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**You Are What You (Can) Eat: Cultivating Resistance through Food, Justice, and
Gardens on the South Side of Chicago**

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In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis,

2015-16 academic year, Pomona College, Claremont, California

Readers:

Professor Francisco Dóñez

Professor Char Miller

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Shout out to Black musicians, our modern-day griots, for teaching me about the Black experience. Shout out to my first love, hip hop, for sustaining me.

Above all else, I am especially thankful for my mama, who always keeps my heart and belly full, and my daddy, who always reminds me to take breaks and care for myself. Both of you keep me nourished in many more ways than I can count. I love you dearly.

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Introduction

“Years ago, there used to be a grandma in our house that had a big black bag, and in the black bag she had a jar called a Mason jar. And she would go to the white man’s kitchen. And she’d fix the greens. And then she would put the greens on his table and she asked a question: ‘Can I take some of these greens home to my children?’ He said ‘No. I own the greens, I own you, and I own the children. You can’t take them home. You can’t take no greens home.’ She said ‘no problem.’ She went back to the kitchen, opened up that big bag, pulled out two or three jars called the Mason jar, and she would take the juice and put it inside of the Mason jar. And she would go home and fix some hot water cornbread. And she would pour the juice. One of the children asked, ‘Grandma, what’s that you giving us?’ She called it potlikker. And what grandma was doing was giving the children the nutrients and the vitamins and the juice that the heat sucked out of the greens so that he really got dead greens, but she got the live juice. And she called that potlikker.”¹

Reverend Albert Sampson’s voice rings in the quiet empty of Fernwood United Methodist Church in the Roseland community of Chicago’s South Side. Just a few moments earlier, we had walked from his office across the street. Even at the most sluggish saunter, the trip could easily take no more than 30 seconds. However, because I was walking alongside Rev. Sampson, those seconds doubled into a minute and stretched until at least five minutes had passed before we finally were able to reach the church steps for no other reason than his popularity. Everyone on the block seems to know him. As soon as he steps outside, he is showered with cheery “good afternoons” and “how are you?”. Neighbors wave hello from across the way, drivers poke their heads out of their

¹ Albert Sampson in discussion with the author, July 2015.

windows to holler their greetings to him as they roll past, his phone is constantly buzzing, but he never fails to smile and offer good-humored quips as he pats the shoulders of each neighbor he passes. He pauses and earnestly points at the street sign above him at the intersection of 101ST and Wallace Street that reads: “Honorary Rev Al Sampson St.”—a testament, if nothing else, to how important he is to the community.

Reverend Sampson was ordained by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1966 and was an active leader throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Today, he continues in his pursuit of Black liberation. Since 1978, Sampson has been transporting vegetables from Black farmers down south to Black consumers in the Chicago area through an organization he started called the George Washington Carver F.A.R.M.S.—Farmers Agricultural Research Management Systems.

Yet now, as we sit face-to-face in his church sanctuary and talk under the canopy of fifty-four African flags, posters of Marcus Garvey, and the stares of life-sized cutouts of Barack and Michelle Obama, Sampson is unsmiling. The weight of the subject is far too heavy to lift the corners of his mouth. We are talking about food, who can eat the best of it, and why.

Sampson’s Roseland community is 97% Black.² Over 15,000 people here are food insecure or unsure of when their next meal will be and how they’ll get it.³ About 38% of the adults⁴ and 56.4% of the children here are obese.⁵ These are not coincidences.

² “2010 Census Data Fact Sheet by Chicago Community Area.xlsx - 2010_Census_Data_Fact_Sheet_by_Chicago_Community_Area.pdf,” *Illinois Action for Children*, September 2011, http://www.actforchildren.org/site/DocServer/2010_Census_Data_Fact_Sheet_by_Chicago_Community_Area.pdf?docID=1741.

Roseland is not unlike many other parts of Chicago's largely Black-populated South and West Sides. In fact, Roseland is not unlike many other Black communities across the United States of America. The wellbeing of this South Side block Sampson and I are talking about is not only an issue of concern for the two of us, but further for the nation as a whole.

We must know why Black people are disproportionately denied access to adequate food to sustain themselves and their families time and time again. We must know why consumers in some communities "can buy French fries, but not fresh potatoes" or "ketchup, but not fresh tomatoes," as Chicago Congressman Bobby Rush probed in his 2008 opinion piece for *The Hill*.⁶ We must know why Black people travel farther than any other racial group to reach the closest grocery store, though they can easily find a fast food joint within half that distance.⁷ We must know why Black people are 1.4 times more likely to be obese than white people.⁸ We must know why Black communities in the

³ "Hunger in Chicago | Research and Studies - Greater Chicago Food Depository," *Greater Chicago Food Depository*, 2012, http://www.chicagosfoodbank.org/site/PageServer?pagename=hunger_research.

⁴ DCastillo, "Roseland Children's Initiative," Text, *Promise Neighborhoods*, (February 11, 2013), <https://promiseneighborhoods.ed.gov/pn/grantee/roseland-childrens-initiative>.

⁵ Helen Margellos-Anast, Ami M. Shah, and Steve Whitman, "Prevalence of Obesity Among Children in Six Chicago Communities: Findings from a Health Survey," *Public Health Reports* 123, no. 2 (2008): 117-25.

⁶ Daniel R. Block et al., "Food Sovereignty, Urban Food Access, and Food Activism: Contemplating the Connections through Examples from Chicago," *Agriculture and Human Values* 29, no. 2 (October 18, 2011): 3, doi:10.1007/s10460-011-9336-8.

⁷ Mari Gallagher, "Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago," 2006, 17, http://www.marigallagher.com/site_media/dynamic/project_files/Chicago_Food_Desert_Report.pdf.

⁸ Marqui Mapp, "Low-Income Blacks Stranded in Food Deserts | theGrio," June 22, 2010, <http://thegrio.com/2010/06/22/low-income-african-americans-stranded-in-food-deserts/>.

South and West Sides of Chicago are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases like diabetes and experience the greatest total years of life lost because of it.⁹ We must know why these issues aren't site-specific to the South Side blocks of Chicago; we must know why suffering is uniform in Black communities all across the entire United States of America.

Black folk are dying and we must know why in order to change that. Yet as of now, attempts to alleviate the health problems of Black people have failed at making the changes we so desperately need to see. There is a disconnection between public health research methodology and discourse and the lived experiences of those in affected communities. There are systems of power in action that affect all of our lives—some more forcefully than others. Some of these institutions are historic with enduring impacts, such as slavery, and others more recent and as consequential, including segregation, industrialized food, and disparate access to nutritious food. Inaccessibility to healthy foods and the subsequently poor health outcomes of the Black community are a vestige of white supremacist systems of domination of the past, present, and even the future, too, if we do not properly address and actively work towards dismantling them.

I argue that we cannot “fix” the issue of food access without knowing the history of Blackness in this country. Though food is widely recognized as a basic necessity for humanity, disparate access to it highlights whose bodies, environments, health, nutrition, and utter existence has mattered most in American society—and whose bodies, environments, health, nutrition, and utter existence has mattered the least. Failure to sufficiently historicize and contextualize social factors undermines our understanding of

⁹ Gallagher, “Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago,” 29.

the relationships between positionality, food access, adverse health outcomes and any efforts we make to improve them.

My thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter introduces the current food system and how it affects Black people. There is a lack of quality food in Black communities and it's making them sick—intentionally. Under the guise of objectivity, institutions of power have historically been used to reinforce, legitimize, justify and mobilize the systems of oppression that have led to the manifestation of slavery in the 19th century, segregation in the 20th century, and the incarceration, wealth, and health disparities of today. These systems of domination are imprinted on everything, even the foods in our neighborhoods and on our plate—or rather, lack thereof.

The second chapter details the complicated relationship between Black people and food as a result of the institution of slavery. After being stolen from the motherland, Black people were stripped of their humanity, resulting in their bodies being traded for food items such as sugar and rum, being thrown the slave master's leftovers and unwanted parts, and them making a delicacy of it—commonly referred to today as “soul food.” I argue that all of this continues to have direct and lasting consequences on the way Black people eat today.

The third chapter takes a closer look at some of the historical underpinnings that have come to shape the flagrant racial segregation of Chicago that has impacted the food available to the Black community. I write about Chicago not only because it is my beloved hometown, but also because, as Hirsch writes in *Making the second ghetto: race and housing in Chicago, 1940-60s*, “the tools that were developed to control and mitigate

the consequences of racial succession were...made available to the country at large.”¹⁰

We are all implicated in this.

In the fourth chapter, I will highlight alternative food pathways forged by community members in the South Side of Chicago. Food justice work is an act of survival and resistance that has proven to be an important source of community empowerment to transform the Black community and its relationship with food, land, and the environment. By examining the food justice work in a city like Chicago and placing the agency of the community at the center of my research, I hope to better understand the mechanisms by which urban community food justice work serves as a successful, sustainable means of fostering positive health outcomes; and how this might be used to improve the health of other historically marginalized communities.

Finally, I cannot emphasize enough that this thesis is a labor of love. Researching and writing has been cathartic experience for me. As I write this, I can't help but be flooded by my earliest memories of being a chubby Black girl living in public housing in the hood of Uptown, guzzling blue Hug juices and licking the red dye of Flamin' Hot Cheetos off my finger tips. This thesis intentionally privileges the too-oft silenced Black narrative and centers the multiplicity of voices, pains, joys, and lived experiences of the African Diaspora, including my own. We, Black people, are not monolithic. Neither are our experiences. Anyone who wants to try to help the Black community must listen to our stories first. Even the most genuine and valiant efforts to help—regardless of the problem—is done in vain if carried out without hearing what the affected community wants first. So please, listen carefully.

¹⁰ Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), xiv.

Chapter 1: Who Has Access to Healthy Foods?

*"Born sinner, the opposite of a winner
Remember when I used to eat sardines for dinner."¹¹
-Notorious B.I.G., Juicy*

Some of my fondest memories of my childhood are centered around food. Not the food supplied by my school, though. My Catholic elementary school was sorely under-resourced; we were regularly served greasy sloppy joes and meats processed far beyond recognition. (We also didn't have a gym. We played on the church steps and parking lot, but we made the best of it by taking clothing lines and turning them into double Dutch ropes, though I never could quite jump in on time and was dubbed "double-handed" because I couldn't hold the rhythm steady enough...)

But the minute my elementary school's last period bell rang, my friends and I would snap our notebooks shut, hurriedly stuff our belongings into our book bags, and excitedly scurry to the tiny-but-stacked corner store just down the street. Jam-packed with all the treats of our dreams, the corner store easily became a part of our daily afterschool routine. I'd stride confidently into all too familiar aisles and debate between whether I would treat myself to a Cosmic brownie that day or just stick with my usual 25¢ chip bag or two. Once my decision was made, the teller would nod to us familiarly, swipe the quarters I had laid on the counter, and bring it back to his register neatly tucked behind bulletproof windows. Just like that, with Hot Crunchy Kurl crumbs outlining our

¹¹ "The Notorious B.I.G. – Juicy Lyrics | Genius," accessed December 12, 2015, <http://genius.com/The-notorious-big-juicy-lyrics>.

mouths and freeze pops identified by color rather than artificial flavor in tow (blue was always the best), we were on our merry way.

During the summer months when class wasn't in session, my mother—who at the time juggled being a full-time student with two part-time jobs in addition to being my full-time mama—would drop me off at the baby sitter's with a *Lunchables* or *Kid's Cuisine* package in hand. I would pick out the meals I wanted to eat that week on our Saturday trips to the grocery store. We didn't have a car, so weekly walks to our nearest *Aldi's* became sort of tradition. I loved grocery trips with mama. I think it was because despite the fact that she was always carrying more plastic bags than I'd ever seen anyone carry at once, in true superwoman fashion, my mama somehow always managed to have a hand ready for me to hold. These moments are among some of my favorite memories together.

At this point in my life, frozen dinners and chicken-flavored Ramen Noodles were some of my favorite meals. Little did I know, I was turning my body into a toxic waste dump—the consequence of which only time will tell. But I am not the only one who ate this way. These “food” items are hood staples for the Black community across the nation—but why? Who determines what you can eat? Who designs the current food system? For whom was it created? In this chapter, we will consider the design of the urban foodscape and built environment as a way to begin thinking about how white supremacist domination affects the food we are able to eat.

The notion that people are fat because they eat more and move less is underdeveloped/rudimentary at best and insulting/stereotypical/damaging/violent at worst. People's food choices are limited by the options available to them both financially

and proximally. Today there are 49.1 million Americans that worry daily about how they will provide enough food for themselves and/or their families—let alone healthy, nourishing food.¹² Of the 16% of the US population struggling with food insecurity, a whopping 53.6%¹³ are Black or Latin@, though they only make up approximately 30% of the greater national population.¹⁴ Furthermore, many communities of color inhabit environments across the United States of America in which there is a dearth of affordable and nutritious foods. These “food deserts” are populated by fast food chains, convenience stores, and liquor stores that carry little else but cheap meat and dairy-based foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, and processed foods like snack candies, chips and soft drinks. Studies have shown that not only do the supermarkets of predominantly Black neighborhoods have a smaller selection than predominantly white neighborhoods, but also white neighborhoods have an average of four times as many supermarkets as Black neighborhoods.¹⁵ Wealthier and whiter suburban communities, by contrast, often serve as “food oases”, or areas possessing disproportionate access to fresh, healthy, affordable food.¹⁶ Even healthier foods are more expensive than unhealthy foods in food deserts.

¹² “Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative (GFJI),” Introduction, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://growingfoodandjustice.org/race-and-the-food-system.html>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “2010 Census Data Fact Sheet by Chicago Community Area.xlsx - 2010_Census_Data_Fact_Sheet_by_Chicago_Community_Area.pdf.”

¹⁵ “Food Deserts | Food Empowerment Project,” accessed April 22, 2015, <http://www.foodispower.org/food-deserts/>.

¹⁶ Renee E. Walker, Jason Block, and Ichiro Kawachi, “Do Residents of Food Deserts Express Different Food Buying Preferences Compared to Residents of Food Oases? A Mixed-Methods Analysis,” *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 9, no. 1 (April 10, 2012): 41, doi:10.1186/1479-5868-9-41.

Between 1989 and 2005, the overall price of fruits and vegetables increased by about 75% while the price of unhealthy foods decreased by more than 26% nationally.¹⁷

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), in 2008 more than 23 million people in the US lived in food deserts.¹⁸ The USDA qualifies census tracts if they meet both the low income threshold—based on having a poverty rate of 20 percent or greater or a median family income at or below 80 percent of the area median family income—and the low-access threshold—based on the determination that at least 500 persons and/or at least 33% of the census tract's population live more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store.¹⁹ It is possible, however, that the data collection by the US government does not reflect the true number of those living with low access to fresh, healthy, affordable food. According to the North American Industry Classification System, small convenience stores are grouped into the same category as supermarkets such as Safeway and Whole Foods when calculating the statistics.²⁰ Because of this, a community with a couple of corner stores offering little more than processed junk foods and liquor might very well be classified as having two adequate retail food outlets.²¹

Limited access to healthy, affordable foods has had major health implications for low-income communities of color. Across the nation, African Americans are 1.4 times more likely to be obese than white people.²² Residents of food desert zones have significantly increased risk of adverse health outcomes such as diabetes, heart disease,

¹⁷ “Food Deserts | Food Empowerment Project.”

¹⁸ “Agricultural Marketing Service - Creating Access to Healthy, Affordable Food,” accessed May 22, 2015, <http://apps.ams.usda.gov/fooddeserts/foodDeserts.aspx>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Food Deserts | Food Empowerment Project.”

²¹ Ibid.

²² Mapp, “Low-Income Blacks Stranded in Food Deserts | theGrio.”

and other diet-related illness. One study of Chicago neighborhoods even found that the death rate due to diabetes in food deserts is double that of areas with access to affordable groceries.²³ Furthermore, research estimates that approximately 70% to 90% of disease risks are probably attributable to differences in environment.²⁴ Neither the formation of food deserts, nor its disparate health outcomes, are happenstance.

Hitherto, popular health discourse has failed to acknowledge race and class as factors that are inextricably linked to obesity and obesogenic environments. The master narrative claims that the solution to the ‘obesity epidemic’ is to eat less and exercise more.²⁵ Such simplification allows people to vilify those who are overweight/obese and peg them as “lazy” and/or “unambitious” and/or “lacking willpower.” Yet we must acknowledge the role of the food industry—and the people behind it—in the observed adverse health outcomes of low-income communities of color. As the sociological law of oligarchy states, the power elite is an exclusive, powerful and privileged group of people, often white, heterosexual, upper-class males that control resources such as education, housing, jobs, health care—even food. This power elite is responsible for making most of the decisions in society and they do so for their own advantage, which privileges them and tends to heavily disadvantage marginalized groups, including low-income people of color. The main concern of the food industry is to sell as much food as possible. This industry—or “Big Food” as some like to call it—targets vulnerable populations that are least likely to be able to access food that is good for their health and often times are

²³ “Food Deserts | Food Empowerment Project.”

²⁴ Stephen M. Rappaport and Martyn T. Smith, “Environment and Disease Risks,” *Science* 330, no. 6003 (October 22, 2010): 460–61, doi:10.1126/science.1192603.

²⁵ Julie Guthman, *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism* (University of California Press, 2011).

dependent on federal health care because they live in poverty. The prioritization of private profits and special interests ahead of public health and the resulting health disparities is reflective of systematic failure that exploits the most vulnerable populations and ultimately fattens the pockets of the already rich.²⁶

Food deserts are usually characteristic of low-income communities of color because of factors like racist insurance and lending practices that make it difficult to develop and sustain businesses in certain areas, white flight, and the subsequent net loss of supermarkets to suburbs with larger sites, fewer zoning impediments, and customers with greater purchasing power. Supermarkets refuse to relocate to the inner city due to misconceptions about lack of profitability and security in these neighborhoods, even though these communities are densely populated and have considerable market power.²⁷

The solutions that have been implemented in order to “fix” unhealthy environments—such as creating outlets for fresh fruits and vegetables in urban food deserts, redesigning public spaces to encourage walking and bicycle riding, and city-sponsored educational campaigns to achieve obesity reduction—are merely “salutary solutions” that “downplay the salience of race and class in explaining the spatial patterning of obesity and defining what constitutes a healthy environment.”²⁸ This is because they are based on the simplistic understanding that “people are fat because they are surrounded by cheap, fast, nutritionally inferior food and a built environment that

²⁶ Stephanie Soechtig, *Fed Up*, Documentary, (2014).

²⁷ “NYLS Food Deserts Report,” accessed July 11, 2015, <http://www.racialjusticeproject.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2012/06/NYLS-Food-Deserts-Report.pdf>.

²⁸ Guthman, *Weighing In*, 67.

discourages physical activity.”²⁹ Unfortunately, this very common understanding of the cause of obesity, as *Weighing In* author Julie Guthman argues, is not only naïve and underdeveloped, but also proved to be problematic because it shapes the way we attempt to mitigate and sometimes even end up exacerbating health disparities. Understanding obesity this way assumes that the environment acts on people and that people are not agents in these environments, reinforcing the idea that these people are “unthinking dupes without personal responsibility.”³⁰

As a result, these salutary solutions do not carefully consider well established histories and trends and instead gentrify the environment to be more like those of the wealthy—which worsens disparities by displacing low-income communities of color by wealthy, often white newcomers because the area is no longer living wage. Solutions such as produce vans and conventional supermarkets do not necessarily reflect the needs of community residents, though they are often assumed to be able to alleviate the poor living conditions without any input from community members at all. Even the burgeoning alternative green food movement in opposition to industrial agriculture has proven to be inaccessible to many because it “presumes that food-ways are individual choices removed from their social and economic constraints.”³¹ This analysis of what author Michael Pollan calls “industrial eaters” assumes that those who are unable to access the “local”, “organic”, and “slow foods” that this movement calls for are “less worthy others.”³² To truly “fix our obesity problem,” we must first address the social

²⁹ Ibid., 66.

³⁰ Ibid., 87.

³¹ Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability* (MIT Press, 2011), 12.

³² Ibid.

structural factors that manifest in the built environment and the ensuing health outcome disparities. We must first recognize that the issue of food access transcends linear connections to poor health outcomes. Disparate food access is about the way “power, control, and inequality are written into the American landscape.”³³ According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), environmental justice is “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”³⁴ Environmental justice will be achieved, the EPA explains, “when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.”³⁵ Through this environmental justice framework, food justice activism recognizes our current food system as an “environmentally and socially destructive centralized agribusiness system in which race and class inform inequalities of material resources and decision-making power.”³⁶

Our present day food system incorporates a network of production, harvest, processing, transporting, and marketing that brings food to our forks and into our mouths—but it is also undeniably rooted in a history of enslavement and exploitation of Black and Brown bodies. Through time, communities of color have been stripped of their ability to own land, produce their own food, and access locally available and affordable healthy foods, even though their physical labor is the driving force of food production

³³ Block et al., “Food Sovereignty, Urban Food Access, and Food Activism,” 3.

³⁴ OECA US EPA, “Environmental Justice,” Announcements & Schedules, accessed April 18, 2015, <http://www3.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice*, 12.

itself. It is a paradox, then, that Black people forced to come to this country and labor on U.S. land literally built the foundation for the systems of oppression that inform present-day inaccessibility to food in Black communities.

The institution of slavery has complicated the relationship between Black Americans and food, to say the very least.

Chapter 2: The Complicated Relationship between Black people and Food

*“Mmm, fried chicken, fly vixen
Give me heart disease but need you in my kitchen”³⁷*
-Nas ft. Busta Rhymes, Fried Chicken

The act of eating food stimulates all senses. We obviously taste food, but we also see it, smell it, touch it, and hear it. We see the colors and textures of food, and even the location of where we are eating. The smell wafts through our nostrils as the food is being prepared, once it’s actually on the plate, and just before it meets our tongues. We feel food with our hands and mouths. We listen to the sizzle of food as it browns, the clanking of dishes and utensils, the bite when our teeth crushes it to bits, and the satisfying gulp that follows. Our taste buds get excited when we eat our favorite meals, nip us when they are not so pleased what they are experiences, and sometimes seem to have no reaction at all.

Where we eat are often place of shared community, places where we share food with each other and establish family tradition. It is where we come together, sit together, cook together, talk together, laugh together, and most importantly, sustain ourselves and one another.

Because eating is such a sensory stimulating experience, memory and food go hand in hand. Food has the ability to trigger memories—even memories that you yourself haven’t personally experienced. This is what Marianne Hirsch has coined “postmemory,” which is:

³⁷ “Nas – Fried Chicken Lyrics | Genius,” accessed December 12, 2015, <http://genius.com/Nas-fried-chicken-lyrics>.

The relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.³⁸

Many Black people carry the postmemoric trauma of the Middle Passage and slavery with them. During the Middle Passage, Black people—after being tied up and stacked one right after the other, starving and laying in their own sweat, urine, feces, and menstrual blood for several weeks on a ship (if they actually survived the trip)—were stripped of all humanity. Black bodies were literally traded in exchange for things like rum and sugar.³⁹ Black people were no longer people, but rather reduced to the status of a food item. Black bodies were being consumed.

But what did the Black bodies themselves consume? Many of the traditional staples of the Black American diet, from black-eyed peas to collard greens to chitterlings, have humble beginnings. What many refer to as “slave food” was borne out of necessity. Slavery was an economically driven institution, and as such, slave traders had to feed their chattel enough of what they would actually eat to survive to voyage across the Atlantic. This meant that slave traders that actually cared enough about their money reproduced the diets of their slaves’ native African lands in the cheapest way possible so that their cargo would survive, providing food items like corn, rice, and/or yams for them to eat.⁴⁰ Upon arrival, Black slaves were continually fed minimal rations of food to just barely sustain them enough to carry on their daily labors. They were often thrown the

³⁸ Marianne Hirsch, “POSTMEMORY.net,” accessed September 15, 2015, <http://www.postmemory.net/>.

³⁹ Vivian Nun Halloran, “Recipes as Memory Work: Slave Food,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 53, no. 2 (July 1, 2012): 154, doi:10.1080/14735784.2012.682791.

