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Growing Community:

Planting Justice, Prisoner Reintegration and Community Gardening

Ian Sharp

Growing Community:
Planting Justice, Prisoner Reintegration and Community Gardening

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS
in
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by Ian Sharp
May 1, 2020

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

APPROVED:

Capstone Adviser

Date

Abstract

As community gardens become more prevalent across the country, do they have more to offer than ensuring communities have access to fresh produce? While a vital part of their mission, some grassroots and nonprofit organizations see gardening as an avenue to counteract and work against systems of food and social inequality. Planting Justice, a grassroots organization located in Oakland, use gardening as a tool for reintegrating prisoners back into the community, and ensure these ex-offenders do not return to prison. Planting Justice also engages with the forces of gentrification, working to coopt the systems of divestment and inequality to create a more equal and harmonious food and social system. I argue that gardening, and the structure of Planting Justice, create a positive, healing atmosphere that allows ex-offenders to reintegrate back into the community and removes barriers that could potentially lead them to returning to prison down the line. As a vehicle of social justice, food is a powerful tool to create equality, and Planting Justice works to harness that ability to combat high recidivism rates and environmental dispossession within the Bay Area. I find that through community engagement, education and a commitment to their staff, Planting Justice creates a community within their organization that improves the reintegrative process of formerly incarcerated individuals while pushing against social forces of dispossession.

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Introduction

Between 2009 and 2014 “[a]n estimated 68% of released prisoners were arrested within 3 years, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years.” (Alper, Mariel et al 2018, 1). According to the NAACP, the United States contains 21% of the world’s prisoners, despite being only 5% of the world’s population (Criminal Justice Fact Sheet 2020). Perhaps it is time to look for a new solution to reduce overall incarceration rates, and recidivism rates.

In recent years, community gardens and other close to home food centered projects are seeing more demand from our society. People across America are starting to prefer purchasing and consuming locally grown food over vegetables grown and shipped from a half a world away. The Bay Area is a prime example of this with the Tenderloin People’s Garden, Phat Beets, City Slickers, and Planting Justice all emerging as organizations focused on community gardening. While the approaches of all these organizations vary slightly, they share one common thread; build up the community which they are located in and provide healthy foods to these community members; as many of these gardens work within food deserts.

With community gardens becoming a larger part of the urban fabric, could they also become a larger part of the reintegration process for formerly incarcerated individuals? Planting Justice believes the answer to lie within the garden itself. Planting Justice is a grassroots organization based in Oakland that uses gardening as a tool to help successfully reintegrate formerly incarcerated men and women into the community. According to their website, while California has a recidivism rate of 44%, none of the ex-offenders who have been hired by Planting Justice have returned to prison (Holistic Re-Entry).

My research engages with the work being done at Planting Justice to better understand how the work they are doing within East Oakland is impacting the community around them. While one of the pillars of their work is working to successfully reintegrate formerly incarcerated men and women into the community, the work being done at Planting Justice interacts with a variety of facets of the East Oakland community. Through gardening, Planting Justice is engaging with the forces of gentrification at play in the Bay Area, by working to provide access to fresh produce and well paying jobs in a divested neighborhood, where developers seek to buy land cheap for their profit. Through employment and education, Planting Justice works to create opportunities for both formerly incarcerated men and women returning to the community, as well as the youth of the community in an economically depressed neighborhood.

In digging into the work being done by Planting Justice, I work to unearth the processes at play that Planting Justice works against, while expanding upon how they confront these issues, and the impact of these programs. People throughout history have often turned to nature and the environment to heal wounds left by urban environments. Planting Justice is following in these footsteps by using food and gardening as a tool to heal social and economic wounds inflicted upon the community of East Oakland. Throughout this research, I engage with the work being done and unpack the impact it is having on East Oakland and examine the efficacy of the organization in working to heal these wounds.

Positionality

I grew up about twenty minutes south of the Twin Cities, in suburban Minnesota, which like many suburbs across the country, was built to support families and commerce, and not nature. My hometown of Apple Valley is an upper middle-class white neighborhood and went to majority white schools through undergrad (getting my degree in La Crosse, Wisconsin, another majority white middle class suburb). As a white male myself, my upbringing lacked a significant amount of cultural diversity. The more culturally diverse Twin Cities were 20 minutes north and yet despite their proximity, I never ventured through the Cities very often, severely limiting my understanding of the outside world for most of my life. All of which changed when I moved to San Francisco to begin work with Habitat for Humanity.

I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 2015 and immediately felt out of place and struggled to adapt. I had moved out to the region as an Americorps member spending a year working with Habitat for Humanity; an experience that would have profound and long-lasting impacts on my life. As someone used to a quiet suburb, the speed and noise of a big city were foreign and unfamiliar to me, as was the disparity. Walking around the city and taking public transportation those first few months was an eye-opening experience for me. In La Crosse I had seen a couple of homeless people, but that is all it was, a couple people. It was nowhere near the scale or magnitude of the homeless population of San Francisco. In addition to the homelessness, the disparity between neighborhoods was staggering. Growing up in suburban Minnesota, everything looked relatively the same. Sure, some houses were bigger and nicer than others, but it was nothing like seeing the multimillion dollar homes a block or two away from run down, dilapidated homes. In addition to what I was seeing with my own eyes, working with Habitat educated me about a whole host of other issues.

Working with Habitat homeowners, I learned of their struggle to acquire housing. Of sacrificing everything they knew to migrate to America to provide a better life for their children. Of living with a dozen or more people in one house just to be able to afford a home; and how grateful they were to be receiving this house from Habitat for Humanity. It was these experiences and stories that solidified my desire to work towards social justice. Growing up I, and everyone else I knew, took their home for granted. It never occurred to me how much of a luxury it was to have a solid place to call home, how fortunate I was to have a consistent source of food, to have access to a good education. Everything I took for granted, and thought everybody else could access, was an incredible privilege. Going to Senegal as a Peace Corps volunteer only expanded my worldview and started to show me how truly privileged I have been and how truly unequal this world is.

I have always had a desire to serve others in whatever way I could but moving to San Francisco, living in Senegal, and working with both Habitat for Humanity and the Peace Corps narrowed in my focus on social justice. I simply couldn't, and still can't to this day, believe that so many of the opportunities that have been presented to me were entirely based upon where I was born and who I was born too. My background has also proposed unique challenges to my research. The main problem being that as a white man from suburban Minnesota, I do not truly understand the lives and experiences of the East Oakland community, and the staff at Planting Justice.

One of the first instances of cultural miscommunication was when I began working with Planting Justice. I came in looking for an internship, expecting that I would need to fill out an application and interview and go through the internship process I was accustomed to, and had experienced in the past. At the end of the day, that was not the case. Planting Justice wasn't

hiring interns in the way I had been accustomed to and rather, I received an internship simply by showing up frequently and becoming known by the staff and members of the organization. For so long before I finally understood this, I was concerned and anxious that I would not be able to work with the organization or do my research with them because I wasn't hearing back from them regarding an internship or next steps to take in the application process when all that they had needed me to do was show up on a consistent basis.

While working with Planting Justice, one challenge that I continuously ran into during my research was the feeling that I was feeding into the creation of the economic hardships that Planting Justice is working to dismantle. I'm not a native of California, I moved out to Daly City from Minnesota to pursue a master's degree at the University of San Francisco. Like so many other transplants to the Bay Area, I am feeding into the cycle of gentrification that is destroying so many homes and communities. Throughout the process of working with Planting Justice and talking to the employees about the organization and the work they do, I never fully could square whether or not the work I was doing at the nursery was helping in equal or greater measure than me having moved across the country to a place I do not call home. In fact, it has made me contemplate the work I have done with Habitat for Humanity and the Peace Corps, as an outsider coming into an area trying to fix a problem that I am exacerbating.

On one hand, working with Planting Justice and helping them weed their nursery allowed the staff a greater bandwidth to accomplish the tasks they needed to complete, without having to be distracted by weeding. In working there consistently for several months, I was also trusted to take and teach volunteers what to do so that staff could attend meetings or focus on getting their own work done. The weeding also allowed for more plants to grow healthily, allowing Planting

Justice to sell more plants and create more capital for the community it is serving and trying to uplift.

Yet on the other hand, I moved into a city that is not my own, into a rental property that may have been someone's home who was displaced due to gentrification. While I am by no means rich, I have enough money to support myself and live comfortably, and the capital I earn and spend creates greater wealth in Daly City, furthering gentrification. Additionally, my trip to Planting Justice is on the BART, though the stations and on the tracks that were built by destroying thousands of homes and dozens of communities; communities who organizations like Planting Justice is attempting to uplift. I never purchased any plants or seedlings from Planting Justice, I never spent any money within East Oakland while I was volunteering, and the only money I did spend in the area was at the BART station refilling my clipper card so that I could take the train home. Throughout the entire process of conducting research in the library, at home and at the Nursery, I always returned to the question of whether or not the work I was doing was actually improving the lives of the community being served by Planting Justice as I have intended, or if my presence within the area itself was doing more harm than I could repair through my work with Planting Justice.

Background

Wheeling my bike out of my garage, I look around me at the neighborhood I currently reside in. It isn't something I do often, nor is it something that has occurred frequently throughout my life, but as I prepare to leave for East Oakland and Planting Justice, it feels only appropriate to take my surroundings into account. I live a mile from two separate BART stations, providing me easy access to public transit which can transport me nearly anywhere in the Bay Area, whether by train or bus. As I begin to pedal up the hill, I hit a park a few hundred feet away. Popular

with the local community, the park plays host to a couple tennis courts, with games often being played by a group of the more weathered members of the community. In addition to tennis courts, there is a couple basketball hoops which are popular amongst the middle school to high school aged residents, as well as parents and children looking to begin their engagement with the sport. Across the path from the tennis courts lays an open field; with a soccer net at one end, it is a perfect place for dogs, families and kids of all ages to run around, play and blow off some steam. Surrounding the park, and lining the entire bike route to the Daly City Bart station, are stock, cookie cutter suburban houses. Similar to my childhood home of Apple Valley, Daly City exists as a suburb of the nearby big city, with houses of almost the exact same design coming in a variety of colors; an effort most likely made to make these houses appear different from their neighbors. As I bike up another hill, I pass school aged kids heading to one of a handful of schools within walking distance of the area, vehicles with occupants heading towards one of the nearby highways, making their trip to work, and buses ferrying people to locations throughout San Mateo county.

Cresting the hill and beginning my descent towards BART, I am greeted by a freshly constructed apartment complex, an automotive dealer and a cross street which is lined by various businesses, restaurants, grocery stores, and much more. In addition to what is before me, I know that further down the hill stands the Westlake Shopping center which provides Daly City with two grocery stores, more restaurants, places to shop and a soon to be third Target in the area; however between me and that lies the BART, my final destination.

Getting onto the train, securing my bike and taking a seat, I settle into the 45-50 minute trek across San Francisco, over the bridge, and into the East Bay. Emerging from the tunnel in West Oakland, I am greeted by the sites of industrial warehouses, fences covered with overlapping

graffiti, and a Downtown area becoming increasingly renovated as the more affluent citizens scramble to move into a burgeoning, hip city. Yet the immediate site of industrial warehouses is what sticks with me the most; a sight that becomes more pronounced the closer I get to the Coliseum BART station. In crossing the bay, I have left behind the bustling metropolis of San Francisco and entered the more industrial Oakland. As I pull through Fruitvale station and emerge at my destination of Coliseum station, the differences become even more pronounced. From the train I have a view of the Nimitz freeway, an offshoot of highway 80, one of the freeways constructed to connect suburbs to the downtown sections of Oakland and San Francisco. The placement of the highway makes it difficult for much to grow, with these stretches lined with storage spaces, art studios and more industrial buildings. On the other side of the tracks lies some housing, though not as outwardly aesthetic as the houses that lined my route towards Daly City BART. Interspersed through these area's is open land, vacant aside from trash, too close to the freeway to be built into anything substantial and too valuable to be sold.

Coliseum station greets me with an entirely different sight; train tracks, industrial buildings and a sense of isolation. Making my way up San Leandro Street, I can see and feel the difference; gone are the smoothly paved suburban streets of Daly City, replaced by streets cracked and worn. As my bike bounces along the way, train tracks sit on the opposite side of the elevated BART tracks, behind which sit even more industrial warehouses and giant storage areas used by companies. I pass under the freeway and glimpse more industrial warehouses on my right, the fences of which are covered with a mixture of graffiti and art which attempts to capture a portion of Oakland's history. Further up San Leandro, I pass by a homeless encampment, with ramshackle housing built up beneath the shelter of the BART tracks, though the passing trains

mean it's anything but quiet. Several residencies have been built, providing me my first ground level glimpse of a community in the area. Turning right onto 85th street, I cross over a set of train tracks which splits fenced in, paved storage areas for a junk car business and a shipping business. Further along 85th I pass corporate offices, Planned Parenthood, the DMV and county services buildings. As I approach my next turn, I am greeted by my first glimpse of residential housing, however briefly.

I turn left onto Edes Avenue, fleetingly able to see a neighborhood in front of me. On the corner there resides an individual with a food cart, peddling fruits and assorted snacks to the construction crews nearby; and perhaps anyone else making their way through the area. On my left is a large FedEx warehouse and to my right the East Oakland Sports Center; what amounts to one of the first signs of established community on my journey. Further ahead at the intersection of Edes and 98th there stands a liquor store, next to a vacant lot, which seems to be a meeting ground for people from across the neighborhood. No matter what time I bike past this intersection, people are always walking towards this corner, leaving this corner, or simply hanging out with anyone else who shows up.

At last I turn up 105th, nearing my destination. This final stretch of road is entirely residential, no warehouses, corporate offices, shipping centers, or train tracks; just houses. As I approach Planting Justice's nursery, an apartment complex sits across the street, a vacant lot resides next to Planting Justice, and the nursery lies underneath the Nimitz freeway. Notably absent along my mile bike ride from the BART station to the Planting Justice nursery is a grocery store, with gas stations, corner stores and liquor stores substituting for grocery stores; something especially apparent considering my destination.

I highlight my trip from Daly City to Planting Justice as an attempt to call attention to the disparities existing between the two areas; disparities that were created consciously and willfully.

As Jessica Trounstine states in her book “Segregation by Design”:

“Segregation is *not* simply the result of individual choices about where to live. Neither racial antipathy nor economic inequality between groups is sufficient to create and perpetuate segregation. The maintenance of property values and the quality of public goods are collective endeavors. And like all collective endeavors, they require collective action....The result has been *segregation by design*.” (Trounstine 2018, 3)

The ramshackle roads my bike bounces over, the highway overlooking Planting Justice, the run down houses, all these are the long term consequences of housing segregation that occurred following World War Two. It is within these conditions that Planting Justice works to empower the local community, aid in prisoner reentry and help to build up the surrounding community that has endured a hardship forced upon them. To understand how this neighborhood was created, I will look back to the 1930’s, uncover the conditions in which neighborhoods were allowed to be segregated and underfunded, and follow the course of these decisions to the present day; to gain a better understanding of the realities of East Oakland, the necessity of the work Planting Justice does, and the healing properties of gardens, both for people individually as well as the space as a whole.

Planting Justice

Throughout the course of my research, I volunteered with the Oakland based organization Planting Justice. Planting Justice is a “grassroots organization with a mission to empower people impacted by mass incarceration and other social inequities with the skills and resources to cultivate food sovereignty, economic justice, and community healing.” (Planting Justice).

Another facet of the Planting Justice mission is holistic reentry, a program built with the goal of reducing the recidivism rate to zero through impactful employment which pays a living wage and

provides communal support for their employees (ibid). Since launching the program, the recidivism rate of their employees is 0%, compared to the 44% recidivism rate of the state (ibid). In the words of Planting Justice, “If a formerly incarcerated person can’t find a legal job that pays enough for them to fully support themselves, they will have to find another way to survive.” (PJ Website). “Planting Justice is an intersectional organization creating family sustaining careers that cultivate food sovereignty, economic justice, and community healing. We create space for people impacted by mass incarceration and other oppressive systems to envision and work towards personal and community transformation through land reclamation, ecological design, and urban food/medicine production” (ibid).

Another pillar of Planting Justices’ program is peer support.

“With 35% formerly incarcerated staff...the struggle to recover from criminalization and incarceration is an experience that is shared by most people in our workplace. Working every day with other people who have successfully made the transition out of prison helps parolees in our program feel more confident that they too will be able to stay out of prison long term” (PJ Website).

By centering peer support and employment in their mission statement, Planting Justice is one of a growing number of organizations working to employ parolees to provide these men and women with a way to support them following release. In a study conducted on post release employment, Elissa Underwood Marek (2018) states that

“...approximately 70 million people have some type of arrest or conviction record that prevents them from obtaining jobs, despite relevant knowledge and skillsets.” (Marek 2018, 59)

That is too significant size of the US population to ignore. In preventing these individual’s from accessing stable, well-paying jobs, the United States has cut off any means for them to rehabilitate, and has instead trapped them into a vicious cycle of incarceration; ensuring that they

will never escape and never be seen. Yet, as seen with Planting Justice and Mareks' work, employment can help these men and women escape that cycle, earn a living and form a community.

A common idea mentioned around the nursery, and a central tenant of their work, is Composting the Empire; an idea which holds that the work Planting Justice does is defined by taking the current systems and infrastructures in place in our society and recycling them to create a more equitable society. It is an understanding that even the existing social systems of dispossession can be remade to benefit all. Much of Planting Justice's work exists to capitalize on current conditions and create benefits for the wider community; from subsidizing the construction of backyard gardens to capitalizing on the highway, and the destruction it represents, to bring capital into the community which it reinvests through its work.

History

Agriculture has always been a part of Oakland lore. Oakland city planners and developers in the 1920' and 30's sought to create "an industrial garden" where workers could "return home by bus or rail to a neighborhood of small, single-family homes, each with a yard or garden" (McClintock 2008, 16). This development style was promoted for the city of Oakland as planners wanted to create neighborhoods away from factories and urban slums as a cure for social and health risks these planners were seeing in other cities across the country (McClintock 2008, 16). This ideal of an urbanized, agricultural city tells a story that connects the city planners in the 1920's and 30's to the Black Panther Party of the 1960's to food justice organizations such as Planting Justice, working with the City of Oakland, to continue this legacy and help rebuild communities destroyed by the practices of redlining.

Redlining and Segregation:

“Cities are ground-zero of humans’ transformative power, where the influx of capital is visibly inscribed on the landscape.... During historical moments of capital overaccumulation following economic booms, surplus capital is invested in this kind of fixed or immobile capital, transforming the urban environment. During economic downturns...the post-industrial city nevertheless retains its industrial character, albeit devalued, dilapidated, and scarred by pollution, often to such a great degree that it precludes future investment.” (McClintock 2008, 12)

Oakland is a city defined by the process of redlining. Redlining refers to “...the practice of refusing to loan money or invest in selected geographic areas. In addition to an outright refusal to invest in a neighborhood, redlining tactics may include a number of subtler actions...”

