San Antonio plazas for more than 50 years reveals that these women were both constructed by and subverted the white gaze. As Norma Cárdenas argues, "In the 1920s, the Chili Queens were recognized as the originators of Tex Mex food who modernized the process of selling food to customers in

¹⁵⁶ Wallach, Jennifer Jensen. 2013. Chapter 7: Food Habits and Racial Thinking. *How America Eats*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

¹⁵⁷ Pilcher, Jeffrey. 2008. Who Chased Out the "Chili Queens"? Gender, Race, and Urban Reform in San Antonio, Texas, 1880-1943 *Food and Foodways* 16(30): 173-200.

¹⁵⁸ Wallach, Jennifer Jensen. 2013. Chapter 7: Food Habits and Racial Thinking. *How America Eats*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

automobiles.”¹⁵⁹ It is possible that the supposed health concerns were really an attempt to deny the success of these working class Mexican women who were not only extremely popular and well liked, but also successful in obtaining financial independence to support themselves and their families. Cárdenas argues,

The performance of femininity by the original Chili Queens challenges white middle-class feminine conventions for economic mobility. Women’s roles and responsibilities were limited to domestic and private affairs. The imaginary served by the Chili Queens was self-fashioned in *China Poblana* national attire, including sequined skirts, embroidered white blouses, and *rebozos* (shawls), sartorially symbolizing the working class feminine ideal. If the Chili Queens subversively played the feminine peasant image to disrupt Mexican nationalism, their embodied otherness transgressed the racial and spatial politics of exclusion and undermined their normalized invisibility.¹⁶⁰



Image 23. The Chili Queens in Haymarket Plaza, San Antonio, Texas 1933.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Cárdenas, Norma L. 2016. Queering the Chili Queens: Culinary Citizenship through Food Consciousness in the New Borderlands in *Latin@s' Presence in the Food Industry* Eds. Meredith E. Abarca and Consuelo Carr Salas. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, p. 123.

¹⁶⁰ Cárdenas, Norma L. 2016. Queering the Chili Queens: Culinary Citizenship through Food Consciousness in the New Borderlands in *Latin@s' Presence in the Food Industry* Eds. Meredith E. Abarca and Consuelo Carr Salas. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, p. 124.

¹⁶¹ The Chili Queens of San Antonio. Special Series The Hidden Kitchen: The Kitchen Sisters. *NPR* October 15, 2004. Web. May 12, 2017; “The Chili Queens of San Antonio.” The Kitchen Sisters. 2011. Web. May 12, 2017.

Southwestern Foods and Cultural Tourism

Another way in which Mexican and Mexican American food has been racialized as primitive and underdeveloped is through American cultural tourism. In the late 19th century, U.S. travelers to Mexico brought with them cultural stereotypes about Mexican backwardness, particularly through notions of Aztec cannibalism. Pilcher argues,

William H. Prescott's popular *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843), with its lurid tales of Aztec cannibalism, led them to suspect that every dish contained, if not human flesh, then at least something unmentionable. Encounters with the so-called Chili Queens—one of the leading tourists attractions in San Antonio, Texas, since the 1880s—seemingly validated their fears of culinary (and sexual) danger from dark-skinned women serving ‘various savory compounds, swimming in fiery pepper, which biteth like a serpent.’¹⁶²

The threat of Mexican bodies was a racialized process through the construction of Mexican foods as dangerous, overly spiced, and/or inedible.

U.S. tourists in Mexico tended to be suspicious of the less processed foods in the late 1800s. Given the ways in which industrialization had standardized and rationalized American foods, they feared unfamiliar foods in Mexico, questioning their nutritional value and flavor before even trying new foods. In 1930, as the Chili Queens closed down as a result of being a “supposed menace to public health,” Café La Colondrina opened in Los Angeles in an attempt to normalize and commercialize Mexican food. The restaurant

¹⁶² Pilcher, Jeffrey. 2004. From “Montezuma’s Revenge” to “Mexican Truffles”: Culinary Tourism Across the Rio Grande in *Culinary Tourism* Ed. Lucy M. Long. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, p. 81.

owners downplayed the flavor and ingredients of regional dishes in order to reel in American consumers and “alleviate fears of contamination.”¹⁶³

Midwestern U.S. farmers detested the “Mexican truffle,” a fungus called cuitlacoche in Nahuatl, because of the ways in which it infected cornfields. On the other hand, indigenous Mexicans consumed the fungus as a source of protein. The food did not come into fashion among American consumers until the mid-1940s when Jaime Saldívar, a gourmet chef, prepared a gourmet dish of cuitlacoche in crepes. Over the next 50 years, French gourmet chefs, Mexican elites, and American farmers began to incorporate the fungus in many of their upper class menus. In particular, American farmers produced cuitlacoche with corn in order to sell it to Mexican elite restaurants in major U.S. cities.¹⁶⁴

In El Paso, Mexican foods such as ranchero cheese, chorizo, tamales, enchiladas, mole, menudo, and chalupas were accepted. However, other foods including nopales (cactus), quelites (pigweed), purslane, and cecina (beef jerky) were considered undesirable, “primitive and unsafe foods.”¹⁶⁵ Social segregation between El Paso Mexicans and El Paso Anglos was made manifest in exclusion of particular food items as well. “The semantic and material separation of food was materialized through the construction of social boundaries that took the form of the exclusion of certain foods and

¹⁶³ Pilcher, Jeffrey. 2004. From “Montezuma’s Revenge” to “Mexican Truffles”: Culinary Tourism Across the Rio Grande in *Culinary Tourism* Ed. Lucy M. Long. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

¹⁶⁴ Pilcher, Jeffrey. 2004. From “Montezuma’s Revenge” to “Mexican Truffles”: Culinary Tourism Across the Rio Grande in *Culinary Tourism* Ed. Lucy M. Long. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

¹⁶⁵ Guerrero, Juan Manuel Mendoza. 2016. Mexican Food in El Paso, 1880-1940: Its Path and Discordant Voices in *Latin@s’ Presence in the Food Industry* Eds. Meredith E. Abarca and Consuelo Carr Salas. Lexington, AR: University of Arkansas Press.

ingredients, the regulation of the sale and production of food, and the spread of discourses that pointed out what ‘correct’ eating habits should be.”¹⁶⁶ Traditional Mexican foodways were considered backward and those in the U.S. were encouraged to use American foods and modern appliances, including stoves and ovens. Corporations such as Old El Paso, Ashley, and Casa Moneo took part in the cultural appropriation of Mexican foods, marketing food items on a national level as “Mexican,” including chips, salsa, and canned foods, while many traditional Mexican foods were excluded, as were Mexicans, who were denied full social and political inclusion. Companies such as these became representatives for Mexican foods in the United States, rather than Mexicans or Mexican Americans.¹⁶⁷

Amy Bentley argues that there has been an acceptance of southwestern cuisine in mainstream U.S. culture, while there is simultaneously a rejection of Mexican immigrant acceptance and inclusion. She argues that southwestern food is also constructed as masculine, through its emphasis on meat, grilling, foods that are high in fat and protein, and particularly through chiles. This masculinity is made evident in food advertising, including the 1970s Frito Lays Chips Frito Bandito. Bentley argues,

This maleness combined with stereotyped notions of Mexican and Latin culture indeed instill a machismo into the cuisine—a sort of dangerousness that the media plays upon, a prime example being the enduring advertising image of the Frito Bandito a generation ago. The Frito Bandito, as offensive then as today for many, infused an aura of exoticism and dangerousness to Fritos corn chips—inviting consumers to see them as

¹⁶⁶ Guerrero, Juan Manuel Mendoza. 2016. Mexican Food in El Paso, 1880-1940: Its Path and Discordant Voices in *Latin@s’ Presence in the Food Industry* Eds. Meredith E. Abarca and Consuelo Carr Salas. Lexington, AR: University of Arkansas Press.

¹⁶⁷ Guerrero, Juan Manuel Mendoza. 2016. Mexican Food in El Paso, 1880-1940: Its Path and Discordant Voices in *Latin@s’ Presence in the Food Industry* Eds. Meredith E. Abarca and Consuelo Carr Salas. Lexington, AR: University of Arkansas Press.

something truly different from other salty, snack foods, more daring, more macho.¹⁶⁸

Elmer Doolin, a white San Antonio resident, bought the recipe for “fritos” or fried masa meal chips from a Mexican café owner. In 1959, he merged his company with Herman W. Lay to create the Frito Lay brand.¹⁶⁹

The 1970s Frito-Lays corn chips commercials became notorious for the use of stereotypical imagery of Mexicans. The Frito Bandito (“bandito” being the Spanish word for bandit) threatened to shoot those who would not give up the coveted corn chips. Armed with two pistols, spurs, a long thin mustache, and an oversized sombrero, the Frito Bandito would go to any means necessary to get his snack.



Image 24. The Frito Bandito.

¹⁶⁸ Bentley, Amy. 2004. From Culinary Other to Mainstream America: Meanings and Uses in Southwestern Cuisine in *Culinary Tourism* Ed. Lucy Long. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, p. 213.

¹⁶⁹ Wallach, Jennifer Jensen. 2013. Chapter 7: Food Habits and Racial Thinking. *How America Eats*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.



Image 25. The Frito Bandito ad.

The Frito Bandito's theme song was as follows,

"Ay, yay, yay, yay
 I am the Frito Bandito
 I like Fritos corn chips, I love them, I do
 I want Fritos corn chips, I'll get them from you.
 Ay, yay, yay, yay
 I am the Frito Bandito
 Give me Fritos corn chips and I'll be your friend
 The Frito Bandito you must not offend."

The Frito Bandito embodied American anxieties about Mexican laborers after the Bracero program as well as anxieties about Mexican activists in relation to the United Farm Workers activism. Chicano activist groups in Washington D.C., Los Angeles and San Antonio understood the lack of diverse representation (both in terms of lack of Latino representation broadly as well as depictions of Latinxs as sleepy bandits) as being in relation to social structures of inequity, particularly in relation to employment, politics, education, and the environment. In the 1960s, the National Mexican American Anti-Defamation Committee (NMAADC), one of the two groups that formed to contest

negative stereotyping in advertising, called for a boycott of Frito corn chips by highlighting the significance of Mexicans and Mexican Americans as consumers, rather than members of the body politic since Mexicans still did not have voting rights in the U.S. Through appeals to news stations, threats of legal suits, and interventions in mass media representations, the advocacy groups were able to put the Frito Bandito to bed. In 1970, Frito-Lay announced that it would not longer use the Frito Bandito mascot.¹⁷⁰ The Frito Bandito imagery demonstrates how the white gaze constructed Mexicans and Mexican Americans as immoral and incorrigible in a racial regime that appropriated Mexican foodstuffs, while simultaneously denying Mexican Americans full inclusion in the body politic.

In the mid-20th century, American-style food was deemed a means of modernization and elitism in the region, including the proliferation of hotcakes and the opening of an Aunt Jemima Restaurant in Mexico City.¹⁷¹ Recent years have seen a growth of the fast food industry in Mexico. Food historian Jeffrey Pilcher argues that Mexican food has histories among indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica, which spans from central Mexico to part of Central America. However, the mid-twentieth century saw the rise of the Green Revolution, which led to industrialized agriculture and the proliferation of fast food in Mexico. One of the effects of the Green Revolution was the spread of Taco Bell in Mexico, once a U.S. small chain that became a global phenomenon. Just after the

¹⁷⁰ Noriega, Chon. 2000. "The Stereotypes Must Die." *Social Protest and the Frito Bandito. Shot in America: Television, the State and the Rise of Chicano Cinema.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁷¹ Pilcher, Jeffrey. 2004. From "Montezuma's Revenge" to "Mexican Truffles": Culinary Tourism Across the Rio Grande in *Culinary Tourism* Ed. Lucy M. Long. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

Cold War, Mexican food spread at an international level as a result of U.S. surfers in Mexico and U.S. servicemen living in the Southwest. Pilcher argues that notions of authenticity have been used to “promote culinary tourism and nationalist ideology.”¹⁷²

The 1997 Taco Bell campaign “Run to the border” campaign invokes ideas about the border as a site of difference and exclusion. The reference “There’s something over there you can’t get anywhere” suggests that Mexican food is desirable. The commercial, created just a few years after NAFTA was formally in place, plays upon ideas of border crossing, but in such a way that obscures the political climate in which the U.S. and Mexican governments (rather than everyday people) were the primary beneficiary of the transnational policy. Instead, in the commercial it is American executives who “run for the border” because they are unable to resist the delicious Taco Bell food. The irony, of course, is that Taco Bell is a purely American creation. The image was complete with two white cowboys out in the desert, with dirt flying around them from the executives’ jet, eating their crispy tacos.



Image 26. Taco Bell ad – American cowboys enjoying tacos.

¹⁷² Pilcher, Jeffrey. 2012. A Tale of Two Tacos. *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, p. 16-17.



Image 27. Taco Bell ad – Make a Run for the Border.

While NAFTA promised mutually beneficial free trade between the U.S., Canada and Mexico, with a particular focus on agriculture, in reality the United States enjoyed the greatest advantages. The elimination of tariffs and other trade barriers benefitted U.S. corporations who were able to move their companies to Mexico and pay exploitative wages to Mexican laborers in order to maximize profit.¹⁷³

The command to “Make a Run for the Border” in the Taco Bell commercial completely effaces the politics of border crossing, particularly in light of NAFTA’s effect on corn production in Mexico and the United States. Prior to NAFTA, corn was the major food staple in Mexico and was used for tortillas, to feed livestock and to trade with other farmers. The Mexican government ended its subsidy to corn growers in Mexico and tariffs on corn in order to encourage investment between Mexico, the U.S. and Canada. The now non-existent subsidies that were once enforced allowed small farmers to make a livable wage. However, after NAFTA Mexican farmers were largely put out of work.

¹⁷³ Patel, Raj. 2008. *Stuffed and Starved: Markets, Power and the Hidden Battle for the World Food System*. Brooklyn, NY: Melvin House Publishing.

While the Mexican government stopped subsidizing its corn farmers, the United States continued to subsidize its farmers growing corn. In particular, 75,000 Iowa farmers grew twice as much corn as 3 million Mexican farmers and spent half as much money. In other words, U.S. corn flooded Mexico, putting approximately 2 million Mexican farm workers out of work. The majority left the countryside and went to large cities looking for work. Many also migrated to the United States without documentation, a migration wave that lasted over 20 years.¹⁷⁴ The notion that white U.S. cowboys, executives and culinary explorers should “Make a Run for the Border” inverts the reality in which millions of Mexicans crossed the U.S.-Mexico border out of political and economic necessity, and instead romanticizes the Southwest through the consumption of the taco.

The 1998 Taco Bell Chihuahua commercials also shaped ideas about the racialization of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. The advertisements garnered wide-scale critiques from Mexican and Mexican American advocacy groups for their racialized depictions. The tiny Chihuahua’s infamous words “Yo quiero Taco Bell” while staring at the audience shaped notions of Mexican desire for Americanized Mexican food- the notion that white Americans are more expertised as creating desirable Mexican food recipes than Mexicans or Mexican Americans.

¹⁷⁴ Wave of Illegal Immigrants Gains Speed After NAFTA. *NPR*. December 26, 2013. Web. May 13, 2017.



Image 28. Taco Bell Chihuahua.

The advertisement uses satire through the tiny, Spanish-speaking Chihuahua that intensely desires a taco from Taco Bell. In one 1999 commercial, the Chihuahua holds a man hostage and is a figure feared by even the police who request “backup,” despite the dog’s tiny stature. Here, the threat of Mexicans and Mexican Americans is mocked, as the dog is constructed as angry and demanding, but clearly not a legitimate menace. Through the non-threatening site of the taco, the racialized political climate is concealed and the Mexican problem is easily resolved through American consumption of Taco Bell.

Racist tropes of Mexican food as backward and primitive continue into the 21st century. In 2015, Coca-Cola came under fire for a racist ad featuring young, white American hipsters who travel to Oaxaca, Mexico during Christmas with a truck full of soda and once there, put up a Christmas tree. The local Oaxacans are in a state of wonder with the Americans’ gifts, playing upon historical constructions of indigenous peoples as primitive and unsophisticated. Also in 2015, McDonald’s created a major blunder when it proclaimed that tamales, a long-time historical Mexican dish, were “a thing of the past”

and that the McBurrito was the modern breakfast choice.¹⁷⁵ There was immediate response on social media critiquing the ad and it was quickly pulled.¹⁷⁶



Image 29. McDonald's McBurrito.

These examples show that the concepts of health and nutrition are not self-evident truths, but are instead social constructions based on notions of racial and epistemic superiority. The Mexican government's conflation of Western food with progress, modernity, and sophistication demonstrate how discourses and ideologies around food produced particular food items as nutritious, valuable and desirable, while simultaneously racializing Mexicans as inferior, deficient, malnourished, and unhealthy. In this way, these shifts to daily meals and food shopping were colonial and neo-colonial civilizing missions.

¹⁷⁵ Lakhani, Nina. Coca-Cola apologizes for indigenous people ad intended as 'message of unity.' *The Guardian* December 5, 2015. Web. April 21, 2017

¹⁷⁶ Solomon, Dan. McDonald's Thinks "Tamales Are a Thing of the Past," McBurritos are Where It's At. *Texas Monthly* February 9, 2015. Web. April 28, 2017.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the white gaze creates static, monolithic representations of blacks and Mexicans particularly through food imagery and discourses. Using Fanon's understanding of how the white gaze constricts notions of black consciousness, I argue that this gaze is present in food images and discourses, which racialize black and Mexican bodies as improper consumers. These representations of race and health situate the body, the community and food as the sites to be problematized.

For U.S. blacks, watermelon and chicken thievery were sites where the pathology of black consumption was made manifest. The newfound freedom of people who had previously been property was a threat to the white racial order. Contemporary imagery of the salivating, wide-grinned, red-mouth black body building on 19th century caricatures reveals the ways in which these constructions continue to be readily available references of how eating is a site of racialization.

The racialization of Mexicans and Mexican Americans as malnourished and primitive exposes the ways in which imperialism is a process that not only shapes how bodies are understood, but also how dietary habits are influenced. The emphasis of food reformers on Anglo nutritional standards reveals the ways in which nutrition and health are partly social constructions used to mobilize broader agendas of national superiority and assimilation. Anglos who presume to know more about Mexican foods than those who are Mexican is a phenomenon that continues today. Alice Waters is just one example of this kind of food gentrification, by serving as a so-called expert on the foods of communities of color. For instance, many white chefs who have worked at Waters' *Chez Panisse* go on to open their own Mexican restaurants in the Bay Area, including Gracias

Madre, Picante (Waters' sister), and Camino, to name a few. Elsewhere, critics have written about how white chefs are credited with preparing non-white foods better than the communities of color that the foods come from.¹⁷⁷ This not only has the effect of making whites the experts of non-white foods, but extends the legacy of racial appropriation that has existed since at least the 19th century, reinscribing the problematic notion that the culinary knowledge of Mexicans and Mexican Americans is trivial and irrelevant.

In the following chapter, I analyze how a public service announcement and short film attempt to address the disproportionately higher rates of type 2 diabetes among youth of color through constructions of black femininity. In particular, I argue that these sites engage the politics of respectability to construct black women as the basis for analyzing the healthy human body. While the public service announcement uses historic tropes of black women as pathological to convince its viewers to reduce their consumption of sugary, fried, and high caloric foods, the short film ambivalently engages ideas about respectability to promote fresh fruits and vegetables. In chapter 2, the black woman's body is the site for understanding how race, gender, health, and food converge in contemporary food politics.

¹⁷⁷ Recinos, Eva. A Short Resource Guide to Food, Race, and Cultural Appropriation. *Bitch Media*. May 25, 2016. Web. February 26, 2017; Ashley Stevens. Stop thinking and just eat: when 'food adventuring' trivializes cultures. *The Guardian* June 1, 2015. Web. February 26, 2017; Luke Tsai. Cooking Other People's Food: How Chefs appropriate Bay Area 'Ethnic' Food Cuisine. *East Bay Express* August 23, 2016. Web. February 26, 2017; Matthew Rodriguez. 'Bon Appétit' video of white chef explaining how to eat pho is peak cuisine Columbusing. *Food Mic*. September 8, 2016. Web. February 26, 2017

Chapter 2: What's on Her Plate?

Black Feminism and the Politics of Food Respectability

Introduction

In this chapter I analyze how black women are made the basis for notions of health, particularly through food consumption and type 2 diabetes. I analyze how the tropes of respectability and the grotesque, concepts I discuss in more detail below, are thought through in two contemporary sites: *Purest Poison*, a San Francisco Bay Area public service announcement, and “The First Lady Introduces Let’s Move!” a promotional video for the federal Let’s Move initiative and embodied by Michelle Obama. I argue that these texts, by building on public health discourses and responding to themes of respectability and monstrosity, produce racial-gendered knowledge that situates black women as always already the embodiment of pathology, but do so by using supposedly objective and neutral contemporary discourses about type 2 diabetes and youth of color. While *Purest Poison* represents the figure of the black woman as pathological and grotesque, the Let’s Move promotional video figures Michelle Obama as the quintessentially healthy, respectable woman. These two representations speak to how the black woman’s body is constructed as the benchmark in contemporary discussions of food, health, and racial-gendered difference in relation to respectability politics.

I utilize two theoretical frameworks to analyze current representations of black womanhood, food consumption, type 2 diabetes, and premature death. I engage the theories on black women and the politics of respectability and the grotesque and embodiments of pathology. The politics of respectability is a theoretical framework

coined by Evelyn Higginbotham from her analysis of the actions, behaviors, and speech of black women in the black Baptist church during the late 19th and early 20th century United States.¹⁷⁸ Higginbotham argues that the politics of respectability was a strategy that fought against racist representations, discourses and structures by engaging in dress, mannerisms, behaviors, and speech that was deemed respectable. I place Higginbotham's analysis of black women and respectability in relation to Janelle Hobson's discussion of the black female body as a grotesque figure. Hobson affirms that the black woman's *derriere*, and the figure of the black woman broadly, is constructed as grotesque, hypersexual, and undesirable. Black feminist scholars including Hortense Spiller and Sara Clarke Kaplan have labeled this figure the "monstrous" - the black female subject that is at once disavowed and yet always present.¹⁷⁹

I extend the writings of Higginbotham and Hobson and apply them to the field of food studies. In "The First Lady Introduces Let's Move!" Mrs. Obama is a beacon for practices that we should embody and emulate as individuals and as a nation. Mrs. Obama constructs herself as respectable through consuming fresh fruits and vegetables and exercising. Scholars have critiqued Higginbotham's politics of respectability for the ways in which it reinforces notions of proper behavior as the means to achieving civil rights. Kevin Gaines argues that 20th century middle-class notions of black racial uplift relied

¹⁷⁸ Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. 1994. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁷⁹ Kaplan, Sara Clarke. 2007. Love and Violence/Maternity and Death: Black Feminism and the Politics of Reading (Un)representability *Black Women, Gender, and Families* 1(1): 94-124; Hortense Spillers. 2003. *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

upon notions of black racial pathology. Black elites believed that acting in ways that were deemed “respectable” would achieve racial equity and viewed the behaviors of women and poor blacks as a hindrance because of assumed impropriety.¹⁸⁰ Rod Ferguson argues that canonical sociology deems the non-normative sexual performances within black communities pathological. He illustrates the intersectionality of gender, race, and sexuality and reveals how performances of respectability have been externally imposed by academic disciplines.¹⁸¹ Hazel Carby asserts that the behavior of working class black women during the Great Migration of the early 20th century was seen as sexually, morally, politically, and socially deviant. Black women’s bodies were thought to be in need of protection and policing by white and black organizations and institutions. Black women’s supposed immoral behavior (traveling alone and engaging in prostitution for work) was viewed as a threat to racial progress, black masculinity, and to the establishment of a black middle class. Black women’s independence created a moral panic in which their bodies were deemed in need of surveillance.¹⁸²

Grace Hong builds on this literature and argues that performances of black respectability during the post World War II period coincided with neoliberalism’s framework. She says, “I define neoliberalism foremost by as an epistemological structure of disavowal, a means of claiming that racial and gendered violence are things of the past. It does so by *affirming* certain modes of racialized, gendered, and sexualized life,

¹⁸⁰ Gaines, Kevin. 1996. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

¹⁸¹ Ferguson, Roderick. 2004. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁸² Carby, Hazel. 1992. Policing the Black Woman’s Body *Critical Inquiry* 18(4): 738-755.

particularly through invitation into reproductive respectability, *so as to* disavow its exacerbated production of premature death.”¹⁸³ She argues that neoliberalism offers communities of color sanctuary from historical legacies of racialized violence, in particular premature death, so long as they participate in neoliberalism’s logics. In particular, she contends that those who are among the elite in communities of color are allowed social and political mobility and protection, which is necessarily reliant upon the abjection of those who are most marginalized within communities of color: the poor, women, and those who are gender- and sexual non-conforming.¹⁸⁴ This chapter takes as its starting point Hong’s understanding of how neoliberalism intersects with respectability politics, as “diverse forms of power—both repressive and affirmative, necropolitical and biopolitical—at the same time.”¹⁸⁵

These authors point out the ways in which the politics of respectability has rendered as abject the conduct, speech, and occupations of those on the margins of black culture, i.e. women, the poor, and the sexually deviant. Therefore, I explore the ways in which the respectable representation of Mrs. Obama is contradictory. On the one hand, she engages in respectability politics that is problematic, but also productive, because it deems the consumption of foods that are fried, and high calories and sugars abject behavior. Let’s Move engages in neoliberal logics of self-help and health as a moral trait.

¹⁸³ Hong, Grace. 2015. Introduction: Neoliberal Disavowal and the Politics of the Impossible. *Death Beyond Disavowal* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, p. 7.

¹⁸⁴ Hong, Grace. 2015. Introduction: Neoliberal Disavowal and the Politics of the Impossible. *Death Beyond Disavowal* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁸⁵ Hong, Grace. 2015. Introduction: Neoliberal Disavowal and the Politics of the Impossible. *Death Beyond Disavowal* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 19.

Mrs. Obama represents the nation as the First Lady, an interesting positionality given the way in which black women have historically been imaged as outside of the nation state. She links the health of the individual body to the health of the national body, particularly to have more productive workers. In doing so, she reinforces good health as a neoliberal, capitalist nation-building project. On the other hand, Mrs. Obama uses respectability politics to contest representation of black women as pathological. She critiques the trope of the black woman as failed subject in response to racist and disparaging representations of the Obamas. Fruits and vegetables are constructed as healthy foods and therefore as respectable foods to eat through Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign.

Her work to embrace life and vitality is haunted by the black woman in *Purest Poison*, who is denied humanity and is instead imagined as the embodiment of pathology, disgust, and the grotesque. In *Purest Poison*, the black woman is pathology itself, as she embodies type 2 diabetes and desires to perpetuate destruction, death, and sexual violence. This is connected with her encouragement of the consumption of sugary, fried, and high caloric foods and beverages. *Purest Poison* was one of many video public service announcements produced between 2010 and 2014 by The Bigger Picture, a San Francisco Bay Area youth-directed organization that seeks to eradicate type 2 diabetes among black and Latinx youth through differential food consumption. Through the production of particular narratives, these short videos produce a sense of consciousness and subjectivity on how we think about race, gender, and health, one that is deeply informed by the contemporary public health discussions on type 2 diabetes. The video plays upon historical renderings of black womanhood as destructive in order to prevent young blacks and Latinxs from consuming foods that may result in type 2 diabetes. The

video attempts to prevent higher rates of diet-related health ailments in communities of color, but does so by relying on racial-gendered tropes of black womanhood as pathological and diseased.

I demonstrate how *Purest Poison* constructs foods that are high in caloric value, fried, and sugary, including fast foods, chips, candies, and sodas, as unhealthy and therefore pathological. Those foods are race- and gender-coded, as the sodas, high caloric and sugary foods are associated with black womanhood and pathology, while fruits and vegetables are associated with the universal subject, made possible through Michelle Obama's careful representation. Those who eat "junk" foods are viewed as failing to properly to care for themselves, which is constructed as disgusting, morbid, and monstrous. In this way, I extend Higginbotham's concept of the politics of respectability and Hobson's concept of black women as grotesque by showing how the consumption of particular food objects shapes ideas about gender, race, and respectability. Through this analysis, I also demonstrate how race and gender are co-constitutive in contemporary food discourses and must be understood as always in relation to one another.¹⁸⁶

In contemporary discourses, understandings of nutrition and health are represented as objective and colorblind, yet I argue, along with others in food and race studies, that they are racially coded. Scholars in the field of food and race argue that how we think of health, nutrition, and proper food consumption is always already imbued with racial ideologies.¹⁸⁷ This is certainly not the first time that science, nutrition, and health

¹⁸⁶ White. E. Frances. 2001. *Dark Continent of Our Bodies*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, p. 112.

¹⁸⁷ For more on food and race scholars' arguments, see Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*. (2012), Julie Guthman's "If they Only

are joined with problematic conceptualizations of race and gender. As Jonathan Metzl asserts, “Too often, we assume that medical and cultural explanations of illness are distinct entities, or engage in frustratingly pointless debates about whether certain mental illnesses are either social constructed or real.” He argues that psychiatric diagnoses and popular understandings of psychiatric conditions are always already medical diagnoses informed by racial ideologies.

Similarly, I argue that the knowledge put forth by Mrs. Obama and *Purest Poison* are deeply informed by public health knowledge as well as racialized and gendered ideologies and discourses about black women. In addition, Mrs. Obama’s representation contests more recent representations of former President Barack Obama and herself with historically racist tropes, as discussed in Chapter 1. While Mrs. Obama and *Purest Poison* seek to educate and inform, their “truths” are inevitably shaped by long standing histories of constructing black women as sites of disease and pathology.

In the section that follows, I analyze how the black woman’s body and health has been historically situated as pathological and diseased. I argue that this construction is the basis for the two sites I analyze. I examine how *Purest Poison* plays upon tropes of black womanhood as diseased and deems the black woman’s body morbid, abject and hypersexual, all of which are linked to the consumption of foods that are fried and/or high in sugars and calories. In “The First Lady Introduces Let’s Move” Michelle Obama is a figure who practices respectability through physical activity, propriety, and encouraging

Knew”: Colorblindness and Universalism in California Alternative Food Institutions *The Professional Geographer* (2008), Rachel’s Race in the Study of Food *Progress in Human Geography* (2011), Doris Witt’s *Black Hunger: Soul Food and America* (1999); Alice Deck’s “Now Then—Who Said Biscuits? The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1903-1953” (2001)

the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. In the following section, I analyze the theme of motherhood. *Purest Poison* situates the black woman as poorly mothered and therefore unable to be a proper mother to black children. As part of this pathology, she desires the consumption of “junk foods” and passes this desire onto black youth. Michelle Obama initially discussed her own failures as a mother by feeding her children pizza and take out foods, but is ultimately able to recuperate herself as a successful mother through feeding her children fruits and vegetables. She mothers her two daughters, but also mothers the nation as a whole, in the hopes of a productive citizenry for the nation-state.

In this chapter I do not focus on the nutritious value of particular food objects, instead I analyze how particular food objects are racially coded and, thereby, deemed respectable or monstrous in relation to the black woman’s body. Rather than reinscribe a dichotomy of “good foods” and “bad foods,” I focus on how those foods deemed nutritious become markers of respectability and, on the other hand, how foods deemed unhealthy become markers of the monstrous, for which the black woman’s body is the groundwork to think through these concepts. As argued elsewhere by Kalindi Vora, the ways in which bodies are racialized and gendered shapes how we understand suitable social roles for those bodies, particularly as it relates to histories in and knowledge production of science and medicine.¹⁸⁸ The figures in the two videos demonstrate a dynamic in which the black woman is the limit, embodiment, and contestation of pathology. Ultimately, I argue that black womanhood represents the limits of the healthy

¹⁸⁸ Vora, Kalindi. 2015. Re-imagining Reproduction: Unsettling Metaphors in the History of Imperial Science and Commercial Surrogacy in India. *Somatechnics* 5(1): 88-103.

human body. Her ability to be represented as healthy is always already haunted by historical tropes of the black woman as pathological and diseased.