⁴⁰ Byron Hurt, *Soul Food Junkies*, Documentary, (2012).

leftovers from master's table and "had very little discretion when it came to what to feed their families in order to keep body and soul together."⁴¹

Because there were substantial rates of illiteracy in the Black community—enslaved and free—most recipes were not written down.⁴² Much of the knowledge of how to prepare the food is inherited. The trauma is, too. In Norman R. Yetman's *When I Was a Slave: Memoirs from the Slave Narrative Collection*, Millie Evans describe her experience eating her meals in a hog trough:

My ma had to work hard, so every time Old Mistress thought we little Black chillums was hungry between meals she would call us up to de house to eat. Sometimes she would give us johnnycakes and plenty of buttermilk to drink with it. Dey had a long trough for us dat dey would keep so clean. Dey would fill this trough with buttermilk, and all of us children would get around de trough and drink with our mouths, and hold our johnnycakes with our hands.⁴³

Though some level of nostalgia permeates Ms. Evans recollection, Vivian Nun Halloran points out that forcing Black slaves to eat out of the hog trough "most disturbingly blurs the boundaries between the way humans and animals are treated" and is telling of Black people's reduced status to chattel.⁴⁴ In the documentary film *Soul Food Junkies* by Byron Hurt, similar recollections resurface as he recalls moments during his boyhood when his grandfather told him stories about his own grandfather eating out of hog troughs. Black people quite literally ate from the "bottom of the barrel."⁴⁵

The shared pains and collective traumas from the associations Black people have with slave food are continually passed down through time. Black playwright and novelist

⁴¹ Halloran, "Recipes as Memory Work," 155.

⁴² Ibid., 148.

⁴³ Norman R. Yetman and Federal Writers' Project, *When I Was a Slave: Memoirs from the Slave Narrative Collection* (Courier Corporation, 2002), 31.

⁴⁴ Halloran, "Recipes as Memory Work," 153.

⁴⁵ Hurt, *Soul Food Junkies*.

Ntozake Shange recalls a visceral response she had to an art installation by Candace Hill-Montgomery that consisted of collard greens in otherwise empty refrigerators: “I thought about our children. I remembered our grandmother’s tending mustards and collard greens just beyond cracked cement. I thought about slavery. We came here hungry, trying to fill our souls and our stomachs with anythin’ll sustain us ever since.”⁴⁶ Though she herself hadn’t experienced slavery, she reacted the way she did because of her ancestral connection to slavery. Indeed it is true that “the trauma of that original and violent displacement from the African motherland is something that continues to hurt down through the generations, even when the references to it are as oblique as the work of art on display.”⁴⁷

Even though Black people had such little agency over what they were tossed to eat, they turned the unwanted leftovers they were given into a delicacy:

The slave cook was able to do so much with so little that it seems important to show you examples of our superb cookery of fifth quarter foods and wild meats... [Simmered Chitterlings, Hog Maws, Fried Liver and Onions] all the magnificent dishes...evolved from these modest beginnings, food that just got better and better as African American cooks honed their skills and expanded their inventory.⁴⁸

Much like the story Reverend Sampson recounted at the beginning of this thesis, this was the ingenuity of Mama. She promoted life through her food so well that you cannot taste the pain in her cooking. How ironic that what is now commonly called “comfort food” was borne out of the utmost discomfort.

But, of course, taking massa’s leftovers and deep frying it was not without consequence. When you fry food, you run the risk of increasing the carcinogenic level

⁴⁶ Halloran, “Recipes as Memory Work,” 157.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 154.

according to Dr. Rodney L. Ellis of Bariatrics and Internal Medicine.⁴⁹ Today the Black community suffers disproportionately from preventable illnesses. Black people are twice as likely as their white counterparts to die from heart disease and stroke.⁵⁰ According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, the incidence of pancreatic cancer is 50 to 90 percent higher for Black people than any other racial group in the U.S.⁵¹ The health effects of their meal preparation methods was unbeknownst to the countless Black women whose food nourished themselves, their families, and their masters, and their master's families. It was what Mama did and taught the rest of the nation to do—and these habits are hard to break.

Some scholars, activists, and community members alike inquire if these slave foods have been causing illness and early death in the Black community—but how couldn't it by merit of being a vestige of white supremacy? It was given to Black people without any intent of providing nourishment to the body. Black people were given scraps only so as to keep their ghosts tethered to their physical bodies for a few more hours while they continued to make profits for the slave master. Some describe the food as “not good for ya, but good to ya,”⁵² telling of not only the lack of knowledge about the health consequences of their meal preparation, but perhaps even more harrowing, the fact that slaves were almost always teetering on the brink of their death. It is possible that the food they ate was created for the now, without regard for the consequences of an unpromised tomorrow.

⁴⁹ Hurt, *Soul Food Junkies*.

⁵⁰ “CDC VitalSigns - Preventable Deaths from Heart Disease & Stroke,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, accessed October 27, 2015, <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/heartdisease-stroke/index.html>.

⁵¹ Hurt, *Soul Food Junkies*.

⁵² Ibid.

The Black community knows this history. In the *Soul Food Junkies* documentary, when the gentlemen carrying around a tub of turkey neck bones, pig ear, pig feet, corn on the cob, peas, and more were asked about the health of their concoction, they said:

This right here, it was all right yesterday. But when they told us it wasn't good for us, we stopped eating. But it wasn't killing us then...This is how we survive. This is what they gave us. We had to eat this. We had to eat the pig feet. We had to eat the pig tail. We had to eat the neck bones. They wouldn't eat it. We fixed it. We seasoned it. It good. Now they like it, too.⁵³

When interviewer Byron Hurt probes “Now who is them? Who is they?,” the man talking peers up at him in clear vexation and let's out an exasperated “you know who they is”—urging the Black interviewer to rely on their shared cultural knowledge about the history of white supremacy in this nation, the way it has directly shaped the eating habits of Black Americans through time, and their consequent health effects.

Because the way we eat is formed throughout a lifetime, it is hard to all of a sudden wake up one day and change your diet. The way many Black people in America eat today is a result of longstanding traditions, experiences, memories, associations, and accesses. So is there a way to adapt this food, these culinary cultural staples, given our current knowledge of health? There has been hesitation and strong criticism of reverence to slave food within parts of the Black community, perhaps most notably by The Honorable Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam and author of the *How to Eat to Live* series published in the 1960s. Fiercely condemning the slave diet, Muhammad was “unwilling to consider plantation foods as a legitimate source of race pride” and urged his followers to shun pork, collard, turnip greens, cornbread, sweet potatoes, black-eyed peas and other items associated with the institution of slavery because they were

⁵³ Ibid.

“unfit for human consumption” and “deleterious to the physical and mental health of the Black nation.”⁵⁴ Similar sentiments are shared by Black activist, social critic, and comedian Dick Gregory, who refers to soul food as “death food” because “it will kill you.”⁵⁵

Yet still there are many that believe that there is hope for salvaging the Black diet. During the Black Power Movement, these foods were redubbed “soul food” as part of their loving embrace of all things Black.⁵⁶ The way Black people eat and/or conceptualize slave food can serve to honor unnamed slave ancestors. The community across the nation may choose to eat ‘like a slave’ as “a way of understanding what it took to survive the trauma of confinement, physical, sexual, and emotional battery, and the humiliation of having one’s humanity denied under the system of chattel slavery practiced in the American South and throughout the Caribbean.”⁵⁷ In “Recipes as Memory Work: Slave Food,” Vivian Nun Halloran details how Black cookbook authors and food memoirists “make the past of slavery seem more relevant and meaningful to twenty-first century readers by invoking the idea of ‘slave food’ as some common ground between themselves as eating subjects and the countless boundspeople who struggled to ensure their loved ones had enough nourishment to face the arduous tasks that lay before them every grinding day during that period.”⁵⁸ This reclamation of soul food can be both physically and mentally nourishing.

⁵⁴ Elijah Muhammad and Elijah, *How to Eat to Live* (Elijah Muhammad Books, 2008), 5.

⁵⁵ Hurt, *Soul Food Junkies*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Halloran, “Recipes as Memory Work,” 148.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

Even so, it seems as if what is killing Black folks now is a much larger machine than what Mama fixes in the kitchen on a Sunday afternoon: the commercialization and commodification of these slave foods. Bryant Terry, Food Justice advocate and author of *Vegan Soul Kitchen* says:

The most important thing is that people complicate their understanding of what soul food is because it's easy to say that it's the bane of African-American health. The bigger cause of the decline of African-American health is the industrialization of our food system four or five decades ago. The goal of these corporations that are producing food is to make it cheap, to make it fast, to make it convenient.⁵⁹

Kolu Zigbi, Program Director of Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems at the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation speaks on the convenience of and routinization of consuming fast foods:

A lot of things happened between the 1960s and today to create the situation that we're in now where people spend less time cooking and more time eating already prepared food and food that's fatty and salty and processed. And some of those changes we all know about--more sedentary lifestyles with television and computers, more women entering the workforce, which is a necessity, maybe always happened in the Black community but became more widespread...But what happened is, if you eat it day after day and for dinner, you know, you may not be having something so healthy, then it really comes a problem, and that's the point that we're at now.⁶⁰

When I spoke to Reverend Al Sampson that afternoon in his church, he shared with me his concerns about the fast food restaurants populating his South Side Chicago community:

When I was a little boy, fifty years ago Popeye [the cartoon] would always solve his problems because Olive Oyl told him get the spinach. Now fifty years later, Popeye is not on the black and white tv that would cut off at twelve o'clock. Popeye's on colored tv now with the same story about how he gets in trouble. Olive Oyl says to him 'I want you to get the spinach.' Well, Popeyes [restaurant] up in my neighborhood now with chicken and biscuits and no spinach...Somebody

⁵⁹ Hurt, *Soul Food Junkies*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

don't want our people to be strong because there's no spinach on the menu of Popeyes.⁶¹

And it's not just the convenience stores and fast food spots down the block hurting the health of the Black community. Even the quality of the food provided in the grocery stores where one would conventionally go to get fresh fruits and vegetables is not well-received. Educator, author, and activist Sonia Sanchez details her dissatisfaction with the food available in her neighborhood in *Soul Food Junkies*:

I go in this supermarket in my neighborhood. I see vegetables that look like they're having a nervous breakdown. They're so shriveled and they're asking people the regular price for it. So I go and put the fruit and the vegetables in a cart, push the bell and tell them, "how dare you do this? how dare you put this out in this community, you know?" And they say "Lady, I'm going to call the police." I said, "Good. I'm gonna call reporters." And they improved on the food, too.⁶²

There is a distrust of the foods available in the Black community because of the historical subordination of Black people in this country. This subordination did not stop once slavery did. We can easily see this by looking at the way Chicago's hyper-segregation developed during and after the Great Migration. Though Black people from the South sought refuge in a city that was supposedly not as blatantly violent, Chicago proved violent in other ways—the consequences of which have shaped the resources Black people have access to today, including food.

⁶¹ Albert Sampson in discussion with the author, July 2015.

⁶² Hurt, *Soul Food Junkies*.

Chapter 3: A Brief History of Chicago's Segregation

*“Racism's still alive, they just be concealin' it
But I know they don't want me in the damn club
They even made me show ID to get inside of Sam's Club”*⁶³
-Kanye West ft. Jay Z & J. Ivy, Never Let Me Down

In Chicago, race and place have been virtually inseparable since its founding. The first non-native permanent resident of Chicago was a Black man: Jean Baptiste Point du Sable of Saint Domingue, known for establishing a successful trading port and farm at the mouth of the Chicago River in the late 1770s and revered to this day as “Founder of Chicago”.⁶⁴ In the 1840s, fugitive slaves and freedmen created Chicago’s first Black community, with almost 1,000 community members.⁶⁵ Yet still, due to discriminatory laws prohibiting Black people from entering the state, it was not until after the Civil War when Black southerners migrated to Chicago that the Black community began to grow significantly, rising 285 percent in the decade between 1860 and 1870 and increasing the Black population from 4,000 in 1870 to 15,000 in 1870.⁶⁶ They mostly had domestic jobs and lived in close proximity to the white people they served. After the Great Chicago Fire in 1871 (and another fire in 1874), however, when white and Black people were forced moved to undamaged areas, Black people began to form communities on the South Side

⁶³ “Kanye West – Never Let Me Down Lyrics | Genius,” accessed December 12, 2015, <http://genius.com/Kanye-west-never-let-me-down-lyrics>.

⁶⁴ William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (University of Illinois Press, 1970), 160.

⁶⁵ Christopher Manning, “African Americans,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/27.html>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

and new arrivals tended to flock towards these rapidly growing locales.⁶⁷ Though formal segregation in public places such as schools, public transportation, and hotels ended legally in 1885, this law was rarely enforced and did not prevent employment discrimination.⁶⁸

Resistance to racial integration by white people was the primary driver of residential segregation.⁶⁹ The threat of violence and even the “declaration of war” against Black residents in some neighborhoods often caused Black people to move. Over half of the Black population lived in the Black belt on the South Side, framed by 12th Street, 57th Street, Wentworth Avenue, and Cottage Grove Avenue. In the words of Social Economics Professor S.P. Breckenridge of the University of Chicago:

In no other part [of Chicago] was there found a neighborhood so conspicuously dilapidated as the Black belt on the South Side. No other group suffered so much from decaying buildings, leaking roofs, doors without hinges, broken windows, insanitary plumbing, rotting floors, and a general lack of repairs. In no other neighborhood were landlords so obdurate, so unwilling to make necessary improvements or to cancel leases so that tenants might seek better accommodations elsewhere. Of course, to go elsewhere was often impossible because nowhere is the prospective colored tenant or neighbor welcome.⁷⁰

Rent was extremely high because the demand far outweighed the supply of housing in the Black belt, not to mention rent for Black people was 15 to 25 higher than that of their white counterparts.⁷¹ Eventually, disease, crime, and vice became abundant, Black folk were dying at twice the rate of white folk, and they wanted to escape the desolation of the

⁶⁷ Tuttle, *Race Riot*, 160.

⁶⁸ Manning, “African Americans.”

⁶⁹ Tuttle, *Race Riot*, 161.

⁷⁰ Sophonisba Breckinridge. "The color line in the housing problem." *Survey* 29 (1913): 575-76.

⁷¹ Tuttle, *Race Riot*, 163.

Black belt, yet they were restricted by property owners' associations and realtors.⁷² In April 1917, in fear of the depreciation of their property values and after failing to legislatively quarantine Black people out of white neighborhoods, they resorted to extralegal intimidation and bombings.⁷³ This drove Black people to arm themselves for protection against property owners' associations and bombers because the police failed to protect them against this escalating violence.⁷⁴

Two years later was the beginning of Chicago's Red Summer. On July 27, 1919, a hot summer's day, four young Black boys decided to take a swim in their favorite spot between the 25th street Black beach and 29th street white beach.⁷⁵ At the same time, however, just a few streets down at 29th Street, Black people were trying to enter the white beach. Mayhem erupted and both groups started throwing rocks and stones at each other. A group of white men who caught sight of the boys began to throw rocks at them. These boys, in their youthful innocence, thought it was a game. That is, until one hit to the forehead ended the life of 17-year old Eugene Williams.⁷⁶ A race war manifested out of the anger and outrage that lasted about five days, leaving seven dead Black men at the hand of the police, sixteen additional Black deaths, fifteen white deaths and over five hundred people of both races injured.⁷⁷

In the time leading up to the tumult of the Red Summer, during the time of World War I, Black people were susceptible to prejudice.⁷⁸ There was an increase in hostility

⁷² Ibid., 164.

⁷³ Ibid., 180.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 173.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 21.

because over four hundred fifty thousand Black people from south migrated north and became competition for jobs, housing, education facilities, transportation, and relaxation, triggering white anxiety of status deprivation and the scapegoating of Black people for issues that arose because of it.⁷⁹ Because of this, Black lives were in jeopardy. Repeated incidents of bomb attacks on Black residences occurred between July 1917 and July 1919 right before the riots.⁸⁰ In 1919, lynch mobs brutally murdered 78 Black people⁸¹ and “athletic clubs”—gangs of white boys in their teens and early twenties—were mobilizing and had been terrorizing Black people for years undeterred and unrestrained by law enforcement.⁸² As William M. Tuttle writes in *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*, “[Black people] in Chicago expected little else of a police force which they had come to view as the armed representative of white hostility,” speaking to the history of neglect and mistrust of the police force by the Black community that is still very prevalent today.⁸³

Eventually, the majority of the 3,500 police officers were stationed right in or around the Black belt, leaving Black people who lived elsewhere in the city vulnerable to assault from white mobs.⁸⁴ Interestingly enough, though Black people were often the victims of brutality, they were persecuted more than their white attackers and arrested at twice the rate of whites by Chicago’s police force.⁸⁵ Hyperbolized retellings, rumors, and downright fabrications of countless murders made its way into the headlines of major

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 159.

⁸¹ Ibid., 22.

⁸² Ibid., 33.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 64., 64.

publications, fueling even more violence.⁸⁶ Black bodies were piling up on the street corners, yet still no efforts to enlist the support of the militia were made to restore civility.⁸⁷

Finally, after seemingly endless back and forth between Chicago residents and the Mayor Thompson and Governor Lowden of the city about whether or not to bring in the military, 6,200 troops occupied the space between Wentworth and Indiana and 18th and 55th street.⁸⁸ Fresh food, milk, ice, pay stations, and other emergency provisions were trucked in and established into the Black belt.⁸⁹ Black people could not return to work in the stockyards for fear of being attacked. They were not safe without the protection of the militia.⁹⁰ This situation lasted until August 8th, when the militia withdrew from Chicago, terminating the fourteen-day rioting spree.⁹¹ The Red Summer left 34 people dead--23 of which were Black males—and 537 injured—342 of whom were Black.⁹²

The reason for the Chicago race riot lies in the migration of Southern Black people during World War I that doubled the city's Black population, heightening racial tensions over labor, housing, politics and more.⁹³ Education and the prospect of a better life was a primary driving force for migration to Chicago.⁹⁴ Black sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and agricultural wage hands were given barely enough money to get by.⁹⁵ Heavy

⁸⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 57.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁹¹ Ibid., 64.

⁹² Randall Bartlett, *The Crisis of America's Cities: Solutions for the Future, Lessons from the Past* (Routledge, 2015), 114.

⁹³ Tuttle, *Race Riot*, 66.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 80.

rains and boll weevil destroyed their food source so they were starving, penniless, and eager for new opportunities to earn a living.⁹⁶ There were many jobs available to Black people in Chicago because of the demand for war products, the deployment of armed forces and decrease in immigration that left a major hole in the labor force--all due to war.⁹⁷ Because wages were high and there were many jobs, particularly in the stockyards, and rumors buzzed across the South about how great life in Chicago was.⁹⁸ The railroad made the city a viable destination for Black people from Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas.⁹⁹

The Chicago Urban League was established in 1915 to help Black migrants make adjustments to their new life in the city. They offered services in employment, “deportment”, cleanliness, juvenile delinquency prevention, and even food purchase.¹⁰⁰ Organizations such as the Chicago Urban League, the Defender, the Wabash Avenue YMCA provided aid and counsel for Black migrants, yet this was not enough to save them from white hate and intolerance.¹⁰¹ Previously hostile Irish-Black relations increased as the Black community grew between 1914 and 1919 and the demand for housing, political participation, and labor.¹⁰² Lack of interaction across racial boundaries allowed stereotypes of fester, many of which whose consequences we still face today.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 84.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 99.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 101.

¹⁰² Ibid., 102.

Black people were characterized as inferior, immoral, lazy, dirty, loud, and brutish and/or docile, imbecile, and meek.¹⁰³

Indeed, labor might as well been the most important cause of the riots of 1919.¹⁰⁴ Though tensions between the two racial groups had long been established, competition over jobs in Chicago had been snowballing since Black strikebreakers were hired to substitute the labor of the white stockyard workers that went on strike with the Eugene V. Deb's American Railway Union in 1894, resulting in a number of lynching, stabbing, and other vicious attacks on Black people.¹⁰⁵ Over time this festered into a general hatred of the Black race, which was further exacerbated by the increasingly high cost of living.¹⁰⁶

Most Black people working in the stockyards were nonunion for a number a reasons. Sometimes they were explicitly barred from union membership and apprenticeship programs¹⁰⁷; other times if they were allowed to join the union, white members made the working conditions so unbearable that Black people would quit before they ever got to join.¹⁰⁸ Besides that, Black people were making a much better living through strikebreaking than they had been accustomed to¹⁰⁹ and did not trust unions and their white working counterparts.¹¹⁰ Overall, the racial antipathy that began with white disdain for "Black scabs" ripened into a general hatred of the entire Black race, setting the precedent for the "Red Summer" riots in Chicago.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 109.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 112.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 132.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 154.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 143.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 147.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 156.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Even so, the Black community continued to thrive until the Great Depression hit and half of the Black population in the city relied on government aid for subsistence. When World War II hit, again, the Black community grew from 278,000 in 1940 to 813,000 in 1960.¹¹² This second great migration led to even more overcrowding in the Black Belt. This, in combination with the continued difficulty of landing permanent jobs due to anti-Black employment discrimination, violent opposition to racial integration from white city residents, and the creation of public housing projects that primarily housed many African American residents allowed for little racial integration.¹¹³

As a native Chicagoan, I grew up within this legacy. Take one CTA train ride on the North-South redline and you will certainly see that this history of violent racism is embedded in the geospatial landscape. Though Chicago is arguably racially diverse overall, a 2012 Census data study conducted by the Manhattan Institute of Policy Research revealed Chicago to be the most racially segregated city in the country.¹¹⁴ Even more unsettling is the fact that the concepts and mechanisms developed to control and address racial succession in Chicago were made available to the entire nation so that essentially the “legal framework for national urban renewal effort” was developed on Chicago’s South Side as highlighted by Arnold R. Hirsh in *Making the second ghetto: race and housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*.¹¹⁵ This means that it is not just I—or anyone

¹¹² Bartlett, *The Crisis of America’s Cities*, 114.

¹¹³ “African Americans,” accessed April 30, 2015, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/27.html>.

¹¹⁴ Jacob Vigdor and Edward Glaeser, “The End of the Segregated Century: Racial Separation in America’s Neighborhoods, 1890-2010,” *Manhattan Institute*, accessed June 2, 2015, <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/end-segregated-century-racial-separation-americas-neighborhoods-1890-2010-5848.html>.

¹¹⁵ Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, xiv.

else from my hometown, for that matter—that grew up in that legacy. It is all of us—we Americans—living in that legacy.

The urban foodscape is one of the most prominent living legacies of racism built into the environment. In his interview in the *Soul Food Junkies* Documentary, Marc Lamont Hill says it best:

There is no better example of racism in the 21st century than the relationship of Black people and access to healthy food. You know, people think about racism as an individual act of prejudice or discrimination from one person to another. That's not what it's about. It's about systems. It's about structures. It's about institutions. And the fact that Black people live in neighborhoods where they can't get access to healthy food choices and white people can get healthy food choices, that is classic textbook racism. When you want to wipe out an entire generation of people, when you want to engage in the kind of 21st century genocide, all you have to do is continue to do what we're doing, which is deprive people of access to healthy food.¹¹⁶

According to the city of Chicago, approximately 79,434 of its residents live in food deserts.¹¹⁷ The city defines residents of food deserts as those living in a census block located more than a mile from a retail food establishment licensee with a business location larger than 10,000 square feet.¹¹⁸ Black people who live on the South Side and West Side of Chicago are particularly aware of the lack of affordable and nutritious foods in their communities¹¹⁹ Qualitative group interviews conducted by Block et al. of mostly African American community members in the South Side of Chicago revealed lack of respect and inequality as factors that are commonly mentioned when speaking about food

¹¹⁶ Hurt, *Soul Food Junkies*.

¹¹⁷ "Food Deserts | Food Empowerment Project."

¹¹⁸ "City of Chicago :: Mayor Emanuel Announces Release of Food Desert Data and New Interactive Efforts to Combat Food Deserts in Chicago," accessed June 1, 2015, http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2013/august_2013/ayor_emanuel_announcesreleaseoffooddesertdataandnewinteractiveeff.html.

¹¹⁹ Gallagher, "Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago."

access and insecurity.¹²⁰ Participants said things like: “We just don’t get proper food. They give us the bottom of everything” and “...the stores in the Black community get worse food than the White community.”¹²¹

Let it be known, however, that though the Black community of Chicago has time and again been denied access to this basic necessity of life, they are far from passive victims of oppression. A number of food justice organizations have been created to place the agency of affected low-access communities at the center of their work to create local food systems that meet their own personal food needs. Here, the community is able to define their problems and collaborate with each other to craft viable solutions. These range from extravagant, well-funded, highly revered organizations to smaller, less funded local projects.

One of the most successful nationally serving nonprofit organization focused on community food systems and food security is Milwaukee-based Growing Power, with the goal “to grow food, to grow minds, to grow community.”¹²² The organization was founded by African American farmer Will Allen with the belief that “if people can grow safe, healthy, affordable food, if they have access to land and clean water, this is transformation on every level in a community... we cannot have healthy communities without a healthy food system,” echoing the Environmental Justice movements advocacy of the right to clean land, water, and food.¹²³ Growing Power has five urban farms in Chicago and many gardens at local public schools; it also offers life skills training

¹²⁰ Block et al., “Food Sovereignty, Urban Food Access, and Food Activism,” 5.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “About | Growing Power,” accessed May 22, 2015, <http://www.growingpower.org/about/>.