(Werner et al 1976, 501). In Oakland, neighborhoods most refused investment were neighborhoods of color. As Oakland built up capital and infrastructure, it built a city to benefit white workers and families, and when those families moved to the surrounding suburbs, they took their capital investments and earnings with them, divesting from Oakland. As Nathan McClintock writes

“...the contemporary cityscape is a map of previous cycles of capital accumulation and devaluation, a palimpsest of building, decay, and renewal. The walls of this prison of fixed capital are often clearly delineated by planning, policy, property taxes, and political boundaries.” (McClintock 2008, 13).

Moving through Oakland, you can see the remnants of capital’s past; the Bay Area industrial center that brought migrants from all over the country who were looking for work (McClintock 2008, 16). Yet you also see the fallout of white flight, decaying homes and buildings, lack of green space and grocery stores, and food justice organizations looking to rebuild communities and hope.

Oakland’s industrial garden received a boost from the New Deal.

“Beginning in 1934, a flood of highly subsidized, low-interest mortgage loans from the newly created Federal Housing Administration fed the growth of the suburbs; East Oakland soon filled in with suburban developments...”

(McClintock 2008, 17).

Yet Oakland’s industrial garden, as well as suburban housing, was a dream not everyone would be able to attain. “Until 1948 racial covenants established by developers and homeowners’ associations prevented people of color from moving in and disturbing social divisions...” (McClintock 2008, 18). As Jessica Trounstine writes, suburbanization became further entrenched through the 1930’s, segregation between white and nonwhite populations increased by 63% (Trounstine 2018, 98). This segregation was a result of zoning practices undertaken by local governments in order to ensure the protection of “property values and allow for the delivery of public goods to constituents with political power – namely landowners, realtors, developers, and white homeowners.” (Trounstine 2018, 98). In structuring segregation at a neighborhood level, local governments and politicians ensured that those with political power had the services they desired while creating an easier route for these cities to deny services to and disinvest in neighborhoods of color (Trounstine 2018, 98). As Trounstine writes in her book:

“Local government policy is a fundamental driver of race and class segregation in America. Through the regulation of land use, local governments manage the use of space. They decide what gets built, what doesn’t get built and where the building happens. Local governments also determine the types of public services provided, along with their amounts and distribution.” (Trounstine 2018, 23).

The entrenchment of these racial covenants had a disastrous impact on African Americans in Oakland. Between 1940 and 1950, “[t]he black population of Oakland grew nearly six fold in Alameda county...” but despite that growth “African Americans were rarely allowed to rent outside of West Oakland due to racial covenants and similar barriers to renting in the new industrial gardens.” (McClintock 2008, 19). Racial covenants became a way of life in America

during this time, leading to severe and long-lasting inequalities between white Americans and Americans of colors. Indeed, “Segregation was enforced by the fact that the federal government had promoted white-only suburbanization since the 1930s...” (Self 2003, 104). The view that racial homogeneity protected property values became widely accepted by whites, encouraging both homeowners and real estate agents to utilize whatever method necessary to promote and maintain racial exclusivity (Self 2003, 104).

San Leandro acts as a single example of the impact of suburbanization. “Between 1948 and 1957 the city added 15,000 industrial jobs and over \$130 million in capital investment in property and facilities.” (Self 2003, 107). All this growth and prosperity ensured that the citizens of San Leandro prospered during this time; however, it came at the expense of racial inequality. Race restrictive housing policies ensured that African American’s wouldn’t be allowed to move into San Leandro, legislatively barricaded within “[r]amshackle dwellings in West Oakland” that “were converted and subdivided to accommodate new migrants” (McClintock 2008, 19); housing units which became significantly more strained as during

“the post-war years the razing of temporary war migrant housing in the East Bay only increased the housing squeeze. In 1940 15 percent of West Oakland’s housing units were overcrowded; a decade later, the percentage had doubled” (Johnson 1993, as cited by McClintock 2008, 19).

Homeownership wasn’t the only facet of Oakland impacted by suburbanization; hand in hand with new suburban residences came jobs. “As Oakland deindustrialized and new factories sprouted in the suburbs, working class white Oaklanders followed...” (McClintock 2008, 22). The increase of production in the suburbs impacted Oakland profoundly as “[u]nemployment skyrocketed; between 1960-1966 10,000 manufacturing jobs were lost. The unemployment rate in 1964 was 11 percent but for blacks was almost twice that high.” (McClintock 2008, 22). The

ideal of Oakland as the industrial garden was dying. Factories lay abandoned, capital left the city, and what was left would be further decimated by Proposition 13. Passed in 1978, white homeowners and their allies passed this legislation which

“severely limited cities’ ability to raise property taxes. The resulting decrease in property taxes took a toll on Oakland’s already impoverished flatlands, as inflow of revenue was squeezed by more than \$14 million, leading to facilities closures and cuts to public services” (Rhombert 2004; Self 2003 as cited by McClintock 2008, 23).

The lack of investment in neighborhoods of color continued to play out in later years, as they were often the targets of urban redevelopment. Messaged to build up neighborhoods which had fallen into decay “urban redevelopment ultimately displaced thousands of residents from their homes. Several of the most ‘blighted’ areas were razed under the aegis of urban renewal.

Thousands were displaced and forced to relocate” (McClintock 2006, 24); a major project of which is the BART. The expansion of BART and the highway system created a means for the residents of these suburbs to bypass the minority communities in Oakland to get to their employment and shopping destinations. As Robert Self states in his book *American Babylon*:

“Powerful new institutions like BART ordered space in particular ways...a new federal interstate highway system linked the East Bay suburban corridor...Jobs, investment, and taxable wealth left the city. Redevelopment transferred property from residents to private developers. African Americans, displaced by urban renewal, moved into new neighborhoods.” (Self 2003, 136).

Bay Area infrastructure projects often ran through minority neighborhoods, razing homes and cutting these communities in half. One of the main highways, the Nimitz highway, cut “along the shoreline southwest of downtown, followed Seventh Street into West Oakland, and curved along Cypress Street to join the Bay Bridge...” (Self 2003, 149-50). Along with the MacArthur highway and the Grove-Shafter highway, these highways “laid the foundation for San Francisco

– East Bay commuter traffic...” (Self 2003, 150). “This transportation network...facilitated the regional dispersal of capital investment. But it disaggregated West Oakland neighborhoods and converted what had been an advantage for local residents...into a liability.” (Self 2003, 150).

These highways were built and sold as a means to connect Oakland with the rest of the Bay Area, allowing for the promotion of capital flow that would benefit all cities and towns connected to these highways; yet in a continuing pattern, for the communities these highways ran through, they caused far more harm than good. “The three highways divided West Oakland into odd, incompatible units, isolated neighborhoods from downtown, and walled off the Acorn project behind two massive rivers of concrete.” (Self 2003, 150). What these highways didn’t destroy, above ground BART tracks did. “Construction of the above-ground portion of the BART line razed what remained of once vital African American commercial property along Seventh Street, former site of jazz clubs, barber shops, grocery stores, newsstands and restaurants.” (Self 2003, 150). Between the construction of the Nimitz highway and the BART tracks, an important section of the black economy in West Oakland was destroyed, while the benefits of these transportation systems never lived up to their promise for the area. Knowing full well the destruction the Nimitz freeway construction would cause, Oakland planners approved its construction, along with the construction of the BART tracks (Self 2003, 150). “Despite sitting at the center of two major new transportation networks, West Oakland had become cut off from an increasingly interconnected set of metropolitan spaces.” (Self 2003, 153).

While it would be easy to discuss these events as past occurrences, with no impact on the neighborhood today, it is important to remember that none of this occurs in a vacuum. While decisions to deny investment to specific neighborhoods and raze homes to the ground to build

highways occurred during the 1940's to 60's, the effects are still seen today. They are seen in the emptiness of my ride to Planting Justice. While Bay Area city centers and suburbs are teeming with life in the form of restaurants and businesses which line the street, the ride from the Coliseum to Planting Justice is marked predominantly by corporate office buildings, vacant lots, and the occasional corner store. There is not a single grocery store on my route, and the houses that do exist are aesthetically much more worn than those I see in Daly City. The streets I ride on in East Oakland are worn and cracked, long term consequences of a city government without the taxable income to resurface its roads.

Black Panther Party

“...capital devaluation has historically been the harbinger of social upheaval in the form of migration, poverty, hunger, crime, and declining public health. Given the extent to which the urban landscape is shaped by capital and its crises of accumulation, urban social struggles against the socioeconomic upheaval that follows are interwoven with struggles for a more equitable environment” (McClintock 2008, 13)

In Oakland, this inequality and decay has not gone unnoticed. Throughout history it has been a rallying cry for political mobilization and polarization; most well-known for birthing the Black Panther Party that became popular across the country; created international ties, and helped to change the fabric of Oakland life during the 60's. As jobs left, businesses became owned by outside corporations and unemployment skyrocketed (McClintock 2008), conditions of divestment and inequality laid the groundwork for political mobilization and the first hints of social services; and the return of the industrial garden.

Formed in the late 60's, the Black Panther Party was founded initially on the policy of opposing police violence in Oakland (Self 2003, 221). Blending the writings of Marx, Lenin, Fanon and Mao, the Black Panthers viewed Black America as a “colony, exploited by an

imperialist class system. Colonists included city hall, white businessmen, the suburbs, and the police...” (Self 2003, 224). This ideology took hold and flourished in West Oakland since the black community was entirely marginalized within their city (Self 2003, 226).

The party grew to offer such programs as the Free Breakfast for Children program, which formed the model for “all federally funded school breakfast programs in existence within the United States today.” (Heynen 2009, 411). The Free Breakfast program is another link in the chain of the belief that Oakland can and should strive to represent the industrial garden. The program was started and supported “because the Black Panther Party understands that our children need a nourishing breakfast every morning so that they can learn...” (*The Black Panther* 1969 as cited by McClintock 2008, 36). Yet while it is a link in the chain of Oakland’s industrial garden, it morphed nature and food from a picturesque ideal that would allow homeowners to escape the grind of factory work, to an activists rallying cry that Food Justice activists have continued to promote. “UA and the struggle for food justice in Oakland (first by the Panthers and now by a new generation of activists) arose in response to the market’s failure to provide affordable access to nutritious food” (McClintock 2008, 37). Among these activists are those working with Planting Justice, City Slicker Farms, Phat Beets, and the volunteers and community members engaging with these organizations.

In addition to the free breakfast programs, the Black Panther Party offered a free ambulance program, a free clothing program, and a research foundation for Sickle Cell Anemia (Self 2003, 230-1). While the party emerged from violence and had a focus on fighting violence with violence, the Black Panthers gradually grew to offer services to the entire community. It was these community programs that may have offered the best future that the Panthers sought to make reality, a community for all residents.

“Those among the Panthers who worked most closely with the program...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.” (Self 2003, 231).

These programs helped “win broad grassroots support for the party’s political objectives.” (Self 2003, 232). These community programs also helped to lay the foundation for community based political campaigns that became central to Panther politics in the 1970’s. In their 1973 political campaign, Bobby Seale and Elaine Brown framed the election as “a contest between the community and the ‘establishment’” (Self 2000, 783), a type of political language that has once again become popular in our politics. In keeping with their communal political language, “the party undertook a massive voter registration and organizing drive.” (Self 2000, 784). As residents of an area all too accustomed to being ignored, the Panthers saw political mobilization as important to ensuring that those who had no voice could elect a voice. Between messaging and policies, the Panthers promoted many of the same political ideas that many current politicians are also pushing; increasing voter rolls, messaging the race as the establishment vs the people, and keying into the tax benefits large corporations receive (Self 2000).

The history of Oakland has done much to create the conditions of marginalization and disenfranchisement of its residents. Suburbanization and white flight took employment and taxable wealth outside city limits, creating economic inequality that lasts to this day. Racially restrictive housing covenants also ensured that black families didn’t have access to an important source of intergenerational wealth. The Black Panther party was the growth of Oakland political expression, one that found a unique voice in the marginalization of West Oakland. The Party’s community welfare programs acted as a model which the federal government soon followed and their campaigning style can be seen throughout history, as many young politicians today

campaign with similar promises and goals made to their constituents as the Black Panthers made to theirs.

Biking from the Coliseum to Planting Justice, I can see the generational ripple effects of the choices made by political leaders and real estate markets in the 1940s. In the shadow of the Nimitz highway, Planting Justice plies their trade; bringing the community together to garden, grow food, and grow their community. The Black Panther party keyed into the communal aspect that food has, something Planting Justice has also worked to expand upon, just another common thread in Oakland's history. Food has become a vital part of activism in Oakland. From the romanticized notion of the industrial garden promoted by city planners in the 20's and 30's, to the establishing of the Free Breakfast program by the Black Panthers, to grassroots organizations such as Planting Justice utilizing food to compost the empire, food has always meant more in the city of Oakland than just a meal; it represents equality. From Oakland, across the United States, and throughout much of the globe, food has become a powerful rallying cry for billions of people and activists, one that holds the potential to reshape the current world order.

Methodology

Volunteering with Planting Justice allowed me to observe interactions occurring at the nursery. As a participant observer, I was able to make note of the interactions occurring within the nursery; interactions amongst the staff, between staff and the volunteers and between the staff and community members or visitors. Observing these interactions allowed me to begin gathering an understanding of the community built up within Planting Justice and how that community interacted with the community from the surrounding neighborhood.

I spent the entirety of my volunteer time at the Rolling River Nursery. With the help of over 900 investors as well as the Northern California Community Loan Fund, Planting Justice purchased a 2-acre lot in the Sobrante Park neighborhood to host the Rolling River Nursery plant collection in 2016. Rolling River Nursery is one of the most successful permaculture plant nurseries in the world with national clientele and the largest, most biodiverse collection of certified organic edible tree crops in North America, with 1,100 varieties of plant (The Planting Justice Nursery & Sogorea Te' Land Trust).

The focus of my volunteer work with Planting Justice was aiding in the weeding of their plant beds as well as weeding avocados in one of their greenhouses. As I came to learn, weeding is one of the primary volunteer tasks at Planting Justice as the staff has limited bandwidth to complete all the work they have and weeding is an easy task for volunteers to tackle. While volunteering with Planting Justice, my days were split between working by myself and working with other volunteers. In working alongside other volunteers, we would primarily group up to weed one planter bed at a time, in order to get through them faster; the exceptions being the few times I worked alone in the greenhouse weeding while other volunteers weeded planter beds, and

large groups coming in after I had started volunteering and being asked to work in a different location.

There were a few occasions in which my work did not have me weeding. I spent one day volunteering with the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, helping them to build miniature greenhouses for some of their plants. Following 2 years of developing and cultivating the Rolling River Nursery, Planting Justice began a partnership with the Sogorea Te' Land Trust that will ultimately facilitate the transfer of Ohlone land back into native stewardship in the first project of its kind in the San Francisco Bay Area. I also aided the staff in replanting and retagging various plants around the nursery so that they could continue to grow and be ready for sale.

The observations I made allowed me to dig into whether and how Planting Justice helps to reintegrate formerly incarcerated individuals within the community. My observations focused on interactions between staff members to begin to understand and unpack the relationships that have been built within the Nursery. Social interactions I focused on were whether smaller social groups emerged within the staff, whether certain staff members avoided discussion with one another, what groups were forming and what were they forming around. I found that these interactions and relationships provided a framework for me to dive into during formal and informal interviews as I went about unpacking what I was seeing and getting a better perspective on the relationships built within the nursery and how these relationships impacted reintegration. The notes I took of these observations were made on my cellphone before being transferred to my computer for storage.

Throughout the course of my work, and getting to know the staff, I chatted with staff members and volunteers about their lives, what brought them to the nursery, what they enjoy most about gardening, and more. In focusing on aspects of the garden and the community built

up within the garden, I sought to unearth similarities and differences of opinions among the staff that may help to enlighten me regarding the Planting Justice community. I also made note of staff groupings and typical work partnerships to understand social dynamics within the organization.

I never had the opportunity to work with a volunteer or group of volunteers more than once as I never saw repeat volunteers on the days I visited, which negated my ability to discuss with them what aspects of the nursery and organization brought instilled a desire within them to volunteer again. Discussions with volunteers also centered around the reasoning behind their visits in addition to where they had traveled from to volunteer. While many volunteers were located within the Oakland region, same as much of the staff, I did meet a few volunteers who traveled from the San Francisco region to volunteer, showing me the range of knowledge surrounding Planting Justice.

These observations were vital to my research as they allow me to witness firsthand the connections being created within the nursery. Through them I was able to begin to understand the way in which working at the nursery brought people together. How tasks were communicated, how staff members worked together, how informal conversations shed light on personal relationships. As Planting Justice does not distinguish their reentry staff from other staff members, observing these everyday interactions provided me a window into the interpersonal relationships between staff members. Volunteer interactions and motives were illuminated as well through these observations, providing me with insight as to the reasoning and motivations surrounding those who decided to spend time working with Planting Justice.

In addition to the observations I made while volunteering, I conducted formal and informal interviews with members of the Planting Justice staff. These interviews provided me with the

ability to dig into the themes I observed while volunteering to gain a better sense of the realities I was witnessing from the outside, as well as to discover facets of the organization I would not have grasped through observation alone. The notes I took of these interviews were made primarily through pen and paper as my cellphone recordings became corrupted in the process of transferring the audio to my computer for transcription; wiping nearly the entirety of the audio files from my phone.

These interviews dug into what I was witnessing within the garden, as well as how Planting Justice as an organization was connecting to the outside community. In thinking about and preparing for my interviews, many of my questions were based more within an analysis of personal relationships; attempting to dig into the social interactions and groups I had been witnessing during my volunteer work at Planting Justice. However, as I began to interview staff members, I quickly came to learn that the connection between Planting Justice as an organizational whole and the community was just as important as the individual relationships being formed to the success of reintegrating individuals into the community.

In approaching my research, I focused in on the people most directly involved with the reintegrative work Planting Justice strives to accomplish, the staff. I wanted to dig into and understand the impact Planting Justice was having on the lives of their reentry staff members, and how this helped them to reintegrate into the broader community. In digging into staff social relations, I sought out social groups and social interactions within a workplace that help me better understand how Planting Justice worked to reintegrate formerly incarcerated individuals. While help from external sources is also important in the process, Planting Justice as an organization has a successful track record of ensuring that none of their reentry staff returns to prison and I worked to unearth the root causes of this success.

This approach helped me to understand the internal dynamics at play that factor into Planting Justice's success in reducing the recidivism rate of their employees to zero. It also opened the door for me to understand how Planting Justice leverages its position to make connections throughout the community, with people, organizations and governments; all of which factor into the helping formerly incarcerated staff members reintegrate back into the community. Unfortunately, due to the time restrictions on my research, I didn't have the bandwidth to reach out to the organizations that Planting Justice partners with to interview them about the work they do with Planting Justice, to understand how external partnerships and relationships factor into the reintegrative process.