Black Women as Pathology

Historically, the black woman's body has been naturalized as diseased through medicalized representations. I build on the literature that critiques such representations by analyzing how *Purest Poison* constructs the black woman as pathology (by embodying her as type 2 diabetes), which results in bodily decay, disability and death. By becoming pathology in this representation, she is relegated to the status of non-human that is then personified. This representation of black womanhood in *Purest Poison* is unique in that it builds upon racialized discourses of black women's bodies as pathological found in scientific racism, but does so through contemporary discourses on "bad eating." While the consumption of sugary, fried, and high caloric foods is associated with stagnant, disabled or decaying bodies in *Purest Poison*, the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables is tied to bodily movement, activity, and joy in "The First Lady Introduces Let's Move!" In *Purest Poison*, the body consumes sodas, sugary foods, and high caloric foods, which then results in the body's stagnation, passivity, and disability. In "The First Lady Introduces Let's Move!" Michelle Obama's representation contests the notion of the black woman as a figure that desires bodily decay and death. As a result of the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, the body dances, jumps and exercises. This bodily movement thereby results in vitality and longevity of life, a direct contestation to *Purest Poison's* imaginary, and therefore a contestation of the black woman figure who desires pathology of the body. While the two sites take differing approaches in their representation, this juxtaposition is significant in that it demonstrates how the black

woman's body is a critical site for contemporary conceptualizations of health, food, race, and gender—conceptualizations that are always in relation to historical tropes of the abjectness of blackness and food.

All of the Bigger Picture's PSAs are deeply informed by public health professionals who worked directly with the young writers and poets as they created their videos.¹⁸⁹ Like antidepressant and antiobesity programs, the Bigger Picture seeks to make lifestyle improvements through collective environments for personal change.¹⁹⁰ Their influence extends to schools, film, radio, and have been featured in Michael Pollan's film *In Defense of Food* as well as nutritionist Marion Nestle's book *Soda Politics* and have been featured on National Public Radio. The organization has worked with more than 2,500 teens in schools in 15 Bay Area schools and has gained national influence.

Each video uses music, visual imagery, and sets of statistics to relay an urgent scenario in which black and Latinx youth experience ill and even deadly effects of consuming "junk foods," which ultimately results in the contraction of type 2 diabetes. In these short videos, ingredients such as sugar, food dyes, food additives, sodium, and high fructose corn syrup are compared to things like crack, cocaine, marijuana, other drugs, and poison. Their consumption is often metaphorized as suicide, war, and colonialism. Particular foods and food items are named as "killing" communities of color, including soda (specifically Coca-Cola, orange sodas, and Dr. Pepper), french fries, slushies,

¹⁸⁹ These health professionals include Some of these sources include Marion Nestle, Michael Pollan, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, academic medical, pediatrics, diabetes, public health, and other health journals, the California Diabetes Program of 2012, the Federal Trade Commission, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, American Diabetes Association, among others.

¹⁹⁰ Berlant, Lauren. 2007. *Slow Death* (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency). *Critical Inquiry*, p. 759 and 770.

chocolate, Taquis, Doritos, potato chips, donuts, fried foods generally, pastries, and cakes are associated with type-2 diabetes and heart disease. The effects of consuming these foods are shown to be premature death, limb amputation, blindness, and chronic and debilitating health conditions. While the videos emphasize the toxicity of these foods, they also emphasize the nutritional value of fresh fruits and vegetables, such as salads, apples, water, and organic foods. Along with the spoken narratives, the visual imagery communicates a dire situation for blacks and Latinxs.

In this way, the Bigger Picture focuses not just on the promotion of health, but specifically the health of youth of color and communities of color. They work with health organizations and health education, including the Population Health Division of the San Francisco Department of Public Health, the Center for Vulnerable Populations/University of California San Francisco, Alameda County Department of Public Health, Sonoma County Department of Health Services, the American Heart Association Greater Bay Area Division, and the Community Engagement and Health Policy Program of the Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI), at UCSF. Their pro-health work is simultaneously anti-racism work. However, the way in which *Purest Poison* represents black womanhood seems at odds with their anti-racism work, as it reifies tropes of black women as pathological.

As the *Purest Poison* video begins, we see the following words across the screen:

“50 years ago, fewer than 1 out of 100 Americans had diabetes.
Now, 1 in 10 do.
At this rate, in 50 years 1 out of 3 Americans will suffer from this debilitating disease.
If type 2 diabetes could speak
What would she say?”

We then see the profile of a black woman who begins spoken word over background music. As we hear the audio of a sultry woman's voice and see the shaded profile of her face from the nose down, focused primarily on her full lips, we also see images of amputated bodies, decomposing bodies, and internal organs juxtaposed with images of carbonated drinks, hamburgers, French fries, potato chips and other foods comprised of sugar and soda. The camera shows images of factories producing soda and meat as well as clips of factory workers, people in a hospital bed, gangrened feet, hospital supplies, energy drinks, amputated feet, and amputated toes. The voice's soft, sultry tone positions her as seductress. As diabetes, she addresses the body that she is entering. She wants to enter, consume and destroy bodies. The message emphasized in *Purest Poison* is that the black woman's pathology must be controlled and policed because the threat of bodily decay—in the form of amputated limbs and/or death—is a constant threat.

In a particular series of scenes (2:54-3:29), the imagery shows the black woman as diabetes, "junk foods," and hospital and medical imagery in such a way that conflates consuming sugary, fried, and high caloric foods with medical pathology, disability, and bodily decay. Type 2 diabetes as black woman states, "I noticed you were starving. Or at least craving. You are welcome, my love. You are everything I've dreamed of burying. I want your teeth to dissolve on my tongue. I want you to envelop me like meat holding a scalpel. I'll hug you so tight your limbs will slide off. You dietary supplement of innocence. You flinching heart monitor. You slab of decaying tissue. You, you naïve, fragile thing."

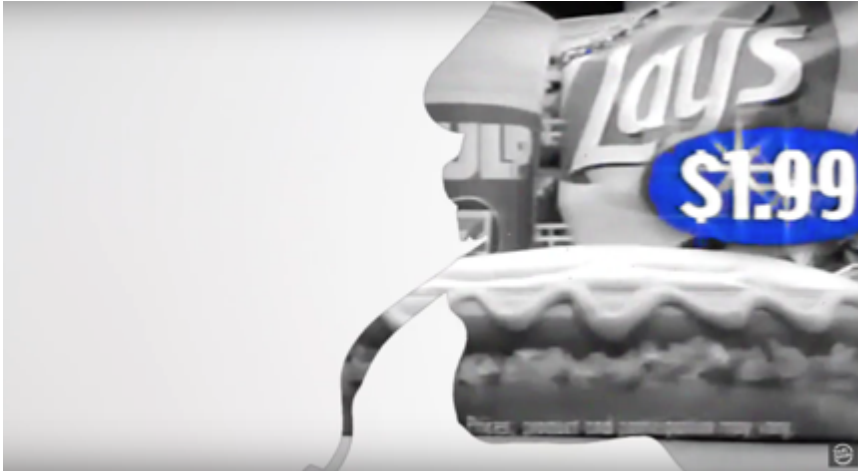


Image 30. Purest Poison – Lays Chips and profile.



Image 31. Purest Poison – amputated foot.



Image 32. Purest Poison – gangrene foot.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Images obtained from *Purest Poison* (2014), The Bigger Picture, youthspeaks.org

The black woman as diabetes desires and causes this pathology, constructing racial-gendered difference as producing and embodying pathology. In the imagery that accompanies the dialogue, the black woman licks a fork, then we see a small bag of Lay's potato chips, a series of factory-related images, including bottles being stacked and animal carcasses hanging in a factory with workers on an assembly line. The next series of images includes hands covered in blue latex gloves using medical scissors to cut gauze that is then placed on a person's stump, while a clear liquid is being poured on the person's amputated leg. We then see the inside of a mouth, a glass with ice being filled with a dark, carbonated beverage, and three hands with blue latex gloves that are treating the amputated foot. We see more images of gauze with dried, dark blood on it; the person appears to be in a hospital and we see markings on the leg above the ankle where the surgeon marked in preparation for surgery. The video then shows images of food: a fast food sandwich with cheese, meat and lots of sauce, and an enchilada filled with meat and covered in sauce with shredded cheese being poured over it. Next there is an image of a woman lying in a hospital bed with close up of her right foot, which appears gangrened and missing a toe and part of her foot. Her second to last toe is gone and her pinky toe, which we can only see from the bottom of her foot, is completely blackened, as is the edge of her foot. Around her pinky toe, the skin is raw: red, black, and a yellowish brown, presumably from gangrene. Her foot is the only object in the close up, while the hospital bed and the rest of her are blurred. She looks away from the camera, toward the ceiling, and holds onto the hospital bed railing. The camera then focuses on bloody gauze that is in a hospital trashcan, presumably from the amputated foot. The camera shows

medical equipment that reads “upstream occlusion” and “open clamps and tube kinks above the pump then push RUN.” The black woman’s profile is shown speaking throughout the series of images. This section of dialogue ends with a close up of the black woman’s face (type 2 diabetes) from the nose down, focused primarily on her mouth.

Through this sequence of images, the camera returns to the black woman’s profile as a constant reminder of who is causing this decay and damage. The usage of medical language and instruments encourages the viewer to read what is happening through a medical model of health. The way in which the images of sodas, high caloric foods, and other sugary substances are juxtaposed with decaying flesh, blood, and amputated limbs signals to the viewer that consuming these types of food will result in hospitalization, at the very least, and the potential loss of limbs. The black woman is constructed as a figure that desires the injury, decay and death of bodies as a way to bring her pleasure.

The focus on the amputated foot and gangrened foot are represented as distortions of the human body in its natural form. These juxtaposed with images of sugary foods, fried foods and soda are used to elicit fear and disgust to prevent the viewer from consuming “junk foods” and potentially contracting type 2 diabetes or other health conditions. The message is clear: if you continue to eat fast foods, potato chips, soda and hamburgers, then your body will turn into an undesirable object of dismemberment. The healthy body, therefore, is imaged to be complete and whole. *Purest Poison* works to convince the viewer that s/he is a subject who has the possibility of *becoming* the object presented. As disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson suggest, the contemporary understanding of disability is “the largely unquestioned belief of many

nondisabled people that disability is life's ultimate misfortune and a perpetual source of suffering."¹⁹² The disabled body contests the ideologies of individualism, autonomy, and self-determination because of its limitations.¹⁹³

The representation of the amputated limbs fits with the current medical model of disability as deficiency. The non-normative body has been represented as "freakish" in American cultural productions from the late 19th to mid 20th century and since the 1940s as pathological scientific specimen by the medical field.¹⁹⁴ This became an "Enlightenment faith in rationality," which subscribed to notions of normative bodies, deviant bodies and, therefore, the devaluation of othered bodies.¹⁹⁵ Garland-Thomson states, "Disability is a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration, and a comparison of bodies that structures social relations and institutions. Disability, then, is the attribution of corporeal deviance—not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do."¹⁹⁶

Thomson discusses how the disabled body and the able body are mutually constitutive; one is the idealized form of embodiment (white, male, able-bodied) while the other is the devalued, inferior, deviant form of embodiment.¹⁹⁷ Disability in cultural

¹⁹² Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pp 84.

¹⁹³ Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pp 86.

¹⁹⁴ Thompson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pp. 74-75.

¹⁹⁵ Thompson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press. Pp 77-78

¹⁹⁶ Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 6.

¹⁹⁷ Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 7-8 and 20.

representations becomes highlighted as something abnormal and/or deviant while the able body is seen as neutral, normal, and natural.¹⁹⁸ Thomson argues, “The medical model that governs today’s interpretation of disability assumes that any somatic trait that falls short of the idealized norm must be corrected or eliminated.”¹⁹⁹ In *Purest Poison*, pathological desire through bad food choices is personified as the black woman, who disables people of color and deprives them of agency. As the video tries to reclaim black and brown pleasure and desire through the consumption of nutritious foods, it simultaneously constructs the black woman’s desire as one of morbidity and mortality.

Purest Poison attempts to convince the viewer that disability is undesirable and that through changing eating habits, one can (and should) avoid becoming disabled. “Eliminating disabled people as discordant social elements is the logical extension of an ideology that esteems national and individual progress toward self-reliance, self-management, and self-sufficiency...”²⁰⁰ The characteristics of independence, individuality, productivity, and autonomy are not only heralded qualities in the United States in relation to work ethic and personality traits, but also in relation to health ideals. “At once familiarly human but definitively other, the disabled figure in cultural discourse assures the rest of the citizenry of who they are not while arousing their suspicions about

¹⁹⁸ Thompson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 135.

¹⁹⁹ Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 79.

²⁰⁰ Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 35.

who they could become.’’²⁰¹ *Purest Poison* constructs the disabled body as one that is immobile, stagnant and unproductive.

In *Purest Poison*, it is the black woman who produces this pathology of unproductivity, decay, and disability onto bodies. This representation of black womanhood as pathological is a particular rendition of how the black woman’s body has been historically constructed as pathological and abnormal through medicalized discourse. Sarjatee Baartman, better known as the Hottentot Venus, was a site of entertainment in freak shows and Worlds Fairs, specifically through medicalized discourse that made a spectacle of her body as a scientific anomaly. Sander Gilman discusses how the Hottentot Venus’ anatomical body parts, including her buttocks, genitalia, nose, and other physical traits, were used as evidence that she (and by extension other black women) was lasciviousness and overly sexual as well as her status as an inferior human species. In fact, her genitalia and buttocks continued to be on display, even after her death at the age of 26 in 1815.²⁰² Gilman says of 19th century medicine as it reduced the black woman to pathology, “Black females do not merely represent the sexualized female, they also represent the female as the source of corruption and disease.”²⁰³ Baartman’s body was cut into small pieces, reducing her to solely her body parts for western medical science to analyze. This historical framing in which black

²⁰¹ Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 41.

²⁰² Gilman, Sander. 1985. Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward and Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine and Literature. *Critical Inquiry*. 12(1): 204-242.

²⁰³ Gilman, Sander. 1985. Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward and Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine and Literature. *Critical Inquiry*. 12(1): 204-242, p. 231.

women are naturalized as the site and “repository” of pathology haunts this representation.²⁰⁴ Steven Epstein argues that during the 1980s and 1990s because women were thought to be “opposite, deviant or other,” they were not included in biomedical research. Up until that time, medical professionals and researchers viewed the differences of women and people of color as “embodied deviance.”²⁰⁵ Historically, communities of color have been considered physically and evolutionarily deficient because of racist constructions of non-white bodies.²⁰⁶ In *Purest Poison*, the black woman is the very site of pathology itself, which is shown to result in amputation and death, while simultaneously eliciting desire.

While the sciences and culture are generally understood as distinct from one another, many have pointed to the ways in which they mutually constitute each other. E. Frances White writes of how 19th century biological models were used to justify racism and sexism to make biology legible as a field.²⁰⁷ She writes, “[the use of everyday] analogies and metaphors ‘revealed’ the truths of nature and were, in turn, seen as truth itself.”²⁰⁸ Baartman is one example of how scientific and popular ideas become intertwined in the early 19th century. Baartman was a scientific exhibit in carnivals, freak

²⁰⁴ Hobson, Janell. 2003. The “Batty” Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body *Hypatia* 18(4): 87-105.

²⁰⁵ Epstein, Steve. 2004. Bodily Differences and Collective Identities: The Politics of Gender and Race in Biomedical Research in the United States. *Body and Society* 10(2): 183-203, p. 186 and 189.

²⁰⁶ Williams, David. 1997. Race and Health: Basic Questions, Emerging Directions. *Annals of Epidemiology* 7(5): 322-333; Stephen J. Gould. 1996. *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company.

²⁰⁷ White. E. Frances. 2001. *Dark Continent of Our Bodies*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, p. 84-85.

²⁰⁸ White. E. Frances. 2001. *Dark Continent of Our Bodies*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, p. 86.

shows, and Worlds Fairs around the country. People came from far distances to view her large buttocks, marking her as freakish and pathological, which were tied to her African ancestry and femininity. *Purest Poison* similarly marks the black woman's body as the site of pathology, coinciding with what scholars on food and black feminism have argued: that the relationship between sexuality, desire, and consumption is tied to "colonial systems of classification and relations of power."²⁰⁹ The black woman as pathological is a long-standing narrative about black women in the U.S. that dates back to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and through the rise of the U.S. as a colonial power. *Purest Poison* is contemporary iteration of this historical trope, but demonstrates how such conceptualizations take on new forms through discourses of type 2 diabetes and food consumption.

While *Purest Poison* constructs the black woman as pathological and diseased, the Let's Move campaign represents First Lady Michelle Obama as full of vitality, life and health. Mrs. Obama contests representations of black womanhood as pathological in a promotional video for her Let's Move initiative. As the first black First Lady, Let's Move has been her project, which focuses on improving childhood health through food and exercise, in part to address the increase of type 2 diabetes. The way that childhood health is promoted through the video, "The First Lady Introduces Let's Move!" is based on Michelle Obama's representation as a respectable, informed, and relatable black woman. While the black woman's body is shown as pathological in *Purest Poison*, in "The First Lady Introduces Let's Move!" the body is shown to be active, engaged, able,

²⁰⁹ Holland, Sharon, Marcia Ochoa and Kyla Wazana Tomkins. 2014. Introduction: On the Visceral. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20(4): 391-406. Pp. 399.

whole, and therefore, healthy. It is through the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, as exemplified by Mrs. Obama's well-dressed, slim and athletic body, that she commands respectability. Through this imagery, the First Lady contests historical notions of black womanhood as medically or scientifically pathological and monstrous. While distinctions exist between how "The First Lady Introduces Let's Move!" and *Purest Poison* represent the black woman, both videos center the black woman's desire as the groundwork for analyzing how to achieve diet-related health in youth of color communities. While these representations are different, they seek to achieve similar ends and imagine black womanhood as the means through achieving those ends.

Let's Move was a federal program under the provision of First Lady Michelle Obama since its inception in 2010. Let's Move primarily focuses on reducing childhood obesity nationwide in order to reduce medical ailments and chronic conditions. In particular, the program focuses on black and Latinx youth as its primary targets. The website states,

Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in America have tripled, and, today, nearly one in three children in America are overweight or obese. The numbers are even higher in African American and Hispanic communities, where nearly 40% of the children are overweight or obese. If we don't solve this problem, nearly one third of all children born in 2000 or later will suffer from diabetes as some point in their lives. Many others will face chronic obesity-related health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, and asthma.²¹⁰

While the program's overall goal is reducing the so-called obesity epidemic, I focus on the program's emphasis on how this is done through food consumption to reduce type 2 diabetes.

²¹⁰ Learn the Facts. Let's Move. Obama White House Archives. N.D. Web. May 3, 2017.

In addition to Mrs. Obama's appearance in the video, all of the children shown are energetic and participating in athletic activities. They appear actively engaged in what they are doing, contesting ideas about youth of color as lazy, unengaged, and unhealthy. In *Purest Poison*, the black woman both embodies and produces pathology. In "The First Lady Introduces Let's Move!" Michelle Obama is both healthy and lively and encourages health, movement, and activity among children. One section of the video shows Obama to emphasize the importance of addressing health from multiple realms.

This led to our new initiative, Let's Move. Let's Move is a nationwide initiative that basically focuses on four key components. First, we want to improve the information and the tools that parents need to make the changes that are desired in their families. The second is that we have to improve the quality of food in our schools. That's where kids are eating many of their meals and we have to do a better job of making sure that that food is quality. Third, we need to improve access and affordability of healthy foods. We have to eliminate food deserts in this country and we need to do it now. And finally, we have to increase physical education for kids. We need to get them moving.



Image 33. Let's Move – Michelle Obama and young girl.



Image 34. Let's Move – Michelle Obama and hula hoops.²¹¹

During this video clip, we see children doing jumping jacks, running, stomping their feet, and playing. These images are spliced with images of parents and children of different racial backgrounds eating fresh vegetables in their kitchens. The camera pans to children at a school, where Mrs. Obama hands out oranges; a young black girl is smiling as she walks away from Mrs. Obama with an orange in her hand and in the following image (Image 33), Mrs. Obama affectionately touches the cheek of a young black girl who has placed an orange on her tray. Both Mrs. Obama and the girl are smiling, as the girl looks at the bananas and oranges that lay on the table. When Mrs. Obama discusses access and affordability, she is at a farmer's market, surrounded by produce. The First Lady holds a basket of greens and is surrounded by leafy greens, red bell peppers, and an orange colored fruit. In the following scene, Mrs. Obama is kneeling down in a schoolyard with other adults and two young black male students. A brown hand holds green lettuce picked out of the ground on which the people are standing. Gardening tools are visible on the right hand side. In the next series of clips, the First Lady is active, as she swings a hula

²¹¹ Images obtained from "The First Lady Introduces Let's Move!" (2010), letsmove.gov

hoop around her hips (Image 34). She leads a group of children, who join her in hula hooping outside on a bright green, grassy lawn, presumably at the White House.

In this sequence of images, the healthy body is one that consumes fruits and vegetables, which leads to the body's ability to be active. The healthy body is also represented as whole here, with no visible disabilities or deformities. Through the imagery and the language, Mrs. Obama is constructed as a healthy body who encourages others to be healthy, via the consumption of fresh produce, familial relationships, and physical movement. Mrs. Obama's physical body became a particularly contentious topic of conversation during her time in the White House. In 2009, she was accused of not dressing appropriately because she bore bare arms in her first official photo as first lady and at former President Barack's Obama's first congressional address.²¹² Her well-toned arms became a topic of controversy, as did her buttocks and hair. For many, however, Mrs. Obama's muscular arms demonstrated youth, vitality, and bodily health—the idealized able body.²¹³ Discussions on her muscular arms, curvaceous buttocks, and the health of body recall notions of the Hottentot Venus, whose backside was put on display as a sign of her freakish nature. Mrs. Obama's self-confidence and encouraging of muscular bodies as healthy bodies counters notions of the black woman as diseased, even if her body continued to be viewed with criticism.

While the former First Lady's program acted as a means of critique of the assumed pathological black woman's body, it simultaneously penalizes those who did not

²¹² Ibanga, Imaeyen. Obama's Choice to Bare Arms Causes Uproar. *ABCNews*. March 2, 2009. Web. April 7, 2017.

²¹³ Jones, Vanessa. Michelle Obama's bare arms stir controversy. *SF Gate. Hearst Communications, Inc.* March 22, 2009. Web. April 7, 2017.

engage in the accepted notions of health and food consumption. This iteration of the politics of respectability legitimates the notion that particular bodies require state management if they do not engage in food consumption that results in bodies that are productive, active, and assertive. Those who do not engage in healthy consumption are perceived as a threat to the nation as they produce what Lauren Berlant has called slow death.

Through her concept of slow death, Berlant provides a conceptual intervention on the relationship between bodies, food, and capitalism. Berlant argues that bodies that are considered sick under a capitalist regime are those bodies that are unable to work. She states, “The phrase *slow death* refers to the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence. The general emphasis of the phrase is on the phenomenon of mass physical attenuation under global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality...under capitalism sickness is defined as the inability to work.”²¹⁴ Berlant situates slow death within Foucault’s framework of biopower, in which “living increasingly becomes a scene of the administration, discipline, and recalibration of what constitutes health,” and “the dispersed management of the biological threat posed by certain populations to the reproduction of the normatively framed general good life of a society. Slow death occupies the temporalities of the endemic.”²¹⁵ In “The First Lady Introduces Let’s Move,” Mrs. Obama’s body is active and whole and produces health for young children of color as well as the nation

²¹⁴ Berlant, Lauren. 2007. “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency).” *Critical Inquiry* 33: 754-780.

²¹⁵ Berlant, Lauren. 2007, p. 756.

more broadly. This program is understood as preventative and proactive, in the hopes of deterring slow death in youth of color communities. As a federal program and as a representation of the nation-state, Let's Move and Mrs. Obama are necessarily nation-building programs that operate under the auspices of well-being for the needs of the nation. While this construction of Michelle Obama contests historical constructions of black women as pathological, it simultaneously reinscribes the idea that the whole, able body is desirable and the disabled body is undesirable object. Although Mrs. Obama does not explicitly discuss preparing these children for the work force, at the end of the video, she states that maintaining children's health will allow them to face the challenges of the future (discussed in more detail below). Therefore, her focus on health is not just about producing healthy bodies for youth of color, but is also about producing a healthy workforce and productive citizenry that will contribute to the growth of the nation.

Purest Poison also builds on the notion of slow death, as those who consume sugar and soda are viewed as threatening the primarily good health of themselves as well as the larger population. While immediate death may not result from consuming particular foods, the images suggest that unhealthy food consumption results in slow bodily deterioration, which leads to conditions such as limited mobility, morbidity, physical ailments, sickness, limb amputation, and death.

While *Purest Poison* produces the black woman as the pathological body through sugary, fried, and high caloric foods, Michelle Obama represents the new, liberal, healthy black body that consumes fresh fruits and vegetables. The historical image of black women as pathological and diseased is a representation that she works within. She attempts to recuperate her image by demonstrating how the black woman's body can be

healthy, vibrant, and full of life. Yet, any sense of universality or security is always threatened by her blackness, which is perceived as excessive.

In *Purest Poison*, the black woman is represented as hypersexual and sexually perverse and these qualities are linked to her pathology of decay and death. Her appetite for consumption is excessive and hypersexualized, a portrayal of the black woman in American society that has existed since U.S. chattel slavery. The black female body has historically been viewed as a site of sexual abjection and desire.²¹⁶ As described by Janell Hobson in “The ‘Batty’ Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body,” the black female body has historically been labeled “‘grotesque,’ ‘strange,’ ‘unfeminine,’ ‘lascivious,’ and ‘obscene.’”²¹⁷ She argues that the black woman’s body has been understood as a site of denigration, excessive sexuality, and outside the realm of normative beauty.²¹⁸ In *Purest Poison*, we see the reinforcement of the black woman’s body as excessively sexual and attempting to elicit sexual desire from the viewer. The agency that she is granted is reduced to the conflation of her deadly and perverse sexual and consumptive appetites. Her references are sexually suggestive and full of desire.

She says, “I want to sodomize your smile with malnutrition. It’s not rape if you yell. Convenience. Cheap. Around the corner. Sweet. Salty.”

²¹⁶ Hobson, Janell. 2003. The “Batty” Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body *Hypatia* 18(4): 87-105.pp. 89; Hartman, Saidiya. 1996. “Seduction and the Rouses of Power.” *Callaloo* 19(2): 537-560.

²¹⁷ Hobson, Janell. 2003. The “Batty” Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body. *Hypatia*. 18(4): 87-105. Pp. 87.

²¹⁸ Hobson, Janell. 2003. The “Batty” Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body. *Hypatia*. 18(4): 87-105. Pp. 88.



Image 35. Purest Poison – factory farming.



Image 36. Purest Poison – Foot and scalpel.

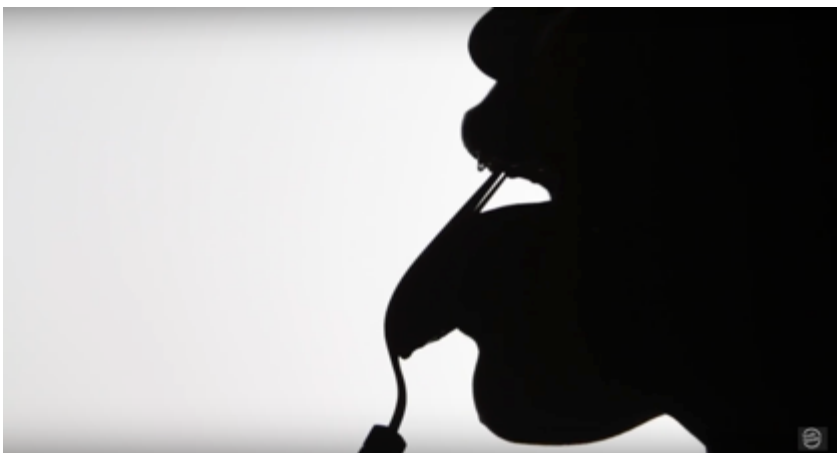


Image 37. Purest Poison – profile licking

The accompanying imagery reflects a relationship between this hypersexuality/perverse sexuality and the consumption of sugary, fried, and high caloric foods. The clip focuses on the black woman's mouth, as is the case throughout the video. We then see a black and white image of two legs that have been amputated and are bleeding profusely. The person's body appears to be on a gurney with medical professionals attending to the legs. What follows is imagery of a cooler filled with ice and Coca-Cola bottles and people picking up some of these bottles, and the bottom of someone's right foot that has a portion of the sole of the foot that appears to have been surgically removed. Medical professionals are holding a scalpel and working on the foot. The hole is extremely red, where the tissue is raw and the outer layer of skin around the hole is white and yellow. The video then pans to meat carcasses in a factory. Throughout these clips, the camera emphasizes the black woman's mouth as she engages in sexually suggestive actions. She licks her fingers and forks slowly and widely opens her mouth and bites down slowly.

These scenes, which produce her as hypersexual along with the constant usage of "I want" in the audio suggest an inherent relationship between sexual desire, food consumption, black womanhood, disgust, repulsion, and bodily destruction. These references to sex and sexual violence within the framework of type 2 diabetes suggest that the black woman is at the boundary of sexuality, sexual violence, and the limit of the proper subject of health. Excessive sexuality is linked to pathology in this video, marking the black woman as both hypersexualized and diseased and the two are inherently interconnected.

By producing a relationship between sexuality and consumption, *Purest Poison* also constructs black womanhood as subject and object in relation to type 2 diabetes.

Food scholars argue that the relationship between sexuality and food produces subjectivities. In *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities*, Elspeth Probyn asserts that linkages between sensuality and eating are ways to understand how identities are produced and the site where power is negotiated.²¹⁹ bell hooks argues that the black female body has only gained attention when it is portrayed as sexually deviant.²²⁰ Hobson maintains that black women have been portrayed as outside of the bounds of normalcy and beauty, situating black women as worthy of degradation, particularly in relation to the body. She states, “These discourses create trajectories of normalcy and dominance that perpetuate black women’s ‘outsider’ and ‘disabled’ status. Hence, their ‘disruptive’ bodies provide further justification for their devaluation and discrimination.”²²¹ *Purest Poison* imagines the black woman as disruptive, abnormal, and hypersexual and situates this perversity in relation to perversity of food consumption, or the consumption of sugary, high caloric foods and drinks, leading to the destruction of the body. The black woman enjoys the destructiveness of the body, producing poor health and even death.

The desires of the black woman in *Purest Poison* are in stark contrast to the portrayal of Michelle Obama’s agency in “The First Lady Introduces Let’s Move!” Her desires are not destructive, but create possibilities for life and vitality. In the video, Mrs. Obama is the agent of change that inspires and creates transformation for the nation. It is because of her desire to produce health and energy in youth, particularly youth of color

²¹⁹ Probyn, Elspeth. *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

²²⁰ hooks, bell. “Selling Hot Pussy: Representation of Black Female Sexuality in the Cultural Marketplace.” *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston, MA: South End Press, p. 124.

²²¹ Hobson, Janell. 2003. The “Batty” Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body *Hypatia* 18(4): 87-105, pp. 89.

and help decrease type 2 diabetes, that Let's Move became a national program. Mrs. Obama's rendering of black woman's desire creates a future full of hope, potential, and thriving youth. She is the epitome of respectability and constructs a healthy future for children in order to produce a healthy nation and citizenry.

The video shifts the narrative of black women as objects. As the First Lady desires to help her own children, that desire extends to the nation and she works to provide national support to families. Futurity becomes the basis for creating change, so that what is possible becomes the driving force to end type 2 diabetes through food consumption. Mrs. Obama's figure intervenes on images that reproduce black womanhood as an object, in the way that humanizes her as someone who is both easily relatable and, as First Lady, a leader to be respected and admired. Her ability to represent herself as respected and respectable, through her attire, hair, mannerisms, diction, and demeanor, allows her to communicate a message and gives her power that has so long been historically denied to black women. However, this method of reclaiming black women's worthiness necessarily produces those who do not engage in the same behaviors as abject and unworthy of respect, particularly as it conflates diction, proper clothing, and consuming the right kinds of foods.



Image 38. Let's Move – White House.



Image 39. Let's Move – Michelle Obama, school gardens.

Mrs. Obama and the black woman figure in *Purest Poison* are both active agents and subjects of change in their disparate videos. Yet, they act in very opposing ways. While Mrs. Obama's actions and ability to think provide life-sustaining activities, the black woman figure in *Purest Poison* is intent on bringing harm, decay, and death to its victims. While *Purest Poison* could refigure representations of black women as pathological and produce a different perspective of food consumption and black subjectivity—"claiming

the monstrosity” as posited by Spillers and Kaplan²²²—the PSA instead relies on problematic tropes of black women whose sexual excess is destructive. While the PSA attempts to produce the figure of the black woman as a subject who thinks, desires, and acts, it does so in a way that imagines her desire as destructive and falls into problematic tropes about black female hypersexuality. By making the black woman embody type 2 diabetes, she is never able to be a full human subject. Mrs. Obama’s representation relies on a politics of respectability to create change and to contest racial-gendered narratives, which both intervenes on tropes of black women as pathological and problematically relies on respectable behaviors for food equity. Her subjectivity is made relatable in order to effect the most change possible. In both sites, the representation of the black woman is the limit of the healthy body through food consumption. In the next section, I analyze how the notion of proper motherhood is correlated with food consumption and in *Purest Poison* and “The First Lady Introduces Let’s Move.”