¹²³ Ibid.

programs for both youth and adults, and sells its products at local farmers' markets. They even sell two market baskets of produce with different prices to provide more affordable alternatives communities that have limited access to fresh produce.¹²⁴ Furthermore, Growing Power has created a network of multicultural food security leaders and alliances called the Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative (GFJI). GFJI is "aimed at dismantling racism and empowering low-income and communities of color through sustainable and local agriculture."¹²⁵ This is important in that it allows activists to extend their community work and support beyond their immediate neighborhoods and across the expanse of the city of Chicago. Growing Power situates its work in the environmental justice framework by using food to combat racism, redistribute resources, and uplift community.

There are a number of other actions being taken to lessen food insecurity in underserved areas of Chicago, from the Food Desert Action based on the West Side that created an Urban Mobile Market focused on providing fresh produce for food desert residents to the Gary Comer Youth Center "oases in the food desert" gardens to the Eat to Live Englewood neighborhood development project.

We must not overlook the important work of these food justice programs that stipple Chicago's South Side, for they are reclaiming power over how they nourish themselves and their communities.

¹²⁴ Block et al., "Food Sovereignty, Urban Food Access, and Food Activism," 8.

¹²⁵ "About Us « Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative (GFJI)," accessed May 22, 2015, <http://growingfoodandjustice.org/about-us/>.

Chapter 4: Food Justice Work on the South Side of Chicago

*“Provin nature's laws wrong, it learned how to walk without havin' feet
Funny it seems but, by keepin its dreams
It learned to breathe fresh air
Long live the rose that grew from concrete
When no one else even cared”¹²⁶*
-2Pac ft. Nikki Giovanni, The Rose That Grew From Concrete

In the Fall of 2014, I took a Food Justice Practicum course at Scripps College with Professor Nancy Neiman Auerbach. Every week, we picked fruit, made jams, and sold them at our local farmer’s market alongside the women of Crossroads transitional home that had been recently released of their long-term prison sentences.

The first morning I stepped foot in the garden we harvested from weekly, an awe-struck “wow” escaped from my lips. Never would I ever have imagined myself picking lemons in a gorgeous, expansive backyard in 100-degree weather in Southern California. I must admit, I had never harvested anything of any sort before for this class, so I already knew when I signed up to be a part of the class that it was going to be one of my most memorable times in Claremont.

On that first day, I was overwhelmed with excitement, but that was almost eclipsed by how naïve and lost I felt. Was I picking the fruit correctly? Did I just put a rotten lemon in the basket? Is this even a lemon?! I was finally starting to get into the swing of things when I Nancy walked over to my friend Alejandra and I with a strange looking fruit in her hands and told us try it. A “fig” she called it. Now here is where I

¹²⁶ 2Pac (Ft. Nikki Giovanni) – *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://genius.com/2pac-the-rose-that-grew-from-concrete-lyrics>.

admit my second secret: I had never before had the experience of literally picking fruit off a tree and eating it. After some slight hesitation, and a rush of sudden realization that this was an incredible opportunity that I hadn't had before, I gobbled the bizarre-looking fruit down.

Although the fig was a little too sweet for my liking, I came to the realization that there were plenty of people like me back home whose idea of "fresh" food was, at best, limited to the fruit & veggie display at the neighborhood grocery store. And to think that even that—simple access to a grocery store—is in and of itself a privilege when you live in a city like Chicago populated with food deserts, is what motivated me to learn about improving access to even the most basic resources for marginalized groups. Everyone deserves access to healthy, affordable food, but not everybody gets it.

So I decided to find out more about the folks in the latter group. During the Summer of 2015, I was awarded a grant through the Pomona College Summer Undergraduate Research Program to complete a create a documentary film chronicling my independent study of the alternative food pathways forged by residents of the South Side of Chicago. I conducted four in-depth interviews with various food justice activists based on the South Side of Chicago with the intention of exploring the following questions:

What actions have community members taken to secure access to healthy foods?

What does resistance to food insecurity look like?

What does urban farming and gardening in Chicago look like right now?

How have urban farms in Chicago contributed to and/or transformed the community?

How do community members describe the importance of urban agriculture? What does current research say about the importance of urban agriculture? Is there disjunction between the two? If so, why?

How do community perceptions of the reason for their limited access to healthy food inform the work they do?

What is the role of community empowerment in food justice work?

How is the relationship between Black people and food complicated by their history with land in the US (as it relates to indentured servitude, slavery, sharecropping, etc.)?

How do Black community members fight racial injustice through farming?

How might Black stewardship with the land serve as acts of reclamation and redefinition of the relationship between the Black community and food? How might this better inform public health initiatives?

Video documentation of my findings was one the most important parts of my methodology. Often times, researchers enter a community to collect the information they need, only to leave without any meaningful contribution. However, it is my obligation to return to the community what it teaches me, especially given my intention to highlight the salience of community knowledge, engagement, empowerment and agency. Video is one of the most powerful, engaging, and, most importantly, easily distributable forms of idea sharing we have today, and thus will allow for extended public accessibility to this information. Upon completion of the project, I intend to publish my documentary on a public media platform such as YouTube or Vimeo so that I may share it not only with

those that participated, but also to those who are not able to read this thesis or otherwise have access to this information.

The first interview I conducted was with Jacqueline Smith, urban gardener who created GrowAsis Urban Garden Consulting, Inc., a consulting service that caters solely to residents of the South Side of Chicago in order to empower people to grow and secure their own food. Jackie also works in partnership with another interviewee, Pancho MacFarland, on The Green Lots Project based in Roseland that works on turning abandoned or underused lots into community gardens. MacFarland is also an Associate Professor of Sociology at Chicago State University. I also spoke with Robert Nevel, architect and founder of KAMI Isaiah Israel's Food Justice and Sustainability located in the Hyde Park neighborhood. And, of course, I interviewed Reverend Al Sampson of Fernwood United Methodist Church in Roseland and creator of the George Washington Carver F.A.R.M.S.

I preface this section by stating that I very intentionally privilege the voices of those I interviewed during my Independent Study over the summer of 2015. I cannot stress enough that what follows is the most important part of this entire thesis: the narratives of affected communities on the South Side of Chicago. I believe that nobody knows the problems—and possible solutions—affecting the community better than the community itself and I hope to highlight as much of their knowledge as I possibly can accordingly.

The community speaks for itself—I am just happy to have been able to write it down.

Interview Themes

Inaccessibility of food

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, food insecurity is the “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”¹²⁷ How does this federally approved definition compare to the vernacular definition of food insecurity? I sought to find out by asking each of the interviewees about their own personal definitions of food insecurity. Pancho MacFarland of The Green Lots Project said:

Food insecurity is when somebody doesn't know where their next meal is coming from, or meals down the line. It doesn't have the be the next meal, but down the line, right? And, you know, it sounds pretty simple, but part of it has to do not only with the political and the corporate angle, but the fact that we don't know how to grow our own food, right? So we're really insecure in that. We're always relying on someone else. We're relying on the government, we're relying on *Jewel* or whoever, all these corporations to feed ourselves, so we're really insecure as it is. So the only security really is to build, to have access to land, and to be able to have the knowledge to grow on it. That's the only real security, right? And to be able to do it. Because the other thing, even if we do have food, even if we do have food, especially in a place like Roseland, which is really, um, there's a great deal of food inequality, right? There's, you know, in a place like this, the food that we do have—it looks like food, we eat it, but it doesn't give you any nutrition. So you're insecure anyway, because you don't have food, you don't have food that is healthy for you and nutritious. So when I talk about things like this like food insecurity, or I talk a lot about food justice, that part of it is nutritious food that you have control over. And that's what would be just or secure in the end, right? So I think it's a little more than is there, kind of, a store in your neighborhood.¹²⁸

This is different from the technical definition. While the USDA's definition is more sterile and does not provide insight as to the reasons why we observe these phenomenon, Pancho's narrative helps us actually glimpse into the experience of living with food

¹²⁷ “USDA Economic Research Service - Measurement,” accessed December 10, 2015, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx#security>.

¹²⁸ Pancho MacFarland in discussion with the author, July 2015.

insecurity in a food desert like Roseland. His definition also begins to hint at the underlying structural inequalities that create food insecurity.

Jackie Smith of both GrowAsis Urban Garden Consulting, Inc. and The Green Lots Project conceptualized food insecurity this way:

My definition of food insecurity is not having access to healthy food at all times. I don't think being able to go to the farmer's market once or twice a week is a means of security. If you don't have it, then obviously you have to go to another source to get it. I believe being food secure means that, you know, if you need a tomato you can go to your backyard and get it because you're growing it. Or you know you can go next door to your neighbor who may have a garden or source of food and get it right next door from them. I think it really is a means of feeling secure knowing that you have food at your fingertips, that you don't have to travel across your neighborhood or across the city to get food that everybody has the right to have... I think being food secure means that you got it better than *McDonald's* or *Burger King* 'cause you got to get in the car and take the bus or walk to *White Castle's* or *Burger King*, but if you want a tomato or you want potatoes or you want cucumbers you know, you can just go into your backyard and get it right out there, and that's way quicker, that's almost a nanosecond as opposed to going somewhere else to a fast food joint to get food and it's so much healthier for you, too.¹²⁹

In Jackie's definition, food security is contingent upon a person's ability to grow their own food and/or ability to access fresh foods without taking more than a few steps from their homes. Her definition also emphasizes the salience of communality because access to a neighbor's garden can also be considered a source of food security, even if one doesn't necessarily have one of their own.

Jackie further explained that not only does she feel that food is inaccessible in her community as a whole, she also unapologetically shared that she personally considers herself food insecure:

I'm living it with the population that I serve. I'm not food secure and I have no problem saying that. I still have to go, I have to go get eggs. I still have to get almond milk. I still have to get my lentils. I still have to get chicken broth and

¹²⁹ Jackie Smith in discussion with the author, July 2015.

things like that because I'm not, yeah, I don't have chickens—I want to have chickens—but I don't have all the resources that I need to be completely sustainable on my own. I preserve a lot, but um, you know, at times I can be food insecure even though I have a plethora of years behind my belt in agriculture, the industry of agriculture. But I still have to figure out a way to feed myself every now and then.¹³⁰

Jackie does not view herself as separate from her community. In fact, most of the food justice community leaders I interviewed are in the trenches working alongside neighbors to create a united front of Black community members dedicated to reclaiming their right to food, land, and health.

One of the first questions I asked the participants was about how accessible healthy, fresh foods were in their respective communities. I was astounded by the uniformity of responses: Every single interviewee said that fresh, healthy foods were not accessible in their community. When Jackie was asked the question, she immediately mentioned not only the poor quality of the food options available in her neighborhood, but also how it compared to other neighborhoods across the city:

[Lack of] fresh food accessibility in this community is very prevalent from what I see and I've lived in this community about a good twenty years. And then outside of this community, like this is Roseland, I've actually lived a little while in Auburn-Gresham, I've lived a good hunk of my life in Hyde Park, in Bronzeville, I drive through Englewood all the time. And then you know if I go to the North Side or if I go to near UIC (University of Illinois at Chicago), they're struggling too but they still have resources to get fresh food whenever they want to.¹³¹

As someone who has spent much of her life in various neighborhoods across the city's South Side, Jackie can't help but notice the resource disparities between where she has lived and the northern, whiter, more gentrified parts of the city.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Similarly, Pancho commented how even where a person lives can easily limit their food options within the South Side:

Well, in the community that I live in, Beverly, which is one community over from Roseland, so if you cross the tracks half a mile going west, you run into the community of Beverly. And it's an upper middle class neighborhood. President of Chicago State University has a residence there, it's the president's mansion, so we don't have a problem in Beverly. You cross the tracks into Roseland, where I used to live up until 2 years ago, or South Chicago where I used to live, which there's less of a problem in South Chicago, but certainly here in Roseland you cross the tracks and there is very little access to real food. You always have to put "real" before food as if food wasn't enough [laughs] because what people talk about when they talk about food is not real, is not nutritious. And what's what we have here. You have lots of corner stores where lot's people will eat at, you've got small groceries that are underwhelming in the kinds of freshness and nutrition that they offer as well, and then you have lots and lots of fast food places and very few good, healthy, sit-down restaurants. I would have my students in the summer classes map the food in Roseland and compare it to Hyde Park, which is just a little bit further north of us and a little east, and it was very hard to find a sit-down restaurant, much less one that had good food. I mean, it was, the restaurant everybody came up with was on Michigan and it was just fried food, it was just like a little steak house, but it was mostly just a bunch of fried stuff. So to answer the question, it's very difficult to access nutritious food. That's it.¹³²

Just a few miles' distance can make a huge difference in what folks are able to feed themselves.

Interestingly enough, even food justice organizer Robert Nevel of the generally well-to-do Hyde Park neighborhood Pancho referenced, whose garden is nestled directly across the street from President Obama's home, also felt that they lacked proper access in their community. "You know," he explained, "I think that in this area in Hyde Park, Kenwood, Woodlawn, and in these neighborhoods, I think good, healthy food is not that accessible. I think there are many people who don't have means to get to sources of that good food."¹³³ Even those who live in relatively wealthier neighborhoods on the South

¹³² Pancho MacFarland in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹³³ Robert Nevel in discussion with the author, August 2015.

Side of Chicago do not necessarily feel comfortable with the food sources available to them and their communities.

So what do residents believe is the cause of their food insecurity? When I asked the interviewees why they lacked access to the healthy foods they sought, their reasoning was multiple and complex.

Reverend Al Sampson said that he believes the Black community lacks access to healthy foods because they don't have control over the food they consume:

What ends up happening is there are more dialysis machines in our neighborhood than any other neighborhood because of this whole issue of not controlling the food that we eat. Years ago, down south, Black folk created, farmed, had their storehouse, had their freezers with the food and they controlled even their seeds. Mama used to put a potato in the window and that potato in the window would be the seedling that she would then transfer to the garden. And that's what our dilemma is. When we left the South in our migration and came up south, we ended up in what they call a Pavlovian-conditioning kind of relationship with food where everybody feeds us but us.¹³⁴

Here he argues that the traditions and agri/cultural knowledges that had sustained Black people historically have been lost to migration when people from the South moved to urban cities like Chicago. After adapting to life in the city, many Black people stopped growing their own food and eventually forgot the practice altogether. Further, Black people lack of power over the food they eat because they are not in charge of the grocery stores, restaurants, and other food sources sitting on their blocks. "Nobody owns a building in Black America," Sampson said to me, exemplifying how Black people lack greater institutional power.

Jackie also connects the food insecurity of her community to greater systemic violences enacted by those in power:

¹³⁴ Albert Sampson in discussion with the author, July 2015.

[Food is] not accessible. It's not. And yeah I don't think healthy food is accessible to people in my community or even the neighboring communities. And I believe that is because there is a lack of resources, there's a lack of education, there is a lack of heritage and information and skills that have been lost between the gaps of the elders and the youth of today. Um, and I believe that, um, I believe that its just—the ball got dropped and it affects us on so many different levels to the point where it affects the crime rate, it affects the school system, it affects families being able to survive where they have to decide whether to feed the kids or if they got to pay the light bill and that should never be (Jackie Smith Interview).

The commonality between food access and access to other vital resources such as housing, employment, and education is power. Because Black people generally are not in power, they cannot make the decisions they want to make for themselves. Interviewees recognized that those that are in power often do not care about those who must bear the brunt of the decisions they make, as demonstrated by the way Jackie explained how Black residents are the targets of discriminatory housing practices that prioritize profit over people:

You know, people have to really come together because there are bigwigs out there who want to take up, who want to take your community away and not make it a community anymore. They want to make it bigger and better for their benefit, for their profits. And they're not going to think twice about the community. They don't think twice about you. They don't care. "Oh, well we're going to come into your community and we'll buy your house for a million bucks, but you have a lifetime of memories in that house. Like your baby was born in that house, you know. You had your wedding ceremony in the backyard kind of thing. And I think, just in my humble opinion, there's no amount of money that can really take the place of what you grew in your community. And you know a lot of people are of the mindset of "yeah, I'll give you this dollar amount and give it to you and you take it, then you're satisfied and I'm definitely satisfied because I got what I want" and now you're displaced. "I don't really care. I got what I needed. I hope you do okay! I hope you make it in the next place that you're going to be in." You know, and it's not fair. It's really not fair.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Jackie Smith in discussion with the author, July 2015.

Self-serving institutions that do not care about the wellbeing of the Black community are interlocked with structural violence, which anthropologist and physician Paul Farmer describes as:

One way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm's way... The arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people ... neither culture nor pure individual will is at fault; rather, historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency. Structural violence is visited upon all those whose social status denies them access to the fruits of scientific and social progress.¹³⁶

Pancho explained how structural violences have manifested into the food insecurity that he sees working in the Roseland community daily:

Hm. Oh, we have to talk about, we have to go back historically and talk about colonialism and racism and capitalism and those -isms that um, have created situations for many of us, um. And when we're talking about Roseland, we're talking about a Black community. And therefore for Black people, Mexicanos, as well as other people of color, all of these forces, right, these historical forces that create um, segregated communities, communities impoverished, communities, these things are planned. I mean we could look at Roseland in it's transition from a white working class neighborhood to a Black neighborhood and we could talk about rioting, we can talk about, you know, mass white violence against Black people here in Roseland who started moving in. We can talk about disinvestment and people starting to pull their resources outside of the community. And in letting it fall to hell. You talk to residents here in Roseland, I got to know and continue to know many people who used to live in Roseland for a long period of time and they talk about the discrimination from streets, to the police violence, to just no jobs, to housing quality to environmental issues. So, um, we'd have to talk about those historical forces if we were to talk about why, um, there's so much inequality. And we find a place like Beverly full of food. Full of food. And not all of it is great either, I mean I don't eat out of there much, I eat out of the gardens, right? But a place like Beverly is full of food versus a place like Roseland which doesn't have many options. I mean, fast food, if you get your food from a place where they have a glass in front of it, right, so that violence doesn't occur, and they hand it to you in a bag, it's likely not to be good. And that's what we find here and all over. Take a ride down 103rd, you can take a ride down Halsted, and maybe Michigan, and that's all you will. I mean, just vast amounts of stuff that

¹³⁶ "Structural Violence | Structural Violence," accessed September 28, 2015, <http://www.structuralviolence.org/structural-violence/>.

looks like food that isn't. And the reasons are complex, but they're not hard to find. [Laughs] I mean, they're out there. You just read a book.¹³⁷

The Roseland community looks the way it does because it was designed that way throughout time. The corner stores and nutrient-empty foods in the community are the result of a number of historical forces that have shaped the physical spatiality of the neighborhood and the demographics of the people living in it. Jackie, Pancho, and other residents of the South Side of Chicago live in neighborhoods that are racially segregated as a result of long history of violent, often deadly opposition to racial integration by white residents that eventually fled and left the neighborhoods disempowered and disinvested.

As Sampson put it earlier, “somebody don’t want our people to be strong”¹³⁸— that ‘somebody’ is the personification of the hegemonic white-supremacist systems of domination that Black people experience all throughout their lives. Sampson said that that though studies have shown that “the grocery stores are too far away, the food we eat is causing the diseases that we have” and that “we’re killing Black people with the food that we eat”, it appears that “nobody is worried about it.”¹³⁹ The folks that aren’t worried about it are those who have the privilege to go about their lives not noticing the structural violence that regularly steals Black life. And even when the folks who are least affected attempt to initiate changes to improve the conditions marginalized communities live in, they often do not even include the voices of those that are most affected. For example, Sampson told me that the discourse that attempts to address the problem of food deserts often does not acknowledge the need for food that is culturally relevant to the community—an issue that he brought to the United States Department of Agriculture for

¹³⁷ Pancho MacFarland in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹³⁸ Albert Sampson in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

the Midwest in February 2015. He recalls standing before them and “challeng[ing] the fact that the food desert still has not been addressed because you’re not bringing up the food of my ancestors,”¹⁴⁰ highlighting the fact that people want to have access to the food that they know how to prepare and actually want to eat.

But not everybody gets the opportunity to speak in front of powerful government officials like Sampson did and ask for the things they need—and not everybody wants to. Many are tired of asking and getting little to none in return. Within the Black community there is historically substantiated mistrust of the government and institutions of power to actually make the changes that they want to see.

So they turn to each other for support.

Self-reliance

There was a robust emphasis on self-reliance throughout the conversations I had with interviewees. Because they were unhappy with what they were seeing in their communities, they decided to take matters into their own hands in order to see some of the changes they saw necessary.

Reverend Sampson believes that Black liberation is inextricably tied to economic sovereignty. “We’re not as ‘poor’ as folk would like to put that kind of paradigm on us... We can’t be that poor when all of these franchises are sitting up in our neighborhoods,”¹⁴¹ he says. “We’re too intelligent of a people to be the only race of people where people come into our community to exploit us rather than to develop an

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

economic arrangement with us.”¹⁴² Sampson encourages Black people want to actively funnel their money back into their own community instead of supporting the corporations that bank on their exploitation.

However, there are challenges to this. One is that there is simply a lack of information about Black-owned businesses. Sampson describes how Black customers at big-name retail grocery stores are unaware of which businesses are Black-owned and thus cannot make deliberate choices about the companies they are supporting:

In *Jewel* food stores here in Chicago there are about twenty or thirty different products that are Black products. This lady named Michele Hoskins, they’ve got Grandma syrup, but it sits right next to *Aunt Jemima* syrup and ten other syrups. I would have her leave *Aunt Jemima*’s next door in the shopping center and come to our wholesale retail. *Reggio*’s pizza is sitting in competition within its own community with *Giordano*’s pizza. *Parker House* sausage, *Baldwin* Ice cream-- there are a lot of packaged Black products where we need to have our own wholesale retail distribution center and system so that people can go back and buy our vegetables of our culture like other cultures do¹⁴³.

The products of Black-owned businesses—like Hoskins’ syrup that comes from her enslaved great-great-great grandmother’s secret recipe¹⁴⁴—are in steep competition with products of other larger companies with greater name-recognition. This makes it difficult for the Black community to “buy Black and bring our dollars back” into the community, as Reverend Sampson likes to say. This is precisely why he intends to create large warehouse sites to connect Black products to Black consumers as part of his “Economic Blueprint of Liberation” that encompasses agricultural, economic, cultural, and educational development.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ “Michele’s Foods | Michele’s Syrup – Good Over Everything | Michele Hoskins | Butter Pecan Syrup | Gourmet Syrup |Premium Syrups,” accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.michelefoods.com/aboutus.php>.

This blueprint is a culturally-appropriate economic system designed around Black tradition:

What I've been attempting to do in my ministry for the last forty years is to get our people to have a simple kind of relationship with their own people. One of the interesting things is, we're in the summer now and a lot of Black folk have family reunions. Family reunions in our world means that folk from down south come up south and they eat soul food vegetables. Folk from up-south go down south and they eat soul food vegetables. Well, the reality is, when you're up-south you're a consumer. When you're down south, you're a producer. Family reunions have never had a meeting and said look, we can consume the vegetables you grow, and let's have a marriage between the two. And since everybody has a truck, why don't we just go to Arkansas since we're all from Arkansas, it's only eight hours, and you produce the watermelons from Arkansas and we'll bring them to the urban world of Chicago, Gary, Milwaukee, St. Louis."¹⁴⁵

Connecting Black farmers to Black consumers is not only mutually beneficial for both parties, but further is also a great way to introduce healthy, fresh and culturally relevant food into the diet of the urban Black community. Sampson explained to me that "if we're in Walmart store, we'd see that Walmart has seedless watermelons. But my farmers grow Diamond, Crimson, Jubilee and Sugar Baby watermelons, which is the Black seed over against the white seed."¹⁴⁶ This is true both literally and figuratively. It's interesting that he uses the example of the watermelon specifically because of the tenuous relationship between Black people and the watermelon stereotype. The stereotype that Black folk have some abnormal appetite watermelon was actually constructed out of white fear of Black sovereignty. Free Black people grew, sold, and enjoyed watermelons, thus the fruit became symbolic of their freedom.¹⁴⁷ Triggered by the threat of Black liberation, white Americans created damaging iconography and associations between Black people and

¹⁴⁵ Albert Sampson in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ William Black, "How Watermelons Became a Racist Trope," *The Atlantic*, December 8, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/12/how-watermelons-became-a-racist-trope/383529/>.

watermelon to serve their own interests and reinforce the notion that Black people were lazy, simpleminded, and docile—stereotypes we still love with today in 2015.¹⁴⁸

Sampson’s program reclaims that history of self-reliance and keeps the cycle of production and consumption within the Black network. And, of course, instead of eating the abundance of processed foods readily available in their communities, here Black people are able to access the foods they actually want to eat without compromising their wellbeing.