A limitation of my research for future projects to key into is the viewpoints and opinions of the community towards Planting Justice and the community's opinion regarding reintegration. While I did interview community members during the course of my research, they were all community members employed by Planting Justice and therefore may have a different view of the reintegrative process and views of the formerly incarcerated individuals working with Planting Justice than outside community members; as those working alongside formerly incarcerated individuals have more time to get to know the individual on a personal level. I was also unable to interact with community members directly impacted by the work of Planting Justice, namely those who received new backyards from the organization. I would be interested in hearing their takes on the work being done and the impact it has had on their lives.

Yet despite the limitations of my research, I find that my research into the internal dynamics at play within Planting Justice revealed how Planting Justice as an organization is able to effectively provide a fresh start for their reentry staff, and that the support provided ensures that

these formerly incarcerated men and women are able to reintegrate with the community and thrive in their new role.

Literature Review:

Pulling from research done by Troy D. Glover (2004) social capital is defined as "...a collective asset that grants members social 'credits' that can be used as capital to facilitate purposive actions." (Glover 2004, 145). Social capital is an intangible asset emerging from interacting with people around you. In building up trust and respect from and for your neighbors, one builds on their stash of social capital, creating deeper connections with people, and closer bonds of friendship. It is an aspect of everyday life that rarely is noticed. In asking a friend to water your plants or watch your pet while you are away, or borrowing sugar or eggs from a neighbor, these interactions are built upon these social "credits" you have built that allow you to feel more comfortable with them helping you, and increasing the likelihood that they will agree to your request.

Social capital plays an important part in my research due to the "credits" it provides members of a community. In researching the role gardening at Planting Justice plays in the reintegration process of formerly incarcerated men and women, social capital is one part of the social structure influencing their reintegration. While community members may initially be hesitant about the prospects of formerly incarcerated individuals working within their community, the work these men and women do with Planting Justice for the benefit of the surrounding community facilitates the growth of social capital which allows for more pathways to reintegration. Social capital is a focus of my research as I find it to be a crucial and omnipresent aspect of all social interactions. People tend to feel more welcome, and may be more welcoming, when an abundance of social capital stores exist within a community. Small towns where everyone knows one another tend to be viewed as much more friendly and welcoming than urban centers where most inhabitants do not know their neighbors. In examining the Bay Area, many people do not know their roommates prior to moving in, with others never bothering to get to know their roommates. In

focusing on social capital, I look to examine how social interaction creates bonds within a community that allow for the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated men and women working at Planting Justice.

Within the literature surrounding social capital, we see two distinct trends emerging. The first of which is that community gardens create large amounts of social capital within the communities they are located in, for those individuals participating within the garden; social capital that they can utilize both within and outside the garden. The second trend is that individuals who have been recently released from prison can struggle in reintegrating into their former community as their time in prison has depleted their prior existing social capital and has strained connections which could be used in rebuilding their levels of social capital. Yet we do not see much work done on linking these two literatures together in one study, to discover if community gardens can act as space for those recently released from prison to rebuild their levels of social capital to aid their communal reintegration.

Outside of the literature on social capital, the efficacy, impact, and need for community gardens has also received more direct research. As cities across the United States encounter the fallout of redlining through the processes of gentrification, community gardens are becoming more popular as a means of ensuring access to food in economically depressed neighborhoods. As race has often been a factor in devaluing and divesting from neighborhoods, a growing body of literature has examined the relationship between food, race, and the built environment.

My research examines how gardens can create social capital that offenders, upon release, can then earn and utilize to aid in community reintegration, within communities which have economic landscapes trending towards low wage employment; and how insufficient access to healthy foods leads to community garden growth, while these very community gardens often

accelerate forces of gentrification. Initially, these “credits” may only be useful to community members within the garden. However, as an individual’s social capital continues to grow, that person may be able to leverage their social capital to increase their standing within the surrounding community. This is due in part to the belief that “...social capital is premised upon the notion that an investment (in social relations) will result in a return (some benefit or profit) to the individual.” (Lin 2001 as cited by Glover 2004, p 145). Within the confines of my research, I will be examining how the growth of social capital is used by individuals released from incarceration to aid in their reintegration into their community. I will first examine the community gardens play in the creation of social capital, then examine the necessity of social capital in the reintegrative process of offenders and end by examining the additional roles green spaces play in communities and other factors impacting offender reentry; both positively and negatively.

As defined by Glover (2004), social capital is a social asset that individuals are able to utilize in order to receive positive social benefits (Glover 2004). The creation of social capital among neighbors and other community members helps to foster a sense of mutual trust and respect within a neighborhood. This has a direct beneficial impact on the overall health of the community. Community with stronger bonds and ties are less likely to experience the effects of crime the same way that communities with weaker ties are prone to, as will be discussed later. In their study of social capital in an urban space, Lyons and Snoxell (2005) find that “[a]s many as 74 per cent of migrants had been helped by a family member already residing in Nairobi” (Lyons and Snoxell 2005, 1083). In addition to moving in with family, many of these migrants also began their employment as an assistant to their families businesses, in order to learn how to run a business and build up capital prior to striking out on their own (Lyons and Snoxell 2005, 1083).

Through the utilization of social capital within the family, these migrants were able to safely move to a new area and find employment in a way that others moving to locales with no pre-built social capital would struggle with.

Outside the family, building social capital is important within a community, to create a sense of place within your neighborhood. The site within which this study will focus on the facilitation of social capital is the community garden. As Glover (2004) states “[w]ithout social capital, community building would be impossible. A community garden...provides a promising context in which to explore the theoretical nature of social capital” (Glover 2004, 144). As people begin to look towards creating a family and settling down, a main desire for many is to find a safe neighborhood within to live and raise a family. The presence of large quantities of social capital, and the opportunity to grow more, factors greatly into this decision; whether these individuals recognize it or not.

Community gardens occupy an important space within my research as they are social spaces wherein people from across a community can come together as one, and regarding the food they create. As open space is increasingly being purchased by developers to build more houses, apartment complexes, or private play spaces, our society is finding fewer collective spaces that have not been commercialized. As a kid in Minnesota, many of my classmates would hang out and spend their free time at various shopping malls littered throughout the Twin Cities. Kids I met from Midwest small towns often spoke of the one store (a Walmart or other department store) that acted as the primary space for social interactions. By commercializing public space, our society has commercialized social interaction and disconnected us from those around us. Community gardens work to bring the community together in a publicly accessed space to help create and facilitate social connectivity within a community.

By engaging with this work through food, community gardens capitalize on a defining feature of global culture to bring people together. We all need food to survive yet some people have forgotten the cultural significance food plays in our society. Neighborhoods defined by the restaurants within their borders, people sampling and engaging with other cultures through a meal, and people sharing and exploring different kinds of produce through the act of growing them. Oftentimes food can indicate a melding of cultures within one dish, whether that is pizza with a Japanese flair or Mexican food influenced by American culture.

Community gardens act as common spaces for people from across the community to come and connect with one another. They allow for the sharing of knowledge, culture, and friendship through the process of growing and sharing food, and recipes to use the food grown. In addition, they are increasingly used within low income communities, and communities with poor food access to help ensure that the residents of these neighborhoods have access to fresh and healthy produce to combat poor health. Community gardens lie at the center of community growth and community reintegration, the connection within which is the focus of this research.

As its very nature is communal, the community garden creates a space wherein members from across the area can come together as one community to build ties and relationships otherwise ignored. Whether the beneficiaries of this social capital be disenfranchised groups (Kingsley and Townsend, 2006; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004; Ghose and Pettygrove), migrant groups (Agustina and Beilin 2011; Shinew, Glover and Parry 2004) or focused on the community in general (Glover 2004; Glover, Parry and Shinew 2005; Teig et al. 2009; Okvat and Zautra 2011; Armstrong 2000; Alaimo, Reischl and Allen 2010) it is clear to see that people from every background benefits from social capital created within a community garden.

In their study on Latino community gardens in New York City, Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny discover that the impetus for the creation of many of these gardens was neighborhood beautification (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004). The gardeners desired "...to participate in this project, because that empty lot was full of garbage...so we decided to clean it up...now a lot of people compliment us for keeping the garden clean and beautiful" (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004, 402). Shinew, Glover and Parry comment on the same phenomena behind gardening, stating that "[b]y converting spaces into gardens, neighbourhood liabilities are transformed into tangible...and intangible...neighbourhood assets" (Shinew, Glover and Parry 2004, 338). In cleaning out vacant lots and implementing gardens in their spaces, the community works together to beautify their neighborhood, making it more desirable to live in and a place where they can be proud of. This pride in turn lends itself to a strengthening of neighborhood ties, as people from across the neighborhood are happy to call this place home, and the communal work undertaken to clean up the lots facilitates the growth of social capital among all the members who worked on the project.

However, what began as a desire to clean up vacant lots turned into something greater. As they grew "...gardens were seen as cultural and social neighborhood centers, where people go to meet with friends, family, neighbors, newcomers, and visitors" (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004, 404). The notion of gardens acting as a communal space is common within the literature. Kingsley and Townsend (2006) note that gardens "...offer places where people can gather, network, and identify together as residents of a neighbourhood" (Kingsley and Townsend 2006, 527). The communal belonging created by gardens allows space for migrants to incorporate themselves into new communities and countries. As Agustina and Beilin (2012) note, a garden "...offers the potential for migrants to physically and socially adapt to their new

environment...ultimately offering a different way to create a sense of belonging” (Agustina and Beilin 2012, 440). In acting as spaces of communal belonging, community gardens create social capital that strengthens the bonds among neighbors, allowing for people to feel more at home within their community; whether they have lived in the area their entire life or have just recently moved in.

Social capital appears in many forms, through many different avenues. Yet one constant that underlies it all is the desire to come together within a community on a group project. It is these actions that allow for the facilitation and growth of social capital within a community, a process that brings people together and allows them to call on each other in the future for potential favors. One area in particular social capital aids a community is in work that simply cannot be done alone, or in conversations that sparks an idea to grow. Respondents to the study done by Glover, Parry and Shiness (2005) discuss how social capital allowed them to create a community garden. One respondent states that in attempting to create a garden, she noted that “I couldn’t do it by myself because I didn’t know how to do it” (Glover, Parry and Shiness 2005, 458), while another remarked that the creation of a garden was sparked through a conversation with another parent, when discussing what to do to help beautify their children’s school (Glover, Parry and Shiness 2005, 459). In coming together as a community, these individuals were able to increase the positive facilitation of ideas as well as complete works impossible on their own; a positive outlet of a community’s social capital that exists within the community. Unfortunately, studies have also found that community gardens, and the social capital they create, can be exclusive.

In their study, Glover (2004) found that by introducing something as simple as a lock, a project started trying to promote community inclusion began to exclude some members. In a community run garden, members of the Old Town Neighborhood Association (OTNA) added a

lock to protect their garden, yet “...it served only to further complicate relations between the core group and other neighborhood residents, as well as between African American residents and the primarily Caucasian core group that controlled the key” (Glover 2004, 154). While the intention of the garden had always been communal in nature, this lock, and the control of the key, gated the garden behind hours run by those in charge of the key. One neighborhood member commented on the issue regarding locking the garden by declaring “...you don’t build community by select people” (Glover 2004, 155). The premise behind a community garden is to incorporate many different voices in the production of this space, and in the course of locking the garden, the OTNA altered the direction of this gardens growth.

For a community garden to truly bring all members of the community together and increase the strength of social connections, people need to have access to it whenever they want to garden. Other studies have explored how beneficial a community garden can be for members involved with it, bringing them together in communal work and creating a sense of pride within the community. It is important that residents near these spaces have full complete access to them whenever they so desire. Community growth doesn’t happen through exclusion, and if a neighbourhood attempts to bring people together through communal space, they should work to ensure it is open to the public at all hours.

However, it is important to note that while installing a gate may create a sense of exclusion, often times they go up for specific reasons. Within the San Francisco Bay Area, a couple community gardens also have gates that are locked during non-working hours. The Tenderloin People’s garden has a gate that is locked whenever staff and volunteers are not there working and the same goes for the Planting Justice nursery in Oakland. In talking with the individuals who run these gardens, they claim that the gates and locks have been installed in order to ensure the

protection of the crops that are grown and stored there. Organizations don't like to see the work they did be trampled upon or stolen by individuals from outside the community looking for free food. Therefore, while some individuals may see a lock as an exclusionary technique, more often than not that isn't the intention; these gardens are simply seeking to protect the work they do for the community to ensure that the people whose benefit these gardens are for can fully appreciate the work going in.

Social capital, making its way outside the garden, can have an impact on the surrounding community. For the men and women being released from prison back into the community, social capital can play an important role in creating space, and desire, to integrate back into their community. As Wolff and Draine (2004) state "The stock of social capital, measured in terms of its size, strength, wealth of resources, and structure, captures the prisoner's potential for bridging to the community." (Draine and Wolff 2004, 466). For the purposes of reintegration, social capital is an important commodity to hold. In their study, Wolff and Draine (2004) illuminate just why social capital is so important for individuals being released from prison.

"...prisoners with fragile social connections may have fewer visitors, causing their connections to the community to wither as a result of incarceration" (Draine and Wolff 2004, 466). While much of the literature surrounding social capital and offender reentry focuses on the amount of social capital needed following release from prison, here we see that it is just as important to have social capital as you head into prison as you do following release. The amount of social connections an individual has throughout their life is important for the prevention of social isolation. As we have seen in our current political climate, increased levels of social isolation creates a scenario where people are easier targets for radicalization and hatred. Stepping away from that outcome, weak levels of social capital prior to entering prison can have

a long lasting negative effect. As the authors explain "...as community connections weaken, the prisoner may begin to identify more with the prison culture and the social connections needed for survival" (Draine and Wolff 2004, 461). In entering prison without strong community ties, some individuals can see their relationships wither and replaced with prison connections, connections that are hard to disconnect from once that person has been released from prison; seemingly signaling a higher chance of returning to prison following release. Through this study we see the import of social capital as a preventative measure for both the first crime and recidivism. Should individuals be living within a community they feel more connected to and a part of, they are less likely to chafe against those social relations in a way that will get them pushed out. As we see with offenders identifying and enhancing prison connections both inside and outside in order to survive, we can infer that similar relationships with family, friends and neighbors would exist within the individual's community should they feel strong kinship with the area they live.

Yet we can see that having strong connections within their community prior to incarceration can prevent the adoption of prison norms. As Draine and Wolff explain "[m]aintaining family ties during incarceration...has been found to lessen the likelihood that the prisoner would adopt prison norms" (Bayse, Allgood and Van Wyk 1991 as cited by Draine and Wolff 2004, 461). While difficult to maintain relationships throughout incarceration, due to a litany of factors, if they are successfully maintained, they can indeed have a positive outcome following release. Should these connections be maintained, they can lead to an individual being more driven to mobilize their remaining social capital following release, as well as actively look to create more. This is an important mind state to maintain as "[e]xperiences that affect the prisoner's sense of self...have implications for his or her willingness or ability to mobilize that capital at the point of release" (Draine and Wolff 2004, 469). Creating a social scenario wherein an individual is more

motivated to act upon their social capital to reconnect with their community can have lasting positive impacts on their life, and the community structure upon return.

Yet the immediate family cannot provide everything a recently released individual needs and thus they turn to the community for support. Wolff and Draine believe that community aid can be centered within community centers, which can “...connect their programs to corrections facilities...” (Wolff and Draine 2004, 478). Such programs currently exist, with Planting Justice, a garden non-profit based in Oakland, having partnered with the Insight Garden Program at San Quentin as a way for prisoners to be trained in gardening techniques, then following release, have the opportunity for full time employment at Planting Justice (Planting Justice Website). This program allows for those recently released to immediately beginning receiving a wage of \$17.50 an hour plus benefits (Fancher 2016), providing a more substantial income than minimum wage employment for Planting Justice employees while working in a job that they have received the requisite training for. This is just one of the benefits gardens can provide.

Community gardens have been linked to positive mental health impacts (Adam-Bradford, Millican and Perkins 2018; Jean 2015). Working in the garden can provide these men and women space to heal from the trauma they endured in prison, and any they potentially carried out with them. In pairing the communal element of community gardens and their mental health benefits, community gardens can act as a space for healing within the community.

Another positive source of social capital within the existing community that is available for those recently released in support from their peers. Draine and Wolff write that “Prisoners released in the past and successfully living in the community are an untapped and virtually unexplored source of potential social capital for those who are now reentering the community” (Draine and Wolff 2004, 479). People often look to others around them with similar life

experiences to connect with socially and seeing other members of their community who have gone through the criminal justice system and have not returned is an enormous source of motivation for them to not reenter as well. These individuals can act as friends, mentors and support structures, ensuring that each other doesn't reoffend and reenter prison. They can also aid in empathizing with the individual in ways that friends and family cannot necessarily, having gone through the same experience of incarceration.

Adding to the role social capital has on the reentry process of offenders, examining the community's response to the person returning from prison is paramount in aiding reintegration. Whether by aiding the growth and capitalization of social capital on the reentry and reintegration process, how community service plays an important role in offender reentry or how bonds within the community allow for improved reentry and reintegration outcomes. The notion of community is important to my research and thus understanding the part it plays in ensuring a successful return following incarceration is important to the outcome of my work, and future work down the line. Therefore, it will be examined through multiple different lenses, to truly expand upon the importance of a healthy community.

Within the scope of this research, offender reentry and reintegration insinuate two separate phenomena. In pulling from work done by Christy Visher (2015) reentry occurs the moment the individual leaves prison. It is "...experienced by individuals sent to either jail or prison...either as adults or juveniles" (Visher 2015, 61). Offender reintegration, then, is the "...individual's reconnection with the institutions of society, which is both the process and the goal" (Visher 2015, 61).

In outlining the impact of incarceration on communities Clear, Rose and Ryder (2001) write:

“...the aggregate impact of high levels of incarceration would be damage to networks of private and parochial social control and decreases in the legitimacy of formal social control” (Clear, Rose and Ryder 2001, 336).

Another work studying the impact of incarceration on the community makes it clear that through incarcerating members of a community, neighborhoods are caught in a cycle of incarceration as high communal prison rates increase crime within that community (Clear, Ryder, Rose 2001). Within the United States, prison is generally understood as a space wherein people enter, are rehabilitated, and return to their community having “paid their price” to society. Yet we can see that this isn’t the end of that story. By increasing incarceration rates within a community, more members of that community are likely to also enter into the prison system. For this reason, the community has become the center for studies attempting to understand ways to help aid ex-offenders in their goal to not re-offend and to prevent the younger populations from entering in the first place.

In orienting the community as the focus of healing, studies have examined community service and both a preventative and recovery tool (Byrne 1989; Killias, Aebi and Ribeaud 2000), and looked at community engagement as a way to strengthen neighborhood bonds (Bazemore and Stinchcomb 2004; Clear, Rose and Ryder 2001; Bazemore and Boba 2007). The studies centered around community engagement tend to focus on them through involving the community in an offenders reentry, and using communal spaces, such as community gardens, to get the ex-offender out into the community to work and begin gaining goodwill.