Mothering the Family and the Nation

In this section, I analyze how *Purest Poison* and “The First Lady Introduces Let’s Move!” construct ideas about black motherhood through food consumption. In *Purest Poison*, the figure of the black woman fails to mother properly. As type 2 diabetes, her improper mothering extends to harming others, making her responsible for the mothering of black children as a whole. On the other hand, Mrs. Obama demonstrates the challenges she faced in mothering, but is able to recuperate herself as mother. She then extends this

²²² Kaplan, Sara Clarke. 2007. Love and Violence/Maternity and Death: Black Feminism and the Politics of Reading (Un)representability *Black Women, Gender, and Families* 1(1): 94-124; Hortense Spillers. 2003. *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

reproductive labor to the nation as a whole, where her mothering of her own children extends to mothering children of the nation. While *Purest Poison* subscribes to tropes of black womanhood and mothering through contemporary discourses on type 2 diabetes, Mrs. Obama challenges these depictions through healthy food and consumption practices.

I extend a particular aspect of the politics of respectability that focuses on the role of black women and disease. Collective issues of racial injustice were treated as issues that also needed to be addressed on an individual basis, particularly in relation to women's behavior in the home. The politics of respectability during the time period discussed by Higginbotham underscored a relationship between "racist representations of black women as unclean, disease-carrying, and promiscuous conjoined with representations of black households as dirty, pathological, and disorderly."²²³ As a result, the politics of respectability made black women responsible for caring for the black family and black people as a whole.²²⁴ I extend this aspect of Higginbotham's analysis by considering how representations of the black woman producing and contesting type 2 diabetes on a individual level are then extended to ideas about how the black woman should combat type 2 diabetes for a larger racial and national community.

In *Purest Poison*, in contradistinction to "The First Lady Introduces Let's Move!" the black woman is unable to act as a loving, appropriate mother. When the video begins, the voice of the narrator (type 2 diabetes as black woman) states, "I was mothered, by the silk cans of a corporation, who wears many faces. Spilled out of a roaring factory's throat

²²³ Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. 1994. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

²²⁴ Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. 1994. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 202.

with cellophane skin. I only know the process of being pumped into something holy and worshipped. Empty.”

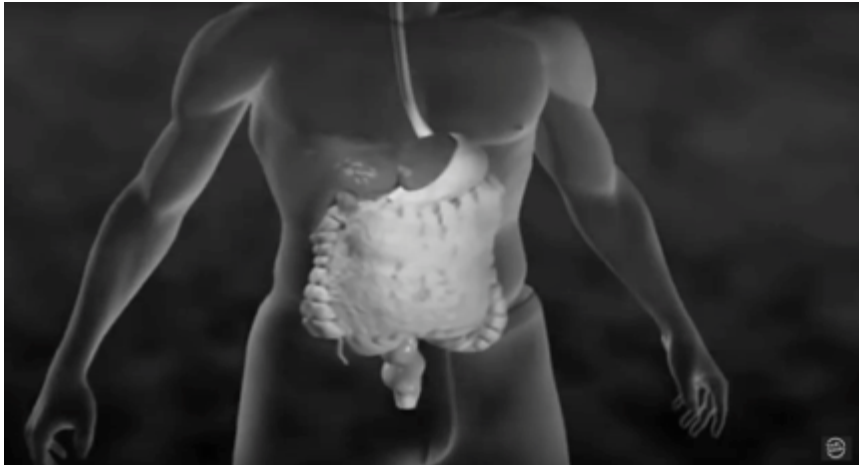


Image 40. Purest Poison – Man’s anatomy.

This opening narration is accompanied by visual imagery that includes people drinking from Coca-Cola and Sobe bottles, large scale factory conveyor belts for the production of soda bottles filled with soda, people eating fast food burgers, images of a factory and meat processing machinery, building signs of McDonald’s and 7-11. We are shown images of Coca-Cola, someone drinking Gatorade, an assembly line of factory workers with whole chickens on a factory production line, and a fast food restaurant drive thru where an employee is giving food to a consumer in a car. The video then shows imagery of Capri Sun, Red Bull, and bottles mass-produced on a factory production line. We see a fountain machine pouring soda into a glass labeled Coca-Cola. There is an image of a male body as one would see in an anatomy class. The imagery highlights the esophagus as well as the internal organs below the lungs, including the liver, stomach, spleen, kidneys, small and large intestines, gall bladder, ureter, and urinary bladder. The areas of

the body that are largely affected by the consumption of the aforementioned foods appear in lighter in color in order to stand out to the viewer.

This imagery situates this otherwise non-medical cultural production within the framework of medicine and public health. We see the body not just as an object that consumes, but as a biological entity that, if not mothered properly, will be destroyed. The body is poisoned by the consumption of sugary, fried, and high caloric foods and beverages. The phrase “I was mothered by the silk hands of a corporation” suggests that corporations have taken the place of mothering for youth of color. I read this line as a commentary on the ways in which black and Latinx children are more widely marketed to than their white counterparts. Advertisements that are higher in soda and/or sugar market more greatly to youth of color, defined as target marketing or advertisements geared toward a particular demographic group.²²⁵ In this way, the clip is critical of the influence of corporations and how they affect the consumptive habits of youth of color.

However, the video relies on the failed mothering of black women as a trope, suggesting that black women are not fulfilling their responsibility of parenting correctly. It is the consumption of sugary, fried, and high caloric foods (or the mothering by a corporation) that produced black womanhood and type 2 diabetes. The referent of the “silk cans of a corporation” alludes to sodas, while “cellophane skin” refers to sugary and high caloric snacks, including candies and cookies, which are packaged in cellophane

²²⁵ Harris, Jennifer L., Marlene B. Schwartz, and Kelly D. Brownell. 2011. Evaluating Sugary Drink Nutrition and Marketing to Youth. Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Powell, Lisa M., Roy Wada, and Shiriki K. Kumanyika. 2014. Race/ethnic and income disparities in child and adolescent exposure to food and beverage television ads across the U.S. media markets. *Health and Race* (29): 124-131.

wrappers. Here the video calls attention to the ways that sugary, fried, and high caloric foods have become extremely widely consumed. In the next lines, these foods are readily consumed and upheld as valuable: “I only know the process of being pumped into something holy and worshipped. Empty.” These statements suggest that youth of color are so invested in consuming sugary, fried, and high caloric foods that they become deified, although the video constructs them as lacking by the statement “Empty.” It is unclear if this statement refers to the concept of “empty calories” (devoid of nutritional value) or if it is black woman as type 2 diabetes who is morally bankrupt.

The intersection of the medical and public health framework, black womanhood, and food consumption constructs black mothering as problematic not only for the black woman, but for all blacks more broadly. These PSAs cater to youth in the San Francisco Bay Area, in the hopes of reducing type 2 diabetes among black and Latinx youth. As part of the growing local and national movements that intervene on the growth of type 2 diabetes among black and Latinx communities, The Bigger Picture created a series of PSAs that directly intervene in the current discourses and health disparities on type 2 diabetes. The 20 PSAs created between 2010 and 2014 build on the public health discussion of type 2 diabetes, in an effort to combat the rise of type 2 diabetes in youth among communities of color. The stated goal of the Bigger Picture is to

combat the rising epidemic of Type-2 diabetes by empowering youth to change the conversation about diabetes, and work to change the social and environmental factors that have led to its spread. We aim to inspire young people to challenge and name the institutional, environmental and social causes of the spread of Type-2 diabetes. It is our hope that by raising their voice, taking action and joining the conversation they will inevitably alter the trajectory of the disease and provide youth with a virtual platform, and real life performance opportunities for their stories to be heard.¹

The PSAs work to bring attention to the causes of type 2 diabetes and particularly highlight how food consumption impacts young black and Latinx communities. While their focus to reduce type 2 diabetes among youth of color is commendable, they rely on ideas about black women as failed mothers in order to do so. This places undue labor on the image of the black woman to be the respectable, responsible caregiver for black and Latinx youth. The images shown extend to large-scale national trends in increased consumption of sugary, fried, and high caloric foods. Yet, only the black woman is represented as type 2 diabetes. *Purest Poison* constructs the figure of the black woman as responsible for societal pathologies and anxieties around unhealthy food consumption. *Purest Poison's* framing of the black mother calls on her not only as an individual, but also for her effect on black youth as a collective.

Perhaps the most important component of the process of mothering is the potential that exists in the creation of a child. Cultural studies scholar Claudia Castañeda states,

I argue that embedded within these assumptions is a conceptualization of the child as a potentiality rather than an actuality, a becoming rather than a being: an entity in the making...the category “child” seems to carry with it an unmistakable and incontrovertible fact: a child is by definition not yet that which it alone has the capacity to become. It is in this unique capacity, in this potential, I suggest, that the child’s availability—and so too its value as a cultural resource—lies.²²⁶

In this way, the figure of the child is used to construct the future that is imagined as full of endless possibilities. Lee Edelman argues that because the figure of the Child connotes a futurity, reproductive futurity is inherently heteronormative in its privileging of the

²²⁶ Castañeda, Claudia. 2002. *Figurations: child, bodies, worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 1.

child. Queer bodies that do not define themselves within the context of futurity refuse a linear or stable future.²²⁷ However, José Esteban Muñoz argues that queerness is inherently futuristic and insists upon working toward a future utopia. In doing so, the restrictive logics of straight time are challenged to imagine a better future.²²⁸ Castañeda argues that it is the child's capacity for change that makes the child unique from how adults are constructed discursively. The figure of the child mutually constitutes the black woman in *Purest Poison* and *Let's Move*. *Purest Poison* and *Let's Move* build upon the notions of the child as the site for transformative collective change in relation to food consumption and diet-related health issues. They bear a particular sense of urgency because of both the child's vulnerability as well as the child's capacity for transformation.

Therefore, the black woman in *Purest Poison*'s inability to mother properly is a grave concern because she likely ruins the child's potentiality for what could be: a future that is unrestrained, promising, and full of hope. The infamous Moynihan Report constructed black women as failed mothers who are unable to care for their families appropriately. Daniel Patrick Moynihan imagined black mothers as pathological parents and castrators to black men. The black woman's body was responsible for the entire black community in his Moynihan Report.²²⁹ *Purest Poison* builds upon such constructions, by imaging the black woman as unable to mother properly and unable to

²²⁷ Funke, Jana. 2011. Review: Lee Edelman No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive *thirdspace, a journal of feminist theory and culture* 10(1).

²²⁸ Warner, Sara. 2011. Cruising Utopia: The Then and Now of Queer Futurity (review) *Modern Drama* 54(2): 255-257.

²²⁹ Spillers, Hortense. 1987. Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book *Diacritics* 17(2): 64-81; Ferguson, Roderick. 2003. *Aberrations in Black*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

care for youth of color, because she was improperly mothered herself, presumably by another black woman. Her inability to mother properly is understood as a detriment to the youth that this video is centered on and catering to, damaging opportunities for a brighter future because of her failure.

In the Let's Move promotional film, Michelle Obama epitomizes the respectable, loving, responsible mother. The video begins with images of her, President Barack Obama and their two daughters, Sasha and Malia. She appears a doting mother, as she looks fondly at her daughters and the former president. The presence of fresh fruits and vegetables is consistent throughout the video: we see images of apples, bananas, oranges, carrots, asparagus, bell peppers, milk, leafy greens, and tomatoes. Mrs. Obama demonstrates how she is able to appropriately achieve the reproductive labor of providing nutritious foods for her family. This reproductive labor extends to caring for the nation, as she contends that she prioritizes bringing lessons about healthy eating to the White House and, therefore, to the nation more broadly.

The video begins with the First Lady's confession of the challenges she faced in properly fulfilling her role as mother. She states,

Before coming to the White House, the President and I lived lives like most families. Two working parents. Busy. Trying to maintain some balance. Picking kids up from school, trying to get things done at work. Just too busy. Not enough time. And what I found myself doing was probably making up for it and being unable to cook a good meal for my kids. Going to fast food a little more than I'd like. Ordering pizza. And I started to see the effects on my family, particularly my kids. It got to the point where our pediatrician basically said, 'You may want to make some changes.' So, started making those changes, short, easy changes, but it led to some really good results. So I wanted to bring the lesson that I'd learned to the White House.

The video shows a sequence of pictures of Mrs. Obama with her family. We are shown family portraits of Mrs. Obama, President Barack Obama, and their daughters, Sasha and Malia. These pictures stretch over a period of many years, showing their growth and continued intimacy as a family. They are both black and white and in color, with the family smiling at the camera, smiling at one another, and hugging and kissing each other. These pictures are interspersed with video of the First Lady in what appears to be a library in the White House. Mrs. Obama wears a purple blouse, lavender cardigan and her hair is cut into a straight bob. She sits in a wooden chair with a plant behind her to the left and a bookshelf unit to the right. The bookshelves are filled with books and two titles are clearly legible: “Eternal America” and “America’s Art.” The bookshelf also holds a few small candles and flowers. Significantly, on the bookshelf, directly next to Mrs. Obama is a large bowl filled with red apples, the quintessential healthy fruit. Other than the First Lady herself, the apples are the most prominent item in the image. Throughout the video, the camera consistently pans back to the First Lady seated in the White House library, with the bowl of apples just behind her.



Image 41. Let's Move – Obama Family.



Image 42. Let's Move – Michelle Obama in White House library.

In this clip, Mrs. Obama establishes herself not just as a mother, but in the role of mothering the nation. Her position as mother of her individual family is linked to her role as First Lady of the United States. She describes her resorting to pizza and fast food as meals for her daughters as negligence as a parent. She shows herself to be relatable to other working moms, overworked and exhausted, and whose capacity to care for her family suffers as a result. Her ability to show herself as a universal figure is a mode of obtaining respectability, as black women have historically not been included within the category of “woman.” Second wave feminism called for equal rights for women, but applied primarily to white women and excluded the grievances, concerns, and voices of black women. Not only were black women excluded from civil rights in relation to race, as black men were privileged as the primary victims, they were also excluded from gender rights. Black feminist scholars have argued that the intersection of race and

gender as mutually constitutive categories of oppression and exclusion must be considered together.²³⁰

Mrs. Obama's presentation of herself as just like any other mother seems a strategic move to garner the respectability that has been so long denied to black women. It also works against racialized associations of the Obamas and watermelon as a means to demean the first black family in the White House discussed in chapter 1. The above narrative builds upon notions of the mother as the primary caregiver of the family and whose success as a mother is made visible by the food she provides to her children. Mrs. Obama's "failure" to cook fresh foods for her family purportedly also speaks to her "failure" as a mother. Yet, she recuperates her failure through heeding medical advice, feeding her children fresh fruits and vegetables, and implementing Let's Move as a national program. The books "Eternal America" and "America's Art" establish her as the mothering representative of the nation-state. Her reliance on medical knowledge as the basis for change is important, as medicine is used as the legitimating authority for proper mothering.

Mrs. Obama redeems herself as a mother by engaging in successful reproductive labor when she discusses the changes she has made to her and her children's diet. This is initially made apparent by the change of music when Mrs. Obama begins to discuss Let's Move as a federal initiative for the nation as a whole. The music is initially ominous, creating a sense of uncertainty and doom. When the Mrs. Obama begins to discuss

²³⁰ White, E. Frances. 2001. *Dark Continent of Our Bodies*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press; Carby, Hazel. 1997. White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood. *Black British Feminism*. Ed. Heidi Safia Mirza. London: Routledge; Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women. *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241-1299.

dietary changes, the music changes to an upbeat, joyous sound produced by string guitars. Food becomes the identifiable marker that demonstrates Michelle Obama's capacity to feed her family (and the nation). Therefore, taking account of the images where Mrs. Obama is photographed with food are vital to understanding how black womanhood becomes constructed as respectable through healthy food choices in this video.

Toward the end of the video, Mrs. Obama states, "Let's Move is going to take families out of their isolation and give them the nation-wide support that they need in a whole range of industries to get their kids on track to live healthier lives, to eat right, to get more exercise, and to be ready to face the challenges of the future."



Image 43. Let's Move – Michelle Obama picnic.



Image 44. Let's Move – Michelle Obama with students in kitchen.

In this segment, we see Mrs. Obama mothering the children of the nation, primarily children of color. In the first clip, she is at a long, bench table with seven adolescent girls. Her hand is fondly placed on a young girl's head, as she serves food to the children seated at the table. They are outdoors, surrounded by large green shrubs and grass and the picnic table has a traditional red and white checkered covering. In the following scene, Michelle Obama is in a professional kitchen, surrounded by youth of color who are all adorned in chef's hats and matching yellow t-shirts. The First Lady is prepping a green vegetable with a young brown-skinned girl. This is followed by a clip of a mother sharing food with her two young children in a kitchen. The woman uses tongs to grab salad from a brown wooden bowl on the kitchen island. The following scene shows a close up of a young boy approximately 8 years old eating an apple. We then see children running on grass playing soccer as a sports team. The video ends with a focus on Mrs. Obama in the library in the White House, the bowl of apples by her side.

It is not insignificant that in these images, Mrs. Obama is primarily photographed while in contact with children of color, to whom the program is catered. She sets an

example for proper eating and mothering by feeding the children fresh fruits and vegetables. Mrs. Obama's interaction with students of color seems a direct intervention in the higher rates of type 2 diabetes for children of color. In all of these images, Michelle Obama demonstrates dignity, care, leadership, and respect as a black woman by how she cares for youth through food. While she initially describes feeding her children pizza and fast food as a failure, she is able to recuperate her failure as mother and black woman through feeding them fresh foods and vegetables. In so doing, she prepares her own children as well as the children of the nation as citizens of the United States to "face the challenges of the future." Their bodily health is equated with their civic engagement, imbuing individual food choices with national political implications. Her ability to produce healthy bodies through the domestic sphere, reproductive labor, and the reproduction of the nation is significant, challenging conceptions of black womanhood as pathological and infectious. As a representative of the nation-state, she also constructs the United States as a nation-state that cares about its youth, wanting to maintain life and health defined through the consumption of fresh produce. Food studies scholar Charlotte Biltekoff argues that during World War II food was used as a tool for wartime propaganda, including "home-front morale," enlisting soldiers through efforts including "urging people to produce foods in victory gardens, conserve through canning and proper cooking techniques, adjust diets to availability, observe rationing and price ceilings, and practice good nutrition."²³¹ While Mrs. Obama's representation in the "The First Lady

²³¹ Biltekoff, Charlotte. 2013. *Eating Right in America: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 56.

Introduces Let's Move!" does not emphasize wartime ideals, her focus on eating well extends individual action to larger national goals.

Conclusion

Purest Poison ends with the following written across the screen: "Nearly 1 in 2 children of color born in the year 2000 will get diabetes in their lifetime...unless we do something about it. Raise your voice and join the conversation about diabetes." As a public service announcement, *Purest Poison* attempts to warn youth of color in an innovative and relevant way against the perils of consuming particular food objects in contracting type 2 diabetes. In this way, The Bigger Picture takes a critical approach to understanding the environmental conditions that lead to the consumption of sugary, high caloric and fried foods for blacks and Latinxs. Their efforts to tackle type 2 diabetes as it affects youth of color through community-based forums demonstrates their efforts in anti-racist health work in the San Francisco Bay Area. However, they rely on tropes of the black woman as pathological, problematically disabled, poor mothers, and hypersexual in their efforts to steer others from consuming these foods. In this way, the PSA falls into the trap of respectability politics - it works critically toward change, but relies on problematic conceptions and representations to produce individual and collective change.

Michelle Obama acts as the representative for the federal Let's Move program and, as a black woman, she exists within the historical tropes that *Purest Poison* reproduces. She epitomizes the respectable woman, proper mother, able-bodied, and universal figure who is relatable and admirable. Mrs. Obama is humanized and humanizing, embracing the consumption of fruits and vegetables and exercise as

redemptive and life-affirming actions. As such, her use of the politics of respectability is also invested in representations of black woman, but as the counterpoint *Purest Poison* and historical and contemporary representations of black womanhood pathological and morbid.

Ultimately, both videos try to create change in their efforts to reduce type 2 diabetes, diet-related illness, and premature death. These short films mark the black woman's body as not only at the limit of the healthy body, but also as a site for intervention for communal change. Their differing messages speak to the ways in which contemporary discourses on healthy foods and type 2 diabetes are infused with racial-gendered messaging as well. These videos demonstrate the way in which notions of respectability and the grotesque of black women function in contemporary food projects on type 2 diabetes and through programs catered to health for youth of color.

While these two sites seem disparate, their shared emphasis on the black woman, food consumption, type 2 diabetes, youth of color, and shared years of initiation make them inextricably linked. In 2010, farmers markets, community supported agriculture, food access for communities were all conversations that were in full swing and these two videos are situated within that context. The production of short films speaks to the impulse to create particular representations of consumption in the hopes of behavioral change. These short films speak to the complexity of how food politics become represented, negotiated, and debated on a national stage and through community-based projects in very public ways. This demonstrates that contemporary food politics, which are often imagined as objective, taken for granted truths based in medical knowledge about health, also produce knowledge about racial-gendered difference. I focus on *Purest*

Poison and “The First Lady Introduces Let’s Move!” because they are representations about communities of color and include the voices of communities of color, an uncommon trait in contemporary discussions of food, race and health.

In the next chapter, I move from the site of the individual racialized body to the site of the community body through geographic space. While in this chapter, I focused on the themes of science and the construction of the black woman’s body, in the next chapter, I focus on how food desert videography is a particularly useful medium to point out structural critiques of food deserts, as well as to connect viewer-consumers to pleasure in food objects and consumption.

Chapter 3: Growing Justice in a Food Desert

I like the fact that it was young black people owning a business in the hood. That was one of my dreams in life, to own a store in the 'hood where we serve healthy food and fresh vegetables and we were the face of the community. Every neighborhood needs that. Period. We are the guardians. Food security.

Adrianna Fike, worker-owner of Mandela Foods Co-Operative (2014)

The question remains: What are today's young activists dreaming about? We know what they are fighting against, but what are they fighting for? These are crucial questions, for...the most powerful, visionary dreams of a new society don't come from little think tanks of smart people or out of the atomized, individualistic world of consumer capitalism where raging against the status quo is simply the hip thing to do. Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge.²³²

Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams* (2002)

Introduction

Following Robin Kelley's lead, in this chapter I analyze what young activists dream about and fight for in regions known as food deserts. I argue that through video activism, they document the racialized politics of the food desert, demonstrating how structural conditions produce the food desert, rather than arguments of individual choice. Food desert videography frames food deserts, a form of food insecurity, as an iteration of environmental racism produced by state-sponsored spatial underdevelopment and subsidized segregation. Through food desert videography, activists imagine and fight for a radically different future in which low-income community of color regions have as

²³² Kelley, Robin. 2002. *Freedom Dreams*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, p. 8.

much access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally-relevant foods as (white) upper middle-class and affluent communities. It is a call that invests in the health and growth of community members, primarily working class and people of color, and recognizes them as worthy of investment and life.

In this chapter, I explore the following questions: How does food desert videography provide a particular type of intervention in food deserts literature? What is the knowledge produced in these videos and how does it reflect dreams for the future? How does food desert videography engage arguments about environmental racism and food insecurity? How do these videos counter typical images of brown and black pathology by incorporating images of life and health? By focusing on food deserts as unequal environments, the ill effects of limited nutritious food access, and the interventions being made in communities of color by communities of color, food desert visual productions creatively connect viewers to both structural forms of inequity as well as sensual forms of desire through food imagery.

I analyze food desert videos as a genre of videography that produces notions of race through politics of space and food. Food desert videography is a form that allows for a structural critique of food access by the visual cues utilized in the videos. Moreover, in their content, these videos employ what Wolfgang Haug has called commodity aesthetics, or appeals to beauty, the senses, and desire within the viewer-consumer in order to

persuade them to possess a particular object.²³³ I argue that the images of fresh produce in food desert videography is intended to manufacture desire in the viewer-consumer in a broader effort to get her/him to purchase fresh produce so that life and health may be generated within the death spaces of food deserts.

I analyze ten (urban) food desert videos, highlighting two representative examples for how visual imagery of the food deserts illustrates the “problem,” intervention, and benefits from interventions. The West Oakland-based videos “Filling the Food Desert-Brahm Ahmadi-Oakland California” and the video on the Mandela Foods Co-Op homepage critique food scarcity in a unique way.²³⁴ This visually compelling imagery calls attention to racialized food disparities in urban, working class communities of color. I analyze how the two videos situate food insecurity as an instance of environmental racism that is structured by state violence through underdevelopment and racialized segregation. As such, the videos acknowledge the racialized historical, political, and economic factors that have produced the food desert as such and articulate themselves within a radical history of anti-racism and anti-colonialism, recognizing food deserts as resulting from long-standing systemic issues. The imagery also resists typical representations of black and brown pathology by imagining black and brown bodies as producers, distributors and consumers of fresh fruits and vegetables. The images of fresh produce are visual markers that elicit desire and pleasure in the viewer-consumer, shifting

²³³ Haug, Wolfgang. 1983. Author’s Introduction. *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality and Advertising in Capitalist Society*. Translated by Robert Bock. New York, NY: Polity Press.

²³⁴ Images obtained from YouTube.com, “Filling the Food Desert-Brahm Ahmadi-Oakland California” (2010); Images obtained from Mandela Foods website (2014).

representations of black and Latinx communities from sites of death and abjection to sites of life and vitality.

In the following section, I offer a brief overview of food deserts literature. I then provide background on West Oakland racial and class makeup and the limited amount of fresh produce available in the region. I then highlight two representative videos that demonstrate how racial difference is produced through the sites of the food desert video in order to offer critiques of structural inequities. I pay particular attention to the Mandela Foods food desert video and how it interrogates the racial-spatial politics of West Oakland as a food desert, through a critique of post-war restructuring and state violence. The chapter concludes that the Mandela Foods video is an exceptional example of food desert videography by situating itself within a history of radical anti-racist and anti-colonial collaborative work.

Space, Race and Food

In her article, “On plantations and prisons: a black sense of place,” geographer and gender studies scholar Katherine McKittrick argues that we should not reduce or naturalize black lives and bodies to racial violence, but instead recognize “the insistence that spaces of encounter, rather than transparent and completed spaces of racism and racist violence, hold in them useful anti-colonial practices and narratives.”²³⁵ She calls for a black sense of place, arguing, “We might reimagine geographies of dispossession and racial violence not through the comfortable lenses of insides/outside or us/them, which repeat what Gilmore calls ‘doomed methods of analysis and action,’ but as sites through

²³⁵ McKittrick, Katherine. “On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place” *Social and Cultural Geography* 12(8): 2011, p. 953-955.

which ‘co-operative human efforts’ can take place and have place.”²³⁶ In other words, rather than focus solely on violence enacted upon bodies of color, McKittrick argues that studies of racialized spaces should highlight how communities of color work toward solidarity, anti-racist practices and discourses, and effect change through collaborative, concerted efforts.

I analyze food desert videography through the lens McKittrick offers by arguing that these videos do not reduce food deserts to spaces of racial violence. While the act of documenting does call attention to racial violence, it also allows the videos to critique that violence in order to imagine and demand a radically different future. While the gaze of surveillance is usually on low-income communities of color to discipline, cause injury, or oppress, I argue that food desert videography reframes that gaze, by using documentation of racialized spaces to call for food equity and simultaneously recognizes how food disparities are linked to other spatial and environmental injustices. Food deserts videography also produces its own narrative, focusing on the sensual pleasures of nutritious foods through visual aestheticism, enabling experiences of pleasure, nourishment, and satisfaction in sites typically constructed as abject. In this way, food desert videography has a unique capacity to engage anti-colonial practices and discourses by visually demonstrating how food, place, and race are interlocking systems of oppression and sites of contestation and transgression.

According to the USDA, food deserts are defined as “...urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. Instead of

²³⁶ McKittrick, Katherine. “On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place” *Social and Cultural Geography* 12(8): 2011, p. 960.

supermarkets and grocery stores, these communities may have no food access or are served only by fast food retailers that offer few healthy, affordable options. The lack of access contributes to a poor diet and can lead to higher levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.”²³⁷ Food desert literature quite distinctly marks differential consumption of nutritious foods as an issue of environmental access.²³⁸ This literature highlights the challenges with accessing nutritious foods, in particular for those who are poor and living in urban environments or rural areas. Sociological and geographical studies on food deserts emphasize how place—the environment—has a significant impact on one’s life chances in relation to accessible nutritious foods. Unlike conservative rhetoric, which deems poor people and people of color as individual bad decision makers who are irresponsible in their food choices, food deserts literature significantly shows how the built environment is structured in such a way that the decision-making capacity of its residents is severely limited.

²³⁷ “Food Deserts.” Agricultural Marketing Service. United States Department of Agriculture. N.D. Web. September 14, 2015. Given that my study is U.S.-based, I use the USDA’s definition of the food deserts (as opposed to the Low Income Project, for instance) for the specific rendering of how food deserts are understood within the context of the United States.

²³⁸ Food deserts research is still developing and continues to be debated. Therefore, while much of the literature on food deserts overwhelmingly argues that the lack of quality produce and the overabundance of foods high in calories and sugars leads to chronic health conditions, there does exist research that argues against these findings. For instance, the assumption is, if given the opportunity, persons will necessarily choose to eat quality, fresh, and nutritious foods. Yet a few studies have reported that when quality produce is made available in areas that previously did not have it, residents do not necessarily begin shopping at the new grocery store (see *Slate*’s “Food Deserts Aren’t the Problem” by Heather Tirado Gilligan, published February 10, 2014). Follow up studies have not yet been published that provide more of an in-depth analysis as to why this may be the case. A few possibilities may be that the store does not offer competitive prices, is considered undesirable because of its unfamiliarity, or sells foods that are not culturally appropriate.

Racial segregation is one of the primary reasons for the existence of food deserts, in which particular racial groups have less access to nutritious foods than do others. Place, in particular where one lives, is a determining factor in health outcomes. Because segregation concentrates poverty in particular regions, it also structures health outcomes. Institutionally-promoted racial segregation, including redlining, bank restrictions of home loans to whites, and allocating higher interest rates for people of color are just some practices that have resulted in residential racial segregation.²³⁹ This state-sponsored segregation has resulted in environments in which communities of color do not have the same access to fresh fruits and vegetables as do their white counterparts.

Critical food desert literature recognizes the intersection between race and class in food deserts.²⁴⁰ These studies make the contention that those who are poor, working class, and persons of color are much more likely to reside in neighborhoods where liquor stores, corner grocery stores, and fast food are prevalent than those who live in middle class and upper middle class neighborhoods.²⁴¹ By the same token, those who are poor and of communities of color are also much less likely to have access to local grocery stores which sell fresh fruits and vegetables. The literature agrees that blacks and

²³⁹ Kurtz, Hilda A. 2013. Linking Food Deserts and Racial Segregation. *Geographies of Race and Food: Fields, Bodies, Markets*. Eds Rachel Slocum and Arun Saldanha. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.

²⁴⁰ Brooks, Kelley. "Research Shows Food Deserts More Abundant in Minority Neighborhoods." Johns Hopkins Magazine. *Johns Hopkins University*. Spring 2014. Web. September 22, 2015; MP Galvez, K Morland, C Raines, J Kobil, J Siskind, J Godbold, and B Brenner. 2008. "Race and food store availability in an inner city neighbourhood." *Public Health Nutrition* 11(6): 624-631.

²⁴¹ While food deserts exists in both rural and urban areas, my focus for this chapter is on the urban food desert. Therefore, the majority of the literature I draw from focuses on urban areas that have been identified as food deserts or regions with low amounts of quality fresh produce and/or large high numbers of convenience stores, liquor stores, and fast food eateries.

Latinxs experience higher rates of chronic illnesses largely as a result of living in urban food deserts.²⁴² The consensus among these texts is that is that the lack of access to quality and nutritious foods leaves residents to consume unhealthy foods that *are* readily available and which lead to a variety of illnesses, in particular, chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease as well as premature death.

Research on food deserts and Oakland demonstrates that economic underdevelopment, devaluation of land, and disinvestment of capital have created spaces where grocery stores are minimal and where liquor stores, corner markets, and fast food eateries are abundant.²⁴³ I follow suit with scholars who seek to “expand the focus on environmental justice from environmental hazards and toxic exposures to issues of the food environment.”²⁴⁴ While environmental justice traditionally highlights issues such as toxic waste sites, landfills, pollution in air quality, and industrial chemicals, I argue for expanding the concept of environmental justice to include the environment accessible for consumption in the form of food.

