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FOOD OPPRESSION: LESSONS FROM *SKIMMED* FOR A PANDEMIC

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INTRODUCTION

In her book, *Skimmed: Breastfeeding, Race, and Injustice*, Andrea Freeman powerfully illustrates how differences in circumstances shape the decisions Black and White mothers make to feed their infants. *Skimmed* explores an important topic, which surely impacts each person as newborns—breastfeeding. Specifically, the book presents how White privilege hides under American cultural assumptions and prejudices, feeding the trope that White mothers make better parenting choices by breastfeeding. Such perspectives fail to acknowledge the policies fueling infant formula and the racial disparities making formula a popular substitute to milk, if not the default source of nourishment for many. By focusing on the histories of Black motherhood and breastfeeding, Freeman examines the “choice” (p. 4) to use formula through the experiences of the Fultz quadruplets, African American girls born in 1946 who became marketing pawns of a formula maker since birth (p. 1).

As *Skimmed* exemplifies, racial injustices and privilege obfuscate the most natural choice mothers face: to breastfeed (or not). Throughout the book, Freeman expertly analyzes material factors (such as economic choices and public subsidies), cultural influences (such as everyday assumptions and prejudices), and the long historical trends that feed these injustices in gender and race-based terms.

This Essay has three parts. Part I focuses on the concept of food oppression and how material and ideological forces socially castigate Black mothers. Part II explores the book’s use of popular culture

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examples—references to historical and current news stories and movies—to help identify the cultural disenfranchising experienced previously by the Fultz family and currently by Black women. Part III uses food oppression examples in *Skimmed* to assess COVID-19 pandemic challenges for food industry workers deemed part of the essential workforce.

I. FOOD OPPRESSION VS. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Skimmed defines “food oppression” as cooperation between the government and other industries that leads to health disparities for marginalized communities and makes poor health appear to be the result of personal choices (pp. 8–9). The central focus of food oppression is to exploit structural factors, such as the government supporting food, agricultural, and pharmaceutical industries to produce unhealthy food items, leading to health disparities along racial, class, and gender lines (p. 8). Similarly, food oppression capitalizes on cultural aspects, such as the idea of personal responsibility. Food oppression also validates the argument that marginalized communities suffer from poor health because of the choices they make as individuals, effectively ignoring or overlooking the context, history, and policies that lead to poor health, instead insisting individuals bear the primary responsibility. Freeman elegantly shows the influence of food oppression over history’s longue durée for Black mothers in the United States. From the unwise slave with limited education to the “welfare queen” who takes advantage of generous government support, food oppression attributes poor health to bad “choices.” By building on racial and gendered stereotypes, Freeman illustrates how current food marketing pushes products like formula.

In prior scholarship, Freeman applied the concept of food oppression to various food justice topics, including the constitutionality of food insecurity,¹ food benefits,² the farm bill,³ and

1. See Andrea Freeman, *Unconstitutional Food Inequality*, 55 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 840 (2020).

2. See Andrea Freeman, *You Better Work: Unconstitutional Work Requirements and Food Oppression*, 53 U.C. DAVIS L. REV. 1531 (2020).

3. See Andrea Freeman, *The 2014 Farm Bill: Food Subsidies and Food Oppression*, 38 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 1271 (2015)

food labeling.⁴ In a 2007 article, she explained food oppression is difficult to identify for two reasons.⁵ First, it stems from the cooperation of market forces and government policy.⁶ Second, food consumption is regarded as a “matter of private choice and free will,” which leads to “blaming individuals for their own health problems.”⁷ This focus on personal responsibility, as Freeman points out, “dominates medical, scientific, and social views of health.”⁸

In earlier works, Freeman noted how food oppression analyses focus on experiences and the “interconnected nature of race, class,” and other identities, rather than food or health policies that emphasize neutrality.⁹ Through a food oppression approach, *Skimmed* effectively pinpoints how intersecting identities suffer from the power of political and economic actors (pp. 12–13). Specifically, *Skimmed* demonstrates how pediatricians, health officials, schools, and government agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, are incentivized to make infant formula the convenient, economical, and “normal” choice (pp. 116–17). By making power the subject of analysis, in this case, it is oppression from state and private cooperation, *Skimmed* unmasks how structural forces and not personal choices sustain health disparities.