Jackie provides a garden consultation service through her personal business, GrowAsis, that caters solely to South Side residents so that they can begin to grow their own food sources in the comfort of their back yards:

I think somebody can be able to grow their own vegetable oasis by knowing what it is they need. If you need spinach, and you eat a lot of it and it’s breaking your bank, like it hurts you every time you have to go to the grocery store like Jewel or Mariano’s you’re like “oh my gosh, that’s not really in my budget” then that’s what you should be growing. Start small. Yeah, I think people should just start small unless you’re just like an avid gardener and you just know what it is, you know how to do it and you just want to go at it, that’s fine. But for those of us who don’t know, just kind of start small, figure out kind of like what it is you eat most of and consider who else are you feeding, how much food do you eat in a day, do you eat within season? We all should be eating in season but some of us don’t. What are you most prone to eat? What are your health issues that you have to deal with that affect your diet or how your diet affects your health? How much money are you willing to spend to establish a garden? Or if you don’t want to spend any money at all, what resources do you have? What bartering system are you going to use to do that? Who do you know that might even be in the realm of gardening or farming? They should start there.¹⁴⁹

Jackie encourages people to grow what they cannot afford so as to increase accessibility to what folks want but can’t necessarily always have readily available. By doing this, both Jackie and Sampson propose alternative economic systems, centered around

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Jackie Smith in discussion with the author, July 2015.

growing your own food, that is more accessible to residents and exists outside of the mainstream capitalist framework.

The organization that interviewees Jackie and Pancho work with called the Green Lots Project “really is more about community service where the community is providing its own service to itself and they learn informally about the different aspects of, you know, growing food from seed to harvest. So anybody who is a part of the community is actually a part of the Green Lots Project.”¹⁵⁰ They take eyesore vacant lots around their neighborhoods and turn them into beautiful community-led garden spaces.

When I see a vacant lot when I’m riding down the street, I cringe because I’m like ‘oh my God, there’s opportunity for great food!’ like that’s what I see when I drive down the street or when I walk down the street or riding my bike I’m like “oh God, that would be a great lot for vegetables to be grown.” And then nobody has a right to it. Everybody has accessibility to it. There’s no land grant, nobody says ‘oh well this is mine, you can’t have it. I’m growing off of it. Me, me, me.’ Everybody should have access to it. That’s my thought.¹⁵¹

Just as they firmly believe that everyone deserves access to fresh foods, so too do they believe that everyone deserves access to land to help make that a reality. The Green Lots Project repurposes underused, sometimes abandoned spaces for the greater good of the community. This work is done for the people by the people.

Where the garden grows, the community grows

What happens when the community has a space to meet and talk and laugh and grow food? Jackie explains that the power in community gardens lies in the fact that they allow neighbors to foster relationships that might have never been formed otherwise.

These relationships not only help to build a sense of community, they also can help

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

mobilize unified, justice-oriented actions to push for the changes they all want to see for their neighborhoods.

I think a lot of people know they need healthy food, some people are totally oblivious, some people actually know, some people are in denial and they still know, some people are, they want to know but they don't know how to get the information and I think that's where GrowAsis comes in where you can get the information, where you can not just keep it for yourself but share with your neighbors, share with your families, share with friends so then that way you know, it's not just about food, but it's about coming together as people, as a people and actually sharing and you end up finding out your people are struggling as much as you are...Just to be able to talk about it and to talk within the community and share and drop names and drop ideas and drop projects, you know, brainstorm on projects and things like that. I think that's what it really does. It leads to really thinking about, like, what it is that you've done and how you want to change that as a community. You know, like, it is empowering people to want to think about what are they going to do with that vacant lot over there on their block? It's an eyesore. What should we do about it? How is our block club administration? How are our leaders going to handle that? Who do we talk to? We need to talk to the alderman. We want to grow our own food. I think also it encourages people within the community to connect and bridge gaps that have been created for lack of information and lack of sharing among people, especially like I said before, between elders and youth. There's a three generation gap between the youth and the elders, and that shouldn't be. But so much has happened between generations and every family and every culture is different as to how that happens. There needs to be some type of conduit or some type of means of communication in some means of understanding. I have yet to meet somebody who doesn't eat food or doesn't like food. Food is like a universal thing. There are people all over the world that need food or grow food. It's almost like music. Music is a universal language. It empowers you to--you can just play a song or choreograph a dance according to a song and you may not speak the same verbal language as I do but if I listen to your song, I know exactly what you're feeling. I have an idea of what you went through or I know what you're trying to express to me in so many notes. Same thing with food. If you cook something, if you cook a home-cooked meal, some people put not only their foot in it, people put love in it, you know. People cook with love. I hope they do, at least. So, I mean, GrowAsis and all the other organizations that work with GrowAsis, I think that's what we do. That's part of our mission. And we all have a common goal and we all have similarities and we learn from one another in order to not only feed ourselves but to feed our community.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Ibid.

Gardens do more than just feed the community; they provide a space where the community can congregate around our most basic and shared necessity: food.

In the garden, all are welcome—small, big, young, old, and everyone in between. I learned that some of the youngest members of the Roseland community love to frequent the gardens, which Jackie is ecstatic about because she believes it is important to get youth involved and teach them how to sustain themselves early on:

Youth are the generation after us and just like we teach our babies how to tie their shoe and how to count, they also need to know how to grow food. And the youth activities that GrowAsis provides does it in a way that meets them where they're at. Because I work in the Chicago Public School system so when I'm working with my students or if I'm tutoring, you know, I have to meet the child where they're at. I don't want to go above them and expect them to know everything, and I don't want to belittle them and think that they don't know anything. So I think it's where they're at. It's important for our youth to know how to grow food because it empowers them and it gives them something to do. it gives them something to look forward to, it gives them something to share with their families and their peers. And it's something that is a tool that is life sustaining. It is something that they can take with them beyond school and beyond a job that they may be able to obtain when they become older. And it's fun! I love getting kids dirty. I want my babies to get dirty. It's so much fun. And they get to plant seeds and they get to ask a lot of questions and find out that they actually know a lot already. And it's good for them to know where their food comes from. That the food does not come from the mom and pop shop on the corner. It's not a gyro. It's not, you know, dollar fries or free fries that come with a hamburger. It's actually what comes out of the Earth. It comes from where they come from. We're all of the Earth. And so it just gives them something to be empowered with and it gives them something to stimulate their minds and to give them other ideas that might be outside of a garden that might lead them into thinking about mathematics and science. Because a garden, ultimately, it is a classroom. It's not just gardening. It's art. It's a place to sing, so there's music. It's a place to draw and create within the garden. It's a means of fellowship and, you know, congregating. Especially for youth. And so they learn so much and they're fascinated by what they see. There's a lot of color and it's a place where they are allowed to be free. And so they can create that by growing food in a little space that is all about them that they can own and be accountable for, then that's a good thing. And GrowAsis is all for that, it's all about not just catering to the adults and the parents, but also catering to the youth and allowing them to have some type of outlet of freedom where if they mess up, it's not the end of the world. And that goes for adults, too. A lot of people are afraid to try because they automatically assume they're going to mess up so they already defeat themselves going in to pick up and tool and get

their hands dirty in soil. And with kids, they really don't have a lot of fear. They're like 'I just want to do it. Can I do it? I want to plant this. Can I water that? Can we pick the pepper's yet?' I get that all the time. "Yes. Yes baby you can pick them up. Don't pick them all because you're not going to have any food later, but you know. And then they learn the process of life. They learn kind of like a cycle of life. So they know like when they planted a seed, a spinach, that it's going to grow. That they can harvest it. That they have to water it to maintain it. They are able to eat it. They can come up with really great snack ideas. Um, you know, I think it just gives them a means of learning on another level that is kind of rigid and binding in a classroom. So they have a lot more freedom in a garden.¹⁵³

Just a few moments after she shared this with me, I heard the percussion of children's feet slapping the pavement as they ran across the sidewalk. They belonged to two little Black boys, no more than 7 and 10 years old, on the other side of the chain link fence bordering the Roseland Community Peace Garden. We paused the interview. Jackie smiled at them warmly and walked over to talk them. "We're not working in the garden today, but you can play around here if you'd like" she tells them. But it was too late. Catching sight of me—an obvious stranger to the community—and my big, intrusive camera, they fell shy with lowered eyes and after a couple of seconds, darted off into the distance. The garden provides a space for these little boys and many other youth in the community an opportunity to learn outside of the classroom. It is a place where they do not have to stifle their interests and sit at a desk under fluorescent bulbs for seven hours a day. There are other ways to learn.

Between 2013 and 2014, there were 39, 279 juvenile arrests in Chicago, and 7, 703 took place on Chicago Public School (CPS) property. About 27 Black youth were

¹⁵³ Ibid.

arrested for every 1 white youth arrested on CPS property.¹⁵⁴ The learning that happens at the garden exists outside of this school-to-prison pipeline. The learning that happens at the garden does not criminalize Black bodies.

And young people aren't the only ones benefitting from these spaces. People who have lived in the community for 20+ years are able to meet each other and connect for the first time ever in these spaces. Further, for those who have lived in their neighborhoods for years and have lived through the cyclical violences that have affected their communities for so long, gardens become a place where their congregation is centered around joy rather than despair:

I think it's important to for communities to be involved in community gardens like this one, it's because it sustains the community. It keeps the resources within the community where you don't have to go outside your community to get something so basic. It's a means of communication. A street can divide you from some of our neighbors, easy. And that shouldn't be. A community garden like this allows, you know, somebody from the block over there or two blocks back that way to come together at a hub. The garden acts as a conduit. A community garden acts as a conduit. And it allows people to communicate with each other, which they probably wouldn't have ever done. They've been living in the same community for the last twenty, twenty five years and never knew that they were neighbors or that they had something in common. And it also is a means of keeping the community alive. So many of the communities die out because they don't have the basic needs that they need so they have to venture out outside the community and live outside of the community in which they were born, in which they raised their children and that they develop their families in and where they went to school and got their first job. And I think a community garden is kind of like a staple of a community. And it's not just because of the food, it's just a means, it's a place where everybody can come and just work together in fellowship and share ideas and talk about things that are actually going on in the community. And it doesn't have to be solely at church, or it doesn't have to be at a synagogue, or it doesn't have to be at a mosque or whatever religious entity that has a title that is probably going to close at five or six o'clock, maybe nine o'clock in the evening. Whereas a garden, you can just be there any time of day. You know if you want to meet up with friends, "Meet me at the garden at like three o'clock on Tuesday", you know. It's there. "Let's pick some raspberries

¹⁵⁴ "CPD in CPS 2013-2014 - Infogram, Charts & Infographics," accessed November 24, 2015, <https://infogr.am/71a60ac6-58da-4f32-a252-b9d08e32e724>.

while we're talking." You know, things like that. It's very simple. I don't think people think out--I don't even think it's about thinking outside of the box. It's thinking basically. We live in a society, we live in a world where everything is bigger and faster and it's more convenient, where the simple things of just being able to sit down and have a conversation not via text or email that, you know, you can share something in a community garden or a entity like this in a community makes it a viable community. It makes it a means of going on for generations to come. So you can say "well my granny and my mama used to sit in the garden and talk about me when I was in my mama's stomach" kind of thing like that, just little things. I really talk crazy, but [laughs], you know, just things like that. It's a place of--something like this in a community is a means of having memories, positive memories. And I'm not talking about "Oh that's where Miss Anderson's son died right there on the corner". That's a memory, but that's not a happy memory. That's not a positive thing. That's a means of someone mourning and grieving. And everybody has to mourn and everybody has to grieve when somebody passes on and transitions. But at the same time, there's also a place where you can, you know, think positively about things that are going on within the community and not always death and destruction and municipal laws that are being passed and policies and rigid construction and gentrification that is really pushing things like this and ideas out of people's means to actually save their communities.¹⁵⁵

Here the garden becomes much more than a place to grow food; it becomes a hub that promotes life for the community.

Pancho told me that the hub he has been a part of for a few years now has taught him that communities centered around gardens and food justice work as a whole are wealthy, but not in the way that we usually conceptualize wealth:

People who are a part of our food community—not only the Green Lots Project, which we have a solid small group, but also in the larger food community on the South Side of Chicago—we're strong. We're strong. We support each other. We help each other out. We have at the Black Oaks Center what they call "community wealth." Our community wealth is our knowledge and our resources and our community that is strong. And so I see that at the small level. I certainly know it's true for our own group and how we relate to one another. And I think that at a geographical community level then, where people who live on this street on Eggleston can begin to develop community. It's harder, but certainly we've seen it done. In many other community gardens we see it happening all the time where communities become stronger in so many different ways. And each one of

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

those ways, I don't think that we should suggest that they are little either. Each one of those ways is really important to people.¹⁵⁶

There is a network of support within the food justice community in Chicago that relies on another form of wealth unaccounted for by capitalism and systems of domination premised on labor and exploitation. This alternative form of wealth is premised on love: love of the self, love of the community, and an honest desire to see one another thrive.

I think that that is so key. That we begin to love each other. There's so much very interesting academic scholarship on love and the power of that. So I think we have to really focus on those kinds of things. We focus on trying to get over on each other. We focus on the next electronic instead of you know, things that really can heal us. I'm sure when you talk to other farmers in this movement, people are going to say these kinds of things about how this heals us and how the land has healed us. Even in the city, the land has healed us. so you have more of an appreciation of life, you have an appreciation for other people and our interconnectedness with each other and other species. And you begin to appreciate that more because, again, you see that materially happening within a few months and you see that your connection to those people created something valuable. And I think that is a good mix for people beginning to like each other. [Laughs.] But then moving onto that next step of starting to love each other and care, care for each other and spread that around... I think we should spread that around to men and women and to kids and elders and we spread love and stewardship. and what we get back from that, from tending the garden and see that we get back way more than you gave. That love that you gave that plant or that community group, you're going to get way more back. I think that's going to be key to building these strong relationships, changing those attitudes.¹⁵⁷

Gardens are spaces where we learn to love again. And the best part of it all? Gardens

lasts.

A community garden is a place where it just reseeds itself. When you reseed, when you plant the seed and you let it grow and it provides you with food that you need and you let it go on and you transition, it leaves a legacy. When it produces seeds, those seeds are going to drop back into the ground and it's going to produce another plant for the next generation to come. That's the way that I look at a community. That's what I think a community should be about, just reseeding over and over and over again to the point where the roots of the community garden are so strong that nothing

¹⁵⁶ Pancho MacFarland in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

can be removed from it. And I say that in a proverbial sense, and I say that literally too. It's powerful. It really is. And it's not about just families who have been here, but people who are coming in outside of the community that need a home. That need a place of belonging and a place to survive and a place to feel like they're welcomed.¹⁵⁸

The garden is a place of survival, a place of belonging, a place of welcome. The garden reseeds the community. The garden ensures longevity.

Honoring ancestors, indigenous peoples, and the sacredness of land

The history of the oppression of Black people in America is an ugly one. Yet the resilience of Black people and other people of color through time is astonishing, and it is something that is constantly admired in the interviewees' food justice work. Pancho explains how today's reclamation of agricultural practices adopted from their subjugated ancestors is what keeps them alive today:

First, you have to go way back to colonialism and all that kind of stuff and enslavement and all that. To bring it more up to date, the loss of traditional ecological knowledge that allowed our ancestors to survive during those horrors of colonialism and enslavement and stuff like that and the theft of land. So we lose that knowledge. And especially when we had people migrating to the city. So we have Black southerners migrating to the cities. In the city you don't have the space. And the Black and green lifestyle was devalued and all kinds of things happened. So you lose that. And you have the same for the urbanized Mexicano community and certain other communities, I just don't know them as well. And so we lose that knowledge and we lose that power. And the fact of just being resource-poor in general. Part of the issue with community garden in an urban setting is just having access to the resources. We don't have access to the resources. We've been impoverished. We're not poor, we've been impoverished. And so we don't have the resources that sometimes we need. We don't have the knowledge that we need that our ancestors had and our elders used to have. And we don't have the other kinds of material resources that we need. You know the history right? Of slavery and colonialism? It doesn't need to be repeated, it should be obvious that we don't have those resources. So yes, it's complicated. And then all the other things that are going on, too. The continued ongoing impoverishment and violence against people of color by the state and by corporations. It's just amazing we're still here. But it shows you the resilience of people of color and it

¹⁵⁸ Jackie Smith in discussion with the author, July 2015.

shows you the resilience of these traditions because these traditions are the things that are keeping us alive, these agricultural, horticultural traditions.¹⁵⁹

When he says “we’ve been impoverished,” Pancho alludes to a certain deliberation on the part of white supremacist institutions of power to strip people of color of the things that sustain them, including the way they grew and ate food. However, they have persevered. That in and of itself inspires Pancho to keep doing the work that he does.

Interviewees constantly made adoring references to how things were “back in the day”, how life was for Black people before all of the *-isms* that shaped the way they live now, and how Black people made something out of nothing for themselves in order to survive.

Jackie compared the lack food access in her neighborhood now to the way African peoples ate before the disruption of colonialism:

Everybody has the right to eat food, to eat healthy food. I’m not just talking about anything that processed, that you can get in the can, or that is packaged. I’m talking about like food that our ancestors ate that they had no problem doing. They didn’t know poor, you know. They had land, they grew on it and they fed the family off of it and that was never an issue. There was never a decision that had to be made as to whether or not they want to eat or if they had to pay a bill or anything like that.¹⁶⁰

While Jackie vocalized her admiration for her people’s way of life before slavery,

Reverend Sampson appreciated the ingenuity of his people during slavery:

We need to say to Save-A-Lot: stop trying to sell our people canned goods because of the sodium which is inside of the canned goods. Our genius as a people is what we call color on the plate. When you get vegetables like squash or crowder peas or butter beans and beets and spinach, all of those is what we call color on the plate. We didn’t have cancer like we got now down south. We didn’t have diabetes or the other challenges we have with what we call the seven deadly sins.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Pancho MacFarland in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Jackie Smith in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹⁶¹ Albert Sampson in discussion with the author, July 2015.

This deep reverence for their ancestors motivates the work that they do today. Jackie's own agricultural practices are reflective of her intention to honor the way her ancestors knew how to live:

Even the way food is grown is different than it was years ago, you know, because industrialization changed all that. Now it's faster, it's easier, it's quicker, you get stuff to market faster. But with that, you take out the essence of what that plant really is. When you genetically modify something, you take away its true DNA. You take away all its characteristics. You take away, really, its purpose. Why it was planted. Why that seed was created. Our people knew that. Our indigenous people, they knew that. They knew the sacredness of a seed, that is not just something that you just grow and change it up because you want the color to be nice and taste better. It was what it was. And it carried on generations of people before us in that one seed.¹⁶²

Her ancestors knew the sacredness of the seed, and so she chooses to save heirloom seeds and preserve seeds when it comes times for harvest in acknowledgement of their practices. She goes on:

Also in conjunction with that, land is sacred. If you are a farmer, if you are a gardener, you know how sacred land is. You know that it carries life in it. You know that it was there before you. You know that you are a steward. That you don't dominate it. You don't destroy it. You don't move anything, unless you are moved my spirit to do it. Not because you want to do it or because it looks ugly or "I don't want that weed there, I'ma pull it out". You know the sacredness of land and you know that you honor it. You honor it with every seed that you plant. I have a ritual where I pray as I plant, every time I plant a seed. Because I know I've driven my car way too much for the week and so I have to give back to Mother Earth. I'm like "I'm sorry Mama Earth, I shouldn't have bought that gas yesterday. Let me go ahead and put that seed right there for ya." And, you know, however you choose to do it. However you choose to do it, however you choose to honor. But I think you need to honor the land because it has carried our people, a people, for a long time. And I think that the food that comes from the land is a reminder of how valuable and how viable soil is and how authenticity plays a huge role in the continuance of life.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Jackie Smith in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Jackie honors the African ancestors whose names she may not know, but whose blood runs through her veins. However, she doesn't have to go that far down her genealogy to find people to admire. She also honors those who are much more immediate in relation to her, including her grandmother.

I had a grandma, my great grandmother was a Mississippi sharecropper. And she raised about, maybe, twenty kids in a shotgun house in Mississippi. She grew everything off the land. She had her own hog. She wrung chicken's necks. She had a smoke house. She did it all. The only time she had to buy anything was flour and oats and probably sugar. And she may have gotten that maybe once a year from the town general store when she got her money from the sharecropping. Everything else she did off the land. And so, as I honor the land, I honor her. I carry on her legacy.¹⁶⁴

Jackie works in recognition of her sharecropper grandmother and what she did to keep her family strong, alive, healthy and well.

Many of the interviewees explicitly attributed the work that they are doing with their organizations to a specific forbearer that inspired them to get involved in food justice. Reverend Sampson told me the story behind his organization George Washington Carver F.A.R.M.S.:

George Washington Carver was a slave, a scientist, and he was an orphan. And about twenty or twenty-five years ago, I was down in Florida A&M and I was talking about George Washington Carver because he's always impressed me because he did the peanut and the sweet potato. He's the godfather of agriculture. When the south was being eaten up with the locus with the cotton, he was able to say to Black farmers, let's move to having row crops to putting these particular products back in the ground to put the nutrients back in the ground... So I was at Florida A&M with a couple of hundred of Black farmers and a brother raised his hand from the back and said that he was a student of George Washington Carver. And everybody clapped. And I said that's awesome. What I'd like to do is take your number, brother, because I would like to have any relatives of George Washington Carver. He said that'll never happen Reverend. I said why not? My people trust me. I want to honor him because of who he was, the godfather of agriculture. He said that's not the problem. He said there's a group of white people in America called 'eugenics' and they believe that your intelligence runs through your genes. And so they ended up castrating George Washington Carver

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

so that he would not have any children. At that moment, in front of everybody sister, I literally broke down and cried. And I made the commitment that I would bring George Washington Carver back home to the Black community.¹⁶⁵

As he described finding out about the castration of George Washington Carver, he paused in effort to recollect himself, but the break in eye contact and the hush in his voice made it clear that this was something that continues to deeply affect Sampson to this day.

Creating the George Washington Carver F.A.R.M.S. allows him to carry on Carver's legacy.

Similarly, Robert Nevel of KAM Isaiah Israel Food Justice Program described an annual event held at their synagogue in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

In honor of Dr. King's birth, we put on for our community a food justice and sustainability weekend that involves really education and advocacy and for these issues of food justice and sustainability. And really what inspires us about Dr. King is the idea that, in it's most basic way, that through love you solve many problems. And what we're trying to demonstrate in this weekend is love for each other, love for the environment, love for all the components of the natural world. And really it is a weekend where that sort of is the undercurrent of all of it. And it allows us then the opportunity to demonstrate the kind of work we do here and to share that collective knowledge and effort with the larger community. It is a weekend. It's totally accessible. It's free and open to everyone. Free of charge. And it is a weekend to demonstrate the importance of these issues, in honoring Dr. King's legacy, and to emphasize the importance of the community and equality that is essential, the essential equality of all of us.¹⁶⁶

This weekend-long education and advocacy program that welcomes any and all who wish to attend is a small part of the lasting legacy that Dr. King left behind.

Doing food justice work in remembrance transforms the pain and trauma into a motivating energy that goes toward continued pursuit of Black liberation. Interviewees felt a deep sense of pride when doing the work of those before them. However, their food justice work is not only done in remembrance of people who have long passed, but also

¹⁶⁵ Albert Sampson in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹⁶⁶ Robert Nevel in discussion with the author, August 2015.

as an extension of actions and movements of the recent past and present. Reverend Sampson makes connections between his own actions in the past as an active member of the Civil Rights Movement, and the food justice work he is doing now. I was lucky enough to hear this story from him:

I came out of the Civil Rights Movement in 1957-61 out of Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. I was president of the NAACP on the campus at Shaw. When SNCC was founded on my campus I gave them the keys...I was president of the youth and college chapters all over North Carolina. I know what Alcatraz looks like in Natchez, Mississippi, in Parchman where they locked up two thousand of us, stripped us butt naked and gave us a laxative. We were like monkeys in the zoo. And they were counter-parting Black women's sacred parts. I know what it means to be in Epes, Alabama where Black students had a school and it said science lab but it didn't have no microscopes. It said library and there was no books. And I turned the school out in Epes, Alabama and we were headed to the white school. And the sheriff named Sheriff Pete put a gun to my head and said, "you're a Martin coon and as soon as you leave from this spot, if you think you're going up to that school I'm going to kill you." And right to this day, I'll never forget, the FBI was right there with a blue Chevrolet and they started laughing. And I said "you heard what Sheriff Pete said" and they said "Yeah Reverend Sampson, there's nothing that we can do, we have to wait 'til he shoots you." And he still had the gun at my forehead. And I looked at him and said "your cap pistol has nothing to do with my life." And I broke out with the song "Ain't gon' let nobody turn me 'round, I'm gon' keep on walkin' on..." and we went up into that school and we desegregated that school. And today they've got Black sheriffs now down there in Epes, Alabama. And my point is, if I could sit down at a lunch counter for a hamburger at a Woolworth Restaurant, I'm quite sure I don't mind dying for the crowder peas and the butter beans and the watermelons that our ancestors produced.¹⁶⁷

Sampson remembers the humiliation, degradation, and trauma of the racism that has personally affect his own life. He uses these memories to inspire the work that he does today. His attitude is one of courage and agency: *we've done it before and we will do it again*. It's also important to note that he would rather die honoring the legacy of his Black ancestors and eating the food of his own people, than die of the poisons currently

¹⁶⁷ Albert Sampson in discussion with the author, July 2015.

in Black communities. His honor for Mama—she who fixed up the potlikker out of the scraps she was thrown—is unwavering.