In their study on community service, Killias, Aebi and Ribeaud (2000) discovered that there was no significant difference between the recidivism rates of individuals opting to serve their sentence through community versus a more prototypical prison sentence. Important to note with this study is that they focused solely on short term prison sentences, those under 14 days, and

stated in their research that "...the negative effects of incarceration on job opportunities and life circumstances are conditional on some minimal duration..." (Killias, Aebi and Ribeaud 2000, 48). In addition to learning that community service had no significant impact on recidivism rates, many of their research participants claimed "...that their experience was helpful to prevent future recidivism" (Killias, Aebi and Ribeaud 2000, 49).

Perhaps, as the authors state, the length of a sentence does play a role in the impact of community service and recidivism, but community service could also simply not factor in that much into an individual's recidivism. The lack of success of serving a prison sentence through community service in an individualistic country, such as the United States, is an important finding to consider when making criminal justice policies. In living in an individualistic society and becoming ever more focused on the individual's needs, it could be an unsuccessful road to tread in trying to incorporate community service into preventing future recidivism. If an individual feels extremely disconnected from their community, it is highly unlikely that a temporally short amount of community service will change that person's outlook on the community.

Perhaps then this research hints towards another solution. Rather than creating systems wherein individuals serving short term sentences can serve their sentences through community service, we begin to examine allowing individual's serving longer sentences to serve some of their sentence through community service. Through long-term community service, we may be able to find a more holistic form of rehabilitation.

In a slight tweak of the understanding surrounding community service, many studies have begun to examine how involving the community as a whole can help to improve the reintegrative process and lower communal recidivism rates. In their study on community engagement in

reentry, Bazemore and Boba (2007) propose a civic engagement model which seeks to address the:

“...weakening community barriers to the development of pro-social identities for persons who have been under correctional supervision; altering the community’s image of such persons; and mobilizing and/or building community capacity to provide informal support and assistance” (Bazemore and Boba 2007, 27).

For many individuals leaving prison and returning to their community, they are often met with a negative social stigma which prevents them from fully returning to their community (Benson et al. 2011). In researching the effects of stigmatization on offender’s, Benson, Alarid, Burton and Cullen found that “Some research finds that individuals who know former offenders personally...hold less stigmatizing views toward felons...” (Benson et al. 2011, 385). It is this finding that provides the context for why a community centered and led re-integrative process is so important; offender’s returning to their community know all or most of the community members already. In involving the community in reintegration, the people that these offenders have known all their life can take charge in helping them return to life outside of prison, creating a more holistic method of reintegration.

Bazemore and Boba write “At the micro level of analysis and identity, community members and groups may engage the offender in activities that restore trust and demonstrate utility to the community in a way that can transform generally negative public identities” (Uggen & Manza 2003 as cited in Bazemore and Boba 2007, 29). Within the community, in working alongside offenders in everyday tasks, other community members can take an active role in reframing the predetermined notions of outsiders surrounding the individual offender. In doing so, not only are community members showing trust and care to the particular offender, who can begin to see themselves once again as a valued community member, but they are also aiding in the process of

de-stigmatization of said offender, helping to break down barriers between them and other community members. Studies examining the impact of community service on recidivism have shown that participation in community service programs is linked to a decrease or consistent level of recidivism, with no increase found (Bazemore and Boba 2007, 30-3).

Beyond community members helping out individually in the reintegration process, returning to a community with strong social ties lends itself to more positive reentry outcomes. Tillyer and Vose (2011) note in their study that “Social disorganization reflects a disruption which contributes to the residents’ inability to solve their own problems, including exerting informal community control” (Tillyer and Vose 2011, 453); the lack of which strains the relationships between individuals, weakening overall community bonds. The impact of social disorganization creates a negative feedback loop within communities and the criminal justice system. As people filter in and out of communities, social institutions break down, weakening the influence of informal social controls, which allows crime rates to grow, which has the consequence of further increasing crime rates as neighborhoods with high crime rates send more people to prison through the removal of people from the neighborhood that could act as stops to the behavior (Clear and Ryder 2001; Tillyer and Vose 2011; Wolff and Draine 2004).

Outside of the research into understanding how community gardens facilitate the growth of social capital and the importance of social capital for the reintegration of offenders, green spaces and prisoner reintegration have been studied through other means. These topics are not the focus of the current study but do have themes worth exploring to further understand the role of social capital and green spaces, such as a garden, on community reintegration. Studies on the role green spaces play in crime reduction, the other societal barriers preventing offender reintegration

and how gardening while in prison have all influenced the way my research will be conducted and the lens through which my findings will be understood.

In talking about the role green spaces play on crime in the inner city, Kuo and Sullivan (2001) propose "...that vegetation can deter crime in poor urban neighborhoods...by increasing residents' informal surveillance...by increasing the implied surveillance of the area, and by mitigating residents' mental fatigue..." (Kuo and Sullivan 2001, 348). As they conducted their research, the authors discovered that "The greener a buildings surroundings, the fewer total crimes...vegetation accounts for 7% to 8% of the variance in the number of crimes reported per building." (Kuo and Sullivan 2001, 354). While my research is not focused on the specific role that green spaces play on crime reduction, the knowledge that green spaces have an impact on reducing overall crime can imply that green spaces could also play a role in creating a more connected community in general. If green spaces can effectively reduce crime within a community, community gardens can then not only act as a space of communal connection within the community, but can act as a crime prevention method as well.

These findings add another important layer to my work surrounding community gardens. If these spaces can also reduce overall neighborhood crime in addition to creating social capital for the reintegration of offenders, then the creation of community gardens could become an important social and political policy for many communities struggling with the impacts of mass incarceration. While community gardens alone lack the bandwidth to alleviate the issues facing many neighborhoods reckoning with mass incarceration, increasing the amount of gardens and using them to create stronger ties within neighborhoods can be a first step in a larger solution that could see the growth of economically depressed neighborhoods. Beyond this impact, community gardens could aid in the communal integration of refugees into their resettled

nations, and perhaps much more. Especially as more and more people move to rediscover their connection with the earth.

While I have focused a lot on the impacts of programs and green spaces outside of prison, and the impact they have on the overall community and the incarcerated individuals themselves, gardening while in still in prison has also proven to be an important source of healing. In their thesis, Rachel Jenkins (2011) explains that

“...a recent study showed that individuals who graduate successfully from the GreenHouse and GreenTeam programs have a much better chance of successfully rejoining society. After one year, the reconviction rate of GreenHouse and GreenTeam graduates was 10 percent, compared to the 21.5 percent of the general population of the formerly incarcerated in New York State, and within three years the rate was 25 percent for graduates, compared to 47 percent of the general population” (Feldbaum et al. 2011 as cited by Jenkins 2016, 31)

Similar to the success seen by employees of Planting Justice, men and women involved in prison gardens had significantly lower recidivism rates than their fellow inmates who did not participate in these garden programs. In a study of prison gardens in Kenya, Kathryn Chepkemoi Langat (2016) finds

“Prison farms can provide prisoners with useful, productive work outside instead of enforced idleness inside; nutritious diet; experience of good farming practices; a more ‘normal’ working day in a more open environment; financial compensation for their work. They also learn teamwork, punctuality and reliability” (Langat 2016, 66).

The author continues on to state that

“Farming rehabilitation provides education in agricultural skills and various aspects of life. These are useful for getting inmates prepared for life outside the prison while serving the community” (Langat 2016, 67)

It is clear to see that gardening, both inside and outside of prison, can have positive impacts on the lives of offenders following release. Through the reduction of recidivism rates and the creation of communities, post incarceration opportunities ensure that these men and women are

rehabilitated and integrated back into their community; and the broader society. Prison gardens, post release employment opportunities and the reduction of crime through increased green spaces all play an important role in the community at large, as well as framing the lens through which my research on social capital connecting community members through the garden will be framed.

As discussed, regarding Oakland's history, segregation and redlining have had long lasting impacts on the structure of the city. Through divestment of neighborhoods of color, city planners under-developed those neighborhoods, which has allowed for present day developers to move in and purchase property within these neighborhoods at cheap rates to renovate these neighborhoods. While urban development is messaged as a means to improve the lives of the residents within these neighborhoods, it is more often the case that these residents are pushed out of the neighborhoods as redevelopment attracts wealthier individuals, pricing out and displacing longtime residents.

Yet for some, community gardens are a symptom of a larger problem. Community gardens, farmers markets, food cooperatives and more are emerging in greater numbers as parts of an Alternative Food Network; a collection of alternative means of obtaining produce without engaging with the global agri-food industry that many find exploitative and harmful. Critiques of community gardens, and Alternative Food Networks as a whole, often point out that

“...the burden of food production and provision of healthy food in low-income areas has largely shifted from the state to non-profits and community-based organizations operation in areas where market failure limits both wages and purchasing power.” (McClintock 2014, 148).

While attempting to create a means for people to purchase and obtain freshly grown produce farmed nearer to where they live, these businesses and spaces often utilize the same market based, neoliberal framework as the food system they are stated to be working against.

In using market-logic, these healthier stores, in trying to aid low-income communities, often price them out of even participating in the discourse. Across the country, health food grocers like Whole Foods and assorted food cooperatives often have food that is two to three times as expensive as a Walmart, essentially declaring that only wealthy individuals have the right to eat healthy. In her research on healthy grocery options, Julie Guthman writes

“Alternative food institutions have tended to cater to relatively well-off consumers, in part because organic food has been positioned as a niche product, even obtaining the moniker or ‘yuppie chow’, and in part because many of the spaces of alternative food practice have been designed and located to secure market opportunities and decent prices for farmers.” (Guthman 2008, 431).

Rather than increasing communities’ access to healthy foods, these healthy grocers have created a narrative that only those who are wealthy enough can eat healthily and participate in the alternative food network.

In her research on health food stores and gentrification, Isabelle Anguelovski writes

“...high-end supermarket chains identify inner-city neighborhoods as desirable for growth and profit potential, and their arrival contributes to the multifaceted transformation of neighborhoods.” (Anguelovski 2016, 1210-1211)

Attracted by low investment costs to open a new branch due to a legacy of divestment in these neighborhoods, high-end healthy food chains such as Whole Foods move in, promising greater access to healthy foods than was previously available to these communities. Yet as Anguelovski describes, the increase of high-end supermarkets creates a food mirage, where “grocery stores abound, but they are unaffordable for lower-income residents” (Breyer and Voss-Andrae 2013 as

cited by Anguelovski 2016, 1214). Despite their intentions, these stores effectively do nothing to aid the communities they say they want to help, while eliminating local supermarkets, eliminating jobs, and helping to displace community residents from their longtime homes.

In working for the creation of more health food stores in low-income communities, activists often label these communities as food deserts, neighborhoods without supermarkets or grocery stores to purchase produce, as a way to create buzz and attention that will help bring in supermarkets that activists believe will help. Yet as Anguelovski discusses, in some cases, these activists tend to be middle-class white citizens who, in describing neighborhoods as food deserts, “appropriate and co-opt EJ [Environmental Justice] claims for the benefits of higher classes who defend their own environmental and food privileges.... Their own right to the neighborhood and high-end customer preferences are to the detriment of Latinos’ (and others’) ability to purchase the diverse foods they were hitherto able to afford.”

(Anguelovski 2016, 1219).

These attitudes, actions and beliefs speak to the whiteness of much of the food movement. Julie Guthman describes these attitudes as a desire of white activists to bring their good food to others.

“Many in the movement seem oblivious to the racial character of these discourses – if anything they presume them to be universal – and so are ignorant of the way in which employment of these discourses might constitute another kind of exclusionary practice.” (Guthman 2008, 434).

Guthman defines these discourses as having been derived from white cultural history and implemented from a place of privilege, as activists either choose not to learn about cultural differences in food, or are oblivious to them, and thus believe that what works for white activists in their lives and their cultures obviously must work for all (Guthman 2008). In critiquing the whiteness within the food movement, it unearths the underlying feature of a majority of food movement and alternative food institutions critiques. After historically segregating cities and

divesting from neighborhoods of color, creating the conditions within these communities exist today, white activists now return to these communities under the belief that they can help out the local population by promoting the lifestyle that have allowed them to prosper, only to create additional harm and dislocate even more members of communities of color. Without taking the time to educate themselves on the cultural differences and the historical legacy of redlining and segregation, many white activists may never truly understand the work needed to be done. Instead, in focusing on health food stores and different diet fads, processes of gentrification and ecological gentrification will continue to impact low-income communities, continually pushing families living within these neighborhoods out of their homes.

This relationship between health food stores, alternative food institutions and gentrification has been described and defined in different ways; Anguelovski describes the process as

“supermarket greenlining, encompassing both act (i.e. targeting certain neighborhoods for ‘healthy’ supermarket development) and outcome (i.e. decreased access to multiple resources – reasonably priced food and cultural safe havens – for minority and low-income communities).” (Anguelovski 2016, 1211).

In examining the relationship outside of the supermarket specific contexts, the process of gentrification exacerbated by alternative food institutions has also been described by scholars as green gentrification and ecological gentrification; all terms pointing back to urban greening as a source of community displacement.

Sarah Dooling (2009) defines ecological gentrification as

“the implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to public green spaces that leads to the displacement or exclusion of the most economically vulnerable...while espousing an environmental ethic.” (Dooling 2009, 630).

The insidious nature of ecological gentrification is the way it alters the discourse surrounding the environment, and access to it. As Dooling states

“...ecological gentrification problematized conventional planning approaches to using public green spaces as tools facilitating social reform and public health objectives, and as tools promoting economic development for the benefit of private-property owners. Ecological gentrification relocates gentrification within the environmental discourses and in the discourses related to the exclusionary aspects of public spaces.” (Dooling 2009, 631).

With forces of gentrification colloquially deepening the collective mindset of many Americans that capital is the key power component in life, ecological gentrification runs the risk of commercializing nature within the city. Adding to this issue is that urban greening programs are not and have not always been implemented equally. As Wolch, Byrne and Newell consider

“Urban green space is also an environmental justice issue, given that in many cities, low-income neighborhoods and communities of color – places where public health challenges tend to be the most critical – often have relatively poor access to safe and well-maintained parks and other types of open space.” (Byrne et al 2014, 239).

By linking public green space to the gentrification of neighborhoods, the desire for these spaces may be reduced in the eyes of low-income communities, who are at highest risk of dislocation in response to these forces. This in turn can have a potentially negative effect for organizations like Planting Justice who attempt to utilize urban green space for the benefit of the surrounding community. While Planting Justice attempts to use the environment and gardening as healing tools, their work may be undermined by these larger forces if most of the population carries a negative connotation of community gardening and food justice work. Planting Justice attempts to counteract larger, systemic forces through education and hands on work, but in order to conduct that work, people need to be interested and invested first; something which may be negatively impacted by these broader forces.

While urban renewal and urban greening often carry the narrative of cleaning up an area for the benefit of the citizens currently residing within the neighborhood, recent studies have proven that to be false. As Anguelovski writes

“...the reduction of contamination and redevelopment of brownfield sites do not seem to work for the benefit of those residents originally exposed to environmental toxins, but rather for wealthier and more educated groups who choose to move into the neighborhood.” (Anguelovski 2016, 1211).

As wealthier inhabitants move into toxic neighborhoods, cities put greater work into cleaning up any lingering environmental toxin so that their revenues can increase. This process then continues the cycle of ecological gentrification listed above, as wealthier and middle-class citizens move into the region, and begin to advocate for the style of living they are accustomed to, and believe they deserve. Which in turn leads to the construction of greater urban parks, Whole Foods and similar grocers, and the eviction of low-income inhabitants who can no longer afford to live within these neighborhoods.

Yet for many organizations, food can act as the focal point for their work against social inequities. As Josh Sbicca (2016) writes

“...the food justice movement creates equitable alternatives and engages in policy battles to improve the conventional food system, *and* uses food as a tool to advance social justice.” (Sbicca 2016, 1363).

Yet for Sbicca, food and food justice can grow beyond the limitations of just improving food systems; it can be utilized to create change on a structural level:

“Restorative food justice practices in Oakland, California are not just fostering individual resilience for formerly incarcerated people, but reflect strategies aimed at disrupting the prison pipeline at the point of reentry.” (Sbicca 2016, 1374).

In their work, Planting Justice works to use food as a healing agent in the lives of formerly incarcerated men and women, providing living wage jobs and a welcoming community to help them transition back into civilian life. Yet, like Sbicca discusses, Planting Justice also uses food as a tool to prevent young men and women from entering the prison pipeline to begin with. Through educational classes, partnerships with schools, volunteer opportunities and internships, Planting Justice attempts to create a community where young men and women never engage with or interact with the criminal justice system to begin with.

It is this work that exemplifies the belief Nathan McClintock has that urban agriculture is both a neoliberalized, market-driven creation that removes some responsibility from the State, and a communal healing force, providing food and opportunities for those who need it most, while simultaneously working to dismantle the social structures holding up our unequal society. To McClintock, urban agriculture can be understood well through Polanyi's double movement. Polanyi feared that

“Without government regulation or a moral economy...the unchecked buying and selling of land, labour, and money...leads to social upheaval and environmental degradation” (McClintock 2014, 157).

Polanyi defines the double movement as “personified as the action of two organizing principles in society, each of them setting itself specific institutional aims, having the support of definite social forces and using its own distinctive methods” (Polanyi 2001, 138). Emerging from the uncoupling of the market from the moral economy and regulation, the double movement is a response by citizens and activists to try and balance out unfettered capitalism. As McClintock describes, the industrial agri-food system and the commodification of food unraveled social relations surrounding food, causing worried citizens and activists to band together through urban agriculture to counter the effects that the industrial food system was

having on their lives (McClintock 2014, 157-6). From this perspective, despite urban agriculture using many of the same societal and economic structures that the industrial agri-food system does, it does so in response to the harm being done by the dominant system. As people struggle to access healthy produce close to home, or struggle to afford the cost of food, they turn to their own yards and open space to fill in the gap.

By examining urban agriculture through the lens of Polanyi's double movement, McClintock unearths the reasoning behind why so many urban agriculture organizations utilize a neoliberal, market-based design. In effect, by modeling themselves in these ways, urban agriculture organizations can assist the success and longevity of their mission by subsidizing the outreach work they do through purchases made by those who can afford them. In selling produce, seedlings, and services such as the creation of a backyard garden to members of the community with enough capital to afford these items, the money and profits made through these transactions can then be funneled through the organization into generating more capital within the community that can be used to provide these same goods and services at reduced or no charge to those with less economic security. Much the same way that government's subsidize large farms across the country tasked with growing crops for our population, nonprofit and grassroots organizations generate these same subsidies through individual purchases from citizens throughout the region; in addition to grant money received from the city and state.

However, despite urban agriculture initially arising as a response to the chaos created by the industrial system, urban agriculture has many broader level impacts on our society. From creating connections within communities, to improving the health of people gardening, to being used as a tool to reintegrate and rehabilitate formerly incarcerated individuals and ensure younger generations do not engage with the criminal justice system, urban agriculture creates a

broad community of everyday men and women to counter the bourgeoisie industrial agri-food system.