In this light, the concept of food oppression continues the illuminating work of critical race theory, emphasizing the daily and seemingly routine challenges people have. The everyday need to feed their families and themselves forces people to confront critical realities—food assistance, poverty, or sensationalized shaming news accounts. *Skimmed* demonstrates how structural and cultural forces shape mothers’ profoundly intimate and needed act of feeding their newborns and infants. Through food oppression, the reader can see how the problem is the history, context, and policies, not the mother who nurtures their child.

4. See Andrea Freeman, *Transparency for Food Consumers: Nutrition Labeling and Food Oppression*, 41 AM. J.L. & MED. 315 (2015).

5. Andrea Freeman, *Fast Food: Oppression through Poor Nutrition*, 95 CALIF. L. REV. 2221, 2245–46 (2007).

6. *Id.* at 2245.

7. *Id.*

8. See Andrea Freeman, *The Unbearable Whiteness of Milk: Food Oppression and the USDA*, 3 U.C. IRVINE L. REV. 1251, 1253 (2013).

9. *Id.* at 1255.

Freeman makes this powerful case regarding infant formula through the Fultz quadruplets. Born in rural North Carolina, the four baby girls were parties to a complex contract with a formula company (p. 20). The company needed such an arrangement since, at that time in history, formula was not as popular as today, much less amongst African American mothers.¹⁰ The contract secured economic support and infant formula for the Fultz quadruplets, and in exchange, the girls were marketing subjects to espouse the benefits of formula (p. 20). As a result of the agreement, the quadruplets were followed in popular media, presented as prime symbols of the product's appeal and health. The media nationally recognized the Fultz girls as healthy formula consumers (p. 23). However, unbeknownst to the public, the medical doctor who delivered and cared for the quadruplets as children had a financial stake in the specific formula maker (p. 20). In simple food oppression terms, the care and health of these young girls took a backseat to the commercial and product development goals of the formula industry. Freeman charts these developments in easy-to-follow reference points regarding household economic choices, healthcare incentives, and retail appeal for a brand name pantry staple.

The Fultz infant formula example of food oppression builds on a racist backstory. Freeman explains how centuries of slavery formed the cultural assumption that “[B]lack mothers” breastmilk was better, with many enslaved Black women forced to nurse White infants (pp. 37–39). This created a division, reinforced by labor and economic circumstances, between newborns and their mothers breastfeeding. By the twentieth century, when formula was developed, corporate makers capitalized on this space to market and then sold the product to African American mothers. Such trends currently persist with formula makers lobbying physicians, hospitals, and other outlets, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), to subsidize and support infant formula (p. 56). For example, infant formula is provided with credits and at substantial discounts almost immediately after childbirth (p. 116). For those in economic

10. The company was one of the first to market items, aside from tobacco alcohol and beauty products, specifically to African American families. (p. 2). In the 1930s and 1940s, formula was mostly marketed to elite white women. (pp. 59–60).

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need, these efforts effectively promote government policies prioritizing formula while downplaying breastfeeding.

Freeman explains how food oppression, as it relates to breastfeeding, currently manifests. A common cultural trope is that Black mothers only use formula and White mothers make the better choice to breastfeed (pp. 8–9). In reality, public health policies and workplace laws pose enormous hurdles for mothers who choose to breastfeed in public or at work. *Skimmed* convincingly explains how cultural tropes and long-term assumptions influence commercial trends to push formula and maintain stringent breastfeeding policies that discourage this most common activity. Newborns and infants need milk; for centuries, economic and policy choices limit this for Black mothers.

II. THE CULTURAL WEIGHT OF INJUSTICE IN *SKIMMED*

Skimmed expertly illustrates the material and conceptual effects of gendered and racial injustice. Using historic and contemporary popular culture examples, the book describes cultural tropes, news, and movies. The examples notably show the influence of commonly held prejudices, unconscious biases, and the societal and long-term tenure of these conceptions. Freeman's illustrations are powerful and convincing. Critical scholarship can at times appear esoteric or too abstract, crafting new analytical categories and specific jargon. This can be off-putting for some readers. However, Freeman expertly and seamlessly avoids this by touching on historical, economic, and cultural analysis. Through various popular culture examinations, *Skimmed*'s arguments become far more convincing, illuminate new relations, and inspire further reflection for the reader.