Then, there are the memories of the trauma that Black bodies carry with them implicitly. Jackie explained the way she conceptualizes the postmemory of colonialism. Even though the relationship between Black people and food have been complicated by violent white supremacist institutions, she believes that Black folk carry a living memory of how to prepare the foods of their African ancestors with them:

Those of us who are of color, who are of African descent, we have been ripped and humiliated. We have been demonized. We have been told that we are not people. That we are not human. That we don't count. That we don't have feelings. That we came from a speck of dirt. We have had our culture, our language, our children, our husbands, our sisters and brothers, our mamas and daddies ripped from us for labor, for colonization, for profit, at the expense of our lives. We have had our land taken from us. We were put on a boat across the Atlantic Ocean. We couldn't speak our native language anymore. We couldn't cook our food the way we wanted to. We couldn't grow our food because this land was not our land. And, I think, I think a lot of us have forgotten that. At the same time though, those of us who endured and were strong enough to make it across that --[chuckles] and I say this so lightly--carnival cruise ship vacation across the Atlantic Ocean from West Africa, from the Ivory Coast, from Benin, from Cameroon, from Senegal, from Kenya, from Nigeria, Ghana, we held on. They didn't want us to be able to read. They didn't want us to speak our native language. But we kept a little something with us. And it was a means of survival to help us make it. Not just another day, to make it to the next minute, the next hour, never knowing what was going to happen to us when we got to where we were going to be placed. We got separated. And so, you know, we kept those ideas and those memories--I believe we kept those memories with us on how to plant a yam. How to grow collard greens. How to make cassava rice.¹⁶⁸

Again we see this idea of holding onto African traditions of the past to sustain Black life of the present. Though Black people have endured an incredible amount of pain and suffering, Jackie believes reclaiming the way African forebearers valued food, land, and community in urban gardens is one way in which Black people can heal themselves now:

¹⁶⁸ Jackie Smith in discussion with the author, July 2015.

I think when you honor the land, you honor your ancestors. You honor yourself because you are--I look at it as, you are replenishing yourself in spirit and physically within your body when you eat from the Earth. And I think somewhere in the many tribes of Africa and the many mothers who birth and raise their children in Africa and here when they got here, I think there was some type of hope. I'm an optimist, I can't help it. I just believe that through all the brutality and the murdering and the raping and the destruction of Black people, there was just a little bit of hope with each life that was brought into the world. Hoping that, you know, somehow, someway, we were going to get back to what it used to be. And we're not all going--it may never be what it used to be. It may not. It may not be in this lifetime. But, I think we can make do with what we have and then even expand upon that as well as do better with positive thinking and speaking life into one another and encouraging one another to say "hey, I know you may be struggling with a health issue. Well you know what Ida, I'll pray. Let me give you some greens. Let me give you some raspberries. Let me give you some lemon balm real quick and you can make some tea if your stomach is upset. Drink that it might settle your stomach, you may feel a little bit better." Something like that, you know, just to share and to have some type of empathy and sympathy for one another. Things like that. Because that's what we were doing before, before they told us that we weren't anything, before they stripped us of our spirituality and told us that white Christianity is the way you're going to get saved. That you're going to go to hell. That you are a heathen. "How dare you cook that food the way you cook it. I want you to cook the way I know it needs to be cooked. And you better not skimp on the butter." You know, things like that where you were just demonized for doing something that sustained you for the longest time. I just think that that's horrible. And we're still doing it. It's still being done. We're even doing it to each other. And that's sad because we've been brainwashed to think that bigger is better and another culture telling us that we're not anything, that we're not going to surmount to anything, that we're not the pinnacle of where we are or what we are because they say so. Because they don't see the positive things that are being done. They see only the negative. And they're fearful. They're scared because they don't know. You're going to be fearful of what you don't know. And they don't know. And they're afraid. They think we're going to dominate. We just want to survive. We want to make it. And we don't just want to make it, we want to be better than okay, you know. And I find that gardening and farming and talking to children and sharing with people, it's a drop in a bucket but eventually it could turn into a big pond. Maybe not in my lifetime, but I pray that something that I may say to someone or even the things that are being said to me resonates and it manifests into something better and it encourages us to think outside the box of what society tell us, what mainstream media says we should do, and what we ought to do.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

The only way we can do this is by actively decolonizing our minds. While part of that decolonization process includes embracing the life-sustaining practices of African peoples, perhaps the most important part of that includes Black people simply recognizing the inherent value they each carry and fostering a sense of self-worth that white supremacy works so hard to destroy.

Healing and empowerment

Beyond simply providing a source of nourishment for physical health, growing your own food can also help to increase the health of the community holistically. Pancho spoke on how his experiences in the garden have transformed his life:

The other thing that I like to emphasize about this is not only the physical health, but the emotional, mental, and spiritual health too. Part of the diseases, the chronic diseases we have in impoverished communities, a lot of it is spiritual, emotional, mental health issues. The violences that we're exposed to of many, many sorts they wear on us physically. And those are the obvious things. When people have to go to the hospital or they're sick, you can see that they're sick. And those are obvious, but there's also the mental health issues. It's hard sometimes to live in this neighborhood. It's hard being a kid in this neighborhood, a young man in this neighborhood. The threats are multiple. You know, my children are in this neighborhood. The threats are multiple. And that's going to wear on you emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. You get beaten. You got that, and you got environmental problems and you've got all these problems and they're weighing down on you mentally, emotionally, spiritually. And so, one of the things that I find it has done for me-- and I know it's done for other people 'cause I hear these stories and I'm in the gardens with people-- was for me, it's given me a better sense of dignity and self worth. I can grow this. And I can do this. And I can do this for—and maybe more importantly—I can do this for other people. I can do this for my neighbors, and my family, and my friends, and my community, and it gives you a sense of pride and dignity. So I think that helps deal with the mental, emotional, and spiritual problems that we have. And then you get in—So that's coming from the perspective of a community garden too, right? When you do it with the community. So you get in the gardens, and you get people together, and we're working together. We're getting stronger physically, cause we're doing hard work. We're getting stronger mentally cause we're solving problems. And we're getting stronger emotionally and physically because we're around each other. We are engaging one another in communion, in working together in spirit, and boosting our spirits and all that stuff. When we talk about

community gardening, the importance of growing your own extends beyond the talk of the food and the health to other aspects of social health. Public health, those kinds of things.¹⁷⁰

Though they may belong to some of the most marginalized communities in the nation, these community members are able to gain some sort of control over the food over their communities. They are not just passive victims of their circumstance. By working in the garden collectively, their health goes up collectively. In these spaces, community members are able to grow food, grow community, and grow self-worth. They are also able to foster mentally, physically, and emotionally healthy relationships with themselves and each other. Food justice work has the ability to nourish mind, body and soul.

Recognizing the relationship between people of color and the Earth seems to be a big part of that. Pancho explains that the way Black and Brown peoples and the way land has been treated over time is one in the same:

We can talk about exploitation of third world workers. Exploitation of workers in California fields. When we grow here, we're not participating in that exploitation. And if we can create jobs, we can create dignity for people, and work, and stuff like that as well, so we're not exploiting farm workers in the same way, we're not adding to the exploitation of the environment and other species through the pesticides and herbicides, and from getting our food from hundreds of miles away and they're traveling through petroleum. What we do here influences the global and vice versa obviously. So that we don't have to fight oil wars because we're not using oils to truck our foods from California and Mexico or Chile, or wherever the hell they come from, we're getting it from right here, and I can ride my bike. Or people that live right there could walk and they could get their food. We don't need oil, do we? Or that much of it. Or just a little bit I guess, I don't know.¹⁷¹

The work Pancho does in the community gardens across the South Side aims to exist outside of the larger system of exploitation that continues to profit off of the destruction of Black and Brown bodies, land, and the environment. One way they do this is by

¹⁷⁰ Pancho MacFarland in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

deconstructing dogmas of exploitation that are perpetuated and carried out at the individual level:

In general, our culture is crass and violent. It's not life-centered at all. We love people. How do we get over on people? How do we exploit people? And I want to teach what I call bio-centric values. Life-centered values. Not human-centered or me-centered or even my-race-centered or my-city-centered or my-country-centered. Life-centered values that I don't think we have...we're losing how to appreciate life and I want to teach that. I think it's important to teach that... I think your values change when you're in the garden. So one of the ways that they're really keeping us down is not only through real physical violence but it's through making us into consumers so that the only way you understand yourself is through what you wear or what you buy or whatever. It's that materialism. When you come to the garden you realize that's all a bunch of, you know. There's no value in that. So you begin to change your values.¹⁷²

In the garden, Pancho teaches life-centered values to children and elders. By teaching individual how to live in a way that promotes life for all, this work subverts ideologies that values and privileges certain lives over others.

When I asked Jackie the same question about the importance of growing your own food, she also declared that we need a life-centered groundedness that does not value one more than another:

When you grow your own food, the importance of doing that is, like I said before, sustaining yourself. When you grow your own food, you know how it was grown, what was put into it—and I'm not just talking water and fertilizer. Like it's a labor of love. That's what it really is... When you grow your own food, you're healthier, you're filled with more diversity within your body because you're growing all these different types of vegetables that you probably normally wouldn't have access to unless you went to the grocery store. When you grow your own food, you are in love with Mother Earth. You are creating biodiversity in the soil every time you plant something different. Plants have all these different types of nutrients that is going into the soil that's helping another plant nearby. It's helping the organisms that are in there. It's contributing to the ecosystem that's going on, not just above ground, but also below ground in the soil. You are being a steward. You're not dominating, you're not destroying, you're not constructing. You're working with nature. You're doing bio-mimicry. Bio-mimicry means that you are

¹⁷² Ibid.

imitating what nature is already doing, so you're just assisting with that and you just let Mother Nature take care of the rest. You do your part and you keep moving forward. When you grow your own food, you're proud. When you grow your own food, you are combatting against not having accessible food at your disposal. When you're growing your own food, you are giving back to your community, to yourselves, to your family, to the earth, to the world.¹⁷³

The true importance of growing your own food is larger than the self. It's about cultivating a symbiotic relationship with the land. It is about learning that we are all equally important and learning how not to overpower another. This, Jackie says, helps you learn that "you're part of the ecosystem. You're part of the plan. You're part of what it's supposed to be."¹⁷⁴ Understanding this role in the ecosystem is particularly important for the Black community as it serves to reaffirm their existence. As a people who have been told in many different ways that Black lives do not matter, as a people living at a day and age where the value of Black lives is still being fervently contested, cultivating this relationship with the Earth can restore the fundamental believe that Black folk have a greater purpose.

We matter.

We have always matter.

We will never not matter.

¹⁷³ Jackie Smith in discussion with the author, July 2015.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Conclusion

“We gon’ be alright.”¹⁷⁵
-Kendrick Lamar, Alright

After conducting interviews with these community organizers about their experiences with food access, growing food, and food justice, I have found that in the alternative food pathways created *by the people for the people*, food becomes more than just physical sustenance. In these gardens, there is deliberate regard for the past. Many of the interviewees vocalized their understanding of our present day food system as inextricably linked to the institution of slavery and white supremacy. Throughout my interviews, there was a recurring theme of ancestry, diaspora, and connecting the food the Black community eats and/or grows with cultural memories of Africa. Interviewees evoked African diasporic memories, traumas, and legacies of forbearers—from unnamed African ancestors to very recognizable Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—and though they viewed food security as absolutely essential for true liberation, they all felt that healthy foods were not accessible in their own neighborhoods.

All expressed dissatisfaction with and/or lack of control over the mainstream food systems and made direct connections between the food available in their neighborhoods and the adverse health outcomes they observed in their communities, which triggers their strong emphasis on community self-reliance. Marginalized communities growing their food is an act of not only survival, but also of celebration and triumph. Acting as safe spaces for neighbors of all ages to congregate, discuss issues happening in the

¹⁷⁵ “Kendrick Lamar – Alright Lyrics | Genius,” accessed December 12, 2015, <http://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-alright-lyrics>.

neighborhood, and ultimately keep the community alive and healthy, gardens become transformative spaces for community building, learning, and collective healing.

Community members become better stewards to the earth, as well as to each other.

Ultimately, community-led urban agriculture has the power to transform urban communities and their relationship with food, land, the environment, and each other.

Community spaces centered around food justice work easily become outdoor classrooms for antiracist, social justice pedagogy. Though the relationship between Black people and food is complicated by their history with land in the United States as it relates to indentured servitude, slavery, sharecropping, and domestic work, present-day Black stewardship of the land can serve as reclamation of a space they've long been historically denied.

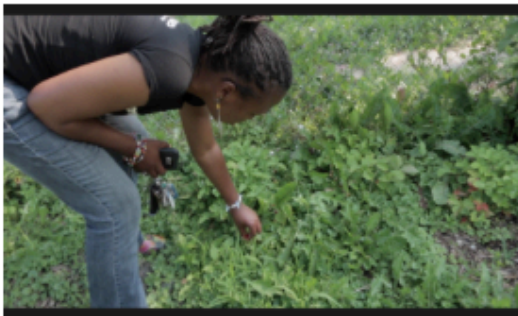
I caught a glimpse of all of this over the summer when I sat nestled in the Roseland Community Peace Garden among the raspberries, spearmints, comfrees, plum trees, walking onions, lilies, Jerusalem artichokes, chives, cilantros, potatoes, grapes, cascading beans, corn and squash. While the cityscape was very much alive and well—with helicopters buzzing above, ambulances rushing past, the teenagers across the street that saw me interviewing Jackie, shouted “She’s gonna be on the TV! Hey!”, placed palm over mouth to stifle their giggles, and scurried away from the scene—so too was the garden. I was only there for a couple of hours, but I was charmed by this oasis in the middle of a food desert. At some point between tasting the sweet strawberry Jackie picked for me fresh off the stem, the hum of bees and other winged-things dancing around my ears, and observing all the low-riding cars that drove past blasting the latest drill music, I was reminded of love: love of myself, love of my fellow Black people, love

for all of humanity, and love for everything that lives. As I went from one part of the South Side to another and collected the stories of those I interviewed, I couldn't help but be reminded of the oral tradition that has kept members of the African Diaspora alive and connected to their history. The stories, knowledges, and histories of interviewees were passed down to me, and I believe it is my duty to share them.

So, that's what I've done here. By writing this thesis, I've not only passed down their narratives to you, I've also passed down mine. Keep them. Carry them with you. Share them with as many people as you can. Maybe, if these stories reach enough people, we might all be reminded of love: love for ourselves, love for our communities, love for all of humanity, and love for everything that lives—and begin to act accordingly.

Appendix

This appendix includes the transcriptions of four recorded interviews I conducted with the food justice organizers of Chicago's South Side. I also include the photos I took of the interviewees at their work sites.



Ida: Please introduce yourself. Who are you and what do you do?

Jackie: My name is Jacqueline Ann Smith. No one calls me Jacqueline; I'm Jacky. I am an urban gardener/urban farmer here in the city of Chicago.

I: Can you tell me a little bit about what you do with GrowAsis and the other organizations that you help out?

J: GrowAsis Urban Garden Consulting, Inc. is my business. It's what I launched a year ago and the purpose of GrowAsis is to empower people to grow and secure their own food. I solely cater to people on the South Side of Chicago and it's just a means of getting people to be earth stewards while living a healthier life according to whatever their lifestyle is. It's about consulting and giving advice to people and also providing them with education to grow their own vegetable garden or to learn a little bit more if they're already doing vegetable or gardening farming, they can add a little bit more to their skills and development. And the other organization I work with is the Green Lots Project. I work with them, this is my second season with the Green Lots Project and it really is more about community service where the community is providing its own service to itself and they learn informally about the different aspects of, you know, growing food from seed to harvest. So anybody who is a part of the community is actually a part of the Green Lots Project. So they are two separate entities, Grow Asis and Green Lots, but at times, you know, I, they work together but GrowAsis is my baby [laughs] and GrowAsis is how I really fulfill my purpose and my mission here on earth.

I: So a lot of your work has to do with food and I saw food security as one of the topics you're really dedicated toward mitigating with these sorts of projects. So I'm just wondering—what is your definition of food insecurity?

J: My definition of food insecurity is not having access to healthy food at all times. I don't think being able to go to the farmer's market once or twice a week is a means of security. If you don't have it, then obviously you have to go to another source to get it. I believe being food secure means that you know if you need a tomato you can go to your backyard and get it because you're growing it. Or you know you can go next door to your neighbor who may have a garden or source of food and get it right next door from them. I think it really is a means of feeling secure knowing that you have food at your fingertips, that you don't have to travel across your neighborhood or across the city to get food that everybody has the right to have. And food security is not a trend, it is a thing that is being lived. And it's not a title that is necessarily put on a particular group of people. Hunger has no discrimination. It affects, it can affect anybody at any time given the circumstances or the situation you may be in. So I think being food secure is just making sure that you know you got your food when you need it. I think being food secure means that you got it better than McDonald's or Burger King 'cause you got to get in the car and take the bus or walk to White Castle's or Burger King, but if you want a tomato or you want potatoes or you want cucumbers you know, you can just go into your backyard and get it right out there and that's way quicker that's almost a nanosecond as opposed to going somewhere else to a fast food joint to get food and it's so much healthier for you too.

I: So that leads to my third question: How accessible do you think healthy and affordable food is in your community?

J: How accessible is it [food]? It's not accessible. It's not. And yeah I don't think healthy food is accessible to people in my community or even the neighboring communities. And I believe that is because there is a lack of resources, there's a lack of education, there is a lack of heritage and information and skills that have been lost between the gaps of the elders and the youth of today. Um, and I believe that, um, I believe that its just—the ball got dropped and it affects us on so many different levels to the point where it affects the crime rate, it affects the school system, it affects families being able to survive where they have to decide whether to feed the kids or if they got to pay the light bill and that should never be. Everybody has the right to eat food, to eat healthy food. I'm not just talking about anything that processed, that you can get in the can, or that is packaged. I'm talking about like food that our ancestors ate that they had no problem doing. They didn't know poor, you know. They had land, they grew on it and they fed the family off of it and that was never an issue. There was never a decision that had to be made as to whether or not they want to eat or if they had to pay a bill or anything like that. And its come to that now, unfortunately, but at the same time for those who don't know, it's an opportunity to know and because I think a lot of people know they need healthy food, some people are totally oblivious, some people actually know, some people are in denial and they still know, some people are, they want to know but they don't know how to get the information and I think that's where GrowAsis comes in where you can get the information, where you can not just keep it for yourself but share with your neighbors, share with your families, share with friends so then that way you know, it's not just about

food, but it's about coming together as people, as a people and actually sharing and you end up finding out your people are struggling as much as you are. Like if one's hurting then everyone's hurting. That's my belief. And so um [lack of] fresh food accessibility in this community is very prevalent from what I see and I've lived in this community about a good twenty years. And then outside of this community, like this is Roseland, I've actually lived a little while in Auburn-Gresham, I've lived a good hunk of my life in Hyde Park, in Bronzeville, I drive through Englewood all the time. And then you know if I go to the North Side or if I go to near UIC, they're struggling too but they still have resources to get fresh food whenever they want to. So I think it's a cultural thing too. But I believe that no matter what background you come from, what your lineage is, you know whatever your financial situation may be, what your education status is, everybody has a right to fresh accessible foods. I don't care where you live, and it really hurts my heart to see my people on the street and they're just standing on the corner doing nothing. When I see a vacant lot when I'm riding down the street, I cringe because I'm like 'oh my God, there's opportunity for great food!' like that's what I see when I drive down the street or when I walk down the street or riding my bike I'm like "oh God, that would be a great lot for vegetables to be grown." And then nobody has a right to it. Everybody has accessibility to it. There's no land grant, nobody says 'oh well this is mine, you can't have it. I'm growing off of it. Me, me, me.'" Everybody should have access to it. That's my thought.

I: I saw that on your website you encourage people to grow their own vegetable oasis, so I'm wondering—how can someone who lives in a “food desert” grow their own vegetable oasis that GrowAsis encourages?

J: I think somebody can be able to grow their own vegetable oasis by knowing what it is they need. If you need spinach, and you eat a lot of it and it's breaking your bank, like it hurts you every time you have to go to the grocery store like Jewel or Mariano's you're like "oh my gosh, that's not really in my budget" then that's what you should be growing. Start small. Yeah, I think people should just start small unless you're just like an avid gardener and you just know what it is, you know how to do it and you just want to go at it, that's fine. But for those of us who don't know, just kind of start small, figure out kind of like what it is you eat most of and consider who else are you feeding, how much food do you eat in a day, do you eat within season? We all should be eating in season but some of us don't. What are you most prone to eat? What are your health issues that you have to deal with that affect your diet or how your diet affects your health? How much money are you willing to spend to establish a garden? Or if you don't want to spend any money at all, what resources do you have? What bartering system are you going to use to do that? Who do you know that might even be in the realm of gardening or farming? They should start there. It's not rocket science, I think people get overwhelmed with the thought of growing their own food, especially if they've never done it before they're like "oh my God, I have a green thumb! I tried to grow an aloe plant and it died. I can't grow this and..." there's no excuse. I believe that there is no excuse as to why people should not grow their own food, no matter if you live in the city of Chicago, in the concrete jungle of New York City, if you live on a rural farm in Oklahoma, there is no reason why you shouldn't be able to grow your own food on some level or capacity. Um, to say that you can't or you're giving excuses as to why you cannot, you will starve ultimately. And you will get food but is it fresh? Is it really good for you? Is it catering to the needs of your

temple, of your body? Is it sustaining you? That's another means to get back to your question about food security—is it sustaining you? It's one thing to have like a whole summer where you're able to grow your own garden all, for what, three or four months if Mother Nature is so generous to allow us to have weather to do such things, um, but what are you doing for those winter months? Are you taking those, like you know, I try to encourage people like 'well what do I do with my greens? I can't grow greens in the winter time?' but you grow them now, you um blanch them, and you freeze 'em. You have them during the winter time whenever you need them, you know, so you'll still be sustainable, you'll still have those nutrients that you need that you got all summer long and still have that during the winter, you know. So it's a means of being sustainable at the same time and not just like a one time deal where 'oh I can only get this in the summer.' You can get it all year round. It's hard work. It doesn't come easy. And if you're really willing to have fresh foods, you have to work for it, um, if you're going to do it from the ground up. And even if you're not, you just have to find a farmer's market, and it's kind of hard work to find a farmer's market, especially on the South Side of Chicago. They're more, like, north, like closer to downtown, or you find them a lot in Hyde Park, um, Kenwood area, Woodlawn area, you can find them there. They're kind of populating here on the south side, but there's like a group of us who know we're out there and we collaborate and we talk and we share and we come up with ideas and we collaborate as far as projects are concerned, but people don't know about us and we have to be vocal about that because we're living with the population that we serve. At least I know I'm living with the population that I serve. I'm not food secure and I have no problem saying that. I still have to go, I have to go get eggs. I still have to get almond milk. I still have to

get my lentils. I still have to get chicken broth and things like that because I'm not, yeah, I don't have any chickens—I want to have chickens—but I don't have all the resources that I need to be completely sustainable on my own. I preserve a lot, but um, you know, at times I can be food insecure even though I have a plethora of years behind my belt in agriculture, the industry of agriculture. But I still have to figure out a way to feed myself every now and then.

I: Which brings me to my next question—what is the importance of growing your own food? I guess you kind of already answered that...

J: Yeah, I can reiterate. The importance is, is when you grow your own food, there's so many dynamics to it. You are—when you grow your own food, the importance of doing that is, like I said before, sustaining yourself. When you grow your own food, you know how it was grown, what was put into it—and I'm not just talking water and fertilizer.

Like it's a labor of love. That's what it really is. And when I'm out here, when I'm at my parents' house growing food for them, um when I'm inside during the winter months and I'm ready to start seedlings of tomatoes to start plant in the spring, I put my all into it.

When you grow your own food, you're healthier, you're filled with more diversity within your body because you're growing all these different types of vegetables that you probably normally wouldn't have access to unless you went to the grocery store. When you grow your own food, you are in love with Mother Earth. You are creating biodiversity in the soil every time you plant something different. Plants have all these different types of nutrients that is going into the soil that's helping another plant nearby. It's helping the organisms that are in there. It's contributing to the ecosystem that's going on, not just above ground, but also below ground in the soil. You are being a steward.