Planting Justice engages urban agriculture within these contradictions. It sells seedlings and produce in order to stay in business, builds edible backyards for residents for a cost, yet uses those profits and proceeds in order to uplift the community and subsidize backyards for low-income families who would not normally be able to afford them. Urban agriculture is full of contradictions that are inherent to its structure and processes and it is up to the activists and organizations utilizing urban agriculture to understand these contradictions and create systemic changes for a better society. My research engages with these contradictions, and how Planting Justice navigates them as they strive towards achieving their mission. I contribute to the existing literature by linking gardening activities to reintegration, digging into the ways Planting Justice creates a welcoming and inclusive space that reduces the risk of recidivism for its reentry staff and creates a desire among them to stay with the organization and grow. I unearth the applicability of such a model, and examine whether it can be replicated in other heavily urbanized areas as a push back against recidivism and gentrification.

Findings and Analysis:

“man’s economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets.” (Polanyi 2001, p 48).

Robbed of the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure; they would die as the victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime, and starvation.

Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighborhoods and landscapes de-filed, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to pro-duce food and raw materials destroyed (Polanyi 2001, 76)

Space to Grow:

The Rolling Hills Nursery, located on 105th Avenue in East Oakland, acts as the focal point of Planting Justice’s mission. The nursery has over a thousand different varieties of seedlings for sale, and houses Planting Justice’s main office; a yurt built to accommodate the entire staff. It sits in the shadow of the Nimitz Freeway (Highway 880), one of the freeways which when built, razed countless minority homes (Self 2005). It also sits between the Coliseum and San Leandro BART stations, the BART system being another tool of urbanization used to destroy minority communities and homes in Oakland (Self 2005). It is a study of opposites. On the one hand, the Rolling Hills Nursery grows hundreds of varieties of plants that help to feed and provide food sovereignty to the community. It is a meditative and therapeutic space within which you can work with the earth and rediscover your connection with the land. As one Planting Justice employee told me, the positionality of the nursery underneath the bridge pushes against the notion of urbanization, against the infrastructure that claims to represent “connectedness” and progress. As one volunteer I worked with summarized, the nursery acts as a space of resistance to the urbanization of the Bay Area. In sitting underneath Highway 880, the nursery seems to

push against the ideal that the highway represents, a vision of an urbanized future of towering businesses and consumerism.

On the other hand, with its location being underneath the freeway, it is in plain sight for vehicles driving by to see. As Diego discussed during our interview, he has seen dozens of people come to the nursery solely based on the fact that they saw it out the window of their car and were curious to check out what the space was. He relayed that many of these guests to the nursery were residents nearby who had no idea that this nursery was here and would have never known had it not been for the highway bringing the nursery to their attention. The highway increases the visibility of the Rolling Hills nursery, by extension providing a signal boost for the work and mission of Planting Justice; one which ironically is working to upset the order represented by the highway.

I find the positioning of the Planting Justice nursery in the shade of Highway 880 to be one example of the double movement at play within Planting Justice. In the case of Planting Justice versus the Highway, Planting Justice can be personified as an organization working for the communities right to the land, while the Highway represents the Bay Area's push for urbanization in the name of "progress". The construction of the highway destroyed many homes and devastated the community, it is a vehicle for capital accumulation between downtown San Francisco and the rich suburbs at the periphery, a vehicle which allows for capital to bypass the East Oakland community. It removes the moral economy from the equation in finding ways to improve capital accumulation for citizens of the downtown and suburban areas; no longer needing to worry how to reach San Francisco or having to include East Oakland in these calculations.

In response to the unshackling of the economy, Planting Justice moved in to help fill the gaps created by the construction of Highway 880 and attempt to re-inject some morality into the economy. The nursery is a site of growth for produce and seedlings, all of which are available for sale to the community. The money earned from these sales are reinvested into the surrounding community through employment and internship opportunities, after school programs, educational seminars, and much more. It is a space for staff, volunteers, and community members to come and escape the urban jungle, to help them reconnect with the earth. The nursery is a space of health and healing, creating a community to counter the disconnection created by technology and capitalism, a space for healthy eating and healthy eating habits, countering the processed foods prominent in the surrounding corner stores and liquor stores. As the free-for-all of capital accumulation set in throughout Oakland, Planting Justice emerged as a push back against that mentality, working to reclaim the community for the long-term residents who are so often overlooked.

Yet the “progress” that this highway represents has had a positive impact on the work done by Planting Justice. As discussed above, the Rolling Hills has seen people from the area visit its garden based entirely off seeing the nursery from the highway. So while Highway 880 was constructed in order to connect the suburbs of the East Bay to downtown San Francisco, razing communities in the process, the proximity of Planting Justice to the highway is enabling the organization to use the infrastructure to build its organization and spread the message of Planting Justice; of Composting the Empire and returning communities and the land to those who have so often been overlooked. In capitalizing on the proximity of the highway, Planting Justice is using the tools of urban development to push back against that urban development; reclaiming the

neighborhood from those whose only desire is to increase the wealth and capital of an area, at the expense of those who live there.

Composting the Empire is a term used often at Planting Justice, referring to the desire to remake the community and world around them in a way that benefits all people. It is the belief that the societal system we currently live within shouldn't be entirely destroyed or remade, but rather to take the elements of the current system and break them down to build a new system from its remnants; similar to creating compost piles for gardens. It is the idea of Planting Justice using the infrastructure (Highway 880) of the current ruling system for their benefit; as people drive along the highway, see the nursery, and make a visit. That visit may then lead to a purchase of plants, volunteering, or donation down the line which never would have occurred without the highway, a donation which also aids the growth of Planting Justice and the expansion of its mission to help heal more communities and break down the inequalities built by the existing system.

Another form this double movement takes is through the Transform your Yard program offered by Planting Justice. This service allows families across the Bay Area to submit for a consultation, choose from a range of different options (raised beds, fruit trees, compost systems, to name a few) and Planting Justice will come build this yard for you (Transform your Yard Program). As their website declares

“By hiring Planting Justice to create a permaculture garden for you and your family, you are supporting this organization and this movement for local organic food, and helping Planting Justice provide green jobs for local youth that train them for a future in permaculture design and urban farming.” (ibid).

An additional feature of this program is that those who can afford to pay for this service help to subsidize the creation of gardens for those who cannot. This allows Planting Justice to provide

edible permaculture gardens for families throughout the region who normally would not be able to afford paying Planting Justice to build them an edible backyard. Through this program, Planting Justice is taking the model of an existing agriculturally based subsidy program, the government subsidizing giant farms across the country, and modifying it to fit their specific needs. As the wealthier residents of the Bay Area have amassed capital, often at the expense of citizens living in communities such as East Oakland, the transform your yard program offers a countermovement to redistribute opportunity to include everyone. Without this program offered by Planting Justice, the wealthier residents would still have access to means by which to acquire an edible landscape in their backyard, yet none of the capital exchanged during this process would be reallocated to low-income communities who lack and desire the same services. Planting Justice thus steps in and offers these services to those who can afford to pay, taking the capital they secured through this transaction to build a similar edible landscape in the yard of a family who would not be able to afford it.

In adopting a subsidization model used by the government, Planting Justice ensures that low-income families across the Bay Area have access to services which will allow them to access and consume healthier produce. By organizing in response to markets either ignoring these communities or seeing them as areas of investment, which lead to dislocation, Planting Justice re-embeds a sense of morality within the economy of the Bay Area, creating equal access to produce for all citizens.

The Transform your Yard program also helps to re-embed the environment into the local economy, providing a garden for people to tend to and a place for them to reconnect to the earth. In providing a green space for households to engage in, this program may also expand upon the

environmental conscious of the Bay Area; ingraining a desire within more people to begin looking for ways to help protect our planet from the dangers of climate change.

Yet despite all the good this causes this program may exacerbate gentrification and climate change. As Planting Justice travels across the Bay Area providing these services, it also increases the range of low-income families receiving these backyard gardens, increasing the amount of communities that experience rising property values, increasing the communities which investors may begin to view as a good investment for further development. In spreading their reach to surrounding areas, is Planting Justice increasing the likelihood of further gentrification in the Bay Area?

While there is certainly a possibility that the edible gardens built by Planting Justice has increased these homeowners desire to be environmentally conscious, it is equally likely that these homeowners may see having an edible garden as their contribution to fighting climate change. While having and caring for the garden is a good first step, they may be negating its benefit if they continue to partake in activities that further exacerbate the problems of climate change. This topic is not the focus of my current research but in examining the impacts these gardens may have, it is a topic that may be of importance to study by scholars in the future.

Digging beneath the topsoil of this program, are there unintended consequences of providing permaculture gardens for free in low-income neighborhoods? On one hand, Planting Justice is capitalizing on trends and desires of the wealthier members of the Bay Area to be ecofriendly and build their lives around being more sustainable. In effect, having these backyard gardens is a status symbol that provides, in a Polanyian sense, a social safeguard that protects these individuals social position within their neighborhood. This trend has led to a rise of ecological or green gentrification (Aygean & Simons 2011; Anguelovski 2016; Byrne, Jason et al 2014;

Dooling, Sarah 2011, 2014). Isabelle Anguelovski describes ecological or green gentrification as the fallout of disinvestment in low income neighborhoods:

“After decades of disinvestment, municipalities are cleaning up dirty waterfronts and restoring parks; private developers are buying dilapidated buildings and transforming them into luxury condominiums with adjacent community gardens; and subsequently residents from higher economic backgrounds are moving in and enjoying new amenities such as parks and other green spaces” (Anguelovski 2016, 1210).

In building these edible landscapes for low-income households, Planting Justice is potentially playing into the green gentrification process. Building these edible landscapes raises the property value, attracting the attention of developers and real estate agents who then move in to capitalize on this change; which further increases the price of the neighborhood, pushing those who Planting Justice is attempting to aid out of the neighborhood. Another Oakland based food nonprofit ran into this issue back in 2012 when a real estate agent used one of their gardens to sell the neighborhood to new homebuyers (Markham 2014). In her article, Lauren Markham writes how Linnette Edwards, a Bay Area real-estate agent, created a video to promote the real estate market of Oakland, Emeryville and Berkeley, and featured a volunteer-run community garden called the Golden Gate Community Garden in her video (Markham 2014). In the video Edwards states, “We’re super psyched that there’s a community garden across the street – it’s definitely a bonus to this block” (Linette Edwards quoted by Markham 2014). This video, meant to drum up attention and excitement for the neighborhood among wealthier, upper class Bay Area residents, upset many members of the existing community, including staff at Phat Beets, who use the garden in their work (Markham 2014).

As Max Cadji, a Phat Beets volunteer states in the article “Our work wasn’t the cause of gentrification, but our programs and aesthetics were being used to sell land and help displace

people” (Max Cadji, quoted by Markham 2014). The area being promoted in the video is currently home to a largely low- and middle-income African American community, while trying to attract the upper-class San Francisco homeowners who were moving away from the rising housing prices within San Francisco (Markham 2014). As scholars have examined and Phat Beets experienced, many community gardening programs, while meant to help those in low-income neighborhoods, often have the effect of creating an atmosphere that is attractive to wealthier residents, who then come in and displace the current community. Community gardens and urban greenery have the effect of raising the economic value of a neighborhood, community or city, which bring in developers and investors who capitalize on low land costs to build up a community and turn a profit.

Yet all this development and urban growth comes at the expense of the communities currently living within the area. As Jason Byrne et al (2014) write

“As more green space comes on line, it can improve the attractiveness and public health, making the neighborhoods more desirable. In turn, housing costs can rise. Such housing cost escalation can potentially lead to gentrification: the displacement and/or exclusion of the very residents the green space was meant to benefit.” (Byrne et al 2014, 235).

While many nonprofit and grassroots organizations create these gardening programs and organizations with the express purpose of helping the community grow, that growth often leads to the expulsion of the very demographic they were hoping to help. So where then does this leave Planting Justice? While it is true that Planting Justice uses the money from those who can pay to transform their yard to build new yards for those they can't, are the new backyards in low-income neighborhoods raising property values that will increase the likelihood that gentrification will occur? While the processes of gentrification haven't yet reached the East Oakland area

where Planting Justice is headquartered, is it merely a matter of time? I contend that despite the surface level work done by Planting Justice that could lead to gentrification of the area, there is more at play below the surface, at the roots of Planting Justice's work.

Nathan McClintock writes that "...contradictory processes of capitalism both *create opportunities for* urban agriculture and *impose obstacles to* its expansion." (McClintock 2014, 148). The capitalist economic system of capitalism has created pockets of disinvestment, places where entire communities have been neglected the same opportunities as their counterparts. In America, these communities have been created through historical redlining, where communities had lines drawn around them to discourage investment. It is precisely because of this that a grassroots organization such as Planting Justice is needed to move into a community such as East Oakland to attempt to provide healthy food to its denizen's. As examined above however, this is not always a clean and neat process. As these organizations begin working and start to improve the neighborhood, it improves the neighborhoods value to investors, who come in and pour more money into the community as a means to build up the infrastructure and attract wealthier home owners and businesses, gentrifying the neighborhood and pushing the current inhabitants out, and away from these programs that were initiated to aid them. These relationships create a cyclical relationship within capitalism of those who try to help those harmed by the system, and those who create further harm in search of profit.

However, in keeping true to their motto of Composting the Empire, Planting Justice digs deep into the roots of the capitalist food system in order to weed out the inequalities and build a healthier, more equal system. With the location of the Rolling Hills Nursery being underneath the freeway, it attracts customers from around the area to visit and shop. This not only increases the visibility and communal knowledge of Planting Justice, it also brings in revenue from the

surrounding neighborhoods, which Planting Justice then recycles back into the community through hiring more community members at a living wage, and creating programs to benefit the youth of the region. While suburbs have historically extracted wealth from urban centers - as those who live in suburbs take the money they earn from jobs in cities such as Oakland and spend it in the suburbs near their home – Planting Justice is reversing that model, taking money from the individuals from surrounding suburban areas and through purchases they make at the nursery, recycle that money back into East Oakland.

Increasing visibility also helps Planting Justice to grow. As more people see the Nursery while driving along the freeway, more people are likely to come in. If they leave having a positive experience, they are likely to return and to recommend the Nursery to friends and family. All of this word of mouth increases the likelihood that more people will patronage the Nursery, increasing the amount of money flowing into Planting Justice, which in turn, increases the amount of money being returned into the East Oakland community. In the few times I have commuted to the Nursery through Lyft from the BART stations, I have created significant interest among my drivers about visiting the Nursery themselves to shop for plants. If a conversation with a stranger can generate that interest, imagine what a conversation with a close friend or family member could do.

The location of the Nursery is also a boon to the work done by Planting Justice. In his discussion surrounding urban agriculture organizations, McClintock writes that

“...the inability of the patchwork urban agriculture organisations to fill in the gaps left by state retrenchment...produces what Lake and Newman (2002) refer to as ‘differential citizenship’.... Only those individuals who have access to the services provided by organisations...ultimately tap into entitlements of citizenship that these organisations provide.” (McClintock 2014, 155-6).

This is a problem for organizations trying to provide food for those in need, especially with how widespread hunger, poor food quality, and the necessary infrastructure to provide these services is our country. While this can lead to organizations leaving out areas of their neighborhood from these services or the oversaturation of organizations within one region, Planting Justice has worked around this issue by centering itself within the main community it seeks to aid, which in addition to locating healthy food within an area with limited access, also serves to further their goal in reintegrating formerly incarcerated staff members. As the reentry staff engages with community members through coworker relationships and neighbors visiting the garden, Planting Justice has ensured that the work done by reentry staff is visible to the public, helping to generate social capital to create better and longer lasting relationships. By positioning the work done by reentry staff to directly benefit the uplifting of the surrounding community, the optics surrounding the work allow for appreciation and is more likely to facilitate the faster growth of social capital for the reentry staff members, allowing them easier access to reintegration.

While the program arms of Planting Justice spreads far and wide across the region, their main office and nursery are in East Oakland, strategically positioning themselves where Planting Justice believes it can have the greatest impact. Their Nursery is the source of much of the food they provide and by growing it in a place where many people who need it can access it, Planting Justice has ensured that they are a community food center, figuratively and literally. Through their work with the city and other organizations, Planting Justice is working hard avoid the spatial dynamic that many other urban agriculture organizations run into, being positioned in a way that prevents certain people from accessing their services.

Both the Nursery and the Transform your Yard programs act as sites of resistance to the corporate food regime - defined as "...a rule governed structure of production and consumption

of food on a world scale” (McMichael 2007 in Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011) – further pulling out the weeds of a system which is suffocating the growth of the community. As Domenic Vitiello and Laura Wolf-Powers state

“In the summer of 2008...Philadelphia’s 226 community gardens grew roughly 2 million pounds, 9 million servings, worth almost \$5 million – more food than all of the city’s farms and farmers markets combined sold the entire year”
(Vitiello and Nairn 2009 in Vitiello and Wolf-Powers 2014, 518)

While the research done in that study is focused on the relationship between community gardens and urban farms and farmers markets, it highlights the potential of community-based food work in aiding healthier diets and food expense reduction. Planting Justice may be one organization, but it provides services that reach throughout the Bay Area and creates significant benefits for the community of East Oakland.

Through acquiring a backyard that allows a household to grow their own food, it reduces the amount of money that household is spending on food at grocery stores. As Vitiello and Wolf-Powers write

“Community and backyard gardens contribute significantly to some households’ food budgets, and gardeners sustain active networks of distribution to neighbors and strangers as a deliberate form of food relief” (Vitiello and Wolf-Powers 2014, 517).

While building backyard gardens may raise the property value of a family’s home, it provides other economic and social benefits. It allows these families to grow a portion of their own food, reducing the cost of their grocery bill; something that can be of added benefit for low-income households who can then transfer those savings to other areas.

Planting Justice has utilized its locations and its programs extremely well to market themselves to the younger, more environmentally conscious members of the Bay Area

community in order to further its goals of helping build up the Oakland community. In composting the empire, Planting Justice is working to provide a more equitable society for all its members. While Planting Justice does this work with its space and services, it also creates a welcoming and equitable social structure within the organization as well. The following section will dig into how the community built within Planting Justice makes all who encounter them feel welcome, and how that aids in their goal of reintegration.

A Growing Community:

Through the course of my research one of my main areas of focus was whether and how gardening could create a community both within its borders and without. Does working at the Rolling Hills Nursery for Planting Justice create a sense of community among the staff? How would a potential Planting Justice community interact with volunteers and the community outside of the nursery boundaries? In this section I discuss what I learned through interviews with staff and my own observations while volunteering with Planting Justice.

Community within the Garden:

Volunteers and Staff

Planting Justice, as an organization is more of a family than a grassroots gardening organization. The staff members treat each other with love and respect and welcome volunteers in graciously and make them feel like part of the team. In my past experiences of volunteering for nonprofit groups, and working for both for- and nonprofit groups, I have never once experienced or witnessed an organization with the sense of community that Planting Justice has. Working alongside them made it abundantly clear how Planting Justice has been so successful in creating an environment that has not seen a single employee hired from prison return to prison.