The history of breastfeeding relies on tropes. They allow people to make quick judgments and foster cognitive shortcuts (p. 87). Four tropes help explain how American society currently perceives Black mothers: "Mammy" who takes excellent care of White children while ignoring her family (pp. 88–90); "Jezebel" with an "insatiable sexual appetite" (p. 89); "sharp-tongued" and quick to anger "Sapphire" (p. 90); and, most relevant to the injustices of breastfeeding, "Welfare Queen" a composite of the three (p. 91). The Welfare Queen is indifferent to her children's needs, uses sexuality to further her interests, and is manipulative—reflecting aspects of the Mammy,

Jezebel, and Sapphire, respectively (pp. 91–92). *Skimmed* shows how none of these stereotypes allow for the “possibility of good mothering” since they emphasize serving White people (Mammy), lust (Jezebel), or cruelty (Sapphire). Masterfully, Freeman examines the start of this history of prejudice in 1786 and then draws clear similarities to present day news stories about bad Black mothers.

Such tropes frame the type-casted roles for Black women in Hollywood plots. *Skimmed* offers concrete and accessible descriptions to show how structural forces perpetuate the idea that Black mothers make bad choices. Freeman uses popular culture examples, which, by definition, appeal to broad audiences to illustrate the structural and long-term interests that result in racial injustices for Black mothers. Freeman ties these images and their narrative evocations in early films, such as *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) (p. 99). These stories are not relegated to film history but continue, as Freeman describes, with Academy Award winning *Monster’s Ball* (2001), *Precious: Based on the Novel “Push” by Sapphire* (2009), and *Moonlight* (2016) (pp. 99–103). Moreover, recent screwball and overwrought comedies add to this with a long line (over ten) of Madea movies since 2003 plus multiple examples of Big Momma movies since 2000 (p. 100).

The power of these cultural readings begins to shine when compared to *Skimmed*’s descriptions of news stories about Black mothers. The book shows how societal prejudices internalize and tell current news with these tropes. This includes stories specific to mothers and infant death, their children killed by police, their use of public assistance, and even animal attacks (pp. 96–98, 106–11).

As a book on the daily concern of feeding newborns and infants, *Skimmed* provides an excellent window into racial injustices. It uncovers the history, economics, and cultural assumptions at play for a subject often overlooked by scholars and by policymakers. In the opinion of this Essay’s author, a food law and cultural studies scholar, Freeman’s analysis excels with the food oppression lens. This concept allows the book to tie in material concerns, such as the economics of the formula industry and its support from government agencies, with long-term and present cultural trends.

III. COVID-19 UNMASKS THE FACES OF FOOD OPPRESSION

Just as *Skimmed* became available to readers in early 2020, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and a global pandemic began to spread, igniting mass fears of disease, death, and job loss. In the United States and across the globe, lockdowns disrupted supply chains for household items and basic food staples. Consumers began to think about who produces, delivers, cooks, serves, or sells their food. Governments classified food industry workers as essential, requiring them to continue working while other industries worked remotely. With the spread of COVID-19, these essential workers worked in dangerous conditions, working in close proximity to co-workers or the public and likely risking infection. This section uses a food oppression perspective, similar to *Skimmed*, to analyze the impacts COVID-19 has had on women in the food industry, the supply chain, and other food sectors. This section will examine why workers in the food industry face disproportionate risks to COVID-19 exposure.

Skimmed provides a sophisticated example of how to examine both history and the present in an effort to propose future reforms. Unfortunately, as of November 2020, the world remains deep in the pandemic with few signs of an end. Over half a year since the global pandemic began, some United States regions face new case surges and news waves of infection outbreaks. The pandemic's impact on food industry workers cannot yet be fully understood. But a food oppression perspective may assist in making critical analytical connections, albeit early and not fully formed.

Just as *Skimmed* shows how Black mothers feel the physical effects of anti-breastfeeding policies, food workers now physically suffer from exposure to the virus. This public health crisis brings to light the impact of food oppression on workers in the production, rather than consumption, stages of the food supply chain. Food oppression obfuscates workers who face unhealthy employment settings while emphasizing workers can freely choose to take on these risks.

In the pandemic economy, women workers are extremely vulnerable because of various employment-based factors. For example, they tend to work in jobs with a greater risk of exposure. As the *New York Times* reports, “One in three jobs held by women has been designated as essential[,]” and “nonwhite women are more

likely to be” essential workers.¹¹ More specifically, nearly two-thirds of frontline workers are women, with their overrepresentation as cashiers (71.8%) and fast food and counter workers (67%).¹² Moreover, many non-White women are at higher risk of job loss during the pandemic.¹³ Concentrated in insecure and low-wage service jobs, Latinx women have the highest unemployment rates at 20.2%, compared to 16.4% for Black women.¹⁴ Unemployment rates for White and Asian American women are 15% and 14.5%, respectively.¹⁵

Additionally, these low-wage jobs lack needed protections, such as sick leave or health insurance, meaning women must continue to work even when ill. Only a quarter of food service workers have sick days, limiting their ability to stay home and avoid infecting others.¹⁶ In its report on frontline workers, the Center for American Progress explains women of color “stand at the intersection” of multiple forms

11. Campbell Robertson & Robert Gebeloff, *How Millions of Women Became the Most Essential Workers in America*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 18, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/us/coronavirus-women-essential-workers.html>.