You're not dominating, you're not destroying, you're not constructing. You're working with nature. You're doing biomimicry. Biomimicry means that you are imitating what nature is already doing, so you're just assisting with that and you just let Mother Nature take care of the rest. You do your part and you keep moving forward. When you grow your own food, you're proud. When you grow your own food, you are combatting against not having accessible food at your disposal. When you're growing your own food, you are giving back to your community, to yourselves, to your family, to the earth, to the world. When you grow your own food, you're increasing your budget tremendously. You can save \$100 in a month. Easy. That's what I did last year, I was saving one hundred dollars every month during the summer just by eating out of the garden because I grew it. You are doing what your ancestors did, and I don't care what color you are, what your race is, what your ethnicity is, what your background is, we all come from an indigenous people and we are doing what our ancestors have been doing for years without a problem. And I don't see why—I know there are barriers for us now, but nonetheless we should still be able to grow our own food and feel proud to do it, feel proud that you know, you spent months, just in the month of April planting seeds so you can have greens and peas and, you know, dinosaur kale and heirloom dragon carrots coming up in the month of June. There's nothing like being able to feed your own family. At least, that's my perspective. You become a wealth of information. There's trial and error. You're not going to get it on the first time when you grow—especially when you're doing it for the first time. You learn. You learn the development of the crop that you're growing. You're learning what pests affect the lifecycle of your crop. You learn what beneficial plants or beneficial insects help your crop. How your crop is helping the life cycle in the insects

that meet whatever it is providing. So you're part of the ecosystem. You're part of the plan. You're part of what it's supposed to be. And I think that's higher than any paycheck that you can get, any title that you have behind your name after you get a degree. It's humbling. That's what I feel. To grow your own food is a humbling thing.

I: So how have GrowAsis and other organizations and other urban farms in Chicago contributed to or transformed your community?

J: I would say that GrowAsis and other organizations have transformed and contributed to my community by igniting people. I think it's a means of igniting. I think GrowAsis, because it's the only entity that I know of as of now that is doing what's being done, it's sparking people's ideas. It's sparking people to want to do something for themselves and do something better for the community. I believe that all those entities that GrowAsis is connected to are channels where there's means of advertisement through word of mouth, which is the best form of advertisement as far as I've found. And it's a means of sharing within the community. Name-dropping is like amazing. "You know Jackie?" "Oh yeah, well I know her. I saw her speak at University of Chicago a couple of months ago and she knows so-and-so and so-and-so from the Healthy Food Hub in South Shore." And "I've worked on the Green Lots Project and her partner a couple years ago when they established that garden over there." You know, it's amazing. It's a means of like, it can be considered a hub but I really think it's a means of igniting people to talk about it. I'm a woman of action so I rather just do it to make the contribution. But just to be able to talk about it and to talk within the community and share and drop names and drop ideas and drop projects, you know, brainstorm on projects and things like that. I think that's what it really does. It leads to really thinking about, like, what it is that you've done and how you

want to change that as a community. You know, like, it is empowering people to want to think about what are they going to do with that vacant lot over there on their block? It's an eyesore. What should we do about it? How is our block club administration? How are our leaders going to handle that? Who do we talk to? We need to talk to the alderman. We want to grow our own food. I think also it encourages people within the community to connect and bridge gaps that have been created for lack of information and lack of sharing among people, especially like I said before, between elders and youth. There's a three generation gap between the youth and the elders, and that shouldn't be. But so much has happened between generations and every family and every culture is different as to how that happens. There needs to be some type of conduit or some type of means of communication in some means of understanding. I have yet to meet somebody who doesn't eat food or doesn't like food. Food is like a universal thing. There are people all over the world that need food or grow food. It's almost like music. Music is a universal language. It empowers you to—you can just play a song or choreograph a dance according to a song and you may not speak the same verbal language as I do but if I listen to your song, I know exactly what you're feeling. I have an idea of what you went through or I know what you're trying to express to me in so many notes. Same thing with food. If you cook something, if you cook a home cooked meal, some people put not only their foot in it, people put love in it, you know. People cook with love. I hope they do, at least. So, I mean, GrowAsis and all the other organizations that work with GrowAsis, I think that's what we do. That's part of our mission. And we all have a common goal and we all have similarities and we learn from one another in order to not only feed ourselves but to feed our community. So that's pretty much what it is.

I: Your website says that you specialize in youth-focused garden activities, so could you explain a little bit about why it's important to get youth involved?

J: Youth are the generation after us and just like we teach our babies how to tie their shoe and how to count, they also need to know how to grow food. And the youth activities that GrowAsis provides does it in a way that meets them where they're at. Because I work in the Chicago Public School system so when I'm working with my students or if I'm tutoring, you know, I have to meet the child where they're at. I don't want to go above them and expect them to know everything, and I don't want to belittle them and think that they don't know anything. So I think it's where they're at. It's important for our youth to know how to grow food because it empowers them and it gives them something to do. It gives them something to look forward to, it gives them something to share with their families and their peers. And it's something that is a tool that is life sustaining. It is something that they can take with them beyond school and beyond a job that they may be able to obtain when they become older. And it's fun! I love getting kids dirty. I want my babies to get dirty. It's so much fun. And they get to plant seeds and they get to ask a lot of questions and find out that they actually know a lot already. And it's good for them to know where their food comes from. That the food does not come from the mom and pop shop on the corner. It's not a gyro. It's not, you know, dollar fries or free fries that come with a hamburger. It's actually what comes out of the Earth. It comes from where they come from. We're all of the Earth. And so it just gives them something to be empowered with and it gives them something to stimulate their minds and to give them other ideas that might be outside of a garden that might lead them into thinking about mathematics and science. Because a garden, ultimately, it is a classroom. It's not just gardening. It's

art. It's a place to sing, so there's music. It's a place to draw and create within the garden. It's a means of fellowship and, you know, congregating. Especially for youth. And so they learn so much and they're fascinated by what they see. There's a lot of color and it's a place where they are allowed to be free. And so they can create that by growing food in a little space that is all about them that they can own and be accountable for, then that's a good thing. And GrowAsis is all for that, it's all about not just catering to the adults and the parents, but also catering to the youth and allowing them to have some type of outlet of freedom where if they mess up, it's not the end of the world. And that goes for adults, too. A lot of people are afraid to try because they automatically assume they're going to mess up so they already defeat themselves going in to pick up and tool and get their hands dirty in soil. And with kids, they really don't have a lot of fear. They're like 'I just want to do it. Can I do it? I want to plant this. Can I water that? Can we pick the pepper's yet?' I get that all the time. "Yes. Yes baby you can pick them up. Don't pick them all because you're not going to have any food later, but you know. And then they learn the process of life. They learn kind of like a cycle of life. So they know like when they planted a seed, a spinach, that it's going to grow. That they can harvest it. That they have to water it to maintain it. They are able to eat it. They can come up with really great snack ideas. Um, you know, I think it just gives them a means of learning on another level that is kind of rigid and binding in a classroom. So they have a lot more freedom in a garden. And especially with me in GrowAsis, like I encourage it. Of course, I have structure but you know, allow them to kind of contribute their own ideas and thoughts and allow them to try something they never really tried but they always wanted to do. So I think that's why GrowAsis provides such a service to the youth.

I: Why is it important for community members of these ideas to be involved in this sort of work, like growing their own food and being empowered? As opposed to the farmer's market or other city-sponsored things they try to implement to mitigate food insecurity...

J: I think it's important to for communities to be involved in community gardens like this one, it's because it sustains the community. It keeps the resources within the community where you don't have to go outside your community to get something so basic. It's a means of communication. A street can divide you from some of our neighbors, easy. And that shouldn't be. A community garden like this allows, you know, somebody from the block over there or two blocks back that way to come together at a hub. The garden acts as a conduit. A community garden acts as a conduit. And it allows people to communicate with each other, which they probably wouldn't have ever done. They've been living in the same community for the last twenty, twenty-five years and never knew that they were neighbors or that they had something in common. And it also is a means of keeping the community alive. So many of the communities die out because they don't have the basic needs that they need so they have to venture out outside the community and live outside of the community in which they were born, in which they raised their children and that they develop their families in and where they went to school and got their first job. And I think a community garden is kind of like a staple of a community. And it's not just because of the food, it's just a means, it's a place where everybody can come and just work together in fellowship and share ideas and talk about things that are actually going on in the community. And it doesn't have to be solely at church, or it doesn't have to be at a synagogue, or it doesn't have to be at a mosque or whatever

religious entity that has a title that is probably going to close at five or six o'clock, maybe nine o'clock in the evening. Whereas a garden, you can just be there any time of day. You know if you want to meet up with friends, "Meet me at the garden at like three o'clock on Tuesday", you know. It's there. "Let's pick some raspberries while we're talking." You know, things like that. It's very simple. I don't think people think out—I don't even think it's about thinking outside of the box. It's thinking basically. We live in a society, we live in a world where everything is bigger and faster and it's more convenient, where the simple things of just being able to sit down and have a conversation not via text or email that, you know, you can share something in a community garden or a entity like this in a community makes it a viable community. It makes it a means of going on for generations to come. So you can say "well my granny and my mama used to sit in the garden and talk about me when I was in my mama's stomach" kind of thing like that, just little things. I really talk crazy, but [laughs], you know, just things like that. It's a place of—something like this in a community is a means of having memories, positive memories. And I'm not talking about "Oh that's where Miss Anderson's son died right there on the corner". That's a memory, but that's not a happy memory. That's not a positive thing. That's a means of someone mourning and grieving. And everybody has to mourn and everybody has to grieve when somebody passes on and transitions. But at the same time, there's also a place where you can, you know, think positively about things that are going on within the community and not always death and destruction and municipal laws that are being passed and policies and rigid construction and gentrification that is really pushing things like this and ideas out of people's means to actually save their communities. People think "oh let's put a Walmart

there and we'll get more jobs." That's great. You have income coming in. But Walmart's not going to be there forever. Land is being bought up all the time by somebody bigger that has more money, more monetary wealth than you do. But, you know, people have to really come together because there are bigwigs out there who want to take up, who want to take your community away and not make it a community anymore. They want to make it bigger and better for their benefit, for their profits. And they're not going to think twice about the community. They don't think twice about you. They don't care. "Oh, well we're going to come into your community and we'll buy your house for a million bucks, but you have a lifetime of memories in that house. Like your baby was born in that house, you know. You had your wedding ceremony in the backyard kind of thing. And I think, just in my humble opinion, there's no amount of money that can really take the place of what you grew in your community. And you know a lot of people are of the mindset of "yeah, I'll give you this dollar amount and give it to you and you take it, then you're satisfied and I'm definitely satisfied because I got what I want" and now you're displaced. "I don't really care. I got what I needed. I hope you do okay! I hope you make it in the next place that you're going to be in. You know, and it's not fair. It's really not fair. And so I think like a community garden, really, like, vesting in a community garden where you live in the community and you know the people—you know your elders, you know your youth, you know the parents, you know the businesses—that's community. And you're willing to share. You're not hoarding information because "I got this so I'ma take this and I'ma be bigger and better." No. That's not what I believe. And I think that a community garden is a place where it just reseeds itself. When you reseed, when you plant the seed and you let it grow and it provides you with food that you need and you let

it go on and you transition, it leaves a legacy. When it produces seeds, those seeds are going to drop back into the ground and it's going to produce another plant for the next generation to come. That's the way that I look at a community. That's what I think a community should be about, just reseeding over and over and over again to the point where the roots of the community garden are so strong that nothing can be removed from it. And I say that in a proverbial sense, and I say that literally too. It's powerful. It really is. And it's not about just families who have been here, but people who are coming in outside of the community that need a home. That need a place of belonging and a place to survive and a place to feel like they're welcomed. There's nothing like getting a home-cooked meal when you visit someone. My dad's from Mississippi and every time I go home and visit with my aunties and my uncles and my cousins, I always get a plate of food. And we sit down and they're talking and they're like "Oh, Jackie, what you been doing up there in Chicago?" "When you gon' come down here?" and, you know, "Are you married yet?" "Do you have any babies?" "How's the business coming?" It's a means of communication and talking with people and you know, I think that's viable and necessary for anybody. It's a means of contact and, you know, communication and you know, sufficiency. Being efficient at the same time, too"

I: How is the relationship between Black people and food complicated by their history with the land, in terms of slavery, indentured servitude, sharecropping, and how does that complicate their history with the land, and how might this sort of work act as maybe a restoration or reclamation of the relationship with the land?

J: Those of us who are of color, who are of African descent, we have been ripped and humiliated. We have been demonized. We have been told that we are not people. That we

are not human. That we don't count. That we don't have feelings. That we came from a speck of dirt. We have had our culture, our language, our children, our husbands, our sisters and brothers, our mamas and daddies ripped from us for labor, for colonization, for profit, at the expense of our lives. We have had our land taken from us. We were put on a boat across the Atlantic Ocean. We couldn't speak our native language anymore. We couldn't cook our food the way we wanted to. We couldn't grow our food because this land was not our land. And, I think, I think a lot of us have forgotten that. At the same time though, those of us who endured and were strong enough to make it across that — [chuckles] and I say this so lightly—carnival cruise ship vacation across the Atlantic Ocean from West Africa, from the Ivory Coast, from Benin, from Cameroon, from Senegal, from Kenya (?), from Nigeria, Ghana, we held on. They didn't want us to be able to read. They didn't want us to speak our native language. But we kept a little something with us. And it was a means of survival to help us make it. Not just another day, to make it to the next minute, the next hour, never knowing what was going to happen to us when we got to where we were going to be placed. We got separated. And so, you know, we kept those ideas and those memories—I believe we kept those memories with us on how to plant a yam. How to grow collard greens. How to make cassava rice. You know, the crops that we have now, they're not the exact same things that comes from Mother Africa or from the continent of India[sic] or somewhere in South America. But it's something that helps us cope, something that has helped us cope. And the things that have come directly over here has been assimilated. You know, the Jamaican food, the Jamaican jerk here has been Americanized in some respect. It's not nearly as spicy as what you're going to get in Jamaica. It really isn't. It's on a whole

‘nother level of hot and spicy. [laughs] It’s on a whole ‘nother level of spices and cooking. The process probably isn’t even the same as what you would get authentically in Jamaica. So, what I notice is that a lot of it has just been assimilated and has just been stripped of what the essence of it really is. And so we have to kind of, like, talk back to, talk to our people in Africa and those people who keep the culture and tradition going in growing and making food. Even the way food is grown is different than it was years ago, you know, because industrialization changed all that. Now it’s faster, it’s easier, it’s quicker, you get stuff to market faster. But with that, you take out the essence of what that plant really is. When you genetically modify something, you take away it’s true DNA. You take away all its characteristics. You take away, really, it’s purpose. Why it was planted. Why that seed was created. Our people knew that. Our indigenous people, they knew that. They knew the sacredness of a seed that is not just something that you just grow and change it up because you want the color to be nice and taste better. It was what it was. And it carried on generations of people before us in that one seed. And that’s why it’s so important to save heirloom seeds and preserve your seeds when it comes time for harvest. Because you’re carrying on and then you’re cutting out the middle man, where you have to go purchase seeds from a nursery, or you have to be solely dependent on Burpee company that produces all these seeds and you gotta go to Home Depot to buy seeds and, you know, you have to wait for Home Depot to come up with seeds for the season when you you’re ready to go now. “I want to plant seeds now! I have to wait for Home Depot for another six months.” That’s not fair. Also in conjunction with that, land is sacred. If you are a farmer, if you are a gardener, you know how sacred land is. You know that it carries life in it. You know that it was there before you. You know that you

are a steward. That you don't dominate it. You don't destroy it. You don't move anything, unless you are moved my spirit to do it. Not because you want to do it or because it looks ugly or "I don't want that weed there, I'ma pull it out". You know the sacredness of land and you know that you honor it. You honor it with every seed that you plant. I have a ritual where I pray as I plant, every time I plant a seed. Because I know I've driven my car way too much for the week and so I have to give back to Mother Earth. I'm like "I'm sorry Mama Earth, I shouldn't have bought that gas yesterday. Let me go ahead and put that seed right there for ya." And, you know, however you choose to do it. However you choose to do it, however you choose to honor. But I think you need to honor the land because it has carried our people, a people, for a long time. And I think that the food that comes from the land is a reminder of how valuable and how viable soil is and how authenticity plays a huge role in the continuance of life. You know, I don't think too many of us are going to make it on preservatives. I don't think it's going to happen. I had a grandma, my great grandmother was a Mississippi sharecropper. And she raised about, maybe, twenty kids in a shotgun house in Mississippi. She grew everything off the land. She had her own hog. She wrung chicken's necks. She had a smoke house. She did it all. The only time she had to buy anything was flour and oats and probably sugar. And she may have gotten that maybe once a year from the town general store when she got her money from the sharecropping. Everything else she did off the land. And so, as I honor the land, I honor her. I carry on her legacy. It kind of jumped some generations, because my dad spent the first six years of his life living with her. And then my grandmother came back and brought him up to Chicago with her husband. So, I knew my great grandmother. I knew her. I didn't know how much she did. So I have to go

through my dad because he spent a lot of time with her on the farm and he knew exactly what she did the way she did it. And so I go to him. He's my gap between her and I. And so, I think when you honor the land, you honor your ancestors. You honor yourself because you are—I look at it as, you are replenishing yourself in spirit and physically within your body when you eat from the Earth. And I think somewhere in the many tribes of Africa and the many mothers who birth and raise their children in Africa and here when they got here, I think there was some type of hope. I'm an optimist, I can't help it. I just believe that through all the brutality and the murdering and the raping and the destruction of Black people, there was just a little bit of hope with each life that was brought into the world. Hoping that, you know, somehow, someday, we were going to get back to what it used to be. And we're not all going—it may never be what it used to be. It may not. It may not be in this lifetime. But, I think we can make do with what we have and then even expand upon that as well as do better with positive thinking and speaking life into one another and encouraging one another to say “hey, I know you may be struggling with a health issue. Well you know what Ida, I'll pray. Let me give you some greens. Let me give you some raspberries. Let me give you some lemon balm real quick and you can make some tea if your stomach is upset. Drink that it might settle your stomach, you may feel a little bit better.” Something like that, you know, just to share and to have some type of empathy and sympathy for one another. Things like that. Because that's what we were doing before, before they told us that we weren't anything, before they stripped us of our spirituality and told us that white Christianity is the way you're going to get saved. That you're going to go to hell. That you are a heathen. “How dare you cook that food the way you cook it. I want you to cook the way I know it needs to be

cooked. And you better not skimp on the butter.” You know, things like that where you were just demonized for doing something that sustained you for the longest time. I just think that that’s horrible. And we’re still doing it. It’s still being done. We’re even doing it to each other. And that’s sad because we’ve been brainwashed to think that bigger is better and another culture telling us that we’re not anything, that we’re not going to surmount to anything, that we’re not the pinnacle of where we are or what we are because they say so. Because they don’t see the positive things that are being done. They see only the negative. And they’re fearful. They’re scared because they don’t know. You’re going to be fearful of what you don’t know. And they don’t know. And they’re afraid. They think we’re going to dominate. We just want to survive. We want to make it. And we don’t just want to make it, we want to be better than okay, you know. And I find that gardening and farming and talking to children and sharing with people, it’s a drop in a bucket but eventually it could turn into a big pond. Maybe not in my lifetime, but I pray that something that I may say to someone or even the things that are being said to me resonates and it manifests into something better and it encourages us to think outside the box of what society tell us, what mainstream media says we should do, and what we ought to do. And that is within our cultural means of doing it, not the Americanized way, not just what we already know and how we can keep our traditions and heritage alive and you know, still continuing.

I: Do you have any final remarks or thoughts or anything that you would like to say that you haven’t yet touched upon or that you would like to expand upon?

J: Thank you. Thank you for being bold enough to search the South. To like, really want to get to the meat of it. And thank you for documenting. Because we don’t document

anymore. We do, but it's via video I think. Your willingness to do this speaks decibels about what is to come. And I think that you making this viral and putting it out there is substantial. And I'm very grateful. And I'm not speaking this on behalf of GrowAsis [laughs]. I'm speaking this from me. Because it's not too many of us out there now who are being recognized and who are given credit where credit is due when it comes to being able to pay homage to those who taught us sustainability. Who embedded in us and disciplined us in how to grow food. And it's really, really hard to go against the grain. It really is. It's not a cakewalk. Sometimes people get the idea that, you know, you grow food and you're dirty all day and you wear overalls and a straw hat and you have a weed in your mouth and you ride a tractor and [laughs] you carry a cow named Bessie behind you and she plows the field for you! No, it's not that. It's so much more than that. Because we have to go against so many things that have been established. So many barriers that we have to break down and so many walls that we have to overcome and break through. And it's not an easy job, but it's reward and it's fulfilling. And for you to come out and be bold enough to send me an email and ask me to do this documentary, I'm like yes! That's just another means of getting it out there of what's being done, about what's going on, not just in Chicago, but in New York City, California's doing big things I know, especially in Oakland, Portland, you know, Atlanta, Detroit. Detroit is really, really, really struggling. They are hurting bad. So just putting it out there what we're doing and how we're doing it and how we're being impactful—that's my thanks. And I'm grateful for what you've decided to do. It's a remarkable thing. And even if this never, ever reaches the internet. Even if it doesn't fall on anybody else's ears, just to be able to let it out and say it one more time is healing for me. Because it let's me know that,

you know, I'm doing the right thing and I'm supposed to be continuing with my mission in doing this. And that I still have a purpose in sharing with someone like you about the value, and how invaluable and priceless it is to do what's being done. And it's not solely just for somebody like me, you know. I have nineteen years of agricultural experience under my belt. I went to high school for it. I went to college for it. I've created a business out of it. It's in my lineage. But I don't have all the answers. I don't. And I'll never claim that I do. I'm always learning every day something new. How to grow something in a particular way. My best friend who helps me do this community project, I'm learning something from him all the time. All the time. So, you know, agriculture is the industry but gardening and farming sustainably are my ministry, and I take it very seriously. And I'm so happy to share it. It's a powerful thing to do, to actually share and the willingness to share without any hesitation or any worry or doubt—that's a good thing. It's actually healing my spirit, so I thank you. It's a remarkable thing that you're doing this and I speak peace and blessings over you as you continue to document with other people and I pray that it goes way beyond Chicago. That it hits all over the country and it hits back home in Africa and India and South America and Australia with the aborigines, our people over there, you know, all people. I'm not trying to say a certain group of people need to know about this—everybody needs to know about this! Everybody should know about this because I think even people who struggled with the potato famine in Ireland would be touched by this. And I think people who are migrant workers somewhere in Central America who are shipping stuff up here right now as we speak need to know about something like this, and letting them know they're not alone and that it's a struggle up here, too. Here in North America, particularly in Chicago. And that we need to get

back to basics. It's essential. It's necessary now. It's not a play-play thing. It's not a trend. It's actually a lifestyle that we need to be living. So I thank you.

Ida: Please introduce yourself and tell us who you are and what do you do?

Pancho: Okay. My name is Pancho MacFarland, um, I am a resident of Beverly neighborhood in Chicago. I am a professor, associate professor of sociology at Chicago State University, um, and I am a community gardener. I work with the Green Lots Projects. So that's who I am.

I: Tell us about what you do with The Green Lots project and the food justice movement in Chicago

P: The Green Lots Project is an organization that, uh, a woman—she had some land here in this is the neighborhood Roseland that we're in—she had some land and she wanted to do something with it, something green with it, and she settled upon, met people, and settled upon the idea of doing a community garden when she learned of what was happening in Chicago and how she could best use her land. So she got together friends, her garden, her land is here in Roseland down the street from where we are now, she got some friends together, created the Green Lots Project, got a board and, you know, just friends of local people, people involved in, uh, food, uh, growing stuff here in Chicago and they created the organization to manage that land. To create a community garden on it. So, that's what it is. That was eight years ago. I got involved about the fourth day of the project because at that time I lived two blocks away from here in the Roseland community, and I asked a friend where a community garden was, because I really wanted to get serious about it now that I just moved here to Roseland, and he said well there's one opening in a few days just down the street, we're starting one. And so I went over

there, it's about eight blocks from my old home, and I got involved. Turned a trash-strewn heap of big, uh, a big hole in the ground with a bunch of trash in it, turned it into a community garden within a couple of weeks. It was amazing what they did. And so from there they managed that garden, managed that garden, I became more and more involved. And, um, became the executive director of the Green Lots Project a few years ago. And so a lot of what we now have—so now the project has involved. So now we have three gardens, we do workshops, we do all kinds of stuff for people. We have some students here at this garden today that we gave a tour and taught them about sustainability, food justice, growing, all kinds of things. That's what we do!

I: What is your definition of food insecurity?