My first interaction with Planting Justice really set the tone for the months that would follow. In arriving on my first day as a volunteer, I was greeted at the front by a Planting Justice staff member who proceeded to welcome me to the nursery, give me a tour and brief history of the work being done at the nursery as well as the general work of Planting Justice, before bringing me to where they wanted me to weed that day. The passion in the staff members voice when talking about the nursery and the overall mission of Planting Justice was infectious and I immediately was drawn to the organization.

Yet beyond the passion they had for their work, the welcoming nature of the organization and of every staff member spoke volumes to the kind of community Planting Justice had built. Throughout my first day as a volunteer, numerous staff members approached me to chat about what brought me out here, to ask if I had been given a tour, and to let me know that I should feel free to wander the nursery to get a full sense of everything they had growing. As I kept returning, this sense of welcoming from the staff really drove home the community Planting Justice was creating and fostering within its organization. For a little over the first month, I was greeted in a similar way every day I arrived to volunteer at the garden, and as I became known to the staff, they greeted me by name whenever I arrived; a gesture that made me feel like part of the Planting Justice community.

As I continued to volunteer with Planting Justice, my relationship with the staff and the organization grew, moving from being someone who comes in on random days to a regular volunteer. This shift in how the staff at Planting Justice not only deepened my relationship with the staff and organization, it shifted how they approached me in terms of my work. While I still primarily was working on weeding, I was occasionally given the task of teaching and guiding new volunteers that arrived on for the day. Additionally, I received less instruction at the

beginning of the day. Instead of being brought to a specific area that they wanted me to weed in, the staff would either tell me to pick up work where I had left off my previous day or tell me a plant type that needed weeding, trusting and knowing that I knew where that plant was located within the nursery.

This shift in my dynamic was empowering and provided me with a feeling of autonomy, giving me with the sense that I was no longer simply a volunteer working at Planting Justice rather that I was a part of the team and the community. It was as though I had finally joined the Planting Justice family that I had been observing for the prior couple of months. The feeling I had about personal growth within the organization isn't unique to me either. As will be further examined in later sections, in interacting with the broader community outside Planting Justice, the staff and organization leave a lasting impact on those they interact with, oftentimes creating connections with passionate community members, or community members who were inspired by interactions with Planting Justice, who then join the Planting Justice community

Planting Justice made sure that every guest they had to the nursery was greeted in a similar fashion, ensuring a positive first impression. I witnessed and participated in many other first time volunteer tours, and they were all structured in the same style as mine. We would be greeted at the entrance of the nursery, asked to sign security waivers, and then be taken on a tour. During the tour the staff member would discuss the variety of plants being grown, from seedlings of fruit trees to avocados and essentially everything in between. We would be led past the community garden, which Hmong community residents have come to work and make their own, as well as by the Land Trust, where we would receive a brief overview of the partnership with the Land Trust and Planting Justice, before being brought to our work site. Throughout the

whole tour, staff would ask us about the reasons we came out, where we came out from, and would thank us for spending time helping them at the garden.

As someone who has worked for nonprofits and given similar tours, and who has been a volunteer in other locations and received a similar tour, none of this felt forced or scripted. Every staff member is passionate about the work they do and love engaging with the people who come in and work at the garden, welcoming us into the Planting Justice community, even if only for a day. These initial interactions with guests and volunteers that arrive at the nursery lay the groundwork for the community built at Planting Justice; Planting Justice is a space within which everyone is welcome.

In chatting with a handful of volunteers throughout my time working alongside them, many of them were drawn either by the mission of Planting Justice, the desire to be more involved in their community, or wanting to be part of a renewable energy system. In their piece on the Dig In community gardens in Melbourne, Jonathan Kingsley and Mardie Townsend learned from participants of the garden that

“I needed to have more connection with my own community because working in development...I always felt a bit detached...so I thought I will get involved in the community when I get back and this is one way.” (Kingsley & Townsend 2006, 531).

Planting Justice has worked to position itself as a place for community engagement and interaction, something many of the volunteers who come to Planting Justice have latched on too.

In chatting with one volunteer while we were working together, Amanda, she told me that she decided to volunteer with Planting Justice based on a recommendation from a friend. Apparently, this young woman’s friend had been involved with Planting Justice in the past and told Amanda that she would really enjoy her time working at Planting Justice. This conversation

Amanda had with her friend led her to spending the day out at Planting Justice and during my time working alongside her, she admitted to really enjoying the work we were doing as volunteers as well as connecting to Planting Justice's mission. I found this interaction to be indicative of the community Kingsley and Townsend described, as well as the community Planting Justice is working to create; one in which everyone is welcome and people who come in contact with Planting Justice spread positive messages of the organization around their community, helping to attract future volunteers. Many people want to work to help build up and stay connected within their community and organizations who can harness that desire effectively are poised to make a real impact on the success of their mission.

However, in many cases, these initial interactions can sometimes be the extent to which Planting Justice staff interacts with volunteers, especially those who come out one day only. I noticed that while the staff made sure that they made a good first impression with the volunteers, they often didn't cycle back throughout the day to check in and chat. Many times, follow up interactions would occur in the context of work, with a volunteer walking up to a staff member with a question about what they were doing. Another case was Planting Justice staff checking in on how volunteers were doing as the staff member was heading off in a different direction.

At first glance I was confused by the lack of interaction occurring throughout the day. After all, the staff had spent a good amount of time chatting with the volunteers on the tour that I was initially a little surprised that they didn't spend more time with the volunteers throughout the day. Even in thinking about my own experience leading teams of volunteers who were building houses for Habitat for Humanity, I would spend the entire day working with them and alongside them. Yet taking the opportunity to walk around the garden as I volunteered, I quickly began to

understand the reason why the staff didn't continue to communicate with volunteers after the initial welcome and tour.

Following the tour and making sure the volunteers knew what work they were doing; the staff members would return to the work they had on their agenda. Oftentimes we volunteers would be doing weeding in various locations around the garden, an easy and hands off task that allowed the staff to focus on more intense, high focus work. In walking the nursery while I was volunteering, I observed staff members building and repairing the large greenhouses, repotting various plants, helping customers with sales and more; all work that isn't volunteer friendly and would be impossible to complete were the staff to spend more time with the volunteers throughout the day. Rather than creating an environment where volunteers and staff had to always work together on designated assignments every day, Planting Justice empowers the volunteers to work on their own, providing them with the space to work and interact with nature and the organization as each individual volunteer preferred. This in turn frees the staff to pursue the projects they must accomplish in order to help the nursery grow.

On days I volunteered with Planting Justice, I was more often the only volunteer or one of a few volunteers that were working that day. It was a rare sight that I saw large groups of volunteers enter but that may be attributed to my personal schedule and volunteering more often during the week than on weekends. Weekends typically saw more traffic as the Saturday's I volunteered on had larger groups of people coming into volunteer. Volunteers typically ranged from High School students to individuals in their mid to late twenties in age (with the occasional volunteer in their thirties or forties but this mostly existed with the corporate group that volunteered), were predominantly Caucasian and their motives to volunteer typically revolved around wanting to give back to the community and feeling a pull towards Planting Justice's

mission. For many of the volunteers I worked with, working at the nursery was often a learning experience. High School students came often under the pre-tense of coursework, learning about the food system and working in the nursery to expand that knowledge; as much as they could within an urban environment. For volunteers untethered to educational coursework, working with Planting Justice often provided them a chance to learn more about the organization and engage with the mission and work of Planting Justice, gaining a greater appreciation of their work. For some, it provides the chance to share their experience with friends and expanding the reach and knowledge of Planting Justice, as is the case with Amanda, a volunteer who came as a result of a friend and who planned on sharing her experience with others as well. Another volunteer I worked with came to find a way to engage with a renewable energy system, had a friend who worked with Planting Justice, and was looking into the possibilities of working with the organization in the future, in a more permanent position.

In reflecting on these interactions, I found that volunteer engagement with Planting Justice provided these individuals the opportunity to connect firsthand with the work being done. By working alongside staff within the nursery, they were exposed to the same communal nature that staff members experience daily. As many volunteers discussed with me, it was Planting Justice's mission of reintegration and creating a more sustainable food system that drew them to volunteer, creating an opportunity for volunteers to work alongside reentry staff and share their experiences with others. This process allows volunteers to share their experiences working with Planting Justice to their social network, creating a broader base of people more receptive to the social capital reentry staff have accumulated and use. Volunteer engagement creates a broader base of support and community extending out from Planting Justice which assists the

reintegration process as more people around the community are cognizant and appreciative of the work done by reentry staff at Planting Justice.

I believe another factor that plays into the staff often working separate from the volunteers is that many days do not have an overabundance of volunteers working at the Rolling Hills Nursery. On days I was volunteering, I was often the only volunteer who was there, and as someone who was known and trusted by the staff, I was often treated less like a volunteer. And even on days when I worked alongside other volunteers, or other volunteers were present at the garden, it was frequently in lower numbers, between 1-5 people other than me. This is by no means a truly accurate account of Planting Justice volunteer numbers as I was not able to volunteer everyday due to other commitments. With the nursery staff not having to consistently work with large groups of double digit volunteers on a daily basis, I think this allowed them to be a little more hands off with their volunteers, as they were able to provide a task that offered a plethora of work to the volunteers while also minimizing the micromanaging that staff members would need to undertake.

One exception to this relationship was on days in which large groups came out together for a group workday. I witnessed two different styles of these types of group volunteer days, one in which a corporate group came out and others where groups of students from local high schools came out to volunteer. In attempting to expand its reach, Planting Justice has partnered with many local schools to provide educational programs as well as in nursery work to continue to educate the community about food sovereignty and environmental justice, more on these partnerships later. These programs provide the ability for Planting Justice educational members to travel to schools and give seminars regarding these topics. Some of the educational staff are members of the reentry staff and as such, are able to provide a unique take on the work being

done by Planting Justice and its importance to not only their lives but to the way they approach their lives.

During these group volunteer events, staff members are much more hands on in working with the volunteers, working alongside them in weeding as well as teaching and working with the volunteers in building planter beds. While working alongside staff members weeding with the high school students who came out, I observed staff interacting with these students about the reasons they came out and the desires they had for their future. It was very casual, and I think played heavily into the relationship that Planting Justice already had with the school, even if the specific staff had personal relationships with these specific students.

In observing interactions which occurred between the staff and the corporate group volunteers, it was very much a conversation between equals. I got the sense that the group wasn't out volunteering as a way to fill a contractual quota of volunteer hours, something I consistently experienced during my time with Habitat for Humanity, but rather that the people from this group were out as partners in the work being done by Planting Justice. It spoke to the relationships that Planting Justice has worked to build within the Oakland area, and an important part of the interactions which occur between the Planting Justice community and the broader community of Oakland; more on this later.

In reflecting upon my positionality within Planting Justice and their mission, one thing which stood out to me throughout my time working with the organization was volunteer demographics. While volunteering with Planting Justice, most of the volunteers I met and worked with, whether as individuals or coming in as group volunteers, were white; individual volunteers were almost entirely white, as were business volunteer groups. In fact, it was only within school groups where volunteer demographics were not heavily skewed towards white volunteers. This

observation stood out to me as I reflected both on my position as a white male working with the organization but also reflecting upon the broader demographics of the region.

Processes of gentrification have hit the Bay Area hard, pushing thousands of families out of their homes as the tech boom brought more and more people to the region. In looking around at the garden, these processes are well represented within the volunteer population. Caucasian corporate volunteers coming out to spend a day working with Planting Justice and taking photos of their work, perhaps for the company's social media page so that they can prove they "serve" their community. Individual volunteers coming to Planting Justice either to conduct research, spend a day off from work trying to help their community, and white high school students spending a morning or afternoon at the garden to fulfil an academic requirement. While not every single one of these white volunteers are necessarily transplants to the area, I found that it spoke to the homogenizing force of gentrification. As development increases in formerly redlined and segregated neighborhoods, wealthier (often white) families will seek a new home in an area cheaper than the surrounding suburbs, pushing the former long-term inhabitants from their homes and decreasing diversity in the area.

I found the primarily Caucasian volunteer force of the corporate volunteer group to be especially telling of the region as Bay Area companies tend to lean into the idea of corporate activism, ensuring that their employees volunteer within their communities, even writing volunteer requirements into their employees contracts. I found myself seeing members of this corporate as embodying the idea of the "white savior complex", that they were out here volunteering primarily to make themselves feel better. While it would most likely untrue to reduce the entirety of their visit to this idea, I could not help wondering how committed these individuals were to the work they were doing. Did they interrogate the need for organizations

like Planting Justice to exist prior to spending the day working at the nursery? Did they examine their positionality and their complicity in the issues facing the community Planting Justice serves? In my own experience working with corporate volunteers while with Habitat for Humanity, I found that a majority of volunteers who came to volunteer under the banner of their company were only there because they were required to complete a set number of volunteer hours per year. They did not ask themselves why an organization like Habitat for Humanity or Planting Justice needed to exist and provide these services and they never stopped to think about their relationship with the societal structures creating the tensions for these organizations to face. Many times, they would not focus on the work they were supposed to be doing, instead continuously walking away from their worksite to handle work business.

This was not the case for all Habitat volunteers coming on behalf of their place of employment, nor is it most likely the case for all the volunteers of the corporate groups who spend time working with Planting Justice, but it is the case that many of these individuals may be ignorant of their complicity within the construction and continuation of these structural systems of inequality. This is the very problem I grappled with throughout the entirety of my time volunteering with Planting Justice. As a non-native Californian, was I doing more harm than good volunteering with Planting Justice? Was weeding a few times a week enough to offset the harm I was causing as a white male of privilege; having moved across the country, pursuing a master's degree, and injecting no capital into the community I was volunteering within? I often felt discouraged through the course of my research as feelings of frustration and helplessness emerged as I would wonder if I was truly in the correct position, and was the correct person, to be doing this work.

The connecting thread between the interactions between staff and volunteers, whether it is a lone volunteer for the day or a group, is the sense of empowerment that the staff provides its volunteers. At many places, volunteers tend to be treated as people who come in to help the staff and the organization further their mission and their goals. Planting Justice treats volunteers as though they are part of their organization, creating connections between people coming in and the organization that helps to fuel the growth and success of Planting Justice. This attitude towards volunteers has also had the added benefit of hiring staff members.

In an interview with Planting Justice staff member Diego, a LatinX young man, told me about how a few of the current Planting Justice staff had similar interactions and growth within Planting Justice as I had. In our interview, Diego spoke to me about how two current staff members began their interactions with Planting Justice through the educational workshops provided to the community by the Planting Justice education team. These workshops left such a positive impact on these two individuals that they began to volunteer with Planting Justice on a regular basis, loving the work they were doing. This continued volunteering eventually led to both of these people being hired on by Planting Justice as members of the educational team.

Diego himself also has a similar backstory to joining Planting Justice. His first interactions with Planting Justice came when he was in high school and one of his teachers secured funds to create a garden within the school grounds to teach kids about the food they eat. As part of this program, the school partnered with Planting Justice who came in and provided educational trainings to the students. These trainings covered ideas surrounding food sovereignty, taught the kids about who grows the food they eat, and the conditions within which these individuals work and live in.

Through these trainings, Diego was introduced to Planting Justice an organization that he felt directly connected to the research he had been doing around the same time in high school; examining the impacts and trauma of environmental racism. His studies informed him about the destruction of the minority communities in Oakland and the government's theft of land from indigenous tribes. Diego went on to tell me that the trainings Planting Justice provided his class during this time really stuck with him and he was "lucky enough" that Planting Justice was hiring around the time he graduated high school and was hired to be a Planting Justice staff member within their educational team. He has since moved from the education team to work with all parts of the organization, including the nursery where he currently works.

The stories of Planting Justice hiring staff members from their educational trainings and volunteer teams speaks to the grassroots level of work they do, as well as touches on the positive community Planting Justice has created within their organization. These hiring's also are representative of Planting Justice's mission to use urban agriculture to change the community.

Nathan McClintock discusses how

"Organised urban agriculture projects emphasising self-sufficiency and which situate transformative change within spaces of consumption therefore serve in an *anti-politics* capacity (Guthman 2007a, Pudup 2008) where the transformation of the food system is relegated to individual choice and individual reengagement with food rather than via collective action" (McClintock 2014, 155).

Much of the narrative surrounding food movements is geared towards consumer choice. This discourse leads to people frequenting farmers markets or health food stores in an attempt to both know where their food comes from and to find healthier, more organic, food to purchase and consume. Or people work to grow their own food, either in their own yard or at a community garden. Yet much of this discourse ignores the cost and spatiality that these solutions require.

Health food stores and farmers markets are usually quite expensive, creating a system in which you have to pay your way to feeling more ethical. Systems such as this often price out those who would benefit the most from having access to healthier and more home grown foods.

Access to community gardens or yards to garden in require living in an area that either has a community garden, or having a living space which accommodates home gardening. Although community gardens have been growing in popularity throughout America, they are always readily available to every community who would benefit from them. Growing food for you at home also requires having the necessary space, removing people living in low-income housing units, any apartment dwellers, and many urban residents; as many urban housing units aren't built to accommodate yards the way suburban housing does. Another facet that both having a plot of land in a community garden to cultivate, and working in a garden of home require is time. Generally speaking, demographics at community gardens tend to skew towards older populations, as they are the ones with the time to go to a garden and work during the day. Not many people are willing to work full time during the day, to come home and work more in a garden to provide them with healthy produce.

This is where Planting Justice's solution shines. By hiring members of the community who have engaged with the work of Planting Justice – whether through volunteering or attending educational trainings or a mixture of both – they take this notion of food system change through individual work and compost it; breaking down harmful elements to help create change. Yes, these are still individuals who are engaging with the work of trying to change the food system, but Planting Justice gives them a platform within their community to push these changes alongside them. It brings passionate and dedicated community members into their fold to help build a community based collective movement to create serious change within Oakland's food

system. The members of the community that Planting Justice hires become representatives between the community and Planting Justice, bringing in goals and ideas from the community to Planting Justice on how best to approach their missions, while also acting as a representative of Planting Justice within the community. As a community representative of Planting Justice, these staff members are able to communicate the goals and mission of Planting Justice to the friends, families and neighbors who may not otherwise engage with the organization as well as to bring some of their educational experience from Planting Justice to these same groups, acting as educators themselves, sharing the drive of Planting Justice.

It isn't just volunteers turned employees that are engaged in this way, but all volunteers. Throughout my work with Planting Justice and working on this research, I have used this opportunity to discuss the work of Planting Justice with those closest to me as well as advocating for the work being done by Planting Justice. One volunteer who I worked with first heard about Planting Justice through a friend of hers, who recommended that she volunteer. After spending a few hours working at the nursery, she felt very connected to the mission of Planting Justice and expressed a desire to volunteer again, as well as to do more research into the work done by the organization and recommend volunteering and working with Planting Justice to other people she knows. Another volunteer I spoke with was drawn to Planting Justice through his desire of wanting to be a part of an environmentally friendly energy system. He had a friend who worked for Planting Justice and spoke to hearing so many positive things about the organization that once he left his job, he immediately reached out to volunteer with Planting Justice in an effort to engage and partake in the work being done by the organization.