12. HYE JIN RHO ET AL., CTR. ECON & POL’Y RSCH., A BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF WORKERS IN FRONTLINE INDUSTRIES 3 (2020), <https://cepr.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020-04-Frontline-Workers.pdf>.

13. See Jocelyn Frye, *On the Frontlines at Work and at Home: The Disproportionate Economic Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic and Women of Color*, CTR. AM. PROGRESS (Apr. 23, 2020, 9:00 AM), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/04/23/483846/frontlines-work-home/>; See also Claire Thornton, *Black, Latina and Immigrant Mothers Are Losing Jobs as COVID-19 Child Care Crisis Grows*, USA TODAY (Dec. 28, 2020), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2020/12/28/black-latina-women-lose-jobs-covid-19-crisis-limits-child-care/4011462001/>.

14. Megan Tobias Neely, *Essential and Expendable: Gendered Labor in the Coronavirus Crisis*, STANFORD U. CLAYMAN INST. FOR GENDER RSCH. (July 3, 2020), <https://gender.stanford.edu/news-publications/gender-news/essential-and-expendable-gendered-labor-coronavirus-crisis>.

15. *Id.*

16. Kimberly Kindy, *As Coronavirus Spreads, The People Who Prepare Your Food Probably Don’t Have Paid Sick Leave*, WASH. POST (Mar. 4, 2020, 11:08 AM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/as-coronavirus-spreads-the-people-who-prepare-your-food-probably-dont-have-paid-sick-leave/2020/03/04/7b35965a-5d51-11ea-9055-5fa12981bbbf_story.html.

of bias, and “deep-rooted cultural attitudes” devalue their work.¹⁷ As laborers, women of color face similar socio-economic and cultural forces as Black mothers.

These working conditions function as food oppression in the production stage of the food system.¹⁸ Workers’ physical health and well-being are at risk when they perform job duties and seek remuneration. Just as a complex mix of legal incentives and policies impact breastfeeding, similar public forces affect women food workers.¹⁹ Workplace and health regulations hinder protections for workers who “choose” to go to work. Most significantly, health safety violations rarely lead to changes in work conditions in farming and food processing plants.²⁰

Agriculture workers exemplify the health risks present during food production. The pandemic threatened many industries, as lockdowns forced many employees out of work.²¹ In particular, farmers worried crops could not be tended to or harvested, aggravating consumer supplies and causing losses for farm owners and their reliant food companies.²² As lockdowns continued, the

17. Frye, *supra* note 13.

18. See generally Helena Bottemiller Evich, Ximena Bustillo & Liz Crampton, *Harvest of Shame: Farmworkers Face Coronavirus Disaster*, POLITICO (Sept. 8, 2020), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/08/farmworkers-coronavirus-disaster-409339>.

19. See, e.g., Mya Frazier, *The Poultry Workers on the Coronavirus Frontline*, THE GUARDIAN (Apr. 17, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/17/chicken-factory-tyson-arkansas-food-workers-coronavirus>.

20. See Monica Campbell, *Farmerworkers Are Getting Coronavirus, They Face Retaliation for Demanding Safe Conditions*, THE WORLD (July 29, 2020), <https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-07-29/sick-covid-19-farmworkers-face-retaliation-demanding-safe-conditions>.

21. Jeanna Smialek, Ben Casselman & Gillian Friedman, *Workers Face Permanent Job Losses as the Virus Persists*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 2, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/03/business/economy/coronavirus-permanent-job-losses.html>; Zeeshan Aleem, *Poll: Half of Americans who lost their job during the pandemic still don't have one*, VOX (Sept. 27, 2020), <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/9/27/21458234/coronavirus-jobs-unemployment-rate>.