²⁴² Smith, Matthew Lee, T.S. Sunil, Camerino I. Salazar, Sadaf Rafique, and Marcia G. Ory. 2013. “Disparities of Food Availability and Affordability within Convenience Stores in Bexar County, Texas.” *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*.

²⁴³ Alkon, Alison, Daniel Block, Kelly Moore, Catherine Gillis, Nicole DiNuccio, and Noel Chavez. 2013. “Foodways of the Urban Poor.” *Geoforum* 48: 126-135; Nathan McClintock. 2011. “From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California.” *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. Eds. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; American Civil Liberties Union. “Unshared Bounty: How structural racism contributes to the creation and persistence of food deserts.” New York Law School, Racial Justice Project.

²⁴⁴ Hilmers, Angela, David C. Hilmers, and Jayna Dave. 2012. “Neighborhood Disparities in Access to Healthy Foods and Their Effects on Environmental Justice.” *American Journal of Public Health* 102(9): 1644-1654, p. 1644.

Since the 1980s, evidence has shown that poor communities and communities of color disproportionately live in toxic environments. Sociologist David Pellow defines environmental racism and environmental inequalities as “the unequal distribution of pollution across the social landscape that unfairly burdens poor neighborhoods and communities of color.”²⁴⁵ Environmental justice work traditionally analyzes how air, soil, and water are filled with contaminants that cause injury to bodies. Differing from the environmental movement, the environmental justice movement centers the ways in which the poor and communities of color disproportionately live in toxic environments. Potential health hazards of these toxic environments are cancers, reproductive illnesses and respiratory disorders, to name a few.²⁴⁶ Toxic environments are caused by toxic waste sites are purchased on land that is devalued, often land that is in or near working class communities; or companies believe that poor and of color communities lack the political power to fight instances of toxicity; or because regulations are not enforced either by the company or by regulating organizations.²⁴⁷

While it is unclear if companies intentionally or unintentionally emit these environmental hazards, it is clear that the lives and bodies of those who live in these areas are deemed less valuable. Laura Pulido argues that environmental racism refers to forms of white supremacy that pollute urban spaces, reproducing poverty, subscribing to ideologies of racial superiority, and, following Gilmore, producing “group-differentiated

²⁴⁵ Pellow, David. 2007. “Poisoning the Planet: The Struggle for Environmental Justice.” *Contexts* 6(1): 37-41.

²⁴⁶ Pellow, David. 2007. “Poisoning the Planet: The Struggle for Environmental Justice.” *Contexts* 6(1): 37-41.

²⁴⁷ Pulido, Laura. 2015. “Geographies of race and ethnicity 1: White supremacy vs. white privilege in environmental racism research.” *Progress in Human Geography*. 39(6): 809-817.

vulnerability to premature death.”²⁴⁸ My research extends this work by viewing food inequities through the lens of environmental racism. I argue that the lack of available nutritious foods in regions that are predominantly working class black and Latinx are instances of the ways in which the social landscape or environment is made toxic for these communities.

The food desert exists as a counterpart to the food oasis, or sites in which nutritious food is abundant and easily accessible, and contains a limited number of corner markets, liquor stores, and fast food eateries.²⁴⁹ The food oasis offers ample fresh produce and is the site of grocery stores such as Whole Foods, Trader Joe’s, and other grocery stores that specialize in natural, organic, specialty or high-end foods. Regions such as Piedmont, the Oakland Hills and Berkeley are examples of food oases that will be discussed in more depth in a later chapter section. Food oases are located in upper middle-class and affluent sections of a city or suburbs, areas that are generally also predominantly white. Just as state-sponsored forms of segregation and underdevelopment resulted in food deserts in poor, urban regions, those actions simultaneously contributed to the production of food oases.

West Oakland

²⁴⁸ Pulido, Laura. 2015. “Geographies of race and ethnicity 1: White supremacy vs. white privilege in environmental racism research.” *Progress in Human Geography*. 39(6): 809-817.

²⁴⁹ Our Mission. *Food Oasis*. N.D. Web. April 9, 2017; Resources. *Georgia Organics*. 2017. Web. April 9, 2017; John Bare. From Food Desert to Food Oasis, One Casserole at a Time. February 17, 2016. Web. April 9, 2017.

Recent writings on food, inequality, and race discuss the lack of nutritious foods available in areas of Oakland, California, labeled a food desert.²⁵⁰ In particular, neighborhoods in West Oakland and East Oakland have been cited as having very limited grocery stores for residents to purchase quality, fresh produce. Other local food justice organizations cite Oakland as a place that lacks sufficient access to grocery stores and is overabundant in liquor stores and fast food restaurants.²⁵¹ While there are several initiatives to create full-service grocery stores in West Oakland, which houses approximately 25,000 residents, Mandela Foods Co-Operative is currently the only one.²⁵²

A 2008 Alameda County Public Health Department Report cites that approximately 140 food stores existed in West Oakland in 1950, but that number had declined to 23 by the year 2000. West Oakland has been increasingly gentrified in recent years, as the historically African American community is being displaced with white young professionals. The per capita income of Oakland between 2009 and 2013 was \$31,971, while the median income in Oakland in 2013 was \$52,583 with 20% of

²⁵⁰ Alkon, Alison. 2012. *Black, White and Green: Farmers Markets, Race, and the Green Economy*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press; Nathan McClintock. 2011. "From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California." *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability* Eds. Alison Alkon and Julian Agyeman. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; "3 Food Initiatives that Could Transform West Oakland's Food Desert." *KQED*. KQED Inc. March 19, 2015. Web. October 13, 2015.

²⁵¹ "About West Oakland." *People's Grocery*. N.D. Web. February 3, 2016.

²⁵² *People's Community Market*. N.D. Web. February 3, 2016; "3 Food Initiatives that Could Transform West Oakland's Food Desert." *KQED*. KQED Inc. March 19, 2015. Web. October 13, 2015; Artz, Matthew. "Proposed West Oakland Supermarket would take bite out of food desert." *San Jose Mercury News*. February 1, 2015. Web. February 1, 2016; "Food Access and Liquor Stores." *Life and Death from Unnatural Causes: Health and Social Inequity in Alameda County*. *Alameda County Public Health Department*. 2008. Web. February 3, 2016.

residents living below poverty.²⁵³ The median income in West Oakland was cited as \$27,971 in a 2015 study.²⁵⁴ In 2011, Oakland's racial demographic included African Americans at 27.3%, whites at 25.9%, Latinx at 25.4% and Asians at 16.7%.²⁵⁵ While Oakland does not have a majority racial group, West Oakland is over 50% African American while East Oakland is primarily Latinx. Those living in West Oakland have been cited as having three times the diabetes rates as other residents in Alameda County.²⁵⁶ A black child born in West Oakland is estimated to die 14 years earlier than a white child born in the Oakland Hills.²⁵⁷ This reality is also due to violence, lack of employment opportunities, health conditions brought on by stress, pollution in the environment by the Oakland ports, among other issues. According to a 2014 Alameda County Public Health Report, West Oakland has the "highest rates of poverty, unemployment, and diet-related chronic disease in Alameda County."²⁵⁸ West Oakland's poverty rate is twice that of California's and the unemployment rate is almost two times as much as the U.S. unemployment rate.²⁵⁹

²⁵³ "Oakland (city), California." *United States Census Bureau*. U.S. Department of Commerce. December 2, 2015 (last revised). Web. February 1, 2016.

²⁵⁴ Artz, Matthew. "Proposed West Oakland Supermarket would take bite out of food desert." *San Jose Mercury News*. February 1, 2015. Web. February 1, 2016.

²⁵⁵ Kuruville, Matthai. "25% drop in African American population in Oakland." *San Francisco Gate*. March 11, 2011. Web. February 1, 2016.

²⁵⁶ Guggiana, Marissa. "For Oakland food desert: a people's grocery store." *Berkeley Side* December 18, 2012. Web. February 3, 2016.

²⁵⁷ Schell, Brittany. "The Pulse of Oakland." 2013. Web. February 4, 2016.

²⁵⁸ "Alameda County Health Data Profile. Community Health Status Assessment for Public Health Accreditation." Alameda County Public Health Department. 2014. Web. February 5, 2016.

²⁵⁹ Soref, Dave. "Mandela MarketPlace: A Beacon of Healthy Hope in Disadvantaged West Oakland." *Organic Connections* March 2014. Web. February 5, 2016.

In comparison, the city of Piedmont is in the Oakland Hills, surrounded on all sides by Oakland flatlands. In 2010, Piedmont was 74% white and boasted a median household income of \$198,705.²⁶⁰ The region enjoys several small upscale grocery stores, including Piedmont Grocery, which specializes in local, seasonal, and fresh foods, including breads, spreads and cheeses.²⁶¹ In addition, a Whole Foods and Sprouts Farmers Market are located just a few miles away. According to a 2009 report by the Hope Collective, an Oakland community-based organization that highlights environmental health and food policy, in the Oakland Hill broadly, there is one supermarket for every 13,778 residents, while in the Oakland flatlands there is one supermarket for every 93,126 residents.²⁶² Similarly, in 2010 Berkeley was almost 60% white with a median family income of \$98,203 and 112,580 residents.²⁶³ In 2014, Berkeley has at least six full-service grocery stores, which would result in one grocery store per 19,000 residents, if the number of residents remained the same or decreased within that four-year difference. These stores include one Safeway, a Whole Foods, a Trader Joe's, a local store named Andronico's (which has since closed but another Safeway has opened in its place), and the famous Berkeley Bowl.²⁶⁴ The examples of Piedmont, the Oakland Hills, and Berkeley suggest that these areas could be thought of as sites of food surplus, or an overabundance of accessible, nutritious foods per person and is drawn particularly along race and class lines. The life that is granted greater value

²⁶⁰ City of Piedmont, Alameda County. Bay Area Census. N.D. Web. April 9, 2017.

²⁶¹ Piedmont Grocery website; "The Best 10 Grocery in Piedmont, CA." *Yelp* N.D. Web. April 9, 2017.

²⁶² Oakland's Food Divide. *Oakland North*. 2017. Web. April 9, 2017.

²⁶³ City of Berkeley, Alameda County. Bay Area Census. N.D. Web. April 9, 2017.

²⁶⁴ Tay, Sue Ying. A survey of Berkeley's major grocery stores. *The Daily Clog. The Daily Californian*. July 14, 2014. Web. April 9, 2017.

through investment in the food economy is white, middle and upper-middle class and affluent.

People's Community Market (the producers of the "Filling the Food Desert-Brahm Ahmadi-Oakland California" video) and Mandela Foods Co-Op intercede in this reality by changing the landscape of food access. In an Alameda County Public Health Department report published in 2008, it was found that

Mandela Marketplace collected data from 22 retail stores that sell food or liquor in the 12 highest-poverty West Oakland census tracts. Findings were that 100% sold unhealthful snack foods; 96% sold alcoholic beverages; and 80% sold some type of fruit or vegetable. The quality of the produce in these stores was generally poor, and fresh food items were not well marketed or maintained. In order to purchase fresh foods at a discount rate, store owners often purchased more than they could sell within the shelf life of the produce. Produce tended to be sold even if it had sat out too long, had not been stored properly, or was deteriorating. In addition, store owners frequently had to raise fresh food prices to minimize their dollar loss.²⁶⁵

While corner store owners do not necessarily want to sell old or damaged foods, they nonetheless often provide foods that lack nutritional value. Mandela Foods and Mandela Marketplace works with these retailers by stocking their shelves with produce, bringing baskets for the produce to be housed in, and pricing labels.

"Filling the Food Desert-Brahm Ahmadi-Oakland California" and Mandela Foods try to change the representation of West Oakland as a site of death and deficiency by reshaping how Oakland is represented as a place. Geographers have argued that place is the physical and material as well as the symbolic and social. Sociospatial relations take

²⁶⁵ "Food Access and Liquor Stores." Life and Death from Unnatural Causes: Health and Social Inequity in Alameda County. *Alameda County Public Health Department*. 2008. Web. February 3, 2016.

account of political changes within a particular geographic space.²⁶⁶ The intangible and the tangible come together in a place like West Oakland, where violence against bodies happens, including the fatal shooting of Oscar Grant. Oakland is haunted by a history of violence and is understood in the popular imaginary as a site of death and destruction. In particular, state violence against young black and brown bodies has rendered Oakland a place where it is expected that young people of color will not have the same life expectancy as a young white person. While Oakland residents may experience violence that is made normal, the two selected food desert videos connect the relationship between the violence of the state with the violence of environmental racism.

As the only full-service grocery store in West Oakland, Mandela Foods offers fresh, nutritious, and quality fruits and vegetables in the neighborhood, which many local corner markets and liquor stores do not. Communities of color in West Oakland participate in a great deal of food justice work and recognize food injustice as an iteration of racism. In her study of the West Oakland farmers markets, in which Mandela Foods participates, Alison Alkon found that those who shop and sell at the farmers market view food access issues as connected with racism and poverty.²⁶⁷ In this way, food justice issues are viewed as inherently entrenched in relation to other social justice issues more broadly.

²⁶⁶ Jessop, Bob, Neil Brenner, and Martin Jones. 2008. "Theorizing Sociospatial Relations." *Society and Space* 26(3): 389-401.

²⁶⁷ Alkon, Alison. 2008. Paradise or Pavement: The Social Construction of the Environment in two Urban Farmers Markets and their Implications for Environmental Justice and Sustainability. *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability* 13(3): 271-289, p. 281.

In the next section, I examine how “Filling the Food Desert-Brahm Ahmadi-Oakland California” and the Mandela Foods Co-Op video use visual markers to make structural critiques about how West Oakland has been produced as a food desert as well as aesthetic images of fresh fruits and vegetables that connect the food’s sensual qualities with the physical body. I argue that these videos make necessary and incisive critiques of food deserts by situating itself in a history of collaborative and anti-colonial racial-spatial politics.

The Food Desert as Video Genre

While sociological and geographic literature on food deserts continues to grow, no academic studies have analyzed the videography of food deserts. I intervene in food deserts literature by recognizing how the visual manifestations of food deserts construct space as racialized and inequitable. Food deserts videography demonstrates how space is racialized through visual productions within the context of food consumption and food access.

In this section, I analyze how food desert videos construct such regions as racialized spaces and call attention to structural inequities.²⁶⁸ Videography on food deserts supplements academic and popular literature by constructing food deserts as both

²⁶⁸ These videos include: “CBS This Morning-Wendell Pierce on Fighting Food Deserts” by CBS News, published April 19, 2012; “The Solution for Urban Food Deserts” by Ruella Rouf, published November 3, 2013; “Building an Oasis in a Philadelphia Food Desert” by PBS Newshour, published August 6, 2015; “Millions of Americans Still Live in Food Deserts” by ABC 10 News, published December 7, 2015; “Filling the Food Desert- Brahm Ahmadi- Oakland California” by Unobscura, published January 15, 2010; “Ron Finley: Food Forrest” by HealthHappensHere, published March 27, 2012; “Health Foods Problem of Oakland, pt1” by Presiden Davis, published July 31, 2009; “California’s Brave New Warriors- Today’s Green Minute” by TodaysGreenMinute, published October 5, 2011; “Living in a Desert” by Naked Juice, published August 22, 2013; and “Food Desert” by Healthy Pima, published March 27, 2012.

physical places and metaphorical spaces. This documentation allows the videos to make a critique about structural conditions that is particularly pronounced in visual form. I argue that videography of food deserts offers particular intervention potential because similar to food images in sites like Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook, food desert videography also aestheticizes food as beautiful, desirable and artistic. The ways in which food desert videography engages in commodity aestheticization is critical because it visualizes fresh produce's sensual qualities—taste, color, texture—in such a way to make it desirable to the viewer-consumer. These visual cues are particularly striking in the context of food deserts as sites of state-sponsored racialized violence in relation to inequities, poverty, and access. Food desert videos reveal how space is racialized and how race is spatialized through the site of food.

I analyze ten short food deserts videos that have at least 1,000 views on YouTube for an overarching understanding of how the genre of food desert videography constructs space, race, class, and gender viewed at both small and large scales. I analyze videos on the city of Oakland, cities in the state of California, and other U.S. cities to determine how the urban food desert is broadly constructed in the United States. Given that the public learns about food deserts from different sources, I include a sampling of sources. The videos I analyze include productions by journalists, food organizations, individual persons, and food corporations.

The 10 videos that I sampled followed a similar format. The visually compelling aspects focus on the “problem” of the food desert, the interventions made, and the benefits/results of those interventions. The problem of the food desert is exemplified by imagery of dilapidated buildings and houses, liquor stores, fast food eateries, public

transit, vacant lots, and corner markets. The videos show close ups of fried, high caloric and fast foods in the region, demonstrating the overabundance of “bad” foods. This aspect plays with themes of lack and excess, as the images show a lack of nutritious foods and an excess of highly processed, fried, and high caloric foods. The environment is visually constructed as a site of deterioration, devastation, and lack. The video then focuses on interventions or responses to the “problem” of the food desert. In this section, the camera turns to imagery of urban gardens, farmers’ markets, full-service retail grocery stores, as well as close ups of seeds, plants, and produce. The video usually ends with the theme of growing community through growing food. We see clips of people gardening, eating, or working together, and images of children with fruits and vegetables or in food gardens. They always appear happy and smiling and are almost always people of color.

In what follows, I provide a reading of how representations of race, space and food inequities are constructed in two food desert videos focused specifically on West Oakland. I highlight these two videos because of how they depart from the food desert video genre. In “Filling the Food Desert-Brahm Ahmadi-Oakland California” and the video on the Mandela Foods Co-Op homepage, the historical context is offered for understanding the production of the food desert, through the devaluation of lands and bodies of communities of color. The majority of the videos I surveyed documented the food desert as such, making visually apparent the lack of food security. However, they did not illustrate how the food desert is socially constructed through a process of neglect, rather than an unfortunate happenstance. The two selected videos are unique in that they make explicit how the food desert is not something that results naturally or by accident;

rather through a convergence of structural segregation and state-sponsored underdevelopment, the food desert is a contemporary manifestation of environmental racism. While food is a commodity, the two videos' aestheticization of food through close up imagery, bright lighting, and the highlighting of food's vibrant colors, is not simply or solely an attempt to underscore food's exchange value. Instead, I understand these visual cues to form subject-object relations through the materiality of food,²⁶⁹ capturing ephemeral qualities that produce an affect of pleasure and desire.

In "Filling the Food Desert-Brahm Ahmadi-Oakland California," Brahm Ahmadi, the CEO of People's Community Market, a not-yet-in-existence retail grocer in West Oakland, discusses the challenges West Oakland faces as a food desert. He calls attention to the white flight of full-service grocery stores and supermarkets in the region in the 1950s.

When you look back at communities like West Oakland, really before the 1950s, they were completely different in terms of the landscape of food outlets that were available. You had mom and pop grocery stores. You had supermarkets. Even the well-known chains that we have today used to have stores in these communities. But starting in the 1950s, they all began to leave. They began to follow the dollar out to the new suburban communities and that left these neighborhoods without grocery stores. And really, so almost half a century now, neighborhoods like West Oakland have gone predominantly without a consistent supply of food in their neighborhoods.

²⁶⁹ Haug, Wolfgang. 1983. Author's Introduction and Chapter 2: The aesthetic abstraction of the commodity: surface – package – advertising image. *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality and Advertising in Capitalist Society*. New York, NY:



Image 45. West Oakland grocery store, 1950s.



Image 46. West Oakland, grocery store produce, 1950s.

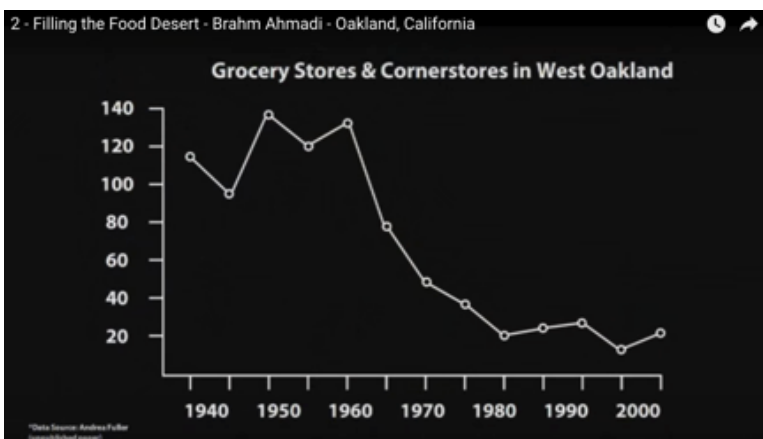


Image 47. West Oakland grocery stores graph.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ Images obtained from YouTube.com, “Filling the Food Desert-Brahm Ahmadi-Oakland California” (2010)

Ahmadi's statement that West Oakland food outlets "began to follow the dollar out to the new suburban communities" in the 1950s refers to redlining, white flight from urban regions to suburbs, and the segregation of communities of color in urban cities. He presents the early 20th century as vibrant in food options, but those options drastically decreased once the grocery stores engaged in hyper-investment in (white) suburban communities. As a result, food options in West Oakland are severely limited because of lack of investment in the region. Ahmadi presents the environment as structuring the options that community members have. The accompanying black and white photographs in Images 45 and 46 provide evidence for the historic existence of local, small-scale grocers that are now so highly desired by those who do work in food and food justice. The black and white chart in Image 47 shows the stark decline in grocery store availability in West Oakland between 1935 and 2005. The chart's usage of quantitative data provides legitimacy to Ahmadi's critique that grocery stores have left the region.

When he discusses interventions being made, Ahmadi highlights community engagement including the People's Grocery grub box and mobile market. They plan to build a full-service supermarket in West Oakland, which is supposed to open during the fall season of 2017.



Image 48. People's Community Market Store Illustration.

Ahmadi states that the proposed People's Community Market will partner with a non-profit organization called Architecture for Humanity to create a building that is approximately one-third the cost of a supermarket, using simpler materials and construction. Image 48 provides a visual to the artisanal simplicity of the store's construction, which will allow it to be an affordable option for groceries in West Oakland. This digital image shows that it is possible to produce affordable, nutritious, local options to residents.

Ahmadi also discusses how grassroots community gardens, urban food co-ops, and farmers' markets are increasing in West Oakland. He argues that urban, low-income neighborhoods have a large spending power and should be considered seriously as a market when grocers are opening up stores. The following images illustrate this discussion:



Image 49. West Oakland food justice – White House.



Image 50. West Oakland food justice – women with produce.

He states, “There *are* real market opportunities here. There *is* spending power *here*.”

These statements are a response to supermarkets and grocery stores who have argued that they would not gain any profit if they opened stores in low-income areas because they believe there to be a lack of spending power in the region.²⁷¹ Here, Ahmadi demonstrates the work that community members must do to make up for the lack of investment by supermarkets and full-service grocers. Through the imagery of people of color standing

²⁷¹ “Supermarket chains avoid low-income neighborhoods, even though they promised not to.” Mashable. *The Associated Press*. December 8, 2015. Web. December 19, 2016.

in front of Oakland legislative buildings and holding bright, ripe vegetables and fruit, he gives credence to the notion that residents are active participants where structure has failed them and have been successful in creative, collaborative projects to produce, distribute, and access healthy foods. In this way, the images center people of color as active participants in their health and wellness.

Mandela Foods Co-Op offers a variety of nutritious foods as the only full-service grocery store in West Oakland. According to the federal Alcohol and Beverage Regulation Administration, in order for a grocery store to be considered full-service it must sell six of the following seven items: “fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh and uncooked meats, poultry and seafood, dairy products, canned foods, frozen foods, dried groceries and baked goods, and non-alcoholic beverages.” At least 50% of the store’s square footage or 6000 square feet of the store’s square footage must be dedicated to these items.²⁷² While local convenience stores may sell some of these food items and while many food justice organizations sell nutritious foods and produce at farmers markets, their CSAs, and other venues, Mandela Foods is the only organization to have met California full-service grocery store standards and to have opened up a retail space in West Oakland for the approximately 25,000 residents. Finally, while Mandela Foods Co-operative is a business, it is associated with multiple other ventures and organizations in West Oakland. These other organizations hold farmers’ market, produce research, support local farmers, and engage in community projects in order to promote health and equity in West Oakland.

²⁷² “Full Service Grocery Store Requirements.” Alcohol Beverage Regulation Administration. DC.gov. N.D. Web. February 4, 2016.

Mandela Foods Co-Operative is a retail subsidiary of Mandela MarketPlace, a non-profit organization created in 2004 that works with local residents, local farmers, local businesses, schools, senior centers, health clinics, and research organizations to “bring food security and economic opportunities to low-income residents in West Oakland.”²⁷³ Mandela MarketPlace takes on a number of projects in West Oakland including incubating businesses, improving produce selection, providing loan access for those who seek small business ownership, and creating working relationships with local farmers of color. Mandela MarketPlace has created 24 worker-owner jobs through Mandela Foods Co-Op, Zella’s Soulful Kitchen (an eatery located inside the Co-Op), Mandela Foods Distribution Center, and Mandela’s MarketPlace. Fifty percent of the produce that comes through Mandela MarketPlace comes from local, under resourced farmers and a portion of that produce then goes to Mandela Foods Co-Op.

Having opened in 2009, Mandela Foods Co-operative is housed in a 2200 square foot store at the corner of Mandela Parkway and 7th Street in West Oakland. As a co-operative, it is democratically owned and operated. In 2014, Mandela Foods Co-Op generated \$1million in profit.²⁷⁴ In a study published in 2015, they noted that 76% of community shoppers said they had increased their consumption of fruits and vegetables since the Co-Op opened, 10 residents have been trained as worker-owners; and 250 shop daily at the Co-Op. The Mandela Foods Co-Op was partially funded by the USDA grant under the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, associated with Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move program. This demonstrates that Mandela Foods does not operate in a vacuum, but

²⁷³ “Transforming West Oakland: A Case Study Series on Mandela MarketPlace.” 2015. Web. February 5, 2016.

²⁷⁴ “Real People, Real Impact.” Mandela Marketplace. 2013. Web. February 5, 2016.

within larger structures of government programs, external grants and funding, and other federal initiatives. It appeals to both the gentrifying community coming into West Oakland as well as local low-income residents who may be dependent on state and federal assistance, such as Women Infants and Children, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and/or Electronic Benefit Transfer.²⁷⁵ While they recognize that the region is being increasingly gentrified, they are not closed off to having those shoppers in their store. However, they strongly support worker-owners who have a long history in the region, as all worker-owners live in West Oakland or used to live in West Oakland and have strong and long-standing ties to the community.

Postwar Restructuring and State Violence

The figures in the video on the Mandela Foods website highlight changes to urban landscape in West Oakland. In particular, owner-worker James Bell references the transition of the region around World War II, when West Oakland had previously been a vibrant community.



Image 51. Mandela Foods – Sean Bell working at Mandela Foods Co-Op.
Image obtained Mandela Foods website: <http://www.mandelafoods.com/about-us> (2014)

²⁷⁵ Bos, Sascha. “The USDA Helps Grow Food Security Programs in Oakland.” *East Bay Express*. February 18, 2015. Web. February 5, 2016.

Bell states,

I know when my grandparents [saw] when the 7th Street corridor was vibrant and those were the areas where people would play blues and all of the clubs and I'm pretty sure at that time, there were areas where you could get fresh produce from. And my grandparents lived through the time where they seen industrialization take all of that away. And I just thought to myself that it would be pretty cool if my grandparents were able to see me helping to re-instill some of that vibrancy back down here.

Here, Bell references the once-thriving business district on Seventh Street in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly for blacks. Seventh Street in West Oakland was an energetic region that included markets, restaurants, dance halls, hotels, blues and jazz clubs, and other businesses. A strong black middle class existed, which allowed blacks to purchase property and own businesses on Seventh Street. With the Second World War, a great deal of labor was needed for the ports and shipyards in Oakland, which meant that many blacks (both men and women) were being hired. As hiring increased, so did migration patterns of blacks from the South. Hiring managers generally placed much of the new migrants into low-wage, low-skilled work. Many of these blacks settled in West Oakland, an established black neighborhood, but due to the influx of migrants, there was limited housing. In the process, Seventh Street became a lively and profitable commercial district frequented by the largely black population in West Oakland.²⁷⁶

Nathan McClintock provides a useful analysis of how West Oakland's landscape changed from the mid 20th century to today. He argues that West Oakland's status as a food desert is a result of what he calls "demarcated devaluation," or "the structural

²⁷⁶ Soliman, Jennifer. *The Rise and Fall of Seventh Street in Oakland: A Historical Essay*. *Found SF*. N.D. Web. December 21, 2016.

processes that have restricted access to healthy food for residents of the flatlands, arguing that a combination of industrial location, residential development, city planning, and racist mortgage lending unevenly developed the city's landscape and concentrated the impacts of capital devaluation within the flatlands."²⁷⁷ McClintock argues that these structural forces have produced West Oakland as a food desert. Previously known as a "garden city," Oakland was a region that displayed greenery and aesthetically beautiful living, while being somewhere between city and country.²⁷⁸

McClintock states that in the mid 1800s, Oakland was seen as a city of homes away from the hustle and bustle of San Francisco, where many worked. In addition, the construction of a railroad that ended in Oakland helped to expand industry from San Francisco to Oakland. He states, "iron works, canneries, cotton and lumber mills, breweries, and carriage factories fueled further industrial agglomeration around the rail terminus in West Oakland and the estuary waterfront at the southern edge of downtown."²⁷⁹ The 1906 San Francisco earthquake, World War I, and World War II brought a growth of workers due to the influx of streetcars, automotive manufacturing, shipbuilding, port work, and factory work (iron work, canneries, cotton and lumber mills, breweries, and carriage factories). A large number of these workers were African American, who experienced the "industrial garden" life—working in the city, but

²⁷⁷ McClintock, Nathan. 2011. From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

²⁷⁸ Self, Robert O. 2003. Introduction. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

²⁷⁹ McClintock, Nathan. 2011. From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, p. 96.

residing within a rail or train ride away where they enjoyed property ownership of single family homes and access to gardens, chickens, and vegetables.

Racially discriminatory practices negatively impacted the African American population in relation to home ownership, migration, and urbanization. The Federal Housing Administration began granting home-ownership loans through the 1934 Federal Housing Act.²⁸⁰ Although Congress created the Federal Housing Authority Title 6 program to offer housing loans to those who could not outright afford to purchase houses, those loans were largely prioritized for whites in the suburbs. As George Lipsitz argues, the 1940s to 1960s saw social democratic policies including FHA loans funneled to whites and largely denied to communities of color, ensuring that white were able to purchase homes in suburbs and able to access monies for water supplies and sewers while communities of color were segregated in cities and exposed to urban renewal projects disproportionately damaged inner city housing for communities of color. Most blacks remained in West Oakland and had to rely on public housing.²⁸¹ Lipsitz states that urban renewal programs during the mid-20th century destroyed more housing for low-income residents than it created, as was intended. This possessive investment in whiteness has guaranteed whites better options for financial, home ownership, money lending. Lipsitz also shows how neoliberal and neoconservative policies of the 1980s and 1990s

²⁸⁰ McClintock, Nathan. 2011. From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; Lipsitz, George. 1995. The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the “White” Problem in American Studies. *American Quarterly* 47(3): 369-387.

²⁸¹ Soliman, Jennifer. The Rise and Fall of Seventh Street in Oakland: A Historical Essay. *Found SF*. N.D. Web. December 21, 2016.

reinforced the racially discriminatory policies of the mid-20th century through attacks on affirmative action, reductive of social services and so-called entitlement programs.²⁸²

Neighborhoods became overcrowded and when the World War II ended, hundreds of blacks lost their jobs. This resulted in increased violence and crime in West Oakland, which city officials labeled “blight” and “slums.” They then engaged in urban renewal and redevelopment of other parts of Oakland in order to prevent it from the same experience as West Oakland. The American Housing Act of 1949, which produced urban renewal projects, growth of public housing, and increased authority of the Federal Housing Administration, destroyed a number of black-owned homes in West Oakland. Those homes that were severely damaged were categorized under eminent domain and destroyed and replaced with public housing projects. Thousands of West Oakland residents were displaced, often pushed out of West Oakland. The Seventh Street corridor lost its liveliness as jobs were lost with the end of the War. The end of World War II also meant that a smaller number of jobs at ports and shipyards were needed replacing longshoreman with cargo containers and cranes.²⁸³

In addition, racial covenants were used until 1948, which were created by developers and homeowners’ associations to exclude people of color from suburban spaces. Homeownership allowed diverse ethnic European-descendant groups to ascribe to the category of “white” and imagine themselves as racially and morally superior to blacks

²⁸² Lipsitz, George. 1995. The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the “White” Problem in American Studies. *American Quarterly* 47(3): 369-387.