However, in spite of Planting Justice providing employment for members of the community who engage with their work as an attempt to create a collective movement pushing against the

food system, much of the work Planting Justice does still relies upon the individualistic nature of consumer choice to grow and evolve. Planting Justice still requires people to be interested enough in the trainings that the organization provides to show up and participate. They still need schools, prisons, juvenile halls and similar institutions to reach out to Planting Justice in order to create educational partnerships that can help educate and train the individuals in these spaces. Planting Justice still needs households who desire a green backyard to reach out to them about the installation of a backyard, people driving past and seeing the nursery to come in and shop. Planting Justice still needs individual society members and corporate groups to find out about Planting Justice in order to spend a day, or a collection of days, visiting and volunteering at the nursery or at the 4-acre farm.

While Planting Justice works hard to keep people engaged with their organization once said individual has first entered the door, they still depend heavily on a person coming to them. Planting Justice has tried to minimize this necessity through partnerships with local schools and other such institutions, with other nonprofit and grassroots organizations, as well as working with the city, all in an attempt to get their name and their work better known in the public sphere. That may be working and helping them in their immediate vicinity, it hasn't entirely pushed its name outside of Oakland; I had to learn about it through academic readings and classmates. Planting Justice is working to push their food justice mission away from consumer choice and towards building a collective movement within the community, but still struggle from some of the same tensions surrounding consumer choice and the individualism built up within the food justice narrative.

While the relationships and interactions with volunteers sheds a light on the community built within Planting Justice, and how they work to form it, the Planting Justice community is most

evident in the relationships formed amongst the staff, and the love and support that exist within the organization.

Community built among the Staff

At its core, Planting Justice is a democratic organization which works to ensure that all voices are represented and heard. While, like many organizations, it has a hierarchical structure, none of the interactions I witnessed would lead one to believe that there is much of a difference in power dynamic between any of the employees. What emerges from all the social interactions I witnessed among the staff members, and the importance they held, was the belief that all these social interactions created a sense of mutual trust and respect amongst the staff members, and more broadly within the organization itself.

This trust allows the staff members to feel welcome and accepted within the organization, which aids those individuals hired through the reentry program re-integrate back into the community. “The social interactions facilitated by the project [community gardens] can foster norms of reciprocity and trust – conventional forms of social capital” (Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 2000 as cited by Glover 2004, 143). I postulate that it is not only the social interactions themselves that help to create bonds of trust among the Planting Justice staff members but that the familial atmosphere within Planting Justice itself that furthers these bonds of trust, and aids in the reintegration process.

In creating a supportive community within the organization, Planting Justice works to hire individuals connected with the community. These hires often include members of the same family who are active and engaged within the community. While giving a tour to a group of students visiting the nursery from UC-Berkeley Greg, a tall white male, told the group that many

of the staff members they hire are related; with parents and their children, siblings, or cousins all working together within Planting Justice. As Greg went on to explain, due to Planting Justice being a community based grassroots organization, the found it to be very important to have families from the community represented on their staff, to provide a community based perspective of the work being done by the organization.

One such family is Santiago and Marta, a mother and son pairing, who have worked at Planting Justice for close to two years now. In discussing with Santiago how he got involved with Planting Justice, he told me how he and his mother were part of the community push to have Planting Justice hire more people from the community to work at the nursery. While the community was happy to have Planting Justice take over the vacant space that it now occupies, it was slated to be a truck storage site prior to Planting Justice moving in, the community did have some reservations about the nursery during the first year of operation. Driven by these reservations, the community organized and worked with Planting Justice in hiring members of the community to represent them within the garden. Planting Justice responded positively to these requests and worked to hire more staff from within the community, ensuring that all groups and voices are heard within the organization.

I believe that having families work together at the garden both increases the social bonding occurring within the garden, as well as without. As Katherine Alaimo, Thomas M. Reischl and Julie Ober Allen discuss in their work,

“[h]aving a household member participate in community gardening...was associated with more positive perceptions of bonding social capital, linking social capital, and the existence of positive neighborhood norms and values.”

(Alaimo, Ober Allen & Reischl 2010, 510)

In Planting Justice hiring families to work for the organization, it creates a familial aspect that has permeated the atmosphere of much of the organization. Having families work together with other staff creates a sense of family among those who work there, helping to build the social bonds they all share.

Like many places, some social bonds among the staff were stronger than others. During my time at Planting Justice, I noticed specific staff groupings emerge throughout the work day. While all the staff was friendly and supportive of one another, I often noticed that the LatinX/Mexican staff population seemed to work more closely with one another and the African American staff population work more closely with one another. An additional facet of these groupings was the music played by each group; with the African American staff playing more hip-hop and R&B while the LatinX staff played more traditional Latin music. There were only a couple cases in which these staff groupings could be explained by family (Marta and her son Santiago) or work specialties (the two tree grafters).

One potential explanation could be a division in demographics in Oakland. In his book on Oakland, Robert Self (2005) discussed how African Americans and the Mexican/Latin populations were pretty isolated in political movements throughout the years (Self 2005). With Oakland having been deeply shaped by redlining and political activism throughout the years, perhaps these groupings are a modern representation of decades old trends. In hiring a diverse staff, Planting Justice seems to be positioning itself not only in a way in which their community based organization has representatives from every cultural group in the community, but as a way to break down the built up divisions within urban areas.

In her book “The New Jim Crow”, Michelle Alexander discusses how during slavery in America,

“...the planter class extended special privileges to poor whites in an effort to drive a wedge between them and black slaves.” (Alexander 2012, 25).

In relation to this, Robert Self discusses how political organization in Oakland throughout history was predominately done on a racial basis (Self 2005). Looking at today’s political landscape, that same division still exists, with the general consensus among politicians and pundits being that the Mexican and LatinX population only care about immigration while the African American population only cares about criminal justice reform and income inequality. These cultural barriers were often put in place by the white ruling elite to ensure that the populations without power would not group together to challenge their ruling hegemony.

While it may not always play out in practice, Planting Justice may be working towards breaking down the cultural barriers of political organization, working to create the collective food movement that they believe is necessary to compost the empire’s food system. In partnering with other organizations in the area, Planting Justice is also bringing their multicultural coalition to other issues that the community cares about, energizing it to build a more equitable community for all who reside there. While different cultural groups do seem to work more hegemonically, none of this seems to impact the work done as at the end of the day, as all the staff is friendly and supportive of one another throughout their work. During my time working with Planting Justice, I observed that staff members with a LatinX and Mexican background typically worked more closely with one another in the completion of tasks while staff members with African-American cultural backgrounds worked more closely with one another and indigenous staff members worked more closely with the other indigenous staff. While all staff members work collaboratively with one another, it seems to be that these cultural groupings emerged out of socio-cultural history within the region. One of the staff led

educational meetings I was made aware of focused on being black in America, and for Diego, a LatinX young man, it was an eye opening experience that allowed him to understand and connect with his coworkers more closely. People often tend to gravitate towards others around them with similar backgrounds and experiences to them, providing safety and comfort within social interactions. I believe that this also plays out within the nursery, but that the organization as a whole does a good job of bringing these varied groups together to create connections across these cultural divides to create trust and social capital for everyone involved. The relationships being built among the staff create an atmosphere of safety and acceptance for all the employees, allowing these relationships to be developed further.

In creating space for their employees, Planting Justice also creates bonds of love; trust and respect that make the workplace healthy and welcoming to all. These bonds are strengthened through monthly all staff meeting and educational meetings every two months. These meetings are mostly kept to staff attendance only, except for educational meetings where the materials may be made available for community trainings. These meetings all provide space for staff members from across the organization to come and make their voice heard, listen to the voices of their fellow staff members, and to learn something new.

Every month Planting Justice has an all staff meeting at the nursery; in a yurt they constructed to be their main organizational office. I was unable to attend any of these meetings but from conversations with staff members and overhearing snippets of the meetings as I walked past the office, they are very democratic in nature. As many of the community members are involved in other community organizations, Diego spoke to me about how every staff member brings different ideas into these meetings, often from things they have seen in practice. Marta and Santiago are two such staffers involved in other organizations, as Marta believes that if you are

going to live in a community, you should be active in it as well; especially if you see things you do not like occurring where you live.

Educational meetings cover a range of topics from understanding and working with medicinal plants, to the experience of being black in America. In talking about these meetings with Diego, he spoke to how they created many “a-ha” moments among other staff members, creating a deep sense of trust and connection. In learning more about these meetings, I could not help but realize how important these would be to the reentry staff members. Having the opportunity to discuss with your peers the way your life has been impacted by certain social norms and traumas creates a deep sense of support and love that helps create bonds between the staff. These bonds then extend out to the community as staff members from the community interact with their friends and neighbors, creating further connections between the reentry staff and the community.

By providing space for people to be seen and heard, Planting Justice creates connection amongst their staff. It helps to create social bonds that strengthen social connections and provides social capital for everyone involved. This is an especially important component for the reentry populations, whose social connections help anchor them to the community, aiding reintegration. However, these social connections that are built up between the staff are also expanded out to the general community through partnerships with other local organizations or other groups who want to work with Planting Justice.

Expanding community interactions

As a grassroots community organization, working with the community is an important part of Planting Justice’s mission. Through their Transform your Yard program, the Rolling Hills Nursery, the 4-acre farm, their educational trainings and partnerships with other local groups and

the city government, Planting Justice works hard to be seen working for the benefit of the community.

Planting Justice has many modes of interacting with the community. One of the most intrinsically tied to their mission is through the hiring of staff members from the community. Similar to Marta and her son Santiago, many community members not only work with Planting Justice but participate in many other community organizations. This connection to the community allows Planting Justice to have a direct line of communication to get feedback on the work they do from the community. These staff members thus act as representatives of the community, providing feedback and guidance that can aid the growth of the organization and allow for course corrections should the community wish Planting Justice to take a different course of action.

Community, Planting Justice interactions that have occurred in the past that have helped to shape Planting Justice are the conversations regarding hiring community members to work for Planting Justice and the desire of the community for Planting Justice to purchase the neighboring vacant lot next door to the nursery. The push for community members to be hired by Planting Justice to work with the organization started shortly after the Rolling Hills Nursery began operating. According to Santiago, the first year of the nursery was not well run from the community's view, with a lot of unsavory interactions occurring at the nursery culminating in a fire of unknown origin. Following these instances, the community mobilized and reached out to Planting Justice, stating that if they were going to work in their community and work for the benefit of their community, members of the community should be hired to work alongside Planting Justice. This worked as Planting Justice began hiring members of the community to

work at the nursery, where both Santiago and his mother have been working for the past two years.

I was also informed that members of the community, as well as some of the Planting Justice staff, desire Planting Justice to purchase the vacant lot neighboring the nursery, and that it was community action that allowed Planting Justice to gain the deed to the current nursery land to begin with. As I was told, the lot where the Rolling Hills Nursery currently resides was originally slated to be a storage space for a trucking company, but following the mobilization of the community, it was sold to Planting Justice instead. As for the neighboring lot, while I have not heard of any current plans, the community desires that it go to Planting Justice as well, a desire shared by the staff; with the hopes that it could be turned into a housing complex for Planting Justice employees.

These interactions are deeply embedded in Planting Justice, and create the framework for much of its work. As a community driven organization, Planting Justice works hard to build up the community for all of the residents living within the boundaries. These successful actions led by the community play well into the mission of Planting Justice. Across all the work Planting Justice does, empowering the community is a central component, whether that means empowering them with the knowledge to grow food on their own, or providing them with the means to push against the agrifood industry with a garden in their yard, Planting Justice works hard to build the community. By locating its main source of operations within a community as active as the one surrounding the nursery has only helped Planting Justice to grow.

Yet despite these positive interactions, tensions still exist between the community and Planting Justice. Planting Justice works to put on community events for everyone to attend but in my talks with employees, turnout has not been what they have hoped, with Diego and

Santiago both citing the stigma surrounding formerly incarcerated employees as the communities main concern with the nursery. However, as community members have continued to work with Planting Justice, community attendance has been increasing and the Rolling Hills Nursery is slowly becoming a community center.

In working to become a center of the community, Planting Justice often works with the city government, offering up the Rolling Hills Nursery as a space for community members to gather during city wide projects. I was told that the City of Oakland put on a “clean your community” type of event and Planting Justice worked with the city to make Planting Justice the general meeting place for the event. Volunteers gathered at the Rolling Hills Nursery before the event, at lunch, and after the event was finished; effectively centering Planting Justice as a community focused organization. By acting as a base of operations, Planting Justice created connections with people from across the community, some who hadn’t heard of Planting Justice before, helping the creation of social bonds between the community members and both the Planting Justice staff and the overall Planting Justice organization.

As a result of all this work, Planting Justice is working to create both an after school program for kids and a summer internship for students that will pay between 15 and 16 dollars and hour. Diego told me that the goal of the after school program was to provide a safe space for local students to come after their school day ended, where they could learn about food and the land while their parents were still at work. The internship is being created to provide students with marketable skills in organic farming and other garden related work that they can carry forward with them into a future career.

Both of these programs work to create safe spaces and opportunities for the local youth to succeed and thrive. For many of the reentry staff members, Planting Justice changed the course

of their lives, giving them the opportunity to become so much more than they thought they could be. Rather than continuing to be reactionary in their work, Planting Justice is now looking to be more proactive, providing opportunities and safe spaces for the youth in a disadvantaged neighborhood.

Unfortunately, the reality is that Planting Justice is only so big and has only so much bandwidth. As a single organization, they cannot do everything to reverse the inequities that they work against in their neighborhood. They simply cannot offer paying internships to every single person who needs one. This is the largest overall problem that Planting Justice faces, that they simply cannot do everything. At times during my experience with Planting Justice, it often felt like they were trying to do everything, to provide everything that the community needed. Yet Planting Justice knows its limits and therefore works diligently to create partnerships with other local nonprofit and grassroots organizations to create a web of organizations all working together to create a more equitable community.

In allying themselves with other organizations, Planting Justice is creating a nexus of nonprofit and grassroots organizations whose missions all align on the goal of helping build a better community. This is important to many of the staff members of Planting Justice as it allows them to increase the scope of their work, and as they themselves often are members of these other organizations. In talking with staff members, I got the impression that Planting Justice had positioned itself at the center of this nexus, but I imagine that that belief is due to the fact that I was talking to members of one organization, not all organizations involved.

The concern with this connection of organizations, the after school programs and the internships is that while they are building a network and an infrastructure to aid the community, by doing so they are signaling to the city that the city itself doesn't need to provide these

services, and that it can leave it up to the nonprofits; which also adds the problem of creating potential competition among these nonprofits and grassroots organizations as they fight each other for whatever grant money is available. While capitalism does open the door for organizations such as Planting Justice to do the work they do, it also limits them from fully reaching their goal. By relying heavily on the money from grants and purchases, Planting Justice and other organizations are ever reliant upon outside sources to continue doing the work they do. This creates tension among the programs as they may eventually lose some funding and have to cut some programs, such as an internship or after school program. At the same time, the nexus of organizations Planting Justice is involved with in once again requiring an individualistic, self-help agenda. Different people have to take it upon themselves to create organizations to help those around them, rather than the city taking it upon them to provide the required services.

Yet while tensions and concerns do arise, where this system thrives is by creating a version of a collective action movement against the current capitalistic regime that much of the literature dictates is needed to create lasting change. By connecting and collaborating with a variety of different organizations, Planting Justice has joined a group of organizations with their own employees and own communities to push for change on a much larger scale. While this model is still localized and may not have much of an impact beyond the immediate region, it can push for effective and lasting change for the denizens of the communities these organizations represent. Throughout history, many nonviolent collective action movements succeeded and facilitated change when various groups all came together to fight for a unified cause, who is to say that this isn't what Planting Justice is creating and are experiencing.

Another facet of Planting Justice's communal connection is their education team. As their website states, Planting Justice's education team

“...hire staff directly from the communities we serve, and they develop important mentorship opportunities with our students through consistent weekly programming.” (Food Justice Education).

By hiring educational staff from the same community they work in, Planting Justice is utilizing existing social connections to deepen the bonds which exist between the community and the organization. In speaking about his experience with the education team, Diego spoke to working with and teaching kids he had grown up with, and how it was rewarding to have that experience with them. Hiring from within the community also removes the potential that these educators will appear as “outsiders” who don’t necessarily understand all the issues facing the community, or understand them in a way that creates the connection. Similar to how in academic fields researchers will work alongside the people they are studying to remove the cold and impersonal “researcher” feel from themselves.

In working to build a community within Planting Justice and creating connections between that community and the community they work in, Planting Justice utilizes a range of methods to get their face seen and voice heard. While tensions and conflict are inherent in every grassroots organization, Planting Justice’s ideal of Composting the Empire shines through as their way of taking the weeds existing in our current society and pulling them out, allowing a healthier, and more equitable, society grow.

Harvesting the Seeds of Reintegration:

While examining the relationship between gardening and community creation was an important part of my research, I was also focused on how the community built up through gardening could aid the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals. For both my research and Planting Justice’s mission, using gardening as a central means for reintegrating ex-offenders is a driving focus. After all, if gardening succeeds in creating a community but that community

does not fully accept these formerly incarcerated individuals back into their social fabric, issues could still emerge. In this section I will detail how the community built through gardening, through work done in the nursery and the relationships created through Planting Justice partnerships, both within Planting Justice and outside of Planting Justice, interacts with Planting Justice's mission of reintegrating ex-offenders back into the community, ensuring none of their staff returns to prison.

Community Reintegration

The main focus of Planting Justice's work in reintegrating formerly incarcerated staff members is to provide them with a living wage job. As their website states

“A real living wage is a real incentive to show up for work every day and avoid things that could jeopardize the job”
(Holistic Reentry).

Planting Justice made the decision that they would provide living wage jobs to all their employees, leaning into the belief that in being able to make enough money to support themselves, they would be more likely to show up to work, and that it would reduce recidivism risks; and based off their claim that none of their employees have returned to prison, that belief has seemed to come true. Indeed, Christy Visher (2015) discusses that financial assistance is one of the greatest continued needs for recently released individuals and that by not receiving the assistance

“Frustrated and overwhelmed, individuals returning to their communities often do not receive the services and treatment they need. Relapse and recidivism is a common result.” (Visher 2015, 62).

By providing financial assistance, Planting Justice is removing a potential path to recidivism. In my interview with Diego, he spoke to a common sentiment of gratitude felt by the reentry staff.

Many of these men and women related how “other jobs would have fired me by now or wouldn’t have had the same love for me that Planting Justice does” (Diego interview). The support, love and time Planting Justice spends with and on its reentry employees creates a clear picture as to why they haven’t had a staff member return to prison.