22. See David Yaffe-Bellany & Michael Corkery, *Dumped Milk, Smashed Eggs, Plowed Vegetables: Food Waste of the Pandemic*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 11, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/business/coronavirus-destroying->

Department of Homeland Security issued letters designating farm work as essential, which created a confusing message, particularly for undocumented workers.²³ While their jobs were authorized as essential under government policies, their status as workers was less than secure under immigration laws. Ultimately, many worked with the understanding that their work, while not authorized, was expected because their work was too vital during a public health emergency. However, in reality, while avoiding food loss was an essential objective, it was not enough to ignore unauthorized immigration presence or halt deportations.

Moreover, farm conditions are particularly prone to COVID-19 outbreaks.²⁴ A recent epidemiology and public health study found farm work is one of the most significant social determinants for COVID-19 deaths in rural areas.²⁵ Workers travel in cramped buses or vans to and from plots with few amenities. Problems also develop with crowded living arrangements. These conditions, which are typical for agriculture workers, increase the likelihood of rapid infection spread.

As COVID-19 began to spread, worker safety became a more prominent issue. Some safety practices—such as physical distancing and personal protective equipment (PPE)—were not promoted or maintained in the workplace. Many agricultural workers did not receive PPE or were unable to keep physical distance while at work or commuting. Additionally, workers faced retaliation when they asked or demanded improvements.²⁶ In April 2020, as the first wave of COVID-19 hit California, the women farmworker group *Lideres Campensinas* called on the state to improve pandemic working

food.html. *See also* Mark Weintraub, *U.S. Farmers Leave Fields Fallow as COVID-19 Wrecks Crop Prospects*, REUTERS (Aug. 10, 2020, 5:12 AM), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-crops/u-s-farmers-leave-fields-fallow-as-covid-19-wrecks-crop-prospects-idUSKCN2561C8>.

23. *See* Robertson & Gebeloff, *supra* note 11.

24. *See* Catherine E. Shoichet, *The Farmworkers Putting Food on America's Tables Are Facing Their Own Coronavirus Crisis*, CNN (Apr. 11, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/11/us/farmworkers-coronavirus/index.html>.

25. *See* Rebecca Fielding-Miller, Maria Sundaram & Kimberly Brower, *Social Determinants of COVID-19 Mortality at the County Level* (July 1, 2020) (unpublished manuscript), <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.03.20089698v2>.

26. *See* Campbell, *supra* note 19.

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conditions in agriculture.²⁷ Notably, the group's demands included pandemic specific requests and general farm work complaints, emphasizing their work conditions forced employees to choose between risking infection by working or failing to support their families by staying home.

Similar COVID-19 risks exist for workers in the meat and poultry processing industry. These employees cut up and process animal carcasses in close proximity to each other in refrigerated environments, conditions ripe for virus spread. In April 2020, President Trump signed an Executive Order calling for meat processing plants to remain open, despite worker infections and deaths, claiming a meat shortage was likely.²⁸ Previously, the Governor of Iowa called on meat processing plants to remain open despite risks to workers because "without them, people's lives and our food supply will be impacted."²⁹ Infections resulted from usual work conditions that traditionally expose workers to toxic chemicals and pressures to speed up the line to increase output and decrease consumer costs.³⁰ Essentially, the consumers' and meat companies' fears were prioritized over the known pandemic risks to workers.

As the food industry and government continue to prioritize production over safety, food workers pay the price. The Food & Environment Reporting Network (FERN) maintains an updated COVID-19 database for farming and food processing. As of January 13, 2021, FERN lists COVID-19 cases in 1,374 meatpacking and food processing plants and 385 farm and production facilities.³¹ From these facilities, positive COVID-19 cases appear for at least 82,101 workers, with 53,502 in meatpacking, 15,987 in food processing, and

27. Letter from Lideres Campesinas, to Jennifer Newsom and Gavin Newsom, First Partner and Governor of California (Apr. 1, 2020) (<http://www.liderescampesinas.org/corona-virus/letter-to-the-governor/>).

28. Exec. Order No. 13,917, 85 Fed. Reg. 26,313 (Apr. 28, 2020).

29. Josh Funk, *Stopping Virus a Huge Challenge at Crowded US Meat Plants*, AP (Apr. 23, 2020), <https://apnews.com/article/3245fe475b5552e493cfeb288ce04131>.

30. See Frazier, *supra* note 20.

31. See Leah Douglas, *Mapping Covid-19 Outbreaks in the Food System*, FOOD & ENV'T REPORTING NETWORK, <https://thefern.org/2020/04/mapping-covid-19-in-meat-and-food-processing-plants/> (last updated Jan. 13, 2021, 12:00 PM ET).