²⁸³ Soliman, Jennifer. The Rise and Fall of Seventh Street in Oakland: A Historical Essay. *Found SF*. N.D. Web. December 21, 2016.

in the inner city.²⁸⁴ Bank redlining ensured that people of color remained unqualified for home loans prior to 1968 and zoning, high housing prices, and denial of loan applications did so after 1968. In addition to segregation, this led to the decline of the black middle class. As whites migrated from urban city centers to suburban regions, they also took a great deal of financial resources with them. In the mid 1960s, there was decline of manufacturing in Oakland and rise of manufacturing in its suburbs. Unemployment rose, particularly for blacks, for whom business ownership decreased at disproportionate rates in comparison to their white counterparts. Even in the 1980s, while the rest of the Bay Area saw a rise in job growth with the shift to a service sector economy, Oakland saw only a 1.5% increase in employment with West Oakland and Fruitvale losing 8 to 10 percent employment. Other state initiatives, such as Proposition 14 and 13, resulted in cuts to social and public services. In 1958, the Nimitz, MacArthur, Grove-Shafter, Cypress Freeways were set in place by the Oakland city council, which was all-white. These and other construction projects cut off devalued neighborhoods (the flatlands of West Oakland, Fruitvale, and East Oakland) from middle class and upper middle class neighborhoods. The construction of Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) in 1964 along the Seventh Street Corridor also negatively impacted the Oakland flatlands. To save on cost, most stops were in the region were built above-ground, running through the middle of, and severely damaging, Oakland's Seventh Street. These projects displaced communities, residences, thriving businesses, and spaces of community gathering and engagement.

²⁸⁴ McClintock, Nathan. 2011. From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Today, what was once the Seventh Street corridor is now primarily boarded up buildings, vacant lots, and has lost its appeal as a black commercial district.²⁸⁵

As McClintock argues, the demarcated devaluation and capital disinvestment in West Oakland resulted in the decline of food retail businesses in the region. Supermarkets had come to control the food retail industry, driving small grocers out of business. As a result, supermarkets controlled where food could be accessed, which became a challenge in the late 20th century. McClintock argues,

By the 1970s, nationwide economic ‘stagflation’ caused supermarket retail to flounder. Mergers and leverage buyouts of competing chains hit less competitive, inner-city markets hard; between 1978 and 1984, Safeway alone closed more than 600 stores in these neighborhoods... The boarded-up hulls of failed supermarkets littered the shoals of America’s postindustrial cities; many remained shuttered, others converted to churches, and only some rigged anew as thrift or dollar stores for consumers with declining purchasing power.²⁸⁶

During the 1980s and 1990s, supermarkets became located primarily in regions only accessible by car, presenting a challenge for those working class people in urban areas or for those who relied on public transit for food. They had to rely on big box stores, fast food eateries, corner grocery stores, and liquor stores. In West Oakland in 1960, 137 grocery stores existed; by 1980, only 22 remained, primarily as a result of supermarket expansion in the suburbs.²⁸⁷ While in 1935, there were eight times as many grocery stores

²⁸⁵ McClintock, Nathan. 2011. From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

²⁸⁶ McClintock, Nathan. 2011. From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, p. 108-109.

²⁸⁷ McClintock, Nathan. 2011. From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

as liquor stores, than number changed dramatically over the course of the next seventy years. By 2013, there were four times as many fast food chains and corner stores as grocers in the East Bay.²⁸⁸



Image 52. Mandela Foods – Carrots.

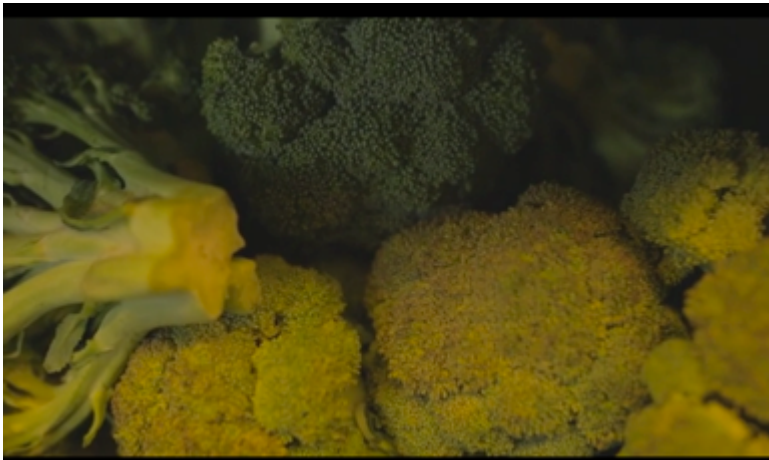


Image 53. Mandela Foods – Broccoli.

²⁸⁸ McClintock, Nathan. 2011. From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, p. 111.



Image 54. Mandela Foods – Yellow bell peppers.²⁸⁹

While Bell speaks about the Seventh Street Corridor, bright images of carrots, broccoli, and yellow peppers (and other produce) are shown, beckoning to a past when West Oakland had easy access to these foods through the vibrancy of the neighborhood. The imagery of the vegetables not only represents desires for health for the community, but they also indirectly reference the historical conditions – including privatization and individualism in relation to home ownership, taxation, deindustrialization, FHA loan disbursement, and urban renewal projects – which the Co-op seeks to overcome.²⁹⁰ The fact that these foods are available at Mandela Foods certainly does not mean that West Oakland is now restored to the time that it was in the mid-20th century. Indeed, Mandela Foods is currently the only full-service grocery store in West Oakland, which seems to suggest that it could not possibly address the needs of all the 25,000 neighborhood residents. Nonetheless, the store’s presence is both a material and symbolic intervention into the health of the region. Bell states, “I don’t necessarily think that it’s a mistake or

²⁸⁹ Images obtained Mandela Foods website: <http://www.mandelafoods.com/about-us> (2014)

²⁹⁰ Self, Robert O. 2003. Introduction. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

that it's by default that, you know, various urban communities are set up to where there's nothing but fast food, liquor stores and gas stations in the area. And then people will get on the Internet and get on the news and talk about how people are sick in those areas. I mean, when that's all that's provided, like, what do you expect?"



Image 55. Mandela Foods – Donuts and Burgers signage.



Image 56. Mandela Foods – Food desert signage.



Image 57. Mandela Foods – State Discount Market store.

Bell’s comment that it is neither a “mistake” nor “by default” that “urban communities”—working class communities and communities of color— are surrounded by “fast food, liquor stores and gas stations” speaks to how food deserts are not simply a matter of circumstance, but are created. The signage presented (images 56-57) emphasize Oakland’s placement as a food desert region, or a space that produces death for those who live there. That this imagery is juxtaposed with foods high in nutritional value creates a new narrative of Oakland from a site of death to a site of life and growth. This imagery focuses on this working class black and Latinx as a place as health and nutrition are vibrant.

In the 1960s, supermarkets had begun to move out to suburbs, where they could access more land for their expansion in size. With the growth of highways, car culture, and cheaper land in the suburbs, supermarkets gained control of the food retail industry, including Kroger and Safeway, putting local grocers out of business and consolidating control with just a few small companies in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition, the rise of the big box store, such as WalMart, Tesco, Carrefour, and Ahold, became competitors

with small grocers and supermarkets, transforming the modern food access system, concentrating on standardization and branding. They therefore prioritize foods that are easily to shelve, including foods that are highly processed, low-cost, and that have broad appeal, including sodas, sugary foods, candy, and potato chips. These supermarkets and box stores have therefore had a great deal of influence on consumption, particularly for low-income communities. Because of the growth of car culture and the movement of supermarkets outside of urban regions, it became difficult for those without cars to access fresh food. The growth of convenience stores in urban regions, which frequently rely upon highly processed foods, has also increased the amount of sugar, salt, and fat consumed in urban regions.²⁹¹

Like the work of other food and social justice organizations, the Mandela Foods video critiques state violence. In particular, I argue that the video highlights the work of the Oakland Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPPSD) and the work of the Black Lives Matter movement. It marks these two organizations that critique state violence of black bodies in the U.S. In calling attention to the work of these two movements, Mandela Foods situates itself within a history of radical anti-racist work, aligning its own work toward food justice in solidarity with these two movements and as an iteration of radical anti-racist work as well.

Toward the end of the short film, the camera focuses on a young black man walking through the store. The young man is wearing a gray hoodie and the camera follows him from behind, his face initially not visible to the camera. As he walks past

²⁹¹ Gottlieb, Robert and Anupama Joshi. 2010. Accessing Food. *Food Justice*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

dried goods, we see him from behind only. We see the profile of his face as he passes through the produce section with an abundant amount of bananas, avocado, pineapple, potatoes, and plantains. The images that follow juxtapose violence against black bodies alongside the importance of access to nutritious foods.



Image 58. Mandela Foods – Young man and apple.



Image 59. Mandela Foods – Olympians.



Image 60. Mandela Foods – Lemons.



Image 61. Mandela Foods – Peaches.



Image 62. Mandela Foods – White Onions.



Image 63. Mandela Foods – Tomatoes.

The store is brightly lit and the produce looks vibrant and fresh. The young man passes the refrigerated dairy section that Bell had been stocking earlier in the video. He continues to another produce section where he stops and considers what to buy (Image 58). We see shiny red and yellow apples as well as other produce including snow peas, and red, yellow, and green bell peppers. The camera pans out to a building mural of Tommie Smith and John Carlos with raised fists at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics in solidarity with the Black Panther Party and U.S. Civil Rights Movement. The quotations reads “Born with insight. Raised with a fist.” The camera goes back to the young man in the store. He selects a red apple and walks toward the front of the store. The camera then shows close ups shots of limes, peaches, white onions, and a variety of tomato types. The young man passes through the bulk foods section of the stores, passes the potato chips, and ends in front of the frozen foods section, greeted by Bell at the front of the store.

As has been argued by many black studies scholars and others, blackness is viewed as dispossessed, unfree, and a site of violence.²⁹² I view this portion of the video as a referent to Black Lives Matter, initially a social media movement and, later, a more large scale on the ground movement. The hashtag Black Lives Matter emerged in 2013 as a result of the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the Trayvon Martin murder. Similar to Mandela Foods, black women started the Black Lives Matter movement. That the young man in the video is wearing a hoodie and his face is initially not visible to the audience is significant. This speaks to the ways in which young black lives are unnamed and non-specific in the popular imaginary. The hoodie is a racially coded article of clothing that represents both young urban black men as well as the struggle against the racial violence that these young men experience. However, the video plays with this common representation and shifts the expectation. While we initially do not see the young man's face, as the video continues, his face is made visible to us, creating a closer relationship between the viewer and the young man in the video. Rather than see his body and life as a violent threat, as is characteristic of law enforcement and the state, the video constructs his body as one worthy of nourishment. His selection of a shiny, red apple—the quintessential American marker of good health—suggests that his life is worthy of living as he invests in maintaining his own bodily health. I view this clip as a critique of the ways in which young black lives are systematically targeted for death. This segment where the young man is surrounded by a variety of fresh produce indicates not only that this black life matters, but that it is deserving of value, investment, and nourishment.

²⁹² McKittrick, Katherine. 2011. "On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place." *Social and Cultural Geography* 12(8):947-963.

While they initially seem disparate, the video considers the relationship between food justice and black solidarity movements through the subsequent imagery of Olympians Smith and Carlos. The imagery references the Black Panther Party's (BPP) Free Breakfast program, which began in West Oakland and catered to poor black youth. Although not labeled as such at the time, the Party's Free Breakfast program was perhaps the first large-scale food justice community-based project in Oakland. The BPP's program was a critique of poverty and state violence, in which poor black children did not have sufficient food to eat and were not aided by the federal government. As Nik Heynen argues, this program "was an imperative for the social reproduction of many inner-city communities and that it was both the model for, and impetus behind, all federally funded school breakfast programs currently in existence in the United States."²⁹³ This segment of the video connects these two disparate moments, contending that food is necessary for survival and that while state violence may work against the thriving of black life, communities of color work toward black survival.

As Robert O. Self argues in *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, in the 20th century, Oakland and the East Bay experienced two differing but related ideals: notions of "a broad liberal one that sought expansion of the social wage and racial equality; and an equally broad populist-conservative one that celebrated private rights and understood liberalism's limits through property and

²⁹³ Heynen, Nik. 2009. "Bending the Bars of Empire from Every Ghetto for Survival: The Black Panther Party's Radical Antihunger Politics of Social Reproduction and Scale." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99(2): 406-422.

homeownership.”²⁹⁴ The Black Panther Party of Self Defense began in 1966 as a response to liberalism’s failures. Renamed the Black Panther Party in 1968, the organization and other black activists were frustrated with liberalism’s failed promises of upward mobility, home ownership, wage and job security, and overall political, economic, and racial promises.

The Black Panther Party was a space where youth could not only critique their surrounding circumstances but could envision the future that they desired. Comprised of black youth who had migrated from the South with their parents and families, members of the Oakland Panther Party hoped to escape segregation and discrimination. However, they experienced new and different forms of racism and segregation in Oakland, including exclusion from higher education, police harassment, and unemployment and underemployment, which resulted in organized action by many of the youth into the BPP. Members called for decolonization, an end to capitalism, and supported transnational movements for united Third World struggles for liberation and decolonization.²⁹⁵

One of the Panther’s strongest and most well-known critiques of the state was through their survival programs, in particular, the Free Breakfast Program for Children, initiated in September 1968. As a response to young black children who were going to school hungry and as a critique to the failures of the public welfare state and liberalism, unemployment, and urban black poverty, the Party offered breakfast to black children before school. Donna Murch asserts, “Ultimately, the BPP mobilized large numbers of

²⁹⁴ Self, Robert O. 2003. Introduction. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

²⁹⁵ Murch, Donna. 2010. Introduction. *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

African Americans by establishing parallel institutions to address shortcomings in public welfare and education.”²⁹⁶ The first free breakfast was held at St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church with the help of Father Earl Neil in West Oakland. Their food programs provided an understanding that community-based support systems could be successful, particularly in the face of a hostile state. Fighting hunger was conceptualized as a means to improve learning, particularly as they considered learning a vital component to raise a black consciousness that was critical of power, capitalism, racism, and an oppressive social structure.²⁹⁷

Nik Heynen argues that the Black Panther Party viewed their Free Breakfast Program as liberating blacks from U.S. racial and capitalist oppression. In late 1969, Bobby Seale required that The Free Breakfast Program became a fixture in all Panther chapters across the United States. Thousands of children benefitted from the program and ate foods that the Party considered nutritious breakfast, including eggs, bacon, grits, toast, and orange juice. Heynen argues that the Free Breakfast Program was one way for the Party to engage in the social reproduction of black people, through ensuring nutritious foods to improve learning and ultimately involvement in racial politics.

Trying to eradicate childhood hunger in black communities was also a means of producing a political racial consciousness that took into account how food was a marker of social and racial exclusion. Heynen states, “Take, for instance, how skipping breakfast

²⁹⁶ Murch, Donna. 2010. *Survival Pending Revolution. Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California.* Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, p. 170.

²⁹⁷ Murch, Donna. 2010. *Survival Pending Revolution. Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise and Fall of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California.* Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

leads to increased cognitive error, slower memory recall, and reduces children's ability to distinguish among similar images."²⁹⁸ The federal government was not providing useful welfare services to unemployed African Americans and other people of color in urban environments. Though the federal government initiated a two-year pilot program titled the School Breakfast Program in 1966 for children considered "nutritionally needy," this program was not developed as a permanent program across the nation until 1975, after the federal government felt national pressure due to the Panther's programmatic success. The Panthers Free Breakfast Program was largely supported by blacks (who otherwise were not necessarily supportive of the Party) because of the ways in which they refigured food to be an issue of right, rather than finances.²⁹⁹

Self argues, "The Panthers gave concrete, radical expression to two currents of thought circulating in North and West Oakland's African American community in the 1960s: black pride and community defense."³⁰⁰ Providing nutrition for young black children was essential to their survival programs, demonstrating that it was possible for blacks to be self-sufficient and for the Party to make apparent the failures of the state. Self writes,

By 'helping the people survive,' the breakfast program allowed the children of West Oakland's poorest neighborhoods to eat a healthy meal in a safe, supportive environment. Those among the Panthers who worked

²⁹⁸ Heynen, Nik. 2009. Bending the Bars of Empire from Every Ghetto for Survival: The Black Panther Party's Radical Antihunger Politics of Social Reproduction and Scale. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99(2): 406-422, p. 409.

²⁹⁹ Heynen, Nik. 2009. Bending the Bars of Empire from Every Ghetto for Survival: The Black Panther Party's Radical Antihunger Politics of Social Reproduction and Scale. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99(2): 406-422.

³⁰⁰ Self, Robert O. 2003. Black Power. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 225.

most closely with the program, particularly women, made sure that the free breakfasts offered concrete assistance to the city's poor while dramatizing a powerful symbol of racial injustice and ghetto marginalization in America: childhood hunger. Free breakfasts were both practical and idealistic in their commitment to ameliorating this social wrong.³⁰¹

That Mandela Foods correlates the Black Lives Matter movement and the Black Panthers in a video about their retail store demonstrates that they envision food justice as a part of broader issues of racial justice and social justice. This segment of the video can be read in the spirit of the Panthers, who argued that food is a necessity for survival and racial consciousness. By changing the gaze from the surveillance of the young black man to one of providing nutrition for him suggests that healthy food is not only critical for survival, but particularly that providing accessible nutritious food is vital community response against state violence.

Collective Ownership: The Racial-Economy of Mandela Foods

Mandela Foods incorporates a model of food justice that reconceptualizes the traditional capitalist business model. Rather than focus on profit as the primary goal, the video emphasizes that providing access for nutritious foods for community members is the primary goal. Following other food co-operatives, Mandela Foods provides shared ownership for individuals to invest in the business through democratic decision-making. Mandela Foods owners are also workers in line with the model of a worker co-operative. Given that the workers are also the owners, they do not have the competing interests of exploiting labor for a maximum profit. What makes Mandela Foods Co-Op unique is that they produce an inherent relationship between race and class in their understanding of

³⁰¹ Self, Robert O. 2003. *Black Power. American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 231.

how the co-op should operate successfully. They produce a racial-economy of health that understands it not solely as bodily but also economic. It therefore not only contests capitalist and neoliberal models of business ownership but also white supremacy.



Image 64. Mandela Foods – Red bell peppers.



Image 65. Limes and Lemons.



Image 66. Mandela Foods – Mushrooms.



Image 67. Mandela Foods – Arugula.

Bell speaks to how the co-operative business model focuses on providing nutritious foods as opposed to making the greatest profit. He says, “Here, we basically in a sense, bite the bullet. We don’t try to make the most in turnover. We try to offer various products at pretty much close to the markup that we buy it for. And then other things, like chips and things like that, will suffice to help us meet that profit margin.” Bell emphasizes that the co-operative model is not about producing the maximum profit. As Bell discusses the “various products” that are sold in Mandela Foods, the camera focuses in on produce including piled carrots, broccoli, yellow peppers, red peppers, lemons &

limes, mushrooms, arugula. The vegetables appear bright, plentiful, and fresh. The imagery of the produce while Bell discusses the co-operative nature of the store provides legitimacy to the notion that a neighborhood like West Oakland can provide nutritious foods at reasonable prices, while engaging in co-operative ownership and still be profitable and successful.

Viewers are also introduced to Erick Ismael Sanchez de Leon, a Latino man who is the Mandela marketplace coordinator and produce buyer/distributor. De Leon tells the camera,

The whole idea is not necessarily to make a profit. The idea is to create an access point for people to get fresh produce and just to introduce them or re-introduce fresh produce. And that's the idea. For the most part, when people learn about what we're doing, you know, they get excited about it. If you approach people with already like some pre-judgment or thinking that you know what's good for them, that's where you lose. You have to spend time with people to establish a relationship. If you want to do good, show that passion. Just start talking about food with people and they'll usually open up. We take being cooperative to heart. If we don't help each other, then who is?



Image 68. Mandela Foods - Erick Ismael Sanchez de Leon at farmers' market.



Image 69. Mandela Foods - Erick Ismael Sanchez de Leon stocking at Mandela Foods Co-Op.

During this segment while de Leon is speaking, the camera goes back and forth between him driving the van and panning over produce at a farmers market. At the market, De Leon passes by tables with produce including yellow onions, green cabbage, garlic cloves, zucchini, and cartons of eggs (image 68). The sunny day also shows de Leon bringing crisp white colored cauliflower with greens still attached, appearing as if it were freshly picked. A farmers market worker packs rainbow chard with large, vibrant green leaves and brightly colored stems. de Leon enters Mandela Foods Co-Op and begins unpacking the cauliflower alongside the other produce on the shelves, including deep colored green string beans, bright celery, leafy rainbow chard, green and red grapes, other leafy greens, and oranges (image 69).

De Leon's segment highlights notions of benevolence that have characterized many food movement initiatives. Many projects have taken on what Jerry Shannon calls neoliberal paternalism. These projects assume that those living in food deserts live "mismanaged" and dysfunctional lives, assuming that the poor lack the competence and ability to manage their own lives and must therefore be reconstructed as a self-regulating

subject.³⁰² Julie Guthman argues that managers of farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture engage in universalizing and colorblind rhetoric when considering why whites make up the majority of participants in these two venues.³⁰³ The management, surveillance, and disciplining of bodies is precisely Foucault's argument as he discusses how health is used as a form of biopower. De Leon challenges biopolitical arguments of this nature by stating that those who live in food deserts are not in need of regulation or management. Mandela Foods resists such a management of bodies, knowledge, and social relations by taking ownership over place. De Leon demonstrates that in working together the brightly colored produce is what the owner-workers have been able to sell without external control.

De Leon's discussion of Mandela Food's collaborative approach and shared, cross-racial ownership is embedded in a longer history of business ownership in the region. The United Farm Workers (UFW) and the Black Panther Party worked in solidarity between the late 1960s and early 1970s. The BPP supported the UFW in strikes in grape boycotts in 1968 and the boycott and picketing of Safeway grocery stores in 1969. The BPP participated in the Safeway boycott not only to support the UFW, but also because Safeway had refused to donate food for their Free Breakfast Program. Despite their different stances on violence, the two organizations supported each other in other campaigns as well. The BPP also supported the UFW to fight against Proposition 22, which would have made particular types of strikes against brands illegal. The UFW

³⁰² Shannon, Jerry. April 2014 "Food deserts: Governing obesity in the neoliberal city." *Progress in Human Geography* 38:248-266.

³⁰³ Guthman, Julie. 2008. "If They Only Knew": Color Blindness and Universalism in California Alternative Food Institutions. *The Professional Geographer*, p. 387-397.

supported the Bobby Seale's run for mayor of Oakland in which he demanded ballots and electoral information to be printed in Spanish and called for more jobs for blacks and Latinx.³⁰⁴ This multiracial coalition demonstrates how blacks and Latinxs have worked together for food justice and racial justice in California.

The opening of Mandela Foods was a financial "risk" that the store-owners took, despite the resistance of many big grocery businesses to take the same "risk" in food deserts.³⁰⁵ It took 10 years for the co-op to move from an idea to an actual retail grocery store, in order to find sizeable retail, funding, and organize community members. Mandela Foods also emphasizes the importance of privileging the needs and interests of people of color, as all of the owners of Mandela Foods Co-Op are people of color and their produce is from the Mandela Food Distribution Network, which is comprised solely of farmers of color.³⁰⁶ Mandela Foods also purchases meats and dairy from local vendors to support local community businesses.³⁰⁷ This economic investment in the local community and communities of color speaks to both a desire to change the culture of food politics and also to revitalize the economic conditions in the neighborhood by investing in jobs and community members. Mandela Foods Co-Op works within capitalist, neoliberal institutions but diverges from its rational, moralizing logics that

³⁰⁴ Araiza, Lauren. 2009. "In Common Struggle Against a Common Oppressor": The United Farm Workers and The Black Panther Party, 1968-1973. *The Journal of African American History* 94(2): 200-223.

³⁰⁵ Schneider, Mike. "Grocery chains leave food deserts barren, an AP analysis finds." AP News. Associated Press. December 7, 2015. Web. February 6, 2016.

³⁰⁶ "Transforming West Oakland: A Case Study Series on Mandela MarketPlace." 2015. Web. February 5, 2016.

³⁰⁷ "Home." Mandela Foods Co-op. N.D. Web. October 6, 2015.

emphasize individual change. Instead they emphasize community development as politicized agents of food equity.

The imagery of richly colored produce alongside de Leon's labor as produce buyer and distributor allows Mandela Foods to inscribe a black and Latinx sense of place despite histories of postwar restructuring, redlining, displacement, gentrification, unemployment, urban renewal, and large-scale economic shifts. They create an urban racial-economy that sees place as a racialized sense of belonging but also business. This is resistance to a racial-economy that is predicated on premature death for black and Latinx lives. The Co-Op is the creation of an alternative racial-economy that is not grounded in promoting relations of community that are not rooted in violence and struggle, but communal care and solidarity. In a society in which capitalism functions as a racialized economy, and blackness and Latinidad function as forms of capital relations, the emphasis on co-operative work in a food desert is a direct critique of capitalism's logic.

Recognizing the importance of capitalist investments in poor and working class communities of color, Mandela Foods invests financially in its communities. Rather than engage in the common leftist decry of an end to capitalism everywhere, the Co-Op recognizes the importance of engaging in the economic and social system that is necessary for their survival. Yet, they diverge from the traditional rendering of neoliberal capitalism, as they do not articulate their ethical commitment to their communities as simple or rational economic calculations. They invest in their work as community members whose work is racial politics to create greater access of nutritious foods for community members.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how videography of food deserts allows for structural critiques of racism and unequal environments. By highlighting liquor stores, vacant lots, fast food eateries, fruits, vegetables, and people of color working together, food desert videography serves a dual function. While it demonstrates how communities of color are exposed to environments that produce poor health and even premature death, they also demonstrate how there are possibilities for intervention, solidarity, and racial equity. By analyzing food documentation's visual commodity aesthetic, these videos articulate a relationship to nutritious food as a right within a broader narrative of food justice, and they reflect the sensual pleasures of consuming fresh produce. The representation of these food objects demonstrates how food can be both an aesthetic object and a source of contestation over life, health, community engagement, and representation. In this way, food desert videography intervenes in food desert discourses and literatures, producing anti-colonial practices and narratives as well as the kinds of cooperative human effort that McKittrick discusses.

By highlighting food imagery and alongside a critical food history of Oakland, the two videos I call attention to reframe the narrative of communities of color as prone to poor health and early death to a narrative of communities of color investing in life and vitality. The two videos highlight the changes they make in the environment, the desirability of fruits and vegetables, and the production of a racial-economy that encourages community solidarity rather than individual competition. In doing so, they prove that energy, vibrancy, and life grow in the food desert of West Oakland. These are

the revolutionary dreams and revolutionary actions that are sustained through the collective, political work of People's Community Market and Mandela Foods Co-Op.

By actively working to disrupt the common representation of communities of color as naturally inclined to food-related chronic conditions and illnesses and focusing on localized, grassroots efforts to change the material conditions in their communities, food desert videography produces new racial knowledge and disrupts the process of diet-related health inequities. While much of the current discourse and research around communities of color, food, and health focuses on the demise of these communities, this chapter demonstrates that these communities are, in fact, active participants in claiming a stake in their health and well-being. By using imagery of food and food-related objects to engage a structural critique, videographers change the narrative of food insecurity to one of food justice by situating themselves with a history of anti-racist work. As such, they engage radical anti-colonial politics. Food desert videography contests white supremacy by allowing the activists to communicate their freedom dreams, recognizing the life that exists in a death space of a food desert and to invest in that life.

In the next chapter, I analyze how the recipe is a site of racial healing in cookbook photographs. By analyzing the cookbooks *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan*, I show how food imagery is used to appeal to people's palates, minds, and sense of social justice. Chapter 4 analyzes how these cookbooks do not simply highlight food as a dehistoricized aesthetic, as do many cookbooks, but instead situate their black and Mexican ingredients and recipes as inherently nutritious and life-sustaining, as a means to battle diet-related health inequities, and situated in relation to the slow food movement. While slow foods highlights European and white settler colonial histories, I argue that *Decolonize Your*

Diet and *Afro-Vegan* intervene on slow food by situating eating locally, sustainably, and innovate recipes within a history of women of color recipes. As a result, they contest notions that “slow foods” (i.e. eating food made from scratch, sharing a meal with others, and local and sustainable foods) are a new, European movement, but instead have a strong history within women of color epistemologies.

Chapter 4: Radical Recipe Foodways as Racial Politics

“Start with the visceral, move to the intellectual, and end with the political.”

-Bryant Terry

“La comida es medicina y resistencia.”

- Luz Calvo and Catriona Esquibel

Introduction

At the Decolonizing Foodways Conference (2015) held at the University of California, Berkeley, chef Bryant Terry and scholars/chefs Luz Calvo and Catriona Esquibel highlighted the importance of honoring ancestral foods and foodways from black and Mexican communities. By drawing from their recent cookbooks, *Decolonize Your Diet* (2015) by Calvo and Esquibel and *Afro-Vegan* (2014) by Bryant Terry, these chefs argue that food is a site for de/colonial struggles both in theory and practice. Their San Francisco Bay Area-based cookbooks include unique, plant-based recipes that reframe black and Mexican foods from abject to healing.

In this chapter, I argue that *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* situate the recipe as a site of racial-gendered healing, both physically and psychically. By using visual artisanal food aesthetics within the context of the Slow Food Movement, the cookbooks produce a sensual affect to connect food to racial-gendered histories, specifically, constructing black and Latinx foods as medicinal. Artisanal foodways emphasize the use of traditional methods, simplicity, specialty, intention, authenticity,

small-scale, and relationality between the source and end of the commodity chain.³⁰⁸

Artisanal foodways also emphasize a sense of history, as they try to distinguish themselves from large-scale agribusiness or food corporations. By framing their cookbooks as artisanal, Calvo, Esquibel and Terry emphasize the quality, value, and flavor of their recipes, recipes that are rooted in black and Mexican histories.

In addition, *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* shift the culinary gaze in interesting ways. Rather than focus on how foods racialized as black and Mexican are “bad” foods, they center imagery in their cookbooks that highlights how foods rooted in black and Mexican histories are medicinal. In particular, they cite their grandmothers and the labor of the racial-gendered space of the kitchen as formative in their culinary development. On the one hand, the gaze of the cookbooks recognizes how Slow Foods has been constructed as a form of culinary whiteness, disavowing black and Mexican culinary foodways. On the other hand, the cookbooks give credence to the ways in which black and Mexican culinary traditions and histories have always engaged a form of slow food, rooted in the consumption of local, seasonal, nutritious, and savory dishes. The gaze, then, is shifted from one that demonizes and pathologizes, as Fanon describes, to one that celebrates, honors, and upholds subjugated epistemologies.

I address the following questions in this chapter: How do *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* represent black and Latinx diasporic foods and foodways—foods deemed abject in a white supremacist context—as medicinal and forms of resistance?

³⁰⁸ When the Label Says ARTISAN, What Does That Mean? *Good Food World*. November 2, 2011. Web. April 7, 2017.

How do these cookbooks use cookbook photography to incorporate issues of racial justice and food justice as part of their cookbook, not in a manner that is additive, but in a way that understands black and Mexican foodways to be inherently healthy eating? How do these cookbooks connect the visceral, intellectual, and political in relation to race, health, and consumption through food imagery?

I situate these cookbooks within the framework and discourses of the Slow Food movement, whose focus is to save artisanal foods from extinction, through their rhetoric and practices of eating locally, seasonally, and sustainably.³⁰⁹ In particular, I analyze how Alice Waters and Michael Pollan, two San Francisco Bay Area-based slow food activists and foodies who have largely publicly defined the slow food movement and contemporary food activism. I examine how they shape ideas about race and gender through their discussions of food and consumption, producing a form of culinary whiteness. *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* also engage the principles of eating locally, seasonally, and sustainably and are, therefore, arguably part of the slow food movement. Yet, these cookbooks make critical interventions in the Slow Food discourse, through a radical reclamation of women of color histories that situate cooking and eating as racial-gendered politics.

Notwithstanding a few notable exceptions,³¹⁰ very little academic literature has been written about the relationship between race, gender, class, and the Slow Food

³⁰⁹ “About Us.” *Slow Food USA*. 2016. Web. April 13, 2016.