However, despite Planting Justice striving to pay a living wage, they are also located within the Bay Area, one of the most difficult places to afford to live. In conversations with several employees, many of them have additional jobs on top of their Planting Justice, a common feature in the Bay Area. While Planting Justice strives to pay a living wage, they are also at the mercy of their being a grassroots organization. They are not an organization with enormous profits, as a more traditional for profit company would be, and thus cannot necessarily afford to pay higher wages for their employees. This creates tension within the lives of their employees, tensions most Bay Area residents feel, about being able to afford to live here and raise a family here.

Most people spoke to needing a second job in order to afford to pay for a place to live. Housing and rent prices are very high in the Bay Area, and while organizations work to pay living wages and people organize for an increase in affordable housing, nothing has come to fruition. In a discussion with Santiago, he explained to me how the community wants Planting Justice to purchase the neighboring vacant lot, either to expand the nursery or for Planting Justice to build housing units for their employees. This was brought up during my interview with Diego who confirmed that there is a desire to purchase the neighboring vacant lot in the hopes that they could use the space to build affordable housing.

While there currently are no plans to build these units from my understanding (most of it seems to be a long term dream/goal), the construction of these homes would create a unique challenge for the organization. While my time with Habitat for Humanity was spent building the

homes and not working much with the financials, I still gathered a decent amount of background information on the cost of building these units. While the cost to build is quite expensive, and I would imagine Planting Justice would partner with another local nonprofit rather than undertake the endeavor entirely on their own, every home I built with Habitat for Humanity raised the property value of the surrounding houses and overall neighborhood. In the construction of these houses, Planting Justice could run into the same issue that the Transform your Yard program presents to them; that they may create the gentrification they are working to dismantle.

Yet despite the tension associated with affording to live in the Bay Area, providing these affordable housing units parlay's well with another Planting Justice goal; returning capital investment to the East Oakland community. Despite the risk of gentrification, it would help to develop the land and turn it into something positive, rather than a vacant lot that may be targeted by some other company to be turned into a storage space; potentially creating environmental hazards for the community. It provides their employees a safe place to live and call home, reduces their dependence on public transit or other forms of transportation (which helps them to save money) and provides a positive face for Planting Justice in the community. As Santiago told me, the community is really advocating for Planting Justice to be able to own this nearby lot. In purchasing it and building homes on it, this action can be interpreted by the community that Planting Justice is working hard to invest in the community, helping to build closer bonds between the staff and the community.

An interesting facet that I believe aids the reintegration process is that there is no existing difference between staff members hired following their release from prison and the staff members hired from the surrounding community. In a chat I had with Sonya, an older indigenous employee, I learned that Planting Justice does not have separate employee sections.

There aren't reentry employees and community employees but rather that all employees receive the same treatment and same experience, the only difference being that reentry employees receive a little extra assistance on the front end of their employment tenure to aid them in the initial reintegration process of finding a place to live and getting their feet under themselves. I found this approach to be incredibly insightful as throughout my time working with Planting Justice, I also did not perceive any outward difference in treatment. Planting Justice strives to treat all their employees the same with all of their employees having the same benefits and treatments as everyone else. Planting Justice is a space where every person is heard, every person is equal, and every person is accepted. The work done in the community by Planting Justice plays another important role, beyond that of helping to build the community, but in creating relationships between the organization and the neighborhood, Planting Justice is creating connections to help the reentry staff reintegrate back into the community.

Neighborhood and community dynamics play a vital role in prisoner reintegration. As Christy Visher writes

“...neighborhood social processes may affect individual transitions from prison to community. Formal and informal social controls involving local social networks are likely to vary across neighborhoods and these processes may deter or exacerbate individual propensities to commit crime.” (Visher 2015, 63)

Planting Justice reentry staff could, and does, have amazing relationships with their fellow employees, but if they leave the workplace and are treated poorly by the community, the work being done by Planting Justice may not be as effective. As has been stated to me and can be seen more on the Planting Justice website and Instagram page, the reentry staff is forever grateful to Planting Justice for providing them with their position. The reintegration process that Planting Justice provides is aided by the connection created between the nursery staff and the community.

With many Planting Justice staff members being hired from the community, it creates a semblance of community representation within Planting Justice, helping to ensure that there are people who live within the community who can help aid the reintegration process. While the entire community of East Oakland is not represented through one organization, Planting Justice's focus on a multi-cultural staff creates an inclusive dynamic that helps to span the gap between staff members and community members of varied backgrounds. Not every member of East Oakland may have the same idea's regarding community cohesion but those working to create equality and opportunity for communities of color often overlooked by white-dominant structures of power have created a sense of community within the garden, and within the surrounding community that they can attach to. The relationships built between reentry staff and community staff provide a community anchor and entry point within which these men and women can begin to reintegrate into the community. As Santiago told me during our discussion, in Planting Justice staff working alongside ex-offenders, they become advocates for them within the community and can help bridge the divide that some community members feel towards the nursery and the staff. It helps to ease the tension the community feels about having formerly incarcerated staff members working at Planting Justice as the community members such as Santiago and his mother Marta can help to put a face to a section of our population that is often kept anonymous; an anonymity that can breed fear.

As neighborhood dynamics are so important for formerly incarcerated individuals to reintegrate into the neighborhood, creating social capital amongst some of the community represented staff members works similarly to building social capital with the community. Todd Clear et al (2001) speak to the importance of having formerly incarcerated individuals working on neighborhood and community projects. In their piece, they recommend involving formerly

incarcerated individuals in neighborhood projects as aiding the reintegration process and reducing the recidivism risk as

“This would put ex-offenders in productive contact with fellow residents in neighborhood activities that lead to the overall improvement of the community. It also would reduce the stigma and isolation associated with incarceration.” (Clear et al 2001, 347).

Through hiring formerly incarcerated individuals to work at Planting Justice, they are actively involving these formerly incarcerated men and women in projects and work that aim to improve the overall life of the various members of the community, as well as the community as a whole. They go and mentor in schools and jails and juvenile halls, becoming involved in those communities. Planting Justice is working to reintegrate their reentry staff in the community by following the exact model Clear et al discussed.

This model has been successful for Planting Justice. They have a zero percent recidivism rate among their staff and despite initial hesitations from the community about formerly incarcerated individuals working in the nursery, community representation at nursery events has increased. Both Santiago and Julio have discussed with me that the hiring of community members to work alongside formerly incarcerated individuals has provided that necessary social bridge for the community to begin to feel more comfortable with the reentry staff in their neighborhood. They spoke to the fact that community events over the past couple of years have seen increased turnout year after year, and that more people come to visit the garden than had been originally. By mixing community related work with community connection, Planting Justice has created a model for reintegration that is working well in the Bay Area.

One thing I did observe through all of this is that despite the positive work being done by the reentry staff with Planting Justice, the community still needed their own members as a way to

vouch for these men and women; added to the fact that these men and women need to do positive work in the community to be accepted. I found the interaction to be slightly disheartening as it signaled to me that despite the fact that the reentry staff is comprised of individuals who made a mistake or were lead down a wrong path in their youth, the simple act of completing their prison sentence wasn't enough for the community to accept them back in. Rather they had to finish their sentence and then be fortunate enough to be hired by Planting Justice and complete work building up the community through the work of Planting Justice, *and* having community members work alongside them and speak to their humanity before the formerly incarcerated members of Planting Justice began to truly be accepted into the community.

For me this really signals a deeper issue with the social consciousness surrounding the criminal justice system and those who have spent time in prison. In a way that is very reminiscent of the food justice movement, it appears to me that it is once again an individualistic process to reintegrate formerly incarcerated individuals back into our communities. A critique of the food movement is that those who are the most affected by the inequities of the food system are the ones who must shoulder most of the work to create the change they desire to see in the food system; only for others to coopt it, alter it, and utilize the changes made to enact further harm against these communities. To make matters worse, these communities frequently weren't the ones in power making the decisions that lead to the inequalities present in the food system, and that they are victims of those in power who decided to benefit themselves over providing equal good to all.

In a similar fashion, I find our current system of prisoner reintegration to once again put the onus of reintegrating onto the shoulders of the victims; those caught up and involved with the criminal justice system. And for many of those incarcerated in our country, they were targeted

specifically by racist police laws to ensure that they would stay in prison, or remain under constant supervision. Prisoner reintegration shouldn't be thrust upon the shoulders of formerly incarcerated individuals, especially when many may have economic and housing concerns as well. The community itself should be responsible for the social reintegration of these men and women, and perhaps through being a part of the social reintegration process, the community can also be an influential factor in alleviating the economic and housing concerns. By pushing Planting Justice to hire community members to work alongside the staff at Planting Justice, the surrounding community seems to believe that in order for those formerly incarcerated individuals to be accepted back into their community, they need people who can vouch for them as opposed to accepting them back with open arms.

Yet Planting Justice can be seen as a model for a better way to reintegrate prisoners. While it does play by some of the socially defined rules surrounding reintegration (namely the method that Clear et al laid out), they also buck the trends by treating them as staff members versus signifying on a daily basis that they are *reentry staff* rather than *staff* members. I find that the messaging surrounding this is a benefit, both mentally and socially, to these individuals and can be a model for communities and organizations alike to follow to aid the reintegration process.

The family dynamic within Planting Justice creates an appreciation for the organization amongst the staff members as well. In a staff spotlight post on the Planting Justice page, employee John claims that

“Planting Justice gave me a better look at a better life. I’m able to share that with kids in high schools, juvenile halls, prisons, and county jails. I’m able to help kids to turn their life around by being a mentor, a friend, a big brother, a dad.” **(PJ Insta)**

Another employee, Darryl, states

“[With the Planting Justice Educator Team], I’m given the opportunity to shine my light while engaging with our future [the youth]. So look at me now: 121 days of freedom under my belt and I’m continuing the good work and making that change in not only my life but in the lives of those I come in contact with.” (PJ Website)

Planting Justice has provided the space for these men to be leaders and role models for the community.

In providing this space to be role models, Planting Justice is also creating a space for them to heal. Thomas Lebel, Matt Richie and Shadd Maruna (2015) discovered through their study that being a “wounded healer”, a formerly incarcerated individual working for prisoner reentry programs, can aid those wounded healers

“in reconciling a criminal past, and will be positively related to perceiving less personal stigma, prosocial attitudes and beliefs, active coping strategies, psychological well-being, and satisfaction with life.” (Lebel et al 2015, 116).

In working with others who have similar experiences with the criminal justice system as they do, wounded healers are able to work through the trauma they experienced, and feel free of the stigma following them around, all while providing aid and guidance to those currently incarcerated to help them grow.

Relationships between formerly incarcerated individuals are also incredibly important once formerly incarcerated individuals are released from imprisonment and returned to the community. As Nancy Wolff and Jeffrey Draine (2004) write

“Prisoners released in the past and successfully living in the community are an untapped and virtually unexplored source of potential social capital for those who are now reentering the community.” (Draine and Wolff 2004, 479).

Creating relationships and forming bonds with formerly incarcerated individuals is a crucial component of newly released individual’s path towards reintegration. The reentry employees

working with Planting Justice have a zero percent recidivism rate (Holistic Reentry), an example of the positive change that Planting Justice helps create in these individuals' lives.

In utilizing this oft ignored aspect of reentry, we see hints of Planting Justice's mission to compost the empire. In providing space for these formerly incarcerated individuals to act as role models, counselors, teachers and success stories, Planting Justice is proving that with support, both socially and economically, formerly incarcerated individuals can return to their communities.

Reintegration of the Land

While not necessarily a goal that has any defined strategies, the work Planting Justice does helps reintegrate the land into the lives of the people who engage with the organization. In conversations with many staff members throughout my time working at Planting Justice, many of them related to me that coming to work in the garden, spending time weeding and helping plants to go, was very therapeutic for them and helped to relieve stress. My own experience is the same as this. The days I spent at the garden helped to relieve a lot of the stress I was experiencing in my life; whether that was stress from school or working on this project or stress from everyday life. As soon as I was at the garden and working, the stress seemed to melt away.

In their study on community gardens in South-East Toronto, Sarah Wakefield et al (2007) discuss how some of their respondents voiced repeatedly the benefits of gardening to their mental health:

“...sometimes when you are stressed out...when you go to the garden, you feel different.” (Wakefield et al 2007, 97).

“It helps you hold onto life.” (Wakefield et al 2007, 97).

For so many people, working in a garden is very stress relieving and can help better their mental health. In a chat with my mother about gardening, she relayed to me that the reason she has always loved gardening is that it is a space for her, and that it helps to calm her mind and stress after a long day or long week.

Having a space to heal and relieve stress is a tremendous benefit for everyone, especially within a heavily urbanized setting. As Sarah Wakefield writes,

“Participants appreciated ‘[the] opportunity to get out into nature even though I live in the city’. The community gardens were seen to offer spaces of retreat within densely populated neighborhoods.” (Wakefield et al 2007, 97).

This sentiment is shared by many staff and volunteers, who link the stress relief of the nursery to the fact that the Rolling Hills Nursery is a plot of greenspace in an otherwise urban area. One volunteer I was working with told me that he came to Planting Justice in an attempt to be a part of a renewable and environmentally based energy system, and become closer to the earth.

Throughout our day, we discussed how humankind had pulled itself out of our planets ecosystem and were destroying the planet and he mentioned how important he found spaces such as the nursery to be; that they help to center people and remind them of the importance of gardening.

Working at the nursery has had added health benefits for many of the employees as well. Pedro, a Mexican nursery employee, told me how before he worked at Planting Justice, his diet consisted of mostly processed foods he could buy from the grocery store but since starting with Planting Justice, he has been eating more fruits and vegetables, and starts every morning with a fruit and vegetable smoothie. He also talked to me about how whenever he does feel stressed, or notices coworkers around him getting more stressed, that stress is almost always linked back to not starting the day with their healthy smoothie.

In addition to creating better eating habits, working with Planting Justice has also led many of the staff to creating their own gardens in their backyards. Both Diego and Pedro told me that they themselves have created gardens in their yards while relaying that many of the other staff members have felt empowered to build their own gardens as well. The action of taking the knowledge they learned from Planting Justice and building gardens of their own in their own yards is a representation of the food sovereignty goals Planting Justice aspires to. In a similar vein as their Transform your Yard program, staff members creating their own gardens is an act of resistance against the corporate food system. The construction of these gardens allows the staff members to remove themselves partially from needing to purchase food from the grocery store, allowing them to reshape the food system as they see fit. Added to this is their employment with Planting Justice, working to create opportunities for more people to have the knowledge and abilities to grow their own food.

Yet while this is a positive for the staff members in terms of their health, it also raises the same tension as the Transform your Yard program, in that establishing a garden in your yard raises your property value. While Planting Justice works to pay their employees a living wage, there is inherent difficulty in paying a living wage within the Bay Area. As staff members build gardens in their yards, the value of their property may raise above levels they can pay for, creating a situation in which they push themselves out of their own neighborhood; despite working for an organization that is intent on building a better community for all the residents and the staff members. While the processes of gentrification haven't yet reached East Oakland, it will be something to watch for as Planting Justice continues its work; if they can create a community that builds everyone up, or if that community is then beset by developers and investors, pushing everyone out of the neighborhood.

In addition to creating connections between people working with Planting Justice and the earth, a connection to the earth also brings people to Planting Justice. In a conversation with Pedro about how he became involved with Planting Justice, he told me how he had been doing research into the colonial history of America, and the world, and was getting angry about everything that had happened but didn't know what to do. So he went to his yard and in meditating and partaking in a religious ritual, he received what he described as a vision of how best to protect the earth and reverse the impact of colonialization. Immediately after he told me that he began researching different organizations and ways that he could help create this change, including looking into how to start and run his own nonprofit. Through this research he came across Planting Justice and has been with them ever since. He told me that he wants to learn how to run a nonprofit while working with Planting Justice so that he can take everything he has learned from Planting Justice, and everything he is passionate about in regards to the earth, and create an organization which can help aid the community the way that Planting Justice does.

While working with Planting Justice, Pedro has found that he feels that working with the plants being grown at the nursery help to reconnect him with both the earth, and the society around him. He spoke to his belief that working with nature helps to reconnect people to one another, especially those separated by urban environments. In reflecting on the connections created through the nursery at Planting Justice, the organization does do a great job of creating connections between those involved with the organization; as soon as they begin to work with Planting Justice.

In my own experience, in addition to relieving stress of my everyday life, working at the garden helped me work through the death of my grandmother. In the first day back at the garden following me return from Minnesota, the act of weeding helped me work through everything that

I was feeling. In being at the nursery, a green space built within an urban environment, I felt connected to the earth in a way that I had been absent in my life for a long time. I remembered that we as people are all connected, and that in a similar fashion that we all arise from the earth, we too must return to the earth. The interconnections created within the environment helped me to remember that while we as people may feel disconnected from one another, we are all parts of the same ecosystem, the same world, and will forever be connected to each other; regardless of if that person has passed on or not.

Conclusion

In working to compost the empire, Planting Justice works to take existing systems and flip them over, exposing an unseen side of an issue to help create a more equitable society. Through their work to weed out the elements of injustice in the Bay Area criminal justice and food systems, Planting Justice is creating space for a more just society to grow without being suffocated by injustice. Planting Justice as an organization works to create a positive change within their community through a variety of means. Central to this is their work to help reintegrate formerly incarcerated individuals into the community.

While gardening is central to the work being done by Planting Justice, it is hard to determine whether or not that is the exact reason for the success Planting Justice has had in ensuring successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals back into their community. The work done by Planting Justice to create deep connections among all their staff members also plays a role in creating a space for these men and women to feel welcome and comfortable within the community, the relationships Planting Justice have built within the outside community, from families to organizations, as well as the positive impact engaging with nature plays on peoples mental health also plays a role in helping formerly incarcerated individuals back into the community. Perhaps it is less a focus specifically on gardening that aids reintegration but how gardening is used that is proving successful for Planting Justice.

Planting Justice has made gardening the central focus of their work to build a better community in the Oakland area. Through building backyard gardens for homeowners, providing a safe space for kids to come after school, internships to provide marketable skills, paying their employees a living wage and providing spaces to be heard and reconnect with the earth, Planting Justice is pursuing their goal of composting the empire through many avenues.

While some of their work may potentially have negative impacts on the overall conditions of the community (increased possibility of gentrification, living wage not being affordable to live in the region), they still strive to make a change within the food system and the community.

Through partnerships with the community, schools, other organizations and other institutions, Planting Justice works to create a collective movement that helps to create a more equitable food system and improve the community. One community that has seen its benefits are the formerly incarcerated individuals who come in contact with the organization.

Through the connections created by nature, Planting Justice has built an organization that effectively prevents recidivism. None of the employees have returned to prison, all of them are extremely grateful to Planting Justice and enthusiastic to continue working with the organization, and the stigma surrounding formerly incarcerated individuals is slowly declining with the East Oakland neighborhood.

In working with Planting Justice and rediscovering the connection that I had with nature, I am once again reminded how inter-connected we are as people even if we refuse to see it. As Planting Justice has shown, centering a community connection within the environment creates a lasting impact both on the facilitation of greater social connection between individuals, and on the connection between the earth and our general society.

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