P: Food insecurity is when somebody doesn't know where their next meal is coming from, or meals down the line. It doesn't have to be the next meal, but down the line, right? And, you know, it sounds pretty simple, but part of it has to do not only with the political and the corporate angle, but the fact that we don't know how to grow our own food, right? So we're really insecure in that. We're always relying on someone else. We're relying on the government, we're relying on *Jewel* or whoever, all these corporations to feed ourselves, so we're really insecure as it is. So the only security really is to build, to have access to land, and to be able to have the knowledge to grow on it. That's the only real security, right? And to be able to do it. Because the other thing, even if we do have food, even if we do have food, especially in a place like Roseland, which is really, um, there's a great deal of food inequality, right? There's, you know, in a place like this, the food that we do have—it looks like food, we eat it, but it doesn't give you any nutrition. So you're insecure anyway, because you don't have food, you don't have

food that is healthy for you and nutritious. So when I talk about things like this like food insecurity, or I talk a lot about food justice, that part of it is nutritious food that you have control over. And that's what would be just or secure in the end, right? So I think it's a little more than is there, kind of, a store in your neighborhood.

I: How accessible is healthy, affordable food in your community?

P: Well, in the community that I live in, Beverly, which is one community over from Roseland, so if you cross the tracks half a mile going west, you run into the community of Beverly. And it's an upper middle class neighborhood. President of Chicago state university has a residence there, it's the president's mansion, so we don't have a problem in Beverly. You cross the tracks into Roseland, where I used to live up until 2 years ago, or south Chicago where I used to live, which there's less of a problem in south Chicago, but certainly here in Roseland you cross the tracks and there is very little access to real food. You always have to put real before food as if food wasn't enough. [Laughs] because what people talk about when they talk about food is not real, is not nutritious. And that's what we have here. You have lots of corner stores where lots of people will eat at, you've got small groceries that are underwhelming in the kinds of freshness and nutrition that they offer as well, and then you have lots and lots of fast food places and very few good, healthy, sit-down restaurants. I would have my students in the summer classes map the food in Roseland and compare it to Hyde Park, which is just a little bit further north of us and a little east, and it was very hard to find a sit-down restaurant, much less one that had good food. I mean, it was, the restaurant everybody came up with was on Michigan and it was just fried food, it was just like a little steak house, but it was

mostly just a bunch of fried stuff. So to answer the question, it's very difficult to access nutritious food. That's it.

I: Why do you believe so many people across the city and nationwide have (/perceive) such limited access to healthy, affordable foods?

P: Hm. Oh, we have to talk about, we have to go back historically and talk about colonialism and racism and capitalism and those —isms that um, have created situations for many of us, um. And when we're talking about Roseland, we're talking about a Black community. And therefore for Black people, Mexicanos, as well as other people of color, all of these forces, right, these historical forces that create um, segregated communities, communities impoverished, communities, these things are planned. I mean we could look at Roseland in it's transition from a white working class neighborhood to a Black neighborhood and we could talk about rioting, we can talk about you know, mass white violence against Black people here in Roseland who started moving in. we can talk about disinvestment and people starting to pull their resources outside of the community. And in letting it fall to hell. You talk to residents here in Roseland, I got to know and continue to know many people who used to live in Roseland for a long period of time and they talk about the discrimination from streets, to the police violence, to just no jobs, to housing quality to environmental issues. So, um, we'd have to talk about those historical forces if we were to talk about why, um, there's so much inequality and we find a place like Beverly full of food. Full of food. And not all of it is great either, I mean I don't eat out of there much, I eat out of the gardens, right? But a place like Beverly is full of food versus a place like Roseland, which doesn't have many options. I mean, fast food, if you get your food from a place where they have a glass in front of it, right, so that violence

doesn't occur, and they hand it to you in a bag, it's likely not to be good. And that's what we find here and all over. Take a ride down 103rd, you can take a ride down Halsted, and maybe Michigan, and that's all you will. I mean, just vast amounts of stuff that looks like food that isn't. And the reasons are complex, but they're not hard to find. [Laugh] I mean, they're out there. You just read a book.

I: What actions have you and other community members, at least members of the Roseland community that you know of, taken to secure access to healthy foods?

P: Well, you know, I was telling the story about the green lots project and how it got started, so that was the impetus. You secured some land, she owns the land, the alderman over there, alderman bill allowed us to use it partialist next to you, so we have two city lots we're growing on. And he's been good because he's been hands off, go ahead and do it, you know. So that's how we got access to that and we started growing on it. And then as green lots project kind of developed and got some momentum and I started going to things, I wanted to learn about community gardens and I wanted to participate in that. And once I got a little bit of expertise, people started asking me to give talks and things. So I was meeting people from all over and they would ask us to do stuff. So that's how we started to evolve as I started getting speaking things and going to conferences and stuff and workshops. So I started meeting a lot more people that way. And people started coming out to the gardens and we started interacting. People starting saying can you help me with this project, can you help me with that. So we built an elders garden in Bronzeville that we managed for a year. And we did an elders gardening club that we did here in Roseland for a season. We worked with kids for a week project, every once a week project for teaching sustainability, and now we have a school garden over in the

Ashland neighborhood. Then people found out that, about me and about that last project more generally and asked us to garden their space that they have here. And so we've been doing that for the last two years. That's how we got, sort of, access to land, right? The access is always precarious. The access is always precarious. The aldermen could pull his support at any moment. Land could be sold. The group whose land we are sitting on and we work, the green lots project works, this garden is called Sacred Greens. The group that owns it is a nonprofit Christian ministry called Chicagoland Prison Outreach, and so they help formerly incarcerated people, people who had the label of criminal or felon, um, they help them gain some skills so they can do, at least try to do a little bit better because once you get that label of felon, right, or criminal, you know, many many doors are shut to you so the goal of Chicagoland Prison Outreach is to try to help these guys and help their spirit. Like is said, they're a Christian ministry and as they're doing their classes, skillbuilding and all kinds of things, they also have classes in bible study and that kind of stuff. So they partner with us, they asked me, they asked us at the time Jackie, my partner in Green Lots right now, they asked us to sit down and have a talk and see if we could take this over, so we did. And the two groups coming together and their sort of religious based, Christian thing and our recognition, because we're farmers, recognition of the sacredness of land, we know that the land is sacred, you don't have to find it in a book, we both thought well what would be the perfect name for this? It would be sacred greens because we believe this food to be sacred, they believe their _ to be sacred, so we put it together. It's been thriving, it's been wonderful. But the question of land has been really key in the urban setting. It's been so difficult, and even once you have land there's many obstacles: water, depending on what you want to do electricity and vandalism, just all

kinds of stuff happens in the garden, so land is central. Plus we're all on top of each other in this city, although here in the south side, we're way down far down south in the hundreds, there's a LOT of open lots and that's why we call ourselves the green lots project. I mean, these lots have been abandoned for years, I mean 10, 20 years there's nothing been growing. They're not doing anything with those. If we could put some stuff on it, some food, people will eat, you know, for free. Why not? What do you think?

I: What is the importance of growing your own food?

P: Well, there's so many ways to get at the subject, right? I have a course in the summer called principles and practices of food justice; it's a 10 week course, 2 days a week for 2 hours and 15 minutes. That's how long it would be to talk about this, you know?

Because, it's a huge subject. So the importance of it, obviously, there's health issues...we could talk about the health. It's so much better to grow your own food if you have the right, you know if you don't have toxic soil and stuff, but if you grow your own food it's so much more nutritious for you, so much better, you can control that. You can control what you're eating as opposed to when you go to the store you don't really know how it was grown. You might know that it's not organic, but what does "not organic" even mean? What's in that? There's all kinds of stuff in that. And there's other issues with how it was grown. You don't necessarily know. At least you know what you've got when you're growing it yourself. I think that'll improve your health and it's freshness and quality—you can't beat it. I eat out of the garden every time I come to the garden. I just eat because it's fresh and I know it's going to be good for me. And then I take it home and I cook it and all that. So you know what you've got, so that's one thing. The other thing that I like to emphasize about this is not only the physical health, but the emotional,

mental, and spiritual health too. Part of the diseases, the chronic diseases we have in impoverished communities, a lot of it is spiritual, emotional, mental health issues. The violences that we're exposed to of many, many sorts they wear on us physically. And those are the obvious things. When people have to go to the hospital or they're sick, you can see that they're sick. And those are obvious, but there's also the mental health issues. It's hard sometimes to live in this neighborhood. It's hard being a kid in this neighborhood, a young man in this neighborhood. The threats are multiple. You know, my children are in this neighborhood. The threats are multiple. And that's going to wear on you emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. You get beaten. You got that, and you got environmental problems and you've got all these problems and they're weighing down on you mentally, emotionally, spiritually. And so, one of the things that I find it has done for me—and I know it's done for other people cause I hear these stories and I'm in the gardens with people—was for me, it's given me a better sense of dignity and self worth. I can grow this. And I can do this. And I can do this for... and maybe more importantly, I can do this for other people. I can do this for my neighbors, and my family, and my friends, and my community, and it gives you a sense of pride and dignity. So I think that helps deal with the mental, emotional, and spiritual problems that we have. And then you get in... So that's coming from the perspective of a community garden too, right? When you do it with the community. So you get in the gardens, and you get people together, and we're working together. We're getting stronger physically, cause we're doing hard work. We're getting stronger mentally cause we're solving problems. And we're getting stronger emotionally and physically because we're around each other. We are engaging one another in communion, in working together in spirit, and boosting our spirits and all

that stuff. When we talk about community gardening, the importance of growing your own extends beyond the talk of the food and the health to other aspects of social health. Public health, those kinds of questions. I think it's that, I think it could come from an economic perspective. I calculated one year, I wasn't even very good at it yet, good at eating out of the garden. I calculated one year, about four years ago when my children were living with me—we had 4 in the house—I was saving \$400 a month. Now, it's a little bit less that was during the growing season. Now it's a little bit less because I live by myself, but I've gotten better at eating out of the garden. I eat everyday out of the garden, everyday, everyday. I put together a little piece of rice or something else, some eggs I get from a local farmer, creating more community, circulating more dollars in the local community, local economy. I eat healthy and save a lot of money. So economically, it makes so much sense. I've gotten better at it, so now we're preserving. Now we're thinking about when we plant, well what can we plant for the winter and for the fall? So we have potatoes growing for the late fall and winter, we've got beans growing that will last years essentially, if we keep them in the right conditions. We have squashes growing that are winter squashes that we'll save, we can keep for a couple months and eat off of those. We think about that. So economically, it's important to grow your own. We could talk about politically, and community empowerment, self-empowerment that goes along with this. I talked about it on an individual level—dignity and self worth and value and empowerment—we can talk about that on a community level too. It really is an empowering thing to have some sort of control over some aspect of your life. We have control over almost no aspect of our life really, our work lives, what we eat, our leisure time almost. This, we have control over. So self-determination and empowerment, some

of those really old goals of the Black Power movement, the Chicano power movement, or some of those kinds of things, self empowerment, community empowerment, self determination. We can talk about that for a long time. We can talk about exploitation of third world workers. Exploitation of workers in California fields. When we grow here, we're not participating in that exploitation. And if we can create jobs, we can create dignity for people, and work, and stuff like that as well, so we're not exploiting farm workers in the same way, we're not adding to the exploitation of the environment and other species through the pesticides and herbicides, and from getting our food from hundreds of miles away and they're traveling through petroleum. What we do here influences the global and vice versa obviously. So that we don't have to fight oil wars because we're not using oils to truck our foods from California and Mexico or Chile, or wherever the hell they come from, we're getting it from right here, and I can ride my bike. Or people that live right there could walk and they could get their food. We don't need oil, do we? Or that much of it. Or just a little bit I guess, I don't know. But again, there's all types of ways we could talk about this, but I want to hear what's next.

I: What is the role of community empowerment in your food justice work and why is it important that community members be involved in providing this urban garden service to themselves and for themselves?

P: So we talked a little bit about that. And one of the pieces too, I think, is, I don't know why this came to mind but the intergenerationality of this project. We want to build community in many different ways, not just neighbor to neighbor but within your household even, within your own family so that elders are talking to young people and that's an issue of building community as well. People complain about, like, we don't talk

to each other but then make no effort to do it often. But there's reason, I don't blame anybody or any individual for these problems, but it's really interesting and the garden is one way that that happens. So I think that we can strengthen the community bonds. We have to talk to each other. And working together and working the gardens is an unbelievable way of talking to each other and communicating. And I think that's going to strengthen us and empower our communities. And you see it happen in on a small scale so the people in our community, that is, people who are a part of our food community—not only the Green Lots Project, which we have a solid small group—but also in the larger food community on the South Side of Chicago. We're strong. We're strong. We support each other. We help each other out. We have at the Black Oaks Center what they call “community wealth.” Our community wealth is our knowledge and our resources and our community that is strong. And so I see that at the small level, I certainly know it's true for our own group and how we relate to one another. And I think that at a geographical community level then, where people who live on this street on Eggleston can begin to develop community. It's harder, but certainly we've seen it done. In many other community gardens we see it happening all the time where communities become stronger in so many different ways. And each one of those ways, I don't think that we should suggest that they are little either. Each one of those ways is really important to people.

I: I can see that your organization values the involvement of youth... Why is it important to get youth involved in food justice work?

P: Well, I mean, not to get too cliché about it but they are the future obviously. [laughs]

And I think that one of the first things I learned about the urban agriculture, doing it in the city is way different than doing it in the country, and one of the first things I learned is that the children bring the community in some ways because the children are curious. So when we're at our garden on Wabash, in the first few days I saw this kid. I saw this kid come on out. And then he was bringing his friends and his brother. So the kids started to converse and then their parents started to converse. And then I got to know the parents through knowing the kids. So the kids really, in our commitment to our children is really what's going to bring the community strong. If we don't have that I don't think—we have to have a commitment to our kids and have our kids be involved in it directly. Beyond that is the whole thing about the future, too. We have to raise people who have this knowledge or we're going to continue to be dependent and disempowered. So we're intergenerational. We want to exchange information with everybody. Some of our most successful work has been with older people, elders in the community who have a little bit of knowledge but aren't sure about their skills and stuff. And they come out and they want to have a space to do this. And they've really grown. But we've done a lot of stuff with kids. We have this school group, we bring in groups mostly. And what we'll do is we'll give them a tour, usually it's me and Jackie giving them the tour and we talk about different aspects of food, urban ag, food justice through giving the tour. And we have people talk about horticulture, have people talk about political education, community, tradition, history, all kinds of things. So we bring them in and try to get them excited and we put them into work, to do some work. But it's really important. I'm from the country so this was amazing to me to move into the city and seeing how people are so disconnect

from the land. I mean, I wasn't like eager to do farmwork as a kid, you know, I didn't want to do that stuff, that's why I got a degree and several degrees after that, because I didn't want to do that hard work. But I had a connection to the land because it was my backyard and you know the mountains were my backyard and stuff. These guys don't have it. These guys have hardly any green spaces. I'm talking about in a place like Roseland, okay. There's beautiful green spaces throughout Chicago. Chicago is amazing in that way. But in some communities like Roseland, we're starved of green spaces. In Beverly on Longwood Street, there are five parks within like ten blocks. Five parks! So people have the good fortune to live over there and have that access. But for a lot of folks, we don't have that access. People are on top of each other or, for whatever reasons, there's neglect. And so I think it's that spirit thing too. Getting out in nature. The guy that wrote that book *Last Child in the Woods* or something—he talks about this nature deficit disorder that our kids, but especially our city kids, are having a nature deficit disorder. [Train rolls past and honks] We're in the city. He get's all this information and talks about how children's lack of access to nature and to green spaces and stuff is causing all these problems and he calls it nature deficit disorder. And I believe it in so many ways from what I've seen. And so I think that we live in a culture that is ugly and violent. I think our popular culture is pretty much crass and violent these days. And I'm not just trying to be an old cranky guy saying 'the stuff you like is not good'. My first two books were about popular culture, were about rap music and the messages in the music and what people are saying and what that means. It's not as simple as it would seem but in general our culture is crass and violent. It's not life-centered at all. We love people. How do we get over on people? How do we exploit people? And I want to teach what I call

biocentric values. Life-centered values. Not human-centered or me-centered or even my race centered or my city centered or my country centered. Life-centered values that I don't think we have as part of this nature deficit disorder. We're losing how to appreciate life and I want to teach that. I think it's important to teach that. And I think when kids can learn that it can translate in so many different ways. I was talking to a guy yesterday, he's been doing this for years in Chicago, a master gardener, and he talks about literally saving people's lives through gardening, saving young people's lives through gardening. And he gave me some examples about how that's done. So we want to save or children from urban social problems, but we also want them to be the ones to solve those problems in the end once they get older. So the garden can do both of those things. It can save them and also help them become the leaders. That's the ideal.

I: How have The Green Lots Project and other urban farms in Chicago contributed to and/or transformed your community?

P: I would say a couple of things about that. One is I don't think we have transformed communities. I don't think the Roseland community is transformed as a result. There's not only us here. We have two gardens here. There's a mini farm on 108th and Union. There's probably eight or ten gardens in Roseland. We haven't transformed most of them. But what we have done is, if you get away from the geographical notion of community, and think more of community ties of people, we have created stronger communities within our groups. And so some people in these communities have been saved. I don't want to get too overly dramatic about it, but the reason I can say that, and I don't think I am being overly dramatic, is because of what it's done for me and how it's transformed my life. Individuals can be transformed and our community, not geographic

community but our larger community of food community and food workers and our organizations have transformed as a result. But I don't think we have transformed. And there will be people who dispute this and people want to say I'm undervaluing what is being done, but I'm not undervaluing that at all. What I'm trying to suggest is that (it's put it in it's place) where we're at in the larger political economy of Chicago and of the world, as well as redefined community. We tend to think of community as geographical community and that is a very important community, but we have other communities too. And we're developing a food community. And I think that is really important. And that's a surprise because my neighbors, they're not farmers, they're going to get a piece of that, they're going to get a piece of that community from me and Jackie's neighbors are going to get a piece from her. Anybody we interact with is going to get some of it. So it spreads out that way. If we judge our success on seeing physical transformation of Roseland community, we would see ourselves as failures. So we have to really think in complex and complicated ways about what community is and what success is in this case.

I: What work do urban gardens and other alternative food pathways created by community members do that the current mainstream food system fails to?

P: It was good that you put the other food pathways because we're all connected. It's not just the growing, there's the community markets, there's food pantries and other kinds of things and there's just like sharing and stuff. So it's not just the community gardens, it's a whole food network that we're developing in the food community. Because then we got people who are creating food forests, they're making the products into other products and things like that. We get nutritious healthy food in the community. I mean, again, even at your best stores, the stuff isn't fresh. You don't know how it's grown. So we get really

quality food into the community, that's for sure. And we try to do it at a low price. So you go to some of the places that I'm connected to, that the markets are connected to, and that I've been shopping at for years and they intentionally keep it below market price so that the people in our community can access it. So that is one thing. And then we teach too. We teach. Because we're interacting with people, whether it's in the garden or whether it's in the community markets and the farmer's market's, we're always teaching. It's not just a space where you go to the store and you buy the food and that's the end of it. They might have a little recipe here, but that's about it. We're teaching people. So, I don't think you can underestimate that either. I've seen people really transform lives by learning how to cook some fresh vegetables. So we do that and the transfer of knowledge is really important in getting healthy food out.

I: How is the relationship between Black and Brown people and food complicated by our history with land in the US (as it relates to servitude, slavery, sharecropping, working the land, etc.)?

P: In so many different ways. Again, in my class we talk about this for a couple of weeks. So first you have to go way back to colonialism and all that kind of stuff and enslavement and all that. To bring it more up to date, the loss of traditional ecological knowledge that allowed our ancestors to survive during the those horrors of colonialism and enslavement and stuff like that and the theft of land. So we lose that knowledge. And especially when we you people migrating to the city. So we have Black southerners migrating to the cities. In the city you don't have the space. And the Black and green lifestyle was devalued and all kinds of things happened. So you lose that. And you have the same for the urbanized Mexicano community and certain other communities, I just don't know

them as well. And so we lose that knowledge and we lose that power. And the fact of just being resource-poor in general. Part of the issue with community garden in an urban setting is just having access to the resources. We don't have access to the resources. We've been impoverished. We're not poor, we've been impoverished. And so we don't have the resources that sometimes we need. We don't have the knowledge that we need that our ancestors had and our elders used to have. And we don't have the other kinds of material resources that we need. You know the history right? Of slavery and colonialism? It doesn't need to be repeated, it should be obvious that we don't have those resources. So yes, it's complicated. And then all the other things that are going on too. The continued ongoing impoverishment and violence against people of color by the state and by corporations. It's just amazing we're still here. But it shows you the resilience of people of color and it shows you the resilience of these traditions because these traditions are the things that are keeping us alive, these agricultural, horticultural traditions.

I: How can we fight racial injustice and justice through farming and growing our own food and food justice?

P: Well, you know, it's that empowerment piece and self-determination. I think your values change when you're in the garden. So one of the ways that they're really keeping us down is not only through real physical violence but it's through making us into consumers so that the only way you understand yourself is through what you wear or what you buy or whatever. It's that materialism. When you come to the garden you realize that's all a bunch of, you know. There's no value in that. So you begin to change your values. You begin to see wealth differently and things like that. And, you know, with that knowledge comes dignity and power and all that kind of stuff. And I see people

doing that. So I think that one of the things that's happened for our peoples is that we've been beaten down psychologically, spiritually, mentally, you know, what I was talking about earlier. And I think that the gardens can help us lift our spirits and provide dignity and empowerment for us. Not only because we're doing something but also when we get to eat that food, and of course what we eat is connected to what we think and other things too. So I think there's myriad ways in which the gardens help, but it's certainly that piece on dignity and value and self-esteem and empowerment. You can see it happening. You can see it. You can talk about it all day, you can read a book, you can talk about how you want to empower the Black community or the Mexicano community or whatever, we want to do that. But this we actually see happening. You see we're taking control of our own lives. We're taking control of our labor power, my energy and our energy together and we're growing something. That's powerful. You see it. We're taking control of our lives in ways that in some other kinds of activism you don't necessarily see that materially. You don't see that power manifest itself.

I: How might Black and Brown stewardship with the land reclaim or redefine the relationship between communities of color, land, and food?

P: Well, I think one of the things I talked about, that biocentric perspective. Another way we can think about it is love. Love of ourselves. Love as individuals but within a community context. I think that that is so key: that we begin to love each other. There's so much very interesting academic scholarship on love and the power of that. So I think we have to really focus on those kinds of things. We focus on trying to get over on each other. We focus on the next electronic instead of you know, things that really can heal us. I'm sure when you talk to other farmers in this movement, people are going to say these

kinds of things about how this heals us and how the land has healed us. Even in the city, the land has healed us. So you have more of an appreciation of life, you have an appreciation for other people and our interconnectedness with each other and other species. And you begin to appreciate that more because, again, you see that materially happening within a few months and you see that your connection to those people created something valuable. And I think that is a good mix for people beginning to like each other. [Laughs.] But then moving onto that next step of starting to love each other and care, care for each other and spread that around. It's not only a—you know I had a friend when I first started doing community gardening I was talking to him and he said 'I always think of a little old lady doing community gardening.' It's not only little old ladies who tend. We got to think about men's roles in this as stewards. And stewards, I think that's an important word. It's not this macho thing of digging in the land and I'm strong and everything. It's taking care of something. And we don't ask men to do that a lot in our culture anymore. And I think when we go back to our indigenous cultures we find that men cared for things. And I think we should spread that around to men and women and to kids and elders and we spread love and stewardship. And what we get back from that, from tending the garden and see that we get back way more than you gave. That love that you gave that plant or that community group, you're going to get way more back. I think that's going to be key to building these strong relationships, changing those attitudes.

I: Do you have any final words/thoughts that you'd like to share?

P: I really want to say that I'm happy you're doing this. I hope you learn a lot and we're all connecting and building this thing together because it takes information, the

knowledge. And you spreading the knowledge is going to benefit us so much. It's going to benefit the Roseland community directly because other people want to get that knowledge. And, you know, I'm going to see your film and I'm going to see what other people have to say and we're going to incorporate that in this. And someone else is going to learn that and they're going to take it. And that's how we build and that's all we can ask of each other. So, I thank you and I appreciate what you're doing.

Reverend Albert Sampson, *George Washington Carver F.A.R.M.S.*

These transcriptions include stories that Sampson shared with me before I started asking him my interview questions.

A: Since 1978, I've been bringing vegetables up from Black farmers down south. Now here's the problem: We're the only race of people where everybody feeds us but us. There are over 600 and something odd Black mayors in Black America. I was Martin King's project director for the first Black mayor called Spokes of Cleveland, then it was Dick Hatch in Gary, and then in Newark, New Jersey Ken Gibson was the third one. But out of all the Black mayors, nowhere is there any wholesale retail distribution center for Black farmers to bring their vegetables. All of the Black colleges that have agriculture programs, nowhere is there a building. So the Black farmer is trapped. He got to grow the vegetables, and then travel in his truck in about a hundred-mile radius for people to buy his vegetables. So there's not one Black agricultural school, with all of the money they've got from the Department of Agriculture, where they have a building. Nobody has a building in Black America. And we're the only race of people. Every other culture—if we were in Chinatown, I would show you Chinese collard greens, where they grow their own greens and they put them in their own truck in their own restaurants. That's why a lot of the old Black restaurants closed. You remember Gladys's on 43rd and Indiana? All of them basically closed because the price of the vegetables kept going up and it was being jammed. So now we have Arab stores that are taking over shops. So that's the context.