³¹⁰ See Jeffrey Pilcher. 2013. Taco Bell, Maseca, and Slow Food: A Postmodern Apocalypse for Mexico’s Peasant Cuisine? in *Food and Culture: A Reader* Eds. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik. New York, NY: Routledge; Teresa M. Mares and Devon G. Peña. 2011. Environmental and Food Justice: Toward Local, Slow, and Deep

movement. Given the pervasive influence that Waters and Pollan have on shaping food discourse, politics, and consumption, the political impact of their work on communities of color is essential to understanding how Slow Food addresses racial, class, and gendered differences. Analyzing how communities of color engage in the movement's ideals while simultaneously diverging from it demonstrates how black and Mexican communities claim their own stake in food politics through the practice of cooking. I analyze how *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* understand the process of cooking food as a politics of food justice. When we center black and Mexican women's foodways, we privilege those epistemologies as not only significant, but central to what it means to eat well. Rather than an additive inclusion of black and Mexican foods, this chapter reframes how we have come to understand these foods as producing energy and life, rather than causing illness and disease, both physically and psychically. Terry, Calvo and Esquibel engage in a critique of culinary whiteness by providing alternatives to the traditional Slow Food cooking that privileges foods and foodways from communities of color.

In the following section, I analyze the Slow Food movement in the San Francisco Bay Area and the role of Pollan and Waters within it. The Slow Food Movement, I argue, is partly a response to the presence of agribusiness and large-scale farming in the San Joaquin Valley. In the next section, I offer examples of how Pollan and Waters engage in forms of culinary whiteness through their discourse, as representatives of Slow Food. I provide background on Terry, Calvo and Esquibel and argue that their food politics are

situated within the Slow Food Movement, but also diverge in important ways. While they value the eating of seasonal, local, and made-from-scratch foods, they depart from Slow Foods by focusing on the racial-gendered experiences of communities of color. Finally, I analyze three important interventions in *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* through cookbook photography. I highlight how they feature indigenous and hybrid dishes as a critique of colonialism; resignify black and Mexican foods as medicinal; and represent women of color cookbooks as a form of resistance. Framing themselves within the context of diet-related health inequities, *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* emphasize how their delicious recipes result in healthy, healing, and thriving bodies and psyches.

Slow Food and Racial Difference

I analyze *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* within the framework of how Michael Pollan and Alice Waters have advanced the ideals of the movement. I contend that Waters and Pollan put forth Slow Food ideals of culinary whiteness rooted in histories of Eurocentrism and settler colonialism, by centering practices and discourses that imagine the American pastoral as a utopian past, pathologizing the consumption of black and Latinx communities and obscuring women of color food practices and knowledge production. Waters and Pollan are cited as two of the leading voices in today's discussion of food and politics: "these are the theorists and influencers who drive the debate in the food world."³¹¹ Also called "two Berkeley-based icons of the sustainable food movement,"³¹² Waters and Pollan have been extremely influential (arguably the

³¹¹ Kliman, Todd. "How Michael Pollan, Alice Waters, and Slow Food Theorists Got It All Wrong." *The Washingtonian* May 29, 2015. Web. April 26, 2016.

³¹² Philpott, Tom. "Why Michael Pollan and Alice Waters should quit celebrating food-price hikes." *Grist* April 5, 2008. Web. April 26, 2016.

most influential) in contemporary U.S. and international food politics. They are widely regarded as two preeminent voices on food politics today.

Alice Waters is likely the most well-known figure in the U.S. who has contributed to the slow food movement and has served as the Vice President of the international organization Slow Food since 2002.³¹³ Known as the “mother of slow food,”³¹⁴ Waters is a world-renowned chef, activist, and food expert. Waters is credited as the grounding force behind the Bay Area Slow Food movement due to her emphasis on using fresh, local, and seasonal foods. Referred to as a “legend,” Waters is highly regarded for her food-based projects in the Bay Area. A *60 Minutes* story states, “[Waters] has done more to change how Americans eat, cook, and the think about food than anyone since Julia Child.”³¹⁵ She is a somewhat controversial figure, as she works towards the consumption of slow foods to combat diet-related chronic illnesses but has also been accused of being elitist. Her purist approach to food has garnered her accusations of being “a patron saint of holier than thou food police,” “an absolutist,” and “smug and irritating noblesse oblige.”³¹⁶ This is exemplified by her internationally recognized gourmet, farm to table Berkeley restaurant, Chez Panisse, opened in 1971 where meals range from \$75-\$125 per person.

³¹³ “Alice Waters.” *Chez Panisse Restaurant and Cafe*. 2016. Web. April 13, 2016.

³¹⁴ Parker-Pope, Tara. “The Mother of Slow Food.” *The New York Times* March 16, 2009. Web. April 12, 2016; Stahl, Lesley. “Alice Waters’ Crusade for Better Food.” *60 Minutes*. CBS. June 10, 2009. Web. April 12, 2016.

³¹⁵ Stahl, Lesley. “Alice Waters’ Crusade for Better Food.” *60 Minutes*. CBS. June 10, 2009. Web. April 12, 2016.

³¹⁶ Dinkenspiel, Frances. Why Does Alice Waters Inspire Such Animosity? *Berkleyside*. April 2, 2010. Web. May 6, 2016; Tracie McMillan. Food’s Class Warfare. *Slate*. June 27, 2012. Web. May 6, 2016.

Alice Waters first learned her approach to eating foods that were local and seasonal during her time studying cooking in France in her late teenage years. She states,

I went to France when I was 19, and I came from a basically fast-food culture in America, and I arrived in the early '60s in France when it was still slow-food culture. The kids came home and had lunch with their parents for two hours every day from school. You know, they went to the market twice a day just so that everything could be fresh and ripe, and people always ate with their family. I think these values are terribly, terribly relevant because they are values that are universal and have been around since the beginning of civilization, really.³¹⁷

Waters articulates European-centered idea of cooking and commensality, or the distribution, exchange, and consumption of a meal along with the exchange of sensory memories and emotions, and she identifies these as universal values that all should maintain. Her attention to this style of commensality, consumption, and cooking are also a direct response to an American culture of fast food, discussed in more detail later in the chapter. With a \$10,000 donation from her father to open a restaurant, she created Chez Panisse.³¹⁸

I also engage the discourse deployed by Michael Pollan, a San Francisco Bay Area-based journalist who has gained fame over the past 15 years for his writings and films on contemporary food politics. Pollan, who is also Knight Professor of Science and Environmental Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, strongly advocates all of the elements of the Slow Food movement, including eating locally, seasonally, high

³¹⁷ Russo, Maria. Chatting with Alice Waters: French Food Culture, Cooking for Kids, and a Dressed-Up Grilled Cheese Sandwich. *Food Network*. November 28, 2016. Web. February 25, 2017.

³¹⁸ Elkann, Alain. Alice Waters: 'We Are Digesting Values' When We Eat. *Huffington Post*.

quality ingredients, and connecting with others and land.³¹⁹ Pollan's written and film contributions that critique the food industry, agriculture, and food marketing gained him awards as well as national and international fame. He is regarded as one of the most well-known food spokespersons in the United States. In particular, two of his books, *An Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) and *In Defense of Food* (2008), and the film *Food, Inc.* (2008) have made Pollan a household name when it comes to discussions of today's food issues. He is recognized as a supporter of the Slow Food movement in popular literature.³²⁰ In Pollan's *In Defense of Food*, he argues, "Food is about pleasure, about community, about family and spirituality, about our relationship to the natural world, and about expressing our identity. As long as humans have been taking meals together, eating has been as much about culture as it has been about biology."³²¹ In this quotation, Pollan situates food within the Slow Food conversations and as the grounding force for human experience.

Pollan and Waters fall into a long history of food reformers on whom everyday people rely for advice on what and how to eat.³²² In her article, "Angels and Vegetables, A Brief History of Food Advice in America," food studies scholar Melanie DuPuis provides an overview of food reformers in the United States. She argues that there has always been a strong association between social reform and dietary reform: "The history of food advice in the United States shows that the search for a perfect diet parallels a

³¹⁹ Pollan, Michael. "Cruising on the Ark of Taste." *Mother Jones* May 1, 2003. Web. April 14, 2016.

³²⁰ Hernandez, Karen. "Op-Ed: Why We Should Ditch the Slow Food Movement." *The Feminist Wire* May 12, 2013. Web. April 25, 2016.

³²¹ Pollan, Michael. 2008. *In Defense of Food* Detroit, MI: Thorndike Press, p. 19.

³²² DuPuis, Melanie. 2007. "Angels and Vegetables: A Brief History of Food Advice in America." *Gastronomica* 7(3): 75-79.

search for moral authority.”³²³ During the late 1700s to early 1800s, food reformers believed in an association between religion and food, arguing that a healthy diet should exclude coffee, tea, and alcohol and limit the consumption of meat. Democratic ideals were espoused through notions of “individual self-making” and self control.³²⁴ Sylvester Graham claimed that the abstinence of meat, spices, fat, and sex was a means of bettering oneself, which recalls the politics of respectability discussed in chapter 2. In the early to mid-1800s, health reformers argued that there was an association between slaveholding and improper food consumption. Groups like the Shakers and the Oneida held strongly onto the belief that the consumption of meat was metaphorically akin to the evils of slavery and viewed abolition and vegetarianism as intrinsically linked. DuPuis states, “The relationship between the physical and national pathologies seemed evident: slavery was like an impassible bolus bringing sickness to the national system, just as meat clogged the body.”³²⁵ After the Civil War, the white working class demanded higher wages, more purchasing power, and more meat. Middle-class nutritionists, home economists, and other professionals pushed back, using the new scientific information on sanitation and calories to argue that the working class should consume and spend less. Nonetheless, the working class argued that their consumption of meat was a racial right, engaging in nativist arguments to create hierarchies between themselves and Chinese

³²³ DuPuis, Melanie. 2007. Angels and Vegetables: A Brief History of Food Advice in America *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 7(3): 34-44, p. 34.

³²⁴ DuPuis, Melanie. 2007. Angels and Vegetables: A Brief History of Food Advice in America *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 7(3): 34-44, p. 37.

³²⁵ DuPuis, Melanie. 2007. Angels and Vegetables: A Brief History of Food Advice in America *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 7(3): 34-44, p. 38.

migrant laborers in the late 1800s. Food reform has historically been a racial project in which race and class boundaries have been negotiated and contested.

Upton Sinclair's ground breaking 1905 novel, *The Jungle*, also had significant impact on dietary reform, though unintentionally. Sinclair hoped that his representation of factory farming in Chicago would have radical effect on the political and social conscious of everyday people, particularly in terms of how they understood the labor conditions of the working class in the meat packing industry, but instead his book's depiction of food production caught national attention, causing him to famously state, "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident, I hit the stomach."³²⁶ His book was used as a basis to pass Theodore Roosevelt's 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act, which made the sale of adulterated food or drugs illegal. The Act also created federal regulations for food safety, including inspections and labeling.³²⁷ In the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, after World War I, food became associated with strength and vigor to fulfill national duties and responsibilities. This nationalist and nativist ideology was used by nutritionists and the League of Nations Mixed Committee of Experts on Nutrition to argue that Asians were malnourished, weak, effeminate, and deserving of colonial projects because they didn't eat much meat or consume much milk. Their dietary habits were constructed as backward, although in reality, Asians seemed to be eating more nutritiously than Americans.³²⁸

³²⁶ Hevrdejs, Judy. " 'The Jungle' Revealed Suffering." *Chicago Tribune*. February 3, 2012. Web. February 16, 2017.

³²⁷ Cohen, Adam. "100 Years Later, the Food Industry is still 'The Jungle.'" *New York Times*. January 2, 2007. Web. February 16, 2017.

³²⁸ DuPuis, Melanie. 2007. Angels and Vegetables: A Brief History of Food Advice in America *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 7(3): 34-44.

In *Eating Right in America*, Charlotte Biltekoff argues that during the Progressive Era food reformers used the science of nutrition to produce a proper citizenry through home economics classes. This also allowed scientists to hierarchize themselves as morally superior members of the middle class in relation to the poor and working class “unhealthy other.” Ideas about nutrition, vitamins, good citizenship, and the re-imposition of gender and class hierarchies were made manifest in World War II U.S. food programs. Having good nutrition was deemed important so that one could fulfill wartime civic duties. The diets of the working class and the poor were thought to be particularly deficient. Journalist Eric Schlosser’s 2001 *Fast Food Nation* exposes the problematics of the fast food industry by focusing on the McDonald’s corporation. Schlosser’s book highlights how fast food eateries engage in unsanitary practices and labor exploitation, especially of immigrant labor, and criticizes the fast food industry’s reliance upon uniformity, low wages, and cheap costs at the expense of quality, fair labor practices, and flavor.³²⁹ Sinclair, Biltekoff, and Schlosser’s work indicates the ways in which food reformation is tied with national values and agendas, labor practices, and health.

Biltekoff offers an analysis of today’s food reformers. She argues that the contemporary mainstream alternative food movement is based upon late 20th century neoliberal ideologies of individuality. Biltekoff argues, “Dovetailing with the new health consciousness, the ethos of neoliberalism shifted the burden of caring for the well-being of citizens from the state to the individual and recast health as a personal pursuit,

³²⁹ Interview with Eric Schlosser. “Unhappy Meals.” *The Atlantic*. December 14, 2000. Web. February 16, 2017.

responsibility, and duty.”³³⁰ Biltekoff asserts that this neoliberal food ethos produced a morality of good and bad eaters, in which bad eaters are stigmatized for their poor food choices.

I argue that Pollan and Waters fit within the longer history of food reformers, working toward the goals of eating sustainably, locally, and seasonally in the hopes of alleviating social problems. Biltekoff argues that Pollan and Waters not only espouse ideals about what it means to be a “good eater,” but also ideals about being a proper neoliberal subject. She cites Alice Waters’ work with urban schoolchildren through her Edible Schoolyards Project (initiated in the 1990s) as an example of how Waters believes changing dietary habits can change social habits and social conditions. Biltekoff states,

Waters’ convictions about the relationship between family mealtimes, social degradation, and the mandate of the public schools were strikingly similar to those espoused by...domestic scientists nearly a century earlier...For Waters, the table was such an important site for the training of good citizens that she called the family meal the ‘core curriculum of civilizing discourse’ and described it as ‘a set of protocols that curb our natural savagery and our animal greed, and cultivate our capacity for sharing and thoughtfulness.’³³¹

Building on Biltekoff, I argue that the Slow Food movement’s civilizing mission is Eurocentric and thus overlooks the significant contributions made by black and Mexican communities to Slow Foods before such a movement was named. Additionally, both Waters’ & Pollan’s framing of Slow Foods relies upon settler colonialist ideals of the yeoman farmer and “back to the land” movements that displace indigenous foods and practices. This iteration of Slow Foods is similar to the very thing they work against—

³³⁰ Biltekoff, Charlotte. 2013. From Microscopes to “Macroscopes.” *Eating Right in America* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 92.

³³¹ Biltekoff, Charlotte. 2013. From Microscopes to “Macroscopes.” *Eating Right in America* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 95-96.

fast foods—in its transformation of local and indigenous foods in order to produce a supposedly new and better way of eating. Waters and Pollan thus engage in culinary whiteness through the emphasis on Eurocentric foods, practices, and early settler American imagery as the ideal.

Fast Food, Industrial Agriculture and the San Joaquin Valley

After World War II, cheap food was newly abundant, including eggs, potatoes, and red meat. In addition, the federal government encouraged consumption, because of the fear that the expected decrease in post-war production would result in an economic crash.³³² The end of the war saw the growth of refrigerators, freezers, frozen foods, and kitchen appliances. As Schlosser cites, the 1950s became known as “The Golden Era of Food Processing” or “a decade in which one marvelous innovation after another promised to simplify the lives of American housewives: frozen orange juice, frozen TV dinners, the Chicken-of-Tomorrow, ‘Potato salad from the Package!,’ Cheez Whiz, Jell-O salads, Jet-puffed marshmallows, Miracle Whip.”³³³ The rise of suburban supermarkets and car culture led consumers to the suburbs to purchase large quantities of frozen and prepackaged foods, rather than the fresh foods that had previously stocked smaller local grocers. Corporate advertising claimed that canned, frozen and prepackaged foods were more nutritious than fresh foods, resulting in an increase of premade foods.³³⁴

³³² Collingham, Lizzie. *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food*. New York, NY: Penguin Press.

³³³ Schlosser, Eric. Why the Fries Taste Good. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All American Meal*. New York, NY: Mariner Books.

³³⁴ Schlosser, Eric. Why the Fries Taste Good. *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All American Meal*. New York, NY: Mariner Books.

As Schlosser describes in *Fast Food Nation*, the fast food industry began in 1940s southern California, which was hugely affected by the recently developed automobile industry. The growth of the car industry in the warm region resulted in drive-thrus that were open year round, unlike other parts of the nation where the drive-thru was only open during warmer months. The factory assembly line method was used in fast food restaurants, with each specific task completed solely by one person. This helped promote efficiency, rationality, and speed. Using this method, fast food eateries did not invest in their employees because they did not require detailed or in-depth training; they simply needed to be instructed on one task.³³⁵

Blacks and Latinxs make up a significant portion of fast food laborers nationally. These groups make up approximately 40% of service sector and entry-level retail jobs.³³⁶ In addition, women make up a growing percentage of low-wage, service sector work.³³⁷ According to a report from 2013, the majority of fast food jobs are filled by those between the ages of 25 and 54.³³⁸ This irony is striking, give the history of Slow Foods among blacks and Latinx, which Terry, Calvo and Esquibel discuss.

Schlosser's book exposes how the fast food industry has become a billion dollar enterprise as it relies on low-trained, low-wage labor and seeks to promote efficiency, speed, predictability, homogeneity, and rationality in its food service. Large-scale

³³⁵ Schlosser, Eric. *The Founding Fathers. Fast Food Nation*. New York NY: First Mariner Books, 2012.

³³⁶ Kim, E. Tammy. Black workers embody the new low-wage economy. *Al-Jazeera America*. September 12, 2013. Web. February 24, 2017.

³³⁷ Wessler, Seth Freed. Chicago Fast Food and Retail Workers Strike. *Colorlines*. April 24, 2013. Web. February 25, 2017.

³³⁸ N.A. The Majority of Fast Food Workers are Not Teenagers, Report Finds. *Think Progress*. August 8, 2013. Web. February 24, 2017.

corporations have used cheap prices to put mom and pop restaurants out of business. The Slow Food movement intervenes in this situation by calling for a slower pace of food consumption, “slow foods” versus “fast foods,” and by highlighting foods that are artisanal and local, foods that celebrate particular regions or are in danger of becoming extinct. As a critique of fast food’s speed, efficiency, and “on the go” consumption, Slow Food specializes in the culinary arts and prioritizes commensality. Slow Food also celebrates the small farmer and independently-owned restaurants rather than chain store eateries suited for maximum profit.

The Slow Food movement started to achieve popularity in the United States in the early 2000s, following an international movement.³³⁹ In 1986, there were plans for a McDonald’s to open in Rome. Italian journalist Carlo Petrini became concerned about the effect of industrialized foods on the local working class restaurants. As is stated on the Slow Food website, “Instead of picketing with signs, [Petrini] armed the protestors with bowls of penne. Defiantly, they declared, ‘We don’t want fast food...we want slow food!’”³⁴⁰ Activists from around the world came together and created a platform that promotes environmental sustainability, an appreciation for food and culture, and the sensual pleasure of eating. The Slow Food movement officially began in 1989.³⁴¹

That the San Francisco Bay Area has become the home base for the Slow Food movement is marked by its close proximity to the San Joaquin Valley. The San Joaquin

³³⁹ “Our History.” *Slow Food*. 2015. Web. April 13, 2016.

³⁴⁰ “History, A Delicious Revolution: How Grandma’s Pasta Changed the World.” *Slow Food*. 2017. Web. January 19, 2017.

³⁴¹ Orecklin, Michael. “Food. Savor the Peach: The Slow Food Movement Wants You to Honor Your Roots and Vegetables.” *TIME. Time Inc.* May 17, 1999. Web. January 22, 2017.

Valley's food production, Berkley food activism, and UC Berkeley's roots as an agricultural research school are important contexts for understanding the movement's emergence. In what follows, I describe these constitutive factors in more detail, with a particular focus on how the San Joaquin Valley's agricultural food production provides ripe circumstances for the Slow Food movement.

The San Joaquin Valley is where the U.S. agricultural industrial complex has made its home. The large farms in the San Joaquin Valley are privately owned, for-profit enterprises that are a massive industry in the area. Agribusiness concentrates processing equipment and facilities for greater profit, resulting in increased concentration of land ownership and agricultural production, putting small-scale farmers in poverty or completely out of business.³⁴² The similarities between big farming and fast food are also pronounced, as in the former's use of conveyor belts, freezers for food maintenance, and assembly line production. The growth of food activism and slow food in Berkeley is very likely because of its close proximity to food production and food-related health issues in the nearby San Joaquin Valley.

The San Joaquin Valley houses the agricultural basin for the state of California, a region notable for both its food production and environmental toxins. California's soil and climate allow for a large variety of produce and nuts to grow vastly. According to the California Department of Food and Agriculture in 2015 over 33% of U.S. vegetables are

³⁴² Altieri, Miguel A. Jul/Aug 1998. Ecological Impacts of Industrial Agriculture and the Possibilities for Truly Sustainable Farming." *Monthly Review* 50(3): 60-71; Horrigan, Leo, Robert S. Lawrence, and Polly Walker. 2002. How Sustainable Agriculture Can Address the Environmental and Human Health Harms of Industrial Agricultural. *Environmental Health Perspectives*. 110: 445-456.

grown in California and 66% of the country's fruits and nuts are grown in California.³⁴³ In 2013, the revenue generated from agriculture was comprised primarily of crops (73%) while a smaller number was made up of commodities generated by livestock (27%). In that same year, approximately \$37.5 billion dollars were produced as a result from California's agricultural industry.³⁴⁴ California is the U.S. primary grower and exporter of agriculture. According to *Western Farm Press*, a site that shares production information on and for California and Arizona farmers, "[California] produces a sizable majority of American fruits, vegetables and nuts; 99 percent of walnuts, 97 percent of kiwis, 97 percent of plums, 95 percent of celery, 95 percent of garlic, 89 percent of cauliflower, 71 percent of spinach, and 69 percent of carrots, and the list goes on and on."³⁴⁵ California has been the nation's largest producer and distributor of produce and grains and, therefore, has been deeply embedded in food issues and politics in the United States.

The growth of industrial agriculture in the mid-20th century has had detrimental effects on human health in terms of environmental toxins and farm worker labor.³⁴⁶ Agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto, Novartis and DuPont were some of the first and continue to be some of the largest corporations that support chemically produced agriculture. The widespread use of monocropping and the genetic modification of food require the increased use of herbicides and insecticides (produced and sold by

³⁴³ "2015 Crop Year Report." California Agricultural Production Statistics. *California Department of Food and Agriculture*. 2015. Web. January 22, 2017.

³⁴⁴ Cornett, Richard. "What happens if US loses California Food Production?" *Western Farm Press*. October 31, 2013. Web. January 22, 2017.

³⁴⁵ Cornett, Richard. "What happens if US loses California Food Production?" *Western Farm Press*. October 31, 2013. Web. January 22, 2017.

³⁴⁶ Industrial agriculture also negatively impacts animal welfare, biodiversity, and the environment, but those discussions are beyond the scope of this paper.

agribusiness corporations) in order to prevent weeds, insects and pests from damaging crops.³⁴⁷ Antibiotics and growth stimulants are also used on farm animals to prevent bacteria, disease, and to produce consumer-desirable meats.³⁴⁸ Residue from pesticides gets into food and water systems used for human consumption, which results in higher risk for cancers and particular reproductive disorders.³⁴⁹ Particular pests have an inherent resistance to certain chemicals in pesticides, creating the need for more and more pesticides and further risk to human beings who consume the food exposed.³⁵⁰

Residents in California's San Joaquin Valley experience a variety of health issues as a result of air and water pollution there. The Valley's mountain top ranges keep air pollutants in the region, including pollution from truck traffic on the nearby freeways, trains that burn diesel fuel, tractors and irrigation pumps, dairy farm waste, and wood burning stoves and fireplaces. Smog and particulate (dust, pollen, soot, smoke that remains in the air) pollution negatively impact residents in the Valley, including resulting in higher rates of asthma and early death, especially for those who are poor and more likely to reside closer to freeways.³⁵¹ Factory farms are almost always located in communities of color or low-income regions.

³⁴⁷ Monoculture or monocropping has become the primary means of farming since the 1940s. Monoculture refers to the practice of growing one crop on the same space of arable land year after year, which reduces the cost of labor and product.

³⁴⁸ Altieri, Miguel A. Jul/Aug 1998. Ecological Impacts of Industrial Agriculture and the Possibilities for Truly Sustainable Farming." *Monthly Review* 50(3): 60-71, p. 61-62.

³⁴⁹ Horrigan, Leo, Robert S. Lawrence, and Polly Walker. 2002. How Sustainable Agriculture Can Address the Environmental and Human Health Harms of Industrial Agricultural. *Environmental Health Perspectives*. 110: 445-456.

³⁵⁰ Altieri, Miguel A. Jul/Aug 1998. Ecological Impacts of Industrial Agriculture and the Possibilities for Truly Sustainable Farming." *Monthly Review* 50(3): 60-71.

³⁵¹ EPA Activities for Clean Air. "Reducing Air Pollution." United States Environmental Protection Agency. June 1, 2016. Web. February 15, 2017; Anderson, Barbara. Chronic

Communities of color in the San Joaquin Valley experience disproportionate higher rates of asthma from being near factory farming. According to a study completed in 2005, one in five children in the San Joaquin Valley had asthma, with one in three in Fresno County—the highest rate in the U.S. In another 2005 study, seven out of eight San Joaquin Valley counties had higher rates of Latinxs residents than the state as a whole (35.9%).³⁵² In addition, over 50% of U.S. water systems that do not meet safe drinking standards are located in the San Joaquin Valley, creating a major obstacle to safe drinking water for those living in the region.³⁵³

Three fifths of San Joaquin Valley counties “have the highest percentage of hospital patients with diabetes in California and four Valley counties rank among the 10 worst in the state for diabetes deaths.” Those who work in the San Joaquin Valley are more likely to contract type 2 diabetes than those who live in the rest of the state or the country. Madera County has a disproportionately higher rate of those who die from heart disease: 140.7 out of 100,000 compared to other states where the average is 103.8 deaths per state.³⁵⁴

Ironically, those who work as farmworkers are often unable to afford the produce and nuts that they cultivate. Those who work in agriculture are paid minimum wage or

diseases take their toll among central San Joaquin Valley residents. *The Fresno Bee*. April 11, 2015. Web. February 15, 2017; “Environmental Racism.” *Food Empowerment Project*. N.D. Web. January 12, 2017.

³⁵² “Environmental Racism.” *Food Empowerment Project*. N.D. Web. January 12, 2017.

³⁵³ EPA Activities for Cleaner Water. “Safer Drinking Water.” United States Environmental Protection Agency. August 1, 2016. Web. February 15, 2017.

³⁵⁴ Anderson, Barbara. Chronic diseases take their toll among central San Joaquin Valley residents. *The Fresno Bee*. April 11, 2015. Web. February 15, 2017.

below, leaving them limited in the quality of foods that are affordable.³⁵⁵ The majority of agricultural workers in the region are of Latinx background; according to a California Research Study in 2013, 92% of farmworkers in California are Latinx.³⁵⁶ The median income in the San Joaquin Valley between 2011 and 2015 was \$53,274 and the per capita income in 2015 was \$22,645. The number of those living in poverty in 2015 was 17%, while the national average of poverty in 2014 was 15%.³⁵⁷ In addition, the San Joaquin Valley has seen some of the largest percentage growth of suburban poor populations between 2000 and 2010. With agriculture as the primary industry in the region, many are employed as under-skilled, low-wage laborers in Fresno, Bakersfield, Modesto, and Stockton. In addition, those who work in agriculture are paid less than those who work in other industries and agriculture is the largest employer in the San Joaquin Valley.³⁵⁸

Those who live in poorer areas of the San Joaquin Valley also lack sufficient grocery stores and open spaces and are exposed to a larger number of liquor stores, corner convenience stores, and fried, high caloric, and sugary foods and drinks. For instance,

Sara Bosse, program manager for policy, planning and communication at the Fresno County Department of Public Health...conducted a survey of a typical corner store in Fresno County and found at least nine different displays of chips, pretzels, high-fat dips and three rows of candy. Other options were ice cream, burritos and sandwiches. And another aisle had

³⁵⁵ Anderson, Barbara. "Central Valley Hard-Hit by Diabetes Epidemic." *The Fresno Bee*. February 14, 2009. Web. January 22, 2017.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Quick Facts: San Joaquin County, California. United States Census Bureau. *U.S. Department of Commerce*. 2016. Web. February 15, 2017; Van Zile, Max. The New Faces of U.S. Poverty. *U.S. News and World Report*. July 6, 2016. Web. February 15, 2017.

³⁵⁸ Van Zile, Max. The New Faces of U.S. Poverty. *U.S. News and World Report*. July 6, 2016. Web. February 15, 2017.

sugar, artificial sugar, marshmallows, artificial creamer, olives, canned refried beans, noodles in a cup, salt, baking soda, mustard, peanut butter, canned sausages, canned ham and tuna.³⁵⁹

This quotation demonstrates the ways in which the San Joaquin Valley is a rural food desert. It also reveals how massive the factory farming system is in the region. For instance, Bolthouse Farms in Bakersfield, which runs more than 60,000 acres of land, is one of two farms that produces 85% of the Valley's carrots, producing six million pounds of carrots per day. A 2012 *New York Times* article asserts, "If you took all the carrots the company grows in a year, they would double the weight of the Empire State Building." Plenty Ag Farms covers over 10,000 acres of land, primarily growing almonds. Other farms in the region maintain hundreds of thousands of cattle and produce billions of pounds of nuts on an annual basis.³⁶⁰ The vast exploitation of land, water, air, farmworkers, residents, and other resources, marks the San Joaquin Valley as the site of big agriculture, particularly through the ownership of corporate farms.

Not only is the San Joaquin Valley an important factor in contemporary Bay Area food activism, so too is the activism and research in Berkeley. Berkeley has been a region for food justice, in efforts to provide free food to those who were unable to afford food. In addition to the BPP's Free Breakfast Program discussed in chapter 3, the San Francisco Diggers were part of the counter-cultural Bay Area movement for food justice in the late 1960s. The Diggers, an offshoot of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, were a guerilla anarchist street theater group rooted in the Haight-Ashbury district of San

³⁵⁹ Anderson, Barbara. Chronic diseases take their toll among central San Joaquin Valley residents. *The Fresno Bee*. April 11, 2015. Web. February 15, 2017.

³⁶⁰ Bittman, Mark. Everyone Eats There. *New York Times*. October 10, 2012. Web. April 13, 2017.

Francisco. Firmly grounded in leftist politics, the Diggers named themselves after the English Diggers, and were an anti-capitalist group that sought a society that was not based upon buying, selling and private property. Most significantly, they were known for providing free bread through makeshift “bakeries” in the Bay Area and other parts of the country.

The bread was cooked in one to two pound coffee tins (because they lacked baking trays) and distributed through All Saints Church in San Francisco, Olompali Ranch in Marin County, Resurrection City in Washington DC, Jellyroll Press on Grove Street in Oakland, and Kaliflower Commune and One Mind Temple in San Francisco. In fact, the Diggers were the first to popularize baking and consuming whole wheat bread. The Diggers also provided free theater performances on streets, in parks, and on stages of other shows on the days that stages were erected (what would now be know as a ‘pop-up’). Like the BPP, the Diggers created a free health clinic as well as creating stores where all the items inside were free for the taking.³⁶¹

The University of California, Berkeley (Cal) has also been foundational in forming the Bay Area as a site of food interest and experimentation. Founded in 1868 as the first land grant university in California, Cal has engaged in agricultural research, education, and experimentation and continues to do so today.³⁶² The federal 1962 Morrill Act established that profit from the sale of farm land be used for the creation of land-grant universities in each state, or public institutions to educate citizens in the fields of

³⁶¹ Overview: who were (are) the Diggers? and Digger Bread and the Free Bakery (ies) *The Digger Archives* N.D. Web. April 14, 2017.