12,612 in farms.³² Of these, 357 workers died, including 269 in meatpacking, 48 in food processing, and 40 in farms.³³ Similarly, grocery workers and other food industry workers fell victim to the virus.³⁴

More than seven months into the pandemic, COVID-19's racial disparities stand out, in terms of virus deaths and contractions, amongst African Americans, Latinx, and other groups. The *New York Times* reports that African American and Latinx persons are three times more likely to be infected and are nearly twice as likely to die than white populations.³⁵ The COVID Racial Data Tracker explains the virus "affect[s] Blacks, Indigenous, Latinx, and other people of color the most."³⁶ Compared to Whites, the APM Research Lab reports that the age-adjusted mortality rate for African Americans is 3.8 times as high, 3.2 times as high for Indigenous persons, 2.6 as high for Pacific Islanders, 2.5 times as high for Latinx, and 1.5 for Asians.³⁷ Academic research examining COVID medical treatments

32. *Id.*

33. *Id.*

34. See Nikita Richardson, *More Than 40 Grocery Workers Have Died From COVID-19*, GRUBSTREET (Apr. 13, 2020), <https://www.grubstreet.com/2020/04/grocery-workers-covid19.html>. See also Abha Bhattarai, *'It Feels Like a War Zone': As More of Them Die, Grocery Workers Increasingly Fear Showing up at Work*, WASH. POST (Apr. 12, 2020, 3:32 PM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/04/12/grocery-worker-fear-death-coronavirus/>; Eric Schlosser, *America's Slaughterhouses Aren't Just Killing Animals*, THE ATLANTIC (May 12, 2020), <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/05/essentials-meatpacking-coronavirus/611437/>; Liz Crampton, *In Absence of Federal Action, Farm Workers' Coronavirus Cases Spike*, POLITICO (June 9, 2020, 7:55 PM EDT), <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/09/farm-workers-coronavirus-309897>.

35. See Richard A. Opiel Jr. et al., *The Fullest Look Yet at the Racial Inequality of Coronavirus*, N.Y. TIMES (July 5, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/05/us/coronavirus-latinos-african-americans-cdc-data.html>.

36. *The COVID Racial Data Tracker*, THE ATLANTIC: COVID TRACKING PROJECT, <https://covidtracking.com/race>. (last visited Jan. 13, 2021).

37. See *The Color of Coronavirus: COVID-19 Deaths By Race and Ethnicity in the U.S.*, APM RSCH. LAB, <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race> (last updated Jan. 7, 2020).

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in the early months of 2020 reached conclusions consistent with these figures.³⁸

In sum, Freeman's food oppression perspective suggests a powerful method to isolate how food workers in the pandemic risk their lives to produce food. As *Skimmed* shows, policy and history fuel the myth of personal choice for breastfeeding; similar factors aid in understanding the effect of COVID-19 on food workers.

CONCLUSION

Skimmed proves itself a groundbreaking work with its analysis of the racial injustices feeding the myth of personal responsibility in breastfeeding. The topic alone should catch more attention from scholars and policymakers interested in race, gender, and, most importantly, motherhood. The food oppression lens provides a powerful tool to examine centuries of history, unchallenged cultural assumptions, and the influential nuances of workplace laws, food subsidies, and health profession practices. Moreover, these innovative connections become easier to understand with Freeman's attention to popular culture, in the form of tropes, movies, and news stories. All of this suggests race, socio-economics, gender, and unchallenged cultural assumptions stand in the way of any reform. This suggests *Skimmed's* discussion of food oppression may pave the way for similar analyses needed in this moment, marked by a pandemic, lockdowns, food shortages, job loss, the need for PPE, and physical distancing. Race and gender impact workers who risk their lives to put food on our tables.³⁹ Hopefully, more expert analysis, like *Skimmed*, can illuminate the issues facing women workers in the food industry.

38. See, e.g., Gregorio A. Millett et al., *Assessing Differential Impacts of COVID-19 on Black Communities*, 47 ANNALS EPIDEMIOLOGY 37 (2020); Eboni G. Price-Haywood et al., *Hospitalization and Mortality Among Black Patients and White Patients with COVID-19*, 382 NEW ENG. J. MED. 2534 (2020); Cary P. Gross et al., *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Population Level Covid-19 Mortality* (May 11, 2020) (unpublished manuscript), <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.07.20094250v1>.

39. See generally Catherine Ragasa & Isabel Lambrecht, *COVID-19 and the Food System: Setback or Opportunity for Gender Equality?*, 12 FOOD SECURITY 877 (2020).