³⁶² Public Affairs. Fact sheet on food/ag studies and research at UC Berkeley. University of California Berkeley. *UC Regents*. 2017. Web. February 15, 2017.

home economics, agriculture, and “mechanic arts.”³⁶³ The goal was to provide educational opportunities to settler, farmers and frontier prospectors, or those who were not well-off.³⁶⁴ Through the Morrill Act, UC Berkeley was the state of California’s first land-grant institution and housed the first Agriculture Experimentation Station run by the state of California.³⁶⁵ Cal continues to engage in agricultural research, education and experimentation through its farms and gardens, the Oxford Tract and the Gill Tract Agricultural Experimentation Station.³⁶⁶ UC Berkeley continues to be a spearhead in food research, experimentation and activism through a number of campus institutes and centers. In addition, the San Joaquin Farm Bureau Federation was created in 1919 (and still exists today) in an effort to connect agricultural development with academic research at University of California Extension programs. The presence of the agriculture industry in the San Joaquin, the activism in the city of Berkeley, and the research at Cal have all influenced the region’s heightened interest and investment in food politics. They create the conditions for the foodie culture focused on food and health is so well-known.

Alice Waters, Michael Pollan, and Culinary Whiteness

Decolonize Your Diet and *Afro-Vegan* embrace Slow Foods’ ideals. While Terry, Calvo and Esquibel do not explicitly discuss their relationship to the Slow Food movement, I argue that they do indeed participate in their principles and ideals by

³⁶³ “1890 Land Grant History.” Prairie View A & M University. *Prairie View A & M University*. 2017. Web. February 15, 2017.

³⁶⁴ Freeling, Nicole. “Conference celebrates UC’s land-grant history.” UC Newsroom. *The Regents of the University of California*. April 30, 2012. Web. February 16, 2017.

³⁶⁵ “About CNR.” College of Natural Resources. University of California, Berkeley. *Regents of the University of California*. 2007. Web. February 16, 2017.

³⁶⁶ Public Affairs. “Fact sheet on food/ag studies and research at UC Berkeley.” University of California Berkeley. *UC Regents*. 2017. Web. February 15, 2017.

focusing on consuming foods that are sustainable, seasonal, and local. However, I argue that these authors diverge from the Slow Food movement, as directed by Waters and Pollan, in very significant ways. Terry, Calvo and Esquibel focus on racialized health conditions related to food consumption, namely heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and cancers.³⁶⁷ They address these health disparities by highlighting foods that are rooted in black and Mexican histories. In addition, they critique Slow Food's lack of engagement with racial and gendered difference. They recognize how the movement focuses on culinary whiteness and Eurocentric histories and, in turn, intervene by highlighting the important contributions to eating locally, sustainably, and healthily by black and Mexican communities.

In several of his works, including *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *Food, Inc.*, Michael Pollan features Virginia organic farmer Joel Salatin as the premier example of how an ethical and sustainable farm should be run. Images of his farm feature large open pastures and Salatin alone on his tractor caring for his farm. Pollan praises Salatin for his commitment to sourcing food locally (at most within a day's drive), raising grass-fed cows, treating his chickens humanely, using organic methods of agriculture, and rejecting many conventional farming technologies and methods. Yet Salatin has garnered criticism from feminist analyses of agricultural studies. Salatin engages in a performance of the white, masculine heteronormative family farm. At one of his presentations, he argued that his "audience should not 'use your emotional energy' on thinking about people in food

³⁶⁷ "Michael Pollan on How Reclaiming Cooking Can Save Our Food System, Make Us Healthy and Grow Democracy." *Democracy Now* May 6, 2013. Web. April 14, 2016.

deserts.”³⁶⁸ Salatin instead suggested they focus, as he does, on white soccer moms as consumers. In an article about Salatin’s celebrity status as yeoman farmer, Ryanne Pilgeram and Russell Meeuf write that documentary films that center Salatin

...use the imagery of ‘natural beauty’ to represent Salatin’s farm, associating the idyllic rural aesthetic with nostalgic, agrarian, White masculinity to affirm the wholesomeness of Salatin’s work as a farmer. Depicting Salatin riding vintage tractors or guiding cows down small country roads—all with Salatin in his customary suspenders and straw hat—the aesthetic used to construct Salatin as a farmer alludes to nostalgic U.S. visions of agrarian masculinity.

These representations that Salatin embraces and references frame food consumption within a longer Jeffersonian historical narrative that imagines land as under the property of whiteness and masculinity. Pilgeram and Meeuf continue, “By idealizing images of the White family tending to the land, films such as *Fresh* promote a nostalgic perspective of the family farm that obscures the long history of oppression and discrimination that has exclude women and people of color from farm ownership and agricultural entrepreneurship in the U.S. (and elsewhere).”³⁶⁹

This long history of oppression and discrimination includes histories of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, laws and extra legal measures to maintain white supremacy as an institutional and ideological system of dominance. Historically, blacks and Latinxs who worked as agricultural laborers (slaves, sharecroppers, farm workers, and migrant labor) have been excluded from land ownership. In addition, the image of the

³⁶⁸ Pilgeram, Ryanne and Russell Meeuf. 2014. The Celebrity of Salatin: Can a Famous Lunatic Farmer Change the Food System? *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* 3(1): 1-19, p. 6.

³⁶⁹ Pilgeram, Ryanne and Russell Meeuf. 2014. The Celebrity of Salatin: Can a Famous Lunatic Farmer Change the Food System? *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* 3(1): 1-19, p. 15.

white, masculine yeoman farmer as the ideal has been held up by other contemporaries, including Victor Hanson, whose comes from a generations of family farmers.

Hanson, a former professor of Classical Studies at California State University, Fresno, has also written extensively about agrarianism, citizenship, democracy, and the yeoman farmer in the United States. Hanson, takes up Jefferson's notion of the yeoman farmer as the foundation for American democracy, arguing that U.S. democracy would not exist without the yeoman agrarian who cultivates the land and builds a proper citizenry, "American republican spirit," meritocracy, with property ownership a symbol of man's freedom, anti-consumption, conservative, Western civilization.³⁷⁰ Marez argues that Hanson has been a supporter of the union between white populism and corporate capitalism, within a masculinist, heteropatriarchal shell. Using his family history in farming as credibility for anti-immigrant rhetoric, Hanson vilifies immigrants for social ills. Marez also asserts that agribusiness has historically aligned itself with images of the white, masculine, heteropatriarchal farmer. The freedom of the white masculine farmer has often been defined in contrast to the rights of farmworkers of color.³⁷¹ Pollan's support for Salatin as a yeoman farmer relies on long-standing histories of manifest destiny and virgin land to be toiled, managed, and owned by white men. While Pollan may not mean to suggest that these histories of racism and violence should be embraced, his call for a Jeffersonian farming lifestyle beckons to this past. By contrast, rather than

³⁷⁰ Hanson, Victor David. Democracy without Farmers. *The Wilson Quarterly* Spring 2000.

³⁷¹ Marez, Curtis. 2016. Farm Worker Futurisms in Speculative Culture: George Lucas and Ester Hernandez. *Farm Worker Futurism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

imagine a utopian agrarian past, *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* recognize how chattel slavery and colonialism shape food relations and foodways.

In his 2009 best-selling book *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, Pollan attempts to answer the question of what everyday people should eat. A follow up to his 2006 award-winning *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Pollan responds to questions about appropriate food consumption for optimal health. He states, "I contend that most of what we're consuming today is no longer, strictly speaking, food at all, and how we're consuming it—in the car, in front of the TV, and, increasingly, alone—is not really eating, at least not in the sense that civilization has long understood the term."³⁷² The book explains his understanding of nutritionism, his critique of the western diet, how the western diet has resulted in particular diet-related diseases, and his dietary recommendations. His first suggestion on how to decide what to eat is the basis for the focus of this section.

In the third chapter of *In Defense of Food*, in the section titled "Eat Food: Food Defined," Pollan outlines his rules for how to determine what to eat. The first rule asserts, "Don't eat anything your great grandmother wouldn't recognize as food."³⁷³ This quotation became well-known after initially published in a 2007 *New York Times Magazine* article titled "Unhappy Meals." This quotation garnered Pollan a great deal of attention in popular discourse, as it became a catalyst for many as a simple but instructive measuring stick by which to determine what constitutes "real food." Calvo and Esquibel also cite Pollan's quotation in *Decolonize Your Diet* as an entry point to critique the

³⁷² Pollan, Michael. 2008. *In Defense of Food*. Detroit, MI: Thorndike Press.

³⁷³ Ibid, p. 205.

Standard American Diet. Pollan's explanation for this instruction is because of the confusion of what constitutes "real food," it is necessary to use the foods of prior generations in order assure the consumption of "real food." However, my interest in this quotation is in how Pollan situates the transmission of knowledge of food safety, history, and memory within the realm of the feminine.

Slow food has been called elitist, as many of its members call for people spending more money on food.³⁷⁴ Some have argued that it lacks a critical analysis of how social class impacts one's ability to participate in slow foods.³⁷⁵ Slow Food and Slow Food USA tout the necessity of spending money on food, in order to support small-scale farmers. However, they have not accounted for those who are poor or working class, who may not be able to spend a large portion of their incomes on local, sustainable, seasonal food, which is often more expensive. Whereas Pollan's standard of "real food" overlooks working class people of color, Alice Waters is critical of what she argues is the improper consumption of people of color by buying material objects rather than the spending their money on the "right" items, or slow foods.

During a *60 Minutes* interview, Alice Waters was asked about the expense of foods that the slow food movement promotes, given the concerns many of the public have expressed. When asked about the cost of specialty Bronx seedless grapes, which totaled four dollars per pound, Waters responded, "We make decisions every day about what we're going to eat. And some people want to buy Nike shoes – two pairs, and other

³⁷⁴ Birdsell, John. "Cheap Drama at Slow Food." *Chowhound*. December 14, 2011. Web. April 25, 2016.

³⁷⁵ Kliman, Todd. "How Michael Pollan, Alice Waters, and Slow Food Theorists Got It All Wrong." *The Washingtonian* May 29, 2015. Web. April 26, 2016.

people want to eat Bronx grapes, and nourish themselves. I pay a little extra, but this is what I want to do.”³⁷⁶ Waters’ comment speaks to the elitism that has also been a constitutive marker of Slow Foods. The notion is that people should necessarily want to spend their money on what is conceptualized as higher quality, expensive foods. While Waters does not specify the referent, the racially-coded “two pairs of Nike sneakers” seems to clearly reference the poor or working class communities of color whose consumer choices Waters suggests are detrimental to their health and reflect their poor judgment. I argue that the cookbooks on the other hand, resignify foods considered abject as full of vibrancy rather than producing death.

This comment is reminiscent of the 1976 speeches by then California Governor Ronald Reagan who was running for President. Reagan became well-known for his speeches about the “welfare queen,” who he claimed abused the welfare system and demonstrated the need for cuts to social service spending. As Reagan narrated it, Linda Taylor, whose given name was Martha Miller, represented the ways in which poor black women took advantage of the poorly managed federal welfare system: “There’s a woman in Chicago. She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards, and is collecting veterans’ benefits on four non-existent deceased husbands. And she’s collecting Social Security in all her cards. She’s got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income alone is \$150,000.”³⁷⁷ While it is unclear how Taylor’s racial background as “welfare queen” came to be marked as

³⁷⁶ Stahl, Lesley. “Alice Waters’ Crusade for Better Food.” *60 Minutes*. CBS. June 10, 2009. Web. April 25, 2016.

³⁷⁷ “‘Welfare Queen’ Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign.” *The New York Times* February 15, 1976. Web. April 30, 2016.

black—her birth certificate, death certificate and other official documents mark her as white, while those who knew her identified her in racially ambiguous and conflicting ways, as white, black, Asian, Native American, and biracial—Reagan’s constant references to Taylor’s abuse of welfare created widespread contempt for poor women of color as unproductive bodies who are characterized by laziness, an incessant capacity to consume improperly, and an inability to take personal responsibility.³⁷⁸

Stories about Taylor continue to frame current ideas about poor people, people of color and spending and convinced many that his proposed cuts to social service programs were not only reasonable but necessary. This “welfare queen,” named as such by *Chicago Tribune* contributor George Bliss,³⁷⁹ discourse took on a life of its own, as it extended to poor blacks and Latinxs broadly who were believed to engage in the wrong kinds of consumption. This discourse continued to develop in 1996 with President Bill Clinton’s creation of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. Priya Kandaswamy argues that this law was deeply racialized and had racialized effects, even if it did not use language that referred specifically to racial categories. Kandaswamy states that the goals of the 1996 Act “were rooted in the belief that welfare enabled a cultural degeneracy amongst recipients that undermined two of the defining institutions of American citizenship—work and marriage.”³⁸⁰ As scholars have pointed out, the construction of the welfare queen is completely inaccurate, as the majority of women on welfare simultaneously work full or part-time in order to supplement their incomes, being on

³⁷⁸ Demby, Gene. “The Truth Behind the Lies of the Original ‘Welfare Queen.’” All Things Considered. *NPR*. December 20, 2013. Web. April 30, 2016.

³⁷⁹ Levin, Josh. “The Welfare Queen.” *Slate*. December 19, 2013. Web. April 30, 2016.

³⁸⁰ Kandaswamy, Priya. 2012. Gendering Racial Formation. *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 33.

welfare does not promote pregnancy, and welfare necessity is not resolved through marriage. The welfare queen continues to be seen as a racialized figure whose relishes in irresponsible consumptive patterns, lazy work ethic, hypersexuality, and sense of entitlement. In doing so, structural inequities that result in racial-gendered disparities are left undisturbed, reinscribing racial, gendered, and class stratification as natural.³⁸¹

While the figure of the welfare queen has been analyzed to reveal how women of color, and people of color broadly, are penalized for particular forms of consumption, Waters' comment in relation to food gives the discussion a new meaning. She assumes that what she understands to be inappropriate forms of consumption then results in "bad eating." The quotation also speaks to how the spheres of the home are always linked to public consumption, what is traditionally imagined as being outside the home. In order to contextualize this statement by Waters, we must also situate it within frameworks of white women's domesticity. In her essay "Manifest Domesticity," Amy Kaplan argues that one of the roles of domesticity is to "tame the savage" within the borders of the nation-state, in particular, people of color. Kaplan analyzes the works of several 19th century white women novelists who produced fluid ideas of domesticity in order to "expand and contract the boundaries of home and nation to produce shifting conceptions of the foreign," including U.S. blacks as foreign to the U.S. nation-state.³⁸² While Waters' comment about Nike sneakers does not necessarily produce poor people of color

³⁸¹ Kandaswamy, Priya. 2012. *Gendering Racial Formation. Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

³⁸² Kaplan, Amy. 1998. "Manifest Domesticity." *American Literature* 70(3): 581-606, p. 583.

as foreign to the nation-state, it does demonstrate how she uses domesticity to shape ideas about proper consumption and public behavior within the space of the nation.

Waters' framing of those who buy two pairs of Nike sneakers rather than eating Bronx seedless grapes endorses the ideology that poor people of color engage in the wrong kinds of consumption, which presumably has an inevitably problematic outcome. Her comment fits within larger conversations about the importance of "personal responsibility" for making the right kinds of "choices." This individualistic approach ignores structural conditions that shape how, where, and why food choices are made. Instead, it is assumed that the consumer is overly invested in consumption of superficial material objects that are beyond their financial means. *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* challenge this discourse of black and Latinx improper consumption. They do not simply do so by arguing that communities of color are buying the "right" kinds of foods and should therefore be approved of by Waters and her cohorts. They instead reframe foods that have been deemed as abject black and Mexican foods and represent them as nutritious and desirable and while viewing the recipe as a site for racial healing.

Interventions by *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan*

Scholars Teresa M. Mares and Devon G. Peña argue that local and slow foods in contemporary food politics must also recognize the cultural values of communities of color. Mares and Peña argue,

Within food justice, it is simply not enough to examine the ethics of going slow to go local. One *has to go deep*, and this means respecting local knowledge, wherever and whenever it is found...there is a wealth of multigenerational place-based agroecological, ethnobotanical, and gastronomical knowledge within Native communities in the United States. However, there is also a wealth of this knowledge in diasporic and

immigrant communities that have face parallel histories of colonization, displacement, and environmental racism.³⁸³

Building on Mares and Peña's work, I assert that the Slow Food movement does not sufficiently account for knowledges and histories of people of color. I analyze how Terry, Calvo and Esquibel fundamentally alter how we think of the Slow Food movement by recognizing the multigenerational place-based gastronomical knowledge that accounts for histories of colonization, displacement, and environmental racism.

Cookbooks are a fruitful site for the analysis of influences ideas about social codes, mores, and dietary lessons. Cookbooks have traditionally been devalued for their association with women and the domestic sphere. However, research on women of color and the domestic sphere argues that the knowledge produced in cookbooks is vital to analyzing the relationship between race, gender, culture and politics. In *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender and Class at the Dinner Table*, Sherrie A. Inness argues that cookbooks are a vehicle for social and political change.³⁸⁴ While they pass down recipes from the past as a form of reproducing community, cookbooks also allows us to explore how women challenge power dynamics and gender inequality.³⁸⁵ I thus analyze how Bryant Terry, Luz Calvo and Catriona Esquibel use the site of the cookbook to draw relationships between the cultural and political in the racial-gendered politics of the recipe.

³⁸³ Mares, Teresa M. and Devon G. Peña. 2011. "Environmental Food Justice: Toward Local, Slow and Deep Food Systems." *Cultivating Food Justice* Eds. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, p. 201.

³⁸⁴ Inness, Sherrie A. 2006. *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender and Class at the Dinner Table*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

Bryant Terry is a gourmet eco-chef, speaker, educator, and well-known figure in the food justice movement. His four cookbooks have garnered him accolades for their creativity, attention to detail, and privileging of Afro-diasporic foods. His activist work has focused on the intersection of poverty, malnutrition and institutional racism and programmatic responses to those social issues.³⁸⁶ In order to create a counternarrative to the food industry's marketing of processed and fast foods, the recipes in Terry's cookbooks include accompanying musical pieces and artwork. He is credited with having made vegan soul food popular as well as plant-based Afro-diasporic gourmet foods.³⁸⁷

Afro-Vegan (2014), Terry's fourth and most recent cookbook, is critically acclaimed and has won several awards.³⁸⁸ In this cookbook, Terry mixes African, Caribbean, and U.S. southern ingredients in a wide range of diverse recipes. As with the Slow Food movement, Terry's recipes focus on making foods that are raw, fresh, and seasonal, and on sharing a meal with others.³⁸⁹ However, Terry argues that Slow Foods as it is currently represented does not account for how black peoples have been eating locally, seasonally, and using fresh ingredients for centuries: "There's this idea of slow food that people talk about. It's often framed as if, I don't know, it was something that was created by Western Europeans, but...when I think about the traditions...history and memory, this is something that people of African descent have been doing for millennia.

³⁸⁶ "Media: The Culture and Community of Food." Bryant Terry website. Turning Wheel Media. 2012. Web. March 10, 2016.

³⁸⁷ "Papa Glow: Food, Family, and Fatherhood with Chef Bryant Terry." *Mama Glow* June 20, 2014. Web. April 25, 2016.

³⁸⁸ "Books: Afro-Vegan. Farm Fresh African, Caribbean and Southern Flavors Remixed." Bryant Terry website. Turning Wheel Media. 2012. Web. March 10, 2015.

³⁸⁹ "Papa Glow: Food, Family, and Fatherhood with Chef Bryant Terry." *Mama Glow* June 20, 2014. Web. April 25, 2016.

It's just like, that's how people connected.”³⁹⁰ This quotation shows Terry's engagement with Slow Food, as well as his critique of how it is incorrectly framed as a Western European movement, obfuscating the gastronomic knowledges of African-descendant peoples. In this way he opposes the notion the Slow Food movement has ownership over the practices that it has named as “slow food”—practices that it marks as a product of whiteness.

In *Afro-Vegan*, Terry discusses how black people have always eaten healthy foods and how it is in fact because Afro-diasporic people have strayed from historically Afro-centric foods that increased food-related conditions have arisen.

More than anyone else, people of African descent should honor, cultivate, and consume food from the African diaspora. Afro-diasporic foodways (that is, the shape and development of food traditions) carry our history, memories, and stories. They connect us to our ancestors and bring the past into the present day. They also have the potential to save our lives. As Afro-diasporic people have strayed from our traditional foods and adopted a Western diet, our health has suffered. Combined with the economic, physical and geographic barriers that make it difficult to access *any* type of fresh food in many communities, the health of these populations across the globe has been devastated. In the United States, where I live and work, African Americans suffer from some of the highest rates of preventable diet-related illnesses, such as heart disease, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes. Many factors contribute to the increase in chronic illnesses affecting African-American communities, and I would argue that disconnect from our historical foods is a significant contributing force. While we continue to work for food justice—the basic human right to fresh, safe, affordable, and culturally appropriate food in all communities—we must also work to reclaim our ancestral knowledge and embrace our culinary roots.³⁹¹

³⁹⁰ “Bryant Terry on Buddhism and Food Justice.” Bryant Terry website. Turning Wheel Media. 2012. Web. February 22, 2016.

³⁹¹ Terry, Bryant. *Afro-Vegan*. New York, NY: Random House Publishing 2014, p. 2.

Terry's framing of the diet-related health conditions faced by those of the Afro-diasporic communities situates the cookbook as a means of healing and survival. By privileging the knowledge of people of African ancestry as a response to food deserts, he embraces racial difference as life-sustaining and healing for diet-related health disparities. Rather than uphold the West as the savior to health inequities, he situates Western culinary traditions as the producer of poor health and calls for a re-embracing of African-descended foods.

Luz Calvo and Catriona Esquibel are two academics in the San Francisco Bay Area. Calvo is a Professor in Ethnic Studies at California State University, East Bay, while Esquibel is an Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University. Part of their research has focused on food justice and decolonization, particularly in relation to reducing diet-related illnesses for Mexican Americans. In an interview about the *Decolonizing Your Diet* project when it was in its initial stages, Luz Calvo talks about the transition to a slow food diet. Calvo asserts,

I was also reading Michael Pollan and Slow Food Movement stuff and I was convinced by a lot of what Pollan had to say. His basic message is, "Eat food, mostly plants and not too much." His key idea is that we need to be eating real food as opposed to processed food. So much of what people eat anymore is not actually food; it's more like a chemical experiment. I agree with Pollan that we need to go back to what our ancestors ate, even in the 1940s, before food became an industrial product. There was this huge change around the 1940s and 1950s, when food became highly processed and also with the advent of factory farming. Thinking about that in a Mexican/Latino context, I started thinking about how my grandparents ate. They owned a Mexican restaurant in San Fernando, where I was born. Everything was made from scratch and the food was delicious.³⁹²

Pollan's message clearly resonates with Calvo's own ideas about consuming less

³⁹² Foy, Michelle. "Decolonize Your Diet! Dr. Luz Calvo and Michelle Foy." *Organizing Upgrade* November 9, 2012. Web. May 4, 2016.

processed foods, promoting more plant-based foods, and fresh foods. However, in considering the relationship between Slow Food and Mexican and Mexican American foods and foodways, Calvo continues, “My critique of Michael Pollan is that he’s very Euro American centered. In *Food Rules: An Eater’s Manual* he has a section on people looking to their ancestry. He talks about traditional Italian, Greek, and other European diets. He doesn’t even mention Mexican food. It’s appalling to me that he would hyper-value Italian food, when Italian food is totally based on food from the Americas, like tomatoes and corn for polenta. Every culture did have a whole food way of eating if you go back far enough. It’s about reclaiming that.” Calvo is critical of Pollan’s situating of Western European as quintessential examples of slow food and the way that the slow food movement ignores the important culinary contribution of Mexican foodways. Calvo’s reclamation of Mexican ancestral foods illustrates how the *Decolonize Your Diet* project frames improving the health of Mexican and Mexican American communities by privileging Mexican indigenous knowledges on health, recipes, ingredients, and dishes.

I understand *Decolonize Your Diet* to address this context through the recipes and ingredients highlighted. As Calvo and Esquibel’s first cookbook together as co-authors and partners, they highlight many of the values of the Slow Food movement, including the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, local, native foods, shopping at farmers markets, gardening, and a “made from scratch approach to cooking.”³⁹³ Significantly, they highlight foods native to Mesoamerica, emphasizing Mexican slow food culture. They respond to fast food and industrial agriculture by emphasizing how Mexican foods

³⁹³ Calvo, Luz and Catriona Rueda Esquibel. 2015. *Decolonize Your Diet: Plant-Based Mexican American Recipes for Health and Healing* Vancouver, BC, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press, p. 38.

and foodways are nutritious alternatives.

Calvo and Esquibel contend that one of the best ways to work against U.S. colonialism is by not consuming the Standard American Diet (SAD), discussed in the introduction. They argue that the SAD has resulted in higher levels of diet-related health issues: “For US Latina/o communities, the Standard American Diet has been imposed through Americanization programs, school lunch programs, targeted advertising campaigns, and national food policies. Our communities are now riddled with the diseases of development- diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and some cancers.”³⁹⁴ The authors counter the SAD and encourage dietary decolonization by bringing visibility to the nutritious value of traditional and indigenous Mexican foods.

Both cookbooks also center the importance of plant-based recipes. Terry and Calvo state that while they had eaten vegetarian foods prior to Calvo’s diagnosis of breast cancer, the cancer prompted them to consume solely vegan foods. While neither cookbook touts plant-based recipes as the only or best way of eating for everyone, they do focus on the nutritional value of a plant-based diet. In *Afro-Vegan*, Terry states,

I see this book naming and solidifying a new genre of cooking an eating, if you will—extending farm-fresh, compassionate food to include foods from the African diaspora. When you consider that for thousands of years traditional West and Central African diets were predominantly vegetarian—centered around staples like millet, rice, field peas, okra, hot peppers, and yams—and that many precolonial African diets heavily emphasized plant-based foods, a vegan cookbook celebrating the food of the African diaspora is perfectly fitting.

Similarly, in *Decolonize Your Diet* Calvo and Esquibel argue,

³⁹⁴ Calvo, Luz and Catriona Rueda Esquibel. 2015. *Decolonize Your Diet: Plant-Based Mexican American Recipes for Health and Healing*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press, p. 26.

We started to evaluate Mesoamerican cuisine and quickly found that foods from the pre-Hispanic era (i.e., before colonization) were among the healthiest foods on the planet and that many of the less healthy aspects of Mesoamerican cuisine came about as a direct result of colonization—with the introduction of wheat, beef, cheese, cooking oils, and sugar. Before colonization, Mesoamerican food was steamed, grilled or cooked on a clay skillet known as a *comal*. Meat was eaten only in small quantities. Our ancestors gathered and ate wild herbs and greens. They cultivated hundreds of different varieties of beans, squash, and corn, not just the few varieties now available at most grocery stores. In terms of corn, in particular, our ancestors created a rich and sustaining cuisine that included yellow, white, red, blue, and black corn, made tamales...tacos...atoles...tlacoyos...and more.

Decolonize Your Diet and *Afro-Vegan* make unique contributions through cookbooks by addressing the ailments of communities of color from a plant-based perspective, while also participating in a critique of colonialism. Terry, Calvo and Esquibel object to the ways in which colonialism and industrial agriculture has disrupted native West and Central African and Mesoamerican foods and foodways. Their emphasis on plant-based recipes can be read as a means of addressing diet-related illness that results from meat consumption via industrial agriculture. They also bring attention to the displacement of particular food practices, such as eating farm fresh vegetables in West and Central Africa and steaming and grilling food in Mesoamerican traditions. They demonstrate that U.S. settler colonialism has resulted in culinary whiteness in which the knowledges of African- and Mexican-descendant histories are disappeared and replaced with damaging Western food knowledges. The emphasis on ancestral foods from communities of color disputes the ways in which Slow Foods highlights white food histories as those that are healthy, diverse, and delicious.

The Effects of the Colonial Food System

One of the primary interventions of *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* in the Slow Food movement is that they directly address the effects of colonialism on foods and foodways for communities of color. Rather than narrating a utopian ideal about indigenous foods, they argue that we must account for the historical hybridization that results from U.S. colonialism. In other words, they recognize how colonialism has both damaged traditional foodways of African diasporic and Mesoamerican foods and produced food hybridization that results in interesting and innovative recipes. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy argue that the notion of “dietary decolonization” has become a very popular concept in recent years by food activists and academics. The body is understood as the site for change as “...importantly for understanding the *practice* of decolonization, this trend is also increasingly identified as taking place at the scale of the body. Thus, not only is there an emphasis on connecting personal food choice to political economic inequities, there is also an impulse to see the body as a strategic location for social change.”³⁹⁵ Terry, Calvo and Esquibel explore ideas of dietary decolonization by situating their cookbooks in histories of colonial violence and power. They contend that today’s current food system is a result of colonial power both in relation to a long legacy of colonialism as well as industrial agriculture. I argue that through the combination of their food photography, their discussions of the violence of colonialism, and the acknowledgement of the racial and food hybridization, these recipes offer a form of physical and psychic racial healing.

Terry’s cookbook includes recipes that highlight the combination of foods from

³⁹⁵ Hayes-Conroy, Allison and Jessica. Feminist Nutrition: Difference, Decolonization, and Dietary Change. 2013. *Doing Nutrition Differently*. Eds. Allison and Jessica Hayes-Conroy. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, p. 180.

regions of the world where the African diaspora has lived. His recipes bring together foods, ingredients, and dishes from the U.S. South, the Caribbean, and East and West Africa. This cultural blend speaks to the effects of chattel slavery, which dispersed African populations across these regions (amongst others). Terry states, “While there is some emphasis on foods that are indigenous to Africa, ultimately, this book is about the fusion of food that resulted from food-crop exchanges between Africa and other parts of the globe that go back thousands of years.”³⁹⁶ The result was the creation of new traditional diets that included a mixture of indigenous, African, and European foods and cooking methods.³⁹⁷ Terry recuperates these food combinations by marking the mixing of African, Caribbean and U.S. Southern foods as a critique of any notion of pure or authentic African American food history. Situating African American cookbooks as a form of literature, Anne E. Goldman states, “The literature of black Americans demonstrates a very different relation to place, not insisting upon the cultural legacy and political responsibilities of a long-settled community, but re-collecting a culture scattered along with its people in the aftermath of the African diaspora.”³⁹⁸ Terry approaches *Afro-Vegan* in a similar way, by recognizing how colonialism and migration have led to heterogeneous Afro-descendant foods and foodways.

³⁹⁶ Terry, Bryant. 2014. *Afro-Vegan: Farm-Fresh African, Caribbean and Southern Flavors Remixed*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, p. 4.

³⁹⁷ Harris, Jessica B. 2011. *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA.

³⁹⁸ Goldman, Anne E. 1996. “I Yam what I Yam.” *Take My Word: Autobiographical Innovations of Ethnic American Working Women*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 34.

Terry's recipe for Hominy and Spinach in Tomato-Garlic Broth soup (p. 44-45)

highlights the racial mixing of foods that resulted from U.S. chattel slavery and colonialism. As he writes,

This soup is primarily inspired by the ingredients of flavor profile of a version of efo riro, a traditional Yoruban stew eaten in Nigeria that I ate several years ago. It was loaded with fresh spinach and tomatoes and included a bit of pounded yam for starchiness. The base of this soup is a smooth tomato-garlic broth that's combined with minced spinach and hominy, the latter a traditional Native American staple that shows up in both African-American and Afro-Caribbean cuisine.



Image 70. Hominy and Spinach in Tomato-Garlic Broth soup.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ Food photography by Paige Green. *Afro-Vegan*. 2014.

The distressed gray-brown hardwood table holds four bowls. Three of those are similar in shape and size, white scalloped with servings of the deeply red colored soup, and pieces of the hominy and spinach visible. A small navy blue and off-white bowl holds some kernels of cooked hominy. The mixture of foods in this recipe shows how food can relay the complexity of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism of indigenous populations. The brutal physical, psychic, linguistic and symbolic violence is accompanied by the mixing of cross-cultural foods. Terry's highlighting of such foods demonstrates his engagement with this complicated political history that does not simply privilege these foods outside of their context, but recognizes the contradictions of the slavery and colonialism; that they can result in delicious hybrid foods. This approach is nuanced, as it does not simply reify the cross cultural and cross-racial mixing as decontextualized fetish, but recognizes the realities that such violence produced.

Differing from *Afro-Vegan, Decolonize Your Diet*, makes the explicit contention that the body is a site for decolonization. Calvo and Esquibel argue that decolonization is essential for validating the knowledge production of the Mexican foodways as well as for survival. They state, "For us, helping build an awareness of the relationship between food and community offers one way to reclaim indigenous knowledge... The project of decolonizing our diets cannot be accomplished through *individual* acts of food preparation. Instead, we hope that our project will inspire our readers to think critically about the effects of colonization on the food we eat and motivate them to get involved in their communities." The authors highlight indigenous Mexican foods as a means to bring attention to how colonialism has impacted indigenous Mexican foodways—by deeming that knowledge invalid or destroying particular foods. Calvo and Esquibel incorporate

these ingredients and recipes as praxis for decolonization, taking place at the sites of the mind and the body. They cite the Latino Paradox (p. 27-29), a term used by the medical field to describe the phenomenon in which Latinx immigrations who come to the United States and have less healthcare resources and financial resources are generally in better health than US born Latinxs. Given that one's level of health and mortality is generally tied directly to one's socioeconomic status, it is unexpected that poor Mexican immigrants are in better health than many U.S. born whites who are middle class.⁴⁰⁰ Since the 1970s, this has been an epidemiological abnormality and which is attributed to food consumption. The consumption of plant-based, fresh, and low sugar foods that immigrants consume is thought to be the primary reason for the Latino Paradox. Thus, even though Latinx immigrants are in a less stable financial position, they are healthier. It has been found that after some years of being in the United States, immigrants' diet changes to a more Americanized diet and their health begins to deteriorate.

Following this research, Calvo and Esquibel call for the reclamation of native foods, including a range of grains, vegetables, fruits, and meats. They reclaim what they refer to as "ancestral foods," or foods of Pre-Conquest Mexico. However, like Terry, they do not imagine a utopian ideal in which "untainted" indigenous foods are to be consumed today. Instead, they recognize that there are various cooking methods and ingredients that have been used to reinvent dishes: "...we've learned that the indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica have always made many different kinds of tamales, and this encourages us to be creative and bold, instead of imagining that there is one 'authentic' recipe that we

⁴⁰⁰ Saenz, Rogelio and Trinidad Morales. 2012. The Latino Paradox. In *The Demography of the Hispanic Population: Selected Essays* Ed. Richard R. Verdugo. 47-73.

need to emulate. Generation after generation, our ancestors fed their families and communities by being clever, adaptable, and ingenious, and by making use of different available ingredients.”⁴⁰¹ The authors assert that to continue to eat the Standard American Diet is to continue to undergo colonization: “we must reject colonization because this diet is literally killing us.”⁴⁰² In this way, Calvo and Esquibel privilege indigenous and local foods that are not part of the SAD, including whole grains, vegetables, and plants, to contesting a history of disease-producing foods.

The Purépecha Bean Soup (92-93) recipe highlights indigenous roots in Mexico. The recipe is a tribute to the Purépecha people who fought against and defeated the Aztecs. The description of the recipe is as follows:

The ancient Purépecha people were excellent strategists and fierce warriors: they dealt one of the few major defeats to the powerful Mexica (Aztec) armies. Today, the Purépecha, located in the Mexican state of Michoacán, continue their tradition of struggle and are active in resisting illegal logging and clear-cutting of their forests. This recipe honors their resilience: a velvety soup garnished with crispy corn tortillas and chewy, bittersweet strips of ancho chiles.

⁴⁰¹ Calvo, Luz and Catriona Rueda Esquibel. 2015. *Decolonize Your Diet: Plant-Based Mexican American Recipes for Health and Healing*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press, p. 32.

⁴⁰² Ibid, p. 37.



Image 71. Purépecha Bean Soup.⁴⁰³

The image includes a brightly lit background that appears almost ethereal. A white wall is somewhat blurry in the background. In the forefront of the picture sits a very light brown unfinished wooden table, with a white bowl and a white napkin on it. The delicate bowl is partially clearly in focus and partially blurred. The bowl is filled with the Purépecha Soup, a rich burned orange color, garnished with diced avocado, small tortilla pieces, black chile strips, and crumbled queso fresco. The thin white linen that sits underneath the bowl has leaves and a flower embroidered on it. To the left of the bowl lies what appears to be a spoon that has an intricate design on it. It is blackened along the spoon part, appearing worn. This artisanal photo brings together ancestral foods within a

⁴⁰³ Food photography by Tracey Kusiewicz. *Decolonize Your Diet*. 2015.

contemporary aesthetic to highlight how foods are an extension of political contexts but also exceed them. By celebrating the Purépecha through this soup and recognizing the continued process of colonialism, Calvo and Esquibel engage readers in the importance of decolonization, at the site of the mind and the body.

Reframing Foods

Decolonize Your Diet and *Afro-Vegan* protest discourses about the improper consumption of blacks and Mexican communities. However, rather than argue that blacks and Mexicans also eat Bronx seedless grapes, for example, they reframe ancestral foods that have been deemed unhealthy or abject within a white supremacist framework as foods that have value and vitality. As Jessica Harris argues, because of the history of U.S. chattel slavery, “the traditional foodways that derive from the history of enslavement that many of us share are often perceived as unhealthy, inelegant, and hopelessly out of sync with the culinary canons that define healthy eating today.”⁴⁰⁴ *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* challenge the assumption that the traditional foodways of black and Mexican communities are inherently out of touch with the contemporary foodie movement and instead frame their dishes as in conversation with Slow Food movement.

Bryant Terry’s recipe for Sweet Pickled Watermelon Rinds and Jalapeños (p. 140) creatively reframes the watermelon as a nutritious fruit within a contemporary foodie culture of pickling. The instructions begin, “Don’t get rid of those watermelon rinds just yet! Pickling is a great way to make the most of them. While pickled watermelon rinds were fairly common in the South, these are unique in that I add jalapeños for a subtle

⁴⁰⁴ Harris, Jessica. 2011. *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journal from Africa to America* New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, p. 1.

kick. The rinds are great alongside savory dishes, similar to how you'd use chutney. You can cut them into thin slices and eat them on Berbere-Spiced Black-Eyed Pea Sliders [p. 32] for another layer of flavor on that burger.”



Image 72. Sweet Pickled Watermelon Rinds and Jalapeños.

The image features a close up of two 1-pint glass, canning jars with metal clamps. In the foreground of the image on the left is a jar with the pickled watermelon rinds that are yellow, bite-size pieces. The jar is open and at the top of the jar we see thin layers of orange and lemon slices. It also contains jalapeño slices whose dark green color compliment the bright and tangy looking citrus and fruit. Behind that jar, another jar is featured, filled to the top with cut green beans. They are the visual for the Ginger-Pickled Green Beans recipe on the previous page (p. 139). In the background and the right side of

the image, we see parts of two glass lids, artistically blurred. The jars and lids sit on a light brown hardwood surface.

Terry's recipe takes watermelon, historically used to mock and ridicule U.S. blacks in minstrel and other performances,⁴⁰⁵ and resignifies those foods to fit within a gourmet foodie aesthetic. As discussed in chapter 1, minstrelsy is known for its use of blackface to produce contradictory, demeaning and stereotypical caricatures of blacks in the United States, particularly as the watermelon came to be known as *the* representative food of African American culture and as the quintessential food of the minstrel performance. As I have previously noted, Fanon discusses how this imagery became a source of shame among blacks, who then struggle to be disassociated from this imagery in order to transcend racial difference, which is ultimately never possible.⁴⁰⁶

Terry recognizes this historical legacy, but rather than create separatism between his cooking and the abjected watermelon, he embraces this food. He does not reduce the watermelon to solely or ultimately being the food marker to Jim Crow and to blackness as inferiority. Instead, he turns the watermelon on its head, so to speak, by embracing the fruit as something that is not only tasty but also nutritious. Terry resignifies the watermelon to represent health and racial difference as pride. He establishes the watermelon as a food that fits within the trendy movement to re-embrace pickling in urban environments. The Sweet Pickled Watermelon Rinds and Jalapeños recipe shifts the gaze from one in which blackness and black foods are abject to one in which blackness and black foods are a cornerstone of artisanal, slow foods.

⁴⁰⁵ Taylor, Yuval and Jake Austen. 2012. *Darkest America: Black Minstrelsy from Slavery to Hip Hop* New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc.

⁴⁰⁶ Fanon, Frantz. 2008. *Black Skins, White Masks*. New York, NY: Grove Press.

Calvo and Esquibel also resignify foods that have been represented as unhealthy. They discuss how two ancestral foods, wild greens *quelites* and *verdolagas*, have historically been considered healthy foods among their Mexican ancestors. However, agribusiness has classified these foods as weeds and therefore marked them as inedible for consumption. They state, “Both of us have grandparents...spoke fondly of finding and preparing *quelites* (lamb’s quarters) and *verdolagas* (purslane)... there is considerable archeological evidence of [*verdolagas*]’ presence in the Americas before colonization... Throughout the world, agribusiness considers both *quelites* and *verdolagas* to be weeds and uses herbicides, such as Monsanto’s Roundup, to try to kill these nutritious plants.”⁴⁰⁷

In the quotation, Calvo and Esquibel describe the indigenous epistemologies of their Mexican ancestry, which have been disavowed by agribusiness. Eco-feminist scholar and activist Vandana Shiva discusses how large agribusiness corporations have put small farmers out of business in India, because of corporate monopolies on seed ownership and dispersal. She critiques how privatization and corporate global ownership of food, plants, and water has framed indigenous foods as something to be owned and commodified. Calvo and Esquibel similarly object to the ways in which corporate agribusiness produces knowledge about food and health, disavowing *quelites* and *verdolagas* as unhealthy foods.⁴⁰⁸

In addition, nation-building projects ideologically invest in notions of health in order to prescribe to particular markers of modernity and racial superiority, as discussed

⁴⁰⁷ Calvo, Luz and Catriona Rueda Esquibel. 2015. *Decolonize Your Diet*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press, p. 24-25

⁴⁰⁸ Shiva, Vandana. 2005. *Earth Democracy* Brooklyn, NY: South End Press.

in chapter 1 in relation to the efforts of the Mexican government to promote milk consumption of milk among Mexican citizens as part of a larger nation-making project to be viewed as modern and associated with progress by the U.S. nation-state in the mid-20th century. These constructions result in hegemonic ideas about what these foods are and whether they are appropriate for consumption.

A recipe for Pickled Verdolagas (p. 178-179) demonstrates how to take this ancestral wild green and create a modern day recipe. The image includes a light gray hard wood table that is so unfinished it more closely resembles a tree bark than a table. On it are three bowls: at the top right, a brown wooden bowl filled with pickled green verdolagas; to its left is a black bowl that contains bright mint green requesón de semilla de calabaza, and beneath both of those is a brown wooden bowl filled with cabbage curtido (another recipe found in the cookbook).



Image 73. Pickled Verdolagas.

The authors embrace the indigenous and Mexican epistemologies of nutrition, stating,

During late summer months, when verdolagas (purslane) are plentiful, we like to pickle them so we can continue eating them during the fall and winter months. This plant [verdolagas] is a nutritional powerhouse. It is higher in omega-3 fatty acids than many other vegetables, protects the liver, and helps heal kidney damage caused by diabetes. You can use pickled verdolagas instead of Pickled Red Onions in any of our recipes as they add a similar acid note.

The recipe also highlights using foods that are in season, as they suggest eating the verdolagas when they are readily available. By focusing on the nutritional benefits of pickled verdolagas, Calvo and Esquibel shift the gaze from this wild green as a deadly weed to a health food that can heal diet-related illnesses. Both the Pickled Watermelon and Picked Verdolagas recipes thus resignify pickling practices that were once

considered a tedious necessity of the past but have come into fashion as a popular activity in today's foodie culture.

Given Gilmore's discussion on racism as vulnerability to premature death, *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro Vegan* make a significant contribution by highlighting the abundance of healthy foods and how food is spiritually nourishing. While it is not within the scope of my project to determine the precise nutritional value of these foods, it is my aim to analyze how racialized foods are represented as healing within a context of black and Mexican foods as detrimental to health. This framing of these recipes as healing is a direct counter to the assumption that the foods eaten by communities of color are more likely to lead to diet-related health conditions and premature death.

In *Afro-Vegan*, Bryant Terry discusses how his recipes include health-producing effects. The Dandelion Salad with Pecan Dressing (p. 81) contains ingredients that are high in nutrition. Terry states,

While they are not often associated with Southern foodways in their popular imagination, dandelion greens are a staple in traditional African-American cooking. My family grew them, and we cooked them along with collard and mustard greens and other leafy vegetables. They are often used as a healing and preventative herb during the spring when they're at their peak, and they're a good source of vitamins A, B16, K, and E, as well as thiamin, riboflavin, calcium, iron, copper, and potassium. Tangerines, which are cultivated in Algeria, add a sweet counterpoint to the bitterness from the dandelion green in this salad, and the sugar-coated pecans add sweet crunch.



Image 74. Dandelion Salad with Pecan Dressing.

Terry highlights how Afro-diasporic foods have health and healing benefits, counter to notions of African American foods as solely fried foods or foods high in sugar and calories. The brightly colored dandelion greens appear to have been freshly washed, as the photo shows water drops on the greens, in the bowl, and on the countertop. In this image, the dandelions appear fresh, crisp, and moist, as if they were just picked out of a garden, or in Terry's words "at their peak." It is as if the nutritional value of the dandelions greens are made manifest through this visual representation. This image with the accompanying blurb works to create desire in the viewer-consumer through its aesthetic appeal.

In *Decolonize Your Diet*, the Kick-Ass Chayote Salad with Pickled Red Onions (p. 80-81) is a dish notable for how it emphasizes energy and healing. The authors write, "This simple, colorful salad is a nutritional powerhouse. The crunchy chayote is high in

antioxidant phytochemicals that may help undo some of the damage caused by the Standard American Diet. This salad has benefits for all ages: the folate in the chayote is especially good for pregnant moms and for the brain health of our elders. Mint is an especially potent inhibitor of cancer cells.”



Image 75. Kick-Ass Chayote Salad with Pickled Red Onions.

This recipe illustrates how Calvo and Esquibel work to counter the negative effects of the SAD through the promotion of indigenous Mexican knowledge, particularly as it relates to premature death. Including a food that addresses cancer is significant in that cancer is the disease with which Calvo was diagnosed. The bright green, red, and yellow colors and the distinct textures of the fruits and vegetables contrast sharply with the matte,

round black bowl in which the salad sits. This imagery provides visual affect that emphasizes the quality, value, and flavor of the Kick-Ass Chayote Salad with Pickled Red Onions. In doing so, the recipe contests the idea that communities of color consume foods that result in premature death and instead illustrates the Mexican ancestral foods that heal illness and produce liveliness and vigor.

Women of Color Cookbooks as Resistance

I situate *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* within a history of women of color cookbooks. While their grandmothers are not listed as authors of these cookbooks, the grandmothers' influence on recipes, knowledge, and ingredients makes them co-authors. Their presence and influence over how these chefs make their culinary creations is fundamental to the framing of these cookbooks. I build on Emma Perez's work on writing Chicanas into a history that typically centers narratives about men. She argues, "As I attempt to take the *his* out of the Chicana story, I am also aware that I too am marked with the *history* I have inherited. There is no pure, authentic, original history. There are only stories—many stories. The ones that intrigue me are the tales by or about women, whether told by men or women; both interest me as I reconstruct the past."⁴⁰⁹ Along the same vein, I argue that the works by Terry, Calvo and Esquibel, deeply influenced by their grandmothers, relay stories of racial-gendered culinary experience. Rather than an attempt to locate authenticity in their narrations, I analyze how they construct women of color culinary analytic that critiques culinary history and knowledge as solely within the realm of white, male figures. Terry, Calvo and Esquibel, work within

⁴⁰⁹ Perez, Emma. 1999. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, p. xv.

a contemporary Slow Food framework but also within a longer history of women of color whose work as cooks is a form of radical transformation.

Scholarship on cookbooks written by women of color demonstrates that these texts do not simply transmit recipes. Cookbooks are producers of important knowledge by carrying with them stories of history, memory, migration, family, and culture. Historian Jeffrey Pilcher argues that community cookbooks written by mestiza Mexican women were a means to resist European colonialism in the 1800s and 1900s.⁴¹⁰ Anne E. Goldman argues that Mexican and Mexican American cookbooks have been used for collective affirmation, to connect the individual to their ethnic history, as a mode of “self-articulation,” as a means of political assertion, and to critique the present.⁴¹¹ She also discusses how these cookbooks allow for a particular form of knowledge production—women of color as story-writers, not solely storytellers.

Sherri Inness argues that late 20th century African American women’s cookbooks challenge stereotypes about blackness and confront racial inequities, such as slavery. She discusses how black women’s cooking demonstrates how they have subverted the mammy stereotype by centering black women’s experiences and relationships to other blacks (as opposed to white bodies as the center point) and utilizing cookbooks as a form of black history, solidarity, traditions, to reframe problematic constructions, and to share

⁴¹⁰ Pilcher, Jeffrey. 1997. “Recipes for Patria: Cuisine, Gender, and Nature in Nineteenth-Century Mexico.” *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories*. Ed. Anne L. Bower. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

⁴¹¹ Goldman, Anne E. 1996. “I Yam what I Yam.” *Take My Word: Autobiographical Innovations of Ethnic American Working Women*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

experiences from black women's daily lives.⁴¹² Inness argues that black women's cookbooks are a way of exhibiting agency within a context of oppression, "conscious feminine labor," a way to construct community and self-determination. These cookbooks provide physical, emotional and spiritual nourishment. Women of color cookbooks, in particular, have been understood as different forms of knowledge production including literature, analyses of political, cultural and gendered contexts, cultural work, storytelling, fiction, memoir, and as "political commentary that is a resistance to the commodification of...culture."⁴¹³ Cookbooks have also been analyzed as "narrators of ethnicity" or texts that embrace immigrant ethnic and racial difference.⁴¹⁴ They are a way to reclaim ethnic and gender identities through writing about food, as a way to construct, defend and transgress social and cultural borders.

Although women of color have often been relegated to the domestic sphere of the kitchen as a means of oppression, gender inequity, and racism, the domestic has also been a site for women of color to obtain access to wage labor. As such, they have used that space to write their own narratives, exert agency, resist inequities, and engage in innovative forms of self-expression. These actions illustrate how the act of cooking and the site of the cookbook hold the potential for transgressive social change. Cookbooks

⁴¹² Inness, Sherri. 2005. "More than apple pie": Modern African American Cookbooks Fighting White Stereotypes. *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender, and Class at the Dinner Table*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 105-106

⁴¹³ Avakian, Arlene Voski and Barbara Haber. 2005. "Feminist Food Studies: A Brief History." *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press; Culver, Carody. 2013. "A Pinch of Salt and a Dash of Plot: The Power of Narrative in Contemporary Cookbooks." *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 118:35-50.

⁴¹⁴ Gvion, Liora. 2009. "What's Cooking In America?" *Food, Culture and Society* 21(1): 53-76.

that center the narratives and experiences of women of color offer an analytic to embrace racial and gendered difference and highlight racialized and gendered knowledge production.

I see cookbooks as an archive for women of color resistance; a collection of stories, experiences, recipes, and ingredients that weave a narrative of how women of color have struggled against marginalization and subjection and have used creativity as a means of survival and thriving. Women of color cookbooks reproduce culture and create community, as opposed to simply being vehicles to transmit already established relationships and histories. This gendered labor is also form of politics: “Using the metaphor of culinary labor to develop an ethnic identity thus associates endeavors in the cultural sphere with struggle in the political domain...it replays political conflict as a struggle for cultural ownership...”⁴¹⁵ Women of color’s culinary labor demonstrates how the realms of politics and culture are always inherently associated, rather than disparate spheres. To speak back to racial and gendered oppression is inherently a form of resistance and means of exerting agency within a capitalist society.

Bryant Terry tells a story about being strongly influenced by his grandmother and her knowledge of cooking. Preparing, preserving, consuming foods from his grandmother’s garden is a narrative he frequently recounts in his cooking presentations, cookbooks, and website. As he did at the Decolonizing Foodways conference, he starts the majority of his cooking demonstrations with a story about cooking in the kitchen with his grandmother. In an interview with the production company, Turning Wheel Media, he

⁴¹⁵ Goldman, Anne E. 1996. “I Yam what I Yam.” *Take My Word: Autobiographical Innovations of Ethnic American Working Women*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 58.

speaks about growing up in a family with a history of agrarian roots and how his grandmother's relationship to food and cooking has influenced his own relationship to food:

One of my fondest memories of my grandmother was hearing her singing spirituals and...when I think back on her engagement around food, I think it was a spiritual act for her. I don't know if she would have framed it as such, but she was very intentional about getting the food from her garden and creating a very calm space in the kitchen and I always talk about how if you came into the house, you'd know she was cooking even if you didn't smell it because you'd always hear her singing. And so, I think early on one of the biggest lesson I learned was whatever our energy, whatever presence we have when we're making food, we infuse that into the food.⁴¹⁶

Terry's relationship to being a chef is largely influenced by his grandmother's culinary traditions. This narrative demonstrates how black women use agency in the kitchen to pass on culinary traditions that affect not only the private space of the home, but also the public issues of health and nutrition. Terry's discussion of his grandmother's "energy" and "presence" in the kitchen demonstrates how cooking passes on spiritual and/or psychic fulfillment in addition to physical nourishment. The cookbook photographs emphasize how the women of color culinary traditions combined psychological and physical nourishment that precede and intervene in Slow Foods.

Terry's recipe for Teff Biscuits with Maple-Plantain Spread (158-159) is a recipe inspired by his grandmother. Terry describes the recipe,

Nothing says Southern breakfast like hot-out-of-the-oven biscuits. I have fond memories of sopping up maple syrup, molasses, and sorghum syrup with my maternal grandmother's homemade biscuits, and I often visualize her standing at her kitchen counter rolling out biscuit dough. For me, her practice of making biscuits almost every weekend has come to symbolize

⁴¹⁶ "Bryant Terry on Buddhism and Food Justice." Bryant Terry website. Turning Wheel Media. 2012. Web. March 21, 2016.

the hospitality, rituals, and slow-food traditions of African-American cookery that I'm hoping to help revive with my work.

Terry then goes on to describe the hybridization of place and food by using grains from Ethiopia as part of a traditional U.S. Southern breakfast. He describes the nutritional value of the teff flour, high in calcium, vitamin C and iron. His inspiration from his grandmother is a reminder of black ownership within the Slow Food movement. Terry claims a stake of black presence as a slow food practice before it was named as such, through the gendered labor of his grandmother's cooking.



Image 76. Teff Biscuits with Maple-Plantain Spread.

Several brown Teff Biscuits sit on top of parchment paper in a baking sheet as Terry (presumably) pulls them out of a hot oven. The biscuits appear fluffy, with a soft, bright,

ethereal light upon them. This brightness is common in food photography, but has a more meaningful resonance in this context, given Terry's discussion of his grandmother, energy, and spirituality. This image offers a sense of metaphysics, in which the past is connected with the present through the knowledge and labor of women of color foodways.

Luz Calvo and Catriona Esquibel recount stories of their abuelas (grandmothers) cooking and preparing foods in Mexico, foods that are emulated in their cookbook. They state that they recognize the ways in which gendered labor has been a part of the cooking process and disavow any labor in the kitchen that is imposed. Nonetheless, they assert that it is through the lineage of their Mexican grandmothers that the spirit of healthy and delicious foods was inspired.

Our *abuelitas* (grandmothers) prepared a simple diet that was as flavorful as it was nourishing. The staples of their diets were beans and tortillas, supplemented with many fruits and vegetables: avocados, corn, tomatoes, chiles, wild greens, squash, herbs, berries, pineapples, papayas, and more. They also had great knowledge of the medicinal value of their herbs and foods. So much of this knowledge is being lost, especially among those of us who have been in the US or away from the land for generations. Many of our immigrant comrades—especially those who hail from rural areas in Mexico and Central America—still carry this vital knowledge. It is imperative that we validate and promote such knowledge and pass it down to future generations.⁴¹⁷

Here Calvo and Esquibel argue that through the traditions of their Mexican grandmothers, they are able to pass down the knowledge that food is healing rather than harmful. They highlight particular foods that are constructive for good health and its significance for addressing health inequities in Mexican American communities. In

⁴¹⁷ Calvo, Luz and Catriona Rueda Esquibel. 2015. *Decolonize Your Diet*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press, p.18-19.

addition, they highlight the knowledge of those who continue to live in Mexico (and Central America) as valuable and useful, rather than backward and premodern, as is often the case. They privilege this knowledge that is largely devalued as important for future generations.

The Quinoa con Leche recipe (228-229) provides a beautiful image to highlight the labor of their grandmothers. They state, “Inspired by our grandmothers’ arroz con leche (Mexican rice pudding) the quinoa and almond milk breakfast pudding is fragrant and flavorful; the protein and fiber give you endurance for your day. Make a pot ahead of time and store individual servings for easy breakfasts throughout the week.”



Image 77. Quinoa con Leche.

On top of the dark hardwood table sits a wide turquoise bowl with creamy quinoa con leche sprinkled with currants and cinnamon. A spoon sits in the dish. The dish is on top of a colorful cloth napkin with turquoise, orange, red, and gray pattern on it. A small jar appears in the left backdrop of the photo, filled with what appears to be pure maple syrup. The mention of the Quinoa con Leche as “fragrant” and “flavorful” produces an affect that creates desire in the viewer-consumer. The hardwood table, the pattern of the cloth, and the apothecary jar give the photo a rustic vintage aesthetic that highlights its artisanal qualities. The description of “protein and fiber,” in addition to the ease of making a pot in advance so that it is readily available throughout the week speaks to the nutritional and practical value of the dish. All of these qualities indicate the quality, value, and flavor that their grandmothers’ recipes offer. The revision of this dish from their grandmothers’ reveals how women of color culinary traditions continue to be relevant and adaptable.

By placing their grandmothers’ personal stories, recipes, and histories and forefronting the gendered labor of the kitchen, Terry, Calvo and Esquibel make public the importance of giving validity to the work of women of color in the domestic sphere, particularly as it relates to the public sphere. Examining the cookbooks photographs allows for an analysis of how they may affectively appeal to a viewer-consumer affect. In doing so, we see how their framing of their cooking does not simply or solely belong to them, but to a broader history and audience through the appeal of food imagery and knowledge production. This history informs the cookbooks that Terry, Calvo and Esquibel produce, taking into account their own personal histories within a larger project of food consumption, gender, and race and extends the legacies of their grandmothers inter-generationally.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how the cookbooks *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* situate the recipe as a site of racial healing through contemporary artisanal food aesthetics. While these cookbooks engage in the discourse embraced by the Slow Food movement, they differ in very significant ways. In particular, they contest discourses by Alice Waters and Michael Pollan that embrace culinary whiteness in ideologies, practices, and histories. I argue that *Decolonize Your Diet* and *Afro-Vegan* take stock of colonialism, racism, sexism, and unequal food access in such a way that destabilizes the foundations of Slow Food as embedded in culinary whiteness. They frame pleasurable eating as an act of racialized politics and even resistance against inequities that lead to premature death. By using food imagery and descriptions to demonstrate the physical and psychic benefits of their recipes, they shift the culinary gaze to the racial-gendered knowledge production of black and Mexican women's histories. The recipes are innovative, combining indigenous Mexican and African Americans dishes and foodstuffs with non-native foodstuffs. They create possibilities for eating nutritiously that take stock of racial histories and inequities, but without creating an essentializing, utopian narrative.

Conclusion: Toward a Politics of a Communal Care and Justice

In this project, I have argued that communities of color use visual imagery to contest representations about black and Latinx communities in relation to diet-related health inequities. Through short-films, a public service announcement, and cookbook photographs, community-based projects represent communities of color as vibrant and life-sustaining in the context of vulnerability to premature death. These images do not simply or solely reflect a reality in which communities of color are active agents in promoting good health, but also produce a political imaginary in which affect and sensuality are used to elicit desire within the viewer. This reveals how communities of color make changes at material, discursive and representational levels.

The visual documentation of food in public and private spaces, including social media, on cell phone apps, and television, to name a few, has rendered the relationship between the visual, technology, health, food, and race a significant site of analysis. Analyzing these concepts together provides an understanding of the ways in which technology affects, shapes, and responds to notions of health inequities and food justice.

While the sites I analyze critique racism, classism, unequal food access environments, and competition, they simultaneously reinforce capitalism, neoliberalism, commodity aesthetics, and problematic racial-gendered constructions. Rather than view such contexts as pure or perfect iterations of food justice, I understand them as complex and contradictory examples of ways in which imagery is used by on the ground movements to effect communal change. They reflect and produce new meanings about life, health, the body, the community, and the recipe that are rooted in their own terms.

They demonstrate the ways in which food is a cultural signifier of both good and poor health, as well as how racialized ideologies shape the ways in which food is conceptualized.

The short films, PSA, and cookbook photographs engage affect and the senses by using visuality to produce desire and disgust within the viewer-consumer. In this way, this project brings together studies on health, food justice, affect, and feminist science and technology studies to understand how communities of color produce knowledge in relation to food consumption. Studies of knowledge production allow scholars to ask questions such as: What counts as knowledge? Whose knowledge is deemed legitimate and whose is deemed illegitimate? Whose histories, narratives, social systems, and political formations are privileged as worthy of study, and whose are excluded? How do power, ideology, hegemony, race, gender, and class shape knowledge production? Visual productions about food created by community-based organizations, in other words, are also forms of knowledge. These images and videos reflect how knowledge is embodied and lived at the scale of the body, the community and the recipe.

Several food studies scholars have argued that federal policy changes are imperative to decrease diet-related health inequities.⁴¹⁸ They assert that large-scale efforts will have the most significant impact on changing how we eat, what we eat, and to what we have access. I agree with these scholars that large-scale structural change requires action at the national level, in the form of farm bills, local and state agricultural changes,

⁴¹⁸ See Julie Guthman's *Weighing In* (2011), Melina Packer's "Soda Taxes and Social Anxieties" in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* (2016), and Melanie DuPuis' "Angels and Vegetables" in *Gastronomica* (2007).

and federal food policies. One of the limitations of the examples I study is that they are not likely to result in large-scale social change for communities of color. Indeed, these images and videos will most likely affect those who are already familiar with and invested in food justice work. Nonetheless, this project attempts to recognize how communities of color make changes on their own terms, often in the absence of federal assistance or support. In addition, analyzing the representational allows a window into how communities seek to represent themselves and imagine a radically different future that envisions food justice through establishing their own narratives.

I began *Foodways (Re)Presented* discussing how the organization Berkeley versus Big Soda used imagery in the East Bay to affect food consumption. This strategy provided a useful window to analyze how food politics, race, and visibility are shaped and explored in several Bay Area spaces. This project has implications for the fields of race and ethnic studies, critical gender studies, food studies, affect studies, and feminist science and technology studies. By recognizing how contemporary discourses on type 2 diabetes are embedded in racial-gendered dynamics, we can better understand how the scientific and the social have meaningful impact on one another. Rather than understand these two fields as disparate, we must recognize the ways in which scientific histories, research, and knowledge and social histories, research, and knowledge mutually constitute one another.

Future studies on race, food, and health should similarly take an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach. For instance, further research could analyze the histories of food justice efforts before there was such a thing called food justice. These would include efforts by black and Latinx individuals and organizations that worked to secure food

sovereignty as a means of self-determinism and self-preservation. Future scholarship could also analyze how federal or national food programs have shaped on the ground food justice movements in the production of food equity and food inequity for communities of color. Still, other investigations could examine black and Latinx food justice efforts as they intersect with seemingly unrelated spaces, such as the work done by Bay Area food justice organization Planting Justice and San Quentin State Prison.

Food justice is inherently linked to social justice. In their discussion of reflexive politics of localism (or eating locally), Melanie DuPuis, Jill Lindsey Harrison, and David Goodman argue, “communitarian ideas of justice often combine with feminist notions of justice as care embedding local farmers and consumers in relations of regard, empathy, and trust.”⁴¹⁹ Building on this notion, I argue that the images and videos I analyze are examples of what might be called a politics of communal care and justice. I suggest that communal care and justice refers to ways in which communities of color produce notions of longevity through community-building efforts that recognize the ways in which communities of color are relegated to death spaces, but imagine possibilities for life nonetheless. Sharing nutritious recipes rooted in Afro-diasporic and Mexican culinary histories, opening full-service grocery stores in food deserts, and creating visual productions in which communities of color have possibilities for life are just a few examples of how a politics of communal care and justice can be made legible. Distinct from self-care, this politics understands care as necessarily personal *and* communal and rooted in pleasure, life, and hope. Politics of communal care and justice imagines that

⁴¹⁹ DuPuis, Melanie, Jill Lindsey Harrison, and David Goodman. 2011. *Just Food? Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, p. 293.

improved individual health and life expectancy are inherently tied to improved communal health and life expectancy and that working toward the future is rooted in a sense of justice and equity.

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