We do a thing called Keep in Touch directory. I organize churches. They would come to my site here. I have a LINK card. And down in Pembroke, we get the vegetables down the road. And out in Altgeld Gardens they have a LINK card. And when the farmers come up from Arkansas and from Pembroke, they come on a Friday night, Saturday morning, 123 churches come pick the vegetables up, and then take them back to their local church. That's what I've been doing for thirty-eight years of my ministry. And what happens is, the people who buy the vegetables—we have a thing called Keep in Touch directory where they have their name and their address. And during the week, our staff calls them and asks how did you like the food. "Well I got mama's peas but I don't have mama's taste." Well I've got some seniors that know how to fix the peas. So that's what Keep in touch directory is...In the South, and in Michigan, there's a lot of brothers who come out of prison and they do work in the white folk's field in prison. But they don't have any jobs nor businesses when they come out. So the project we have is HOME, Healing Our Men Economically. So when they come out we're going to assign them to Black farmers through my organization because if you've done 5 or 10 years in the fields in prison, then we just need to change uniforms. You've got an orange uniform, well we'll give you a George Washington Carver's.

This is the food desert. When I went to Cleveland last year, there was a group called the Cleveland Trust Foundation. They did a study. They came up with the same conclusion. The grocery stores are too far away, the food we eat is causing the diseases that we have. Now, here's the problem. Both [including Gallagher's] of these studies say that we're killing Black people with the food that we eat. And nobody is worried about it, so let's

stay on the pathway. So last month in February, I spoke before the United States Department of Agriculture for the Midwest, and I challenged the fact that the food desert still has not been addressed because you're not bringing up the food of my ancestors.

I'm going to give you and your daddy here some peas from my farmers from Arkansas. But when you look at Save-A-Lot, you go into Save-A-Lot, eighty to ninety percent of the food in there is canned goods. Save-A-Lot is owned by Jewel Foods. And that was the response the city made. Now they're saying Whole Foods— Whole Foods is not telling the whole truth, they're having a problem in California where they won't admit that the food that they have is GMO. So if we're in Walmart store, we'd see that Walmart has seedless watermelons. But my farmers grow Diamond, Crimson, Jubilee and Sugar baby watermelons, which is the Black seed over against the white seed. Walgreens has cut up food. If you go over the 35th and King drive and you walk into Walgreens, they got little plastic cups. They have our people with a box and they put dirt in the box. Now the problem is, they never asked how far do they roots go down before they go into that vacant lot that they put the box up and put the dirt in the box.

I: Who are you and what do you do?

A: My name is Reverend Doctor Al Sampson. I'm president of the George Washington Carver F.A.R.M.S, which is an organization around the country where I'm producing a simple marriage between the Black farmer down south and the Black consumer up South. Because I argue that we're the only race of people where everybody feeds us but us. And what I've been doing with my ministry, I was at Fernwood United Methodist Church for thirty-eight years, I retired in 2013. And now since the world is my parish now, what I've

been doing is making sure that Africans in America, for the first time in Black America, we're going to have warehouses where we grow our own food and be able to sell our own food through churches and through the grocery stores that we plan on building.

I: What is your definition of food insecurity?

A: What it means is that we're like the dope person where they keep going to everybody's house to eat. And it makes us a creature of habit. There are reports out that says that the food we eat is causing the diseases that we have. The report called the Food Desert Report [by Mary Gallagher] says that the grocery stores are too far away and as a result, we have what I call an International Belly. Shrimp fried rice by the Chinese. If you're Indian, you can have Subway. If you're Pakistanian [sic], you can have Dunkin' Donuts. If you're Polish, you get the sausage, the Polish sausage. If you're Greek, you get gyro sandwich. As a result, the eating habits of our people have produced one fundamental thing: there are more dialysis machines in our neighborhood than there are in any other neighborhood in America. When the Jews fix their meat, it called kosher. When the Arabs fix their mix, the Muslims fix their meat, it's called halal. When Christians fix their meat, they say they want red meat with the blood running out and they want fried foods and as a result, what ends up happening is there are more dialysis machines in our neighborhood than any other neighborhood because of this whole issue of not controlling the food that we eat. Years ago, down south, Black folk created, farmed, had their storehouse, had their freezers with the food and they controlled even their seeds. Mama used to put a potato in the window and that potato in the window would be the seedling that she would then transfer to the garden. And that's what our dilemma is. When we left the south in our migration and came up south, we ended up in

what they call a Pavlovian-conditioning kind of relationship with food where everybody feeds us but us.

I: How accessible is healthy, affordable food in your community?

P: It's not as accessible as it should be. It's not even as accessible as it ought to be because we are not in control of the food system. What I've been attempting to do in my ministry for the last forty years is to get our people to have a simple kind of relationship with their own people. One of the interesting things is, we're in the summer now and a lot of Black folk have family reunions. Family reunions in our world means that folk from down south come up south and they eat soul food vegetables. Folk from up south go down south and they eat soul food vegetables. Well, the reality is when you're up south you're a consumer. When you're down south, you're a producer. Family reunions have never had a meeting and said look, we can consume the vegetables you grow, and let's have a marriage between the two. And since everybody has a truck, why don't we just go to Arkansas since we're all from Arkansas, it's only eight hours, and you produce the watermelons from Arkansas and we'll bring them to the urban world of Chicago, Gary, Milwaukee, St. Louis. So what we've done is divided up the country. Because I've been working with this program for about forty years now. And Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas—we're going to have what I call agricultural hubs where the farmers are going to have a building where they can bring the vegetables down south to their building and then from there we're going to have a trucking. We have what they call the George Washington Carver Independent Truckers Association. They will end up picking up the vegetables from our agricultural hub and then be brought to the Midwest where we'll have a wholesale retail distribution center. We will have a building. And

once the vegetables get here, then they will be distributed through Milwaukee, Gary, St. Louis, all the way up to what we call the three C's, Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, and then straight up to Detroit. North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia is going to be divided up where that's going to be our southern agricultural hub where the farmer's will bring our vegetables from there into that hub and then be taking up to Newark, New Jersey. And from Newark, New Jersey, we're going to turn back around and send the vegetables all the way up to Boston and all the way back down to Washington, Baltimore. The tragedy of our reality as Africans in America is that there are 600 Black cities and these 600 Black cities all over Black America, there is no wholesale retail distribution center nowhere. And Black leadership has not been as intentional as I would like them to be at working with the project I'm working on. So don't wake them up because I don't want them to worry me right now. [Laughs]

I: Can you talk about legacy of George Washington Carver and his impact on the work that you do?

A: George Washington Carver was a slave, a scientist, and he was an orphan. And about twenty or twenty five years ago, I was down in Florida A&M and I was talking about George Washington Carver because he's always impressed me because he did the peanut and the sweet potato. He's the godfather of agriculture. When the south was being eaten up with the locus with the cotton, he was able to say to Black farmers, let's move to having row crops to putting these particular products back in the ground to put the nutrients back in the ground. Well, I was talking about George Washington Carver, and a farmer, about two or three hundred of them were at Florida A&M.

[Dog barking interrupts. Sampson steps outside to put the dogs back in the house and returns quickly.]

So I was at Florida A&M with a couple of hundred of Black farmers and a brother raised his hand from the back and said that he was a student of George Washington Carver. And everybody clapped. And I said: “That’s awesome. What I’d like to do is take your number, brother, because I would like to have any relatives of George Washington Carver.” He said, “That’ll never happen Reverend.” I said “Why not? My people trust me. I want to honor him because of who he was, the godfather of agriculture.” He said, “That’s not the problem”. He said, “There’s a group of white people in America called ‘eugenics’ and they believe that your intelligence runs through your genes. And so they ended up castrating George Washington Carver so that he would not have any children.” At that moment, in front of everybody sister, I literally broke down and cried. And I made the commitment that I would bring George Washington Carver back home to the Black community. That was a good twenty, twenty-five years ago. I came back and I started going up on the airwaves and staying committed to the Black farmer and created the organization George Washington Carver F.A.R.M.S., which means Farmers Agricultural Resource Management System. And as a result of that, I’ve been moving around the country with what I call the economic blueprint of liberation. One of the problems with Black leadership is that when they die, there’s no script for young people to follow on what shall we do in the absence of. Martin King’s last book was ‘Where do we go from here?’ [inaudible]...caters to our community and I was able to go into that book and see the impact that the urban world moving into Chicago, when he came into Chicago I was a part of that movement. I was on his staff at the time. And we lived on the

West Side of Chicago in 16th and Hamlin and I participated in all of the demonstrations during that time. I was his project director for the campaign in Cleveland, I stayed with Ralph Abernathy two years after the assassination of Martin King, which was in 1968. I stayed there until 1970. So what I have found is that we don't have a economic system inside of our community in order to have our young people, when they go out of school, what do they go into. We take the position that businesses produce jobs, but jobs don't produce businesses. And where's the economic entity? And that's what we've been doing.

I: Why is making the connection between Black farmers and consumers important to you and why is it important to “buy Black and bring your dollars back” as your website says?

A: Because every culture does it. I have always said that if we were in Chinatown, we could see that the Chinese grow their own Chinese collard greens. They put it on their own truck. They put it on their own stores. And they put it in their own restaurants.

That's what Elijah Muhammad was attempting to do, even to the point where he had fish that came from Peru. So we've had these economic initiatives, but we've never had an economic system inside our community. And our people walk around with a lot of skills.

One of the interesting things that occurs in the church is that the preacher says 'will the visitors please stand'. And they always ask the visitor what church do you belong to?

They'll even sing to the visitors and all that. When I go to a church and speak, or college or wherever I go, my issue is—what do you do? So if I'm in a church on Sunday morning as a guest speaker, I ask “Are there any plumbers? I would appreciate it if you would stand. Are there any electricians? I'd appreciate it if you would stand. Are there anybody

who has trucks?’’ Because in the scripture, Ezekiel 37 raises the question: ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ Yeah they can live, if you get ‘em up. If you get our people out of the cemetery and bring ‘em to the twelfth chapter of Corinthians, which is what we call the body of Christ. Where we are different members that makes up the whole. Martin King said power is the ability to move from one human relationship to the other.

Reverend Willie Barrow said we are not as much divided as we are connected. On a Sunday morning, it is conceivable on a Sunday morning in a church that people can sit right next to each other for years, but they never ask the question “what do you do?” So, I’ve been moving around the country and people are now seeing that when I come, I’m coming to put the body of Christ together. So if there are young people playing instruments in the church, then I would be saying to them give me somebody in the church who is in real estate who knows how to do what I call identifying the pin number which is called the property index number. You have a lot of young preachers with an iPad up in the pulpit. Well, my iPad means Investment Property Acquisition Department. Young people and old folks sit in church and if they’re in church, grandma ought to be able to say “I got an abandoned building next door to me”, get the address to that building and bring it to Tuesday night’s meeting where the young people will see that there’s some commercial property, there’s some residential property in vacant lots. And those who know about computers ought to be able to establish a data bank. So that we have an economic proposition going on right inside of the church. So where I started out with the seed, because all through the Bible, through the story of Adam and Eve to the story of Noah on the boat, he got off the boat because he ran out of food. And when you look at the story at the end it says in seed time and at harvest. The story of Joseph, with all that

he went through in Genesis 37 through 50, at the end of the arrangement, when he brings the entire family together, Joseph becomes what I call in charge of the Department of Agriculture. It's all about the seed. So the first principle of economics is that you have to control the means of production. And that's what we've been doing in our ministry and moving around the country and several parts of Africa and the Caribbean with that whole idea of Economic Blueprint of Liberation.

I: How has your organization, as well as bridging agriculture and the church, transformed or contributed to your community?

A: Well, everybody knows that I'm the vegetable man. [laughs] When they come for lights and gas, because we have a program where we help people with the lights and the gas, and out of that we've created a contractor, tradesmen's base, but folk know that we also are the ones that bring the vegetables up. And we're getting ready now in the next thirty days, we have found some brothers and sisters that are putting together an economic program utilizing the stock market in a program called New Wealth. They are merging with us, with the George Washington Carver, as two corporations for the express purpose of buying stock in order to buy warehouses and trucks. So it's an economic strategy utilizing our economic strength coming out of the church and coming out of the community. Because we're not as "poor" as folk would like to put that kind of paradigm on us. We spend more money on the lottery than any other group of people. Casinos would shut down if we would not play the gambling game. We can't be that poor when all of these franchises are sitting up in our neighborhoods. People laugh when I'm in the pulpit and I talk about Popeye. When I was a little boy, fifty years ago Popeye would always solve his problems because Olive Oyl told him get the spinach. Now fifty years

later, Popeye is not on the Black and white TV that would cut off at twelve o'clock. Popeye's on colored TV now with the same story about how he gets in trouble. Olive Oyl says to him 'I want you to get the spinach' well, Popeye's up in my neighborhood now with chicken and biscuits and no spinach. And Olive Oyl is just as skinny today as she was fifty years ago because he never gave her any spinach, even though she gave him the proper advice to get out of the trouble and the challenges that he had. Somebody don't want our people to be strong because there's no spinach on the menu of Popeye. Years ago, when I was in the south I used to love to go out in the rural and preach because I could smell the chicken. And I always argue that the chicken came out the church— Church's Chicken. And all over the neighborhood, Church's Chicken. Now folk don't have no chicken in the church because they're on the corner of Black America where they're selling the chicken, but it's not in the church and it's not being sponsored by the church. So my argument is, if minister Louis Farrakhan can sell bean pies, the Black church ought to sell sweet potato pies. So one of the brothers that you met today, him and two other brothers boarded a bus last year and they slept on the Magna Bus. And they went down to Memphis. They didn't sleep in a hotel, they slept on the bus. And they got there in the morning. That morning, my mama from Byhalia, Mississippi drove to Memphis, met them, and then took them to the sweet potato folk and we bought about two or three thousand dollars worth of sweet potato. They rented a truck and came back to Chicago. When they came back to Chicago we had organized six churches and we had asked every church to make sure they had a computer, had a dining hall, had a kitchen and we ended up having a sweet potato pie contest. And then we pulled individuals out of those churches to become judges in the sweet potato pie contest. Meanwhile, we ended

up selling those sweet potatoes and some of our folk, when they saw the sweet potato coming out of Mississippi with the dirt on the outside and the milk on the inside, they ended up breaking down crying because they remembered that sweet potatoes that they grew up on, and not the sweet potatoes that are nice and shiny and all basically look alike inside of the grocery stores. So we believe that we can solve this problem if we move towards knowing that everybody feeds us but us.

I: What is the role of Black farmers in our continued pursuit of black liberation?

A: Well, the Black farmer would be extinct if we don't hurry and develop the economic system that we're talking about. When I say a warehouse, I'm looking at the warehouse not only for Black farmers to bring his fresh vegetables into the agricultural hub, but I'm also looking at what we call International Free Trade Zones. In every single state, there is a, which is governed by the Department of Commerce, to have a designated area called International Free Trade Zones. Which means there are brothers here in Chicago and in Philadelphia that are in Ghana where there are a group of farmers that are in Ghana that are in a co-op, and they bring pineapples and mangoes into Black America today as we speak. The problem is they don't have a warehouse. What I have found, because I've taken my own time and money for the last thirty something odd years, forty years, and now I have found where International Free Trade Zones are. There are brothers on the east coast that actually control ports. There are brothers down south that actually own ports. And so when we look at the Caribbean, when we look at the fifty-four African countries, there's no reason why we can't pull together and move with an economic proposition. So if Johnny Arman was here, who is the Consulate General of Haiti, he would tell you that we're now getting ready, in the next thirty, forty days, we're going to

have his agronomist from the country of Haiti come to St. Louis. And from there we're going to where we have the heirloom seed bank at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. Why is that important? Because the country of Haiti grows peanuts. And they make peanut butter. And I'm taking the delegation this fall because I want to have George Washington Carver peanut butter on the peanut butter jar. And when I get the warehouse, I want to have the Black farmers' vegetables, which is fresh produce, and then I want to have—example, in Jewel food stores here in Chicago there are about twenty or thirty different products that are Black products. This lady named Michele Hoskins, they've got Grandma syrup, but it sits right next to Aunt Jemima syrup and ten other syrups. I would have her leave Aunt Jemima's next door in the shopping center and come to our wholesale retail. Reggio's pizza is sitting in competition within its own community with Giordanos pizza. Parkerhouse sausage, Baldwin Ice cream—there are a lot of packaged Black products where we need to have our own wholesale retail distribution center and system so that people can go back and buy our vegetables of our culture like other cultures do.

I: How is the relationship between African American people and food complicated by our history of slavery, sharecropping, and otherwise tenuous history with the land here in the US?

A: Well, that's a very deep question. And let me give you an old country answer. Years ago, there used to be a grandma in our house that had a big black bag, and in the black bag she had a jar called a Mason jar. And she would go to the white man's kitchen. And she'd fix the greens. And then she would put the greens on his table and she asked a question: 'Can I take some of these greens home to my children?' He said 'No. I own the

greens, I own you, and I own the children. You can't take them home. You can't take no greens home.' She said 'no problem.' She went back to the kitchen, opened up that big bag, pulled out two or three jars called the Mason jar, and she would take the juice and put it inside of the Mason jar. And she would go home and fix some hot water cornbread. And she would pour the juice. One of the children asked, 'Grandma, what's that you giving us?' She called it potlikker. And what grandma was doing was giving the children the nutrients and the vitamins and the juice that the heat sucked out of the greens so that he really got dead greens, but she got the live juice. And she called that potlikker. Well, the thing that has killed off our community now as we look at 2015 is pot and liquor. And what we're attempting to say is that we're introducing a computer which is called a Solar computer and we're introducing the microscope because there are a lot of seniors that are still alive from Haiti to the West Indian culture all the way back to Africa where they can identify several of the herbs that are still growing out here in our culture and we're going to teach our young people to go back to the herbs. Because there was a time when we didn't have Walgreens. We didn't have CVS. I was very happy that CVS said that they were going to take all of the cigarettes out of the stores. I was hoping that Black leadership would say thank you to them, but I was excited about that because when you go to other stores, the liquor stores in one section of the store and then the drugs and the prescription drugs on the other side of the store, and then the food that they said is causing the diseases that we have fruit in plastic cups that are all cut up and we don't know whose hands was in the plastic cups. We're challenging Black churches to stop having food pantries were the people have to sit all day long and they leave the church with a bag full of canned goods and the pastor has never done a study on whose diabetic

inside of the church, because the sodium is inside the canned goods. We need to say to Save-A-Lot: stop trying to sell our people canned goods because of the sodium, which is inside of the canned goods. Our genius as a people is what we call color on the plate. When you get vegetables like squash or crowder peas or butter beans and beets and spinach, all of those is what we call color on the plate. We didn't have cancer like we got now down south. We didn't have diabetes or the other challenges we have with what we call the seven deadly sins.

I: How might African American stewardship with the land help us sort of redefine and reclaim our relationship to the land and food?

A: One of the things we have to do as a family is stop having family reunions and fighting each other with the land that our ancestors left us. It's been a serious problem in our community. I've traveled around the country. Grandma and grandpa left the sons and the daughters with the land and he divided it up and they got to fighting. Two of them wanted to sell off a piece of the land in order to get some money because they were up South and didn't see the continuity of passing on wealth. We got Black lawyers who have come out of the south. They've moved to the urban world and they haven't seen or had the sensitivity to go back into the south and say we don't need to lose our land. Everything is based on the principle of land. And you get independent and you become free if you appreciate the land. And if Black folk who were down south with not much 'education', if they were able to understand not only how to preserve the land but how to grow food on the land, what George Washington Carver said, there'd be no scraps. I have a friend named Calvin Jarrett (sp?) that's got five hundred sewing machines. Well,

under Clinton, when he was the president, he destroyed the welfare system, gave us three strikes and you're out, and destroyed the textile system with NAFTA, the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement. And what he basically said was that I need to take this out of the South and take it over to Mexico and other countries. So what we're getting ready to do is identify people in the south who have got some buildings, mayors and county officials that have some buildings in order to bring economic development in what we call food, clothing, shelter, and water. I have found where there's some brothers in Black America that come out of Mississippi and they have their own water and we're going to move with that a part of our economic liberation plan. I just maintain that we're too intelligent of a people to be the only race of people where people come into our community to exploit us rather than to develop an economic arrangement with us. I was really happy when President Barack Obama last year invited fifty-four African countries—and four of them couldn't come because of the Ebola crisis—but a couple of them came to us in Chicago because they know the work that we're doing. Just the idea of having African countries, with all of the food that they produce, and the Caribbean countries with all the food that they produce, there is no reason why we should be walking around begging when we can be building. We can be growing our own and selling our own produce.

I: Final comments?

A: Our philosophy is “there is no culture without agriculture”. And we really believe that time is not up, the clock has not stopped. We are at war. And if people really believed that Black life matters, if we really really believe that we cannot breathe, if we really believe that we are Richard Wright's *The Outsider*, Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man*, James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name*, Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, then

we ought to remember Maya Angelou who said “I rise. I rise. I rise.” We ought to remember that Michael Jackson looked at the world—when other brothers were saying that boys and girls in the hood, he said we are the world. I really believe that this is the right moment in history for us to begin feeding ourselves, clothing ourselves, and producing the marriage between the brothers and sisters in Africa. I call it the “ABC plan”: Africans in the homeland, Blacks in America, and Caribbean brothers and sisters. That’s where my struggle and my cross is going to be. I came out of the Civil Rights Movement in 1957-61 out of Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. I was president of the NAACP on the campus at Shaw. When SNCC was founded on my campus I gave them the keys. I would have been a member but I was already president of the NAACP on the campus. I was president of the youth and college chapters all over North Carolina. I know what Alcatraz looks like in Natchez, Mississippi in Parchment where they locked up two thousand of us, stripped us butt naked and gave us a laxative. We were like monkeys in the zoo. And they were counterparting Black women’s sacred parts. I know what it means to be in Epes, Alabama where Black students had a school and it said science lab but it didn’t have no microscopes. It said library and there was no books. And I turned the school out in Epes, Alabama and we were headed to the white school. And the sheriff named Sheriff Pete put a gun to my head and said, “you’re a Martin coon and as soon as you leave from this spot, if you think you’re going up to that school I’m going to kill you.” And right to this day, I’ll never forget, the FBI was right there with a blue Chevrolet and they started laughing. And I said “you heard what Sheriff Pete said” and they said “Yeah Reverend Sampson, there’s nothing that we can do, we have to wait ‘til he shoots you.” And he still had the gun at my forehead. And I looked at him and said

“your cap pistol has nothing to do with my life.” And I broke out with the song “Ain’t gon’ let nobody turn me ‘round, I’m gon’ keep on walkin’ on...” and we went up into that school and we desegregated that school. And today they’ve got Black sheriffs now down there in Epes, Alabama. And my point is, if I could sit down at a lunch counter for a hamburger at a Woolworth Restaurant, I’m quite sure I don’t mind dying for the crowder peas and the butter beans and the watermelons that our ancestors produced. Because when you go on the Internet, watermelons come out of Africa. Cantelopes come out of Italy. And we have the food of our culture. And if I’m by myself on the preacher’s side, I’ll ask God to send me the members of the preacher’s churches because I have to stay on the battlefield when it comes to feeding ourselves. I learned it from a man named Dr. Vernon Johns. And Vernon Johns went to New York and he said to the preacher “I want to come up and do a revival for you.” And he said “Well, I don’t have no money to pay you now. You’re a powerful preacher. You’re the pastor down in Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.” He said “No, no, don’t worry about me getting a collection. I don’t want nothing every night. I’m coming five nights, I’m not charging.” He said, “well how are you going to make it?” He said “I’ll bring up two thousand watermelons at five dollars apiece and every morning when I preach that night, no collection. You can take one for the church, but I don’t need to collection, I just need two thousand people to buy my watermelons and that’ll be ten thousand dollars for me.” He taught us the value of understanding the economic relationship to the Earth to the economic relationship to our people who need to constantly get food from the Earth and not from a grocery store that we don’t own.

I: Please introduce yourself and tell us who you are and what do you do?

R: My name is Robert Nevel and I am an architect and also the founder of KAM Isaiah Israel's food justice and sustainability program. So that would make me also an urban farmer.

I: What is your definition of food insecurity?

R: That's a terrific question. I think that one can have insecurity around their sources of food, whether it be unaffordable, or it's inaccessible. I think that those are certainly two components of an insecure food system. You can't afford it or you can't find it or you cannot get to it. I think that if you are insecure when it comes to food, you don't have, you may not have access to that food, you may not be able to afford the food, or it might be available, period, in your community.

I: How accessible is healthy, affordable food in your community?

R: You know, I think that in this area in Hyde Park, Kenwood, Woodlawn, and in these neighborhoods, I think good, healthy food is not that accessible. I think there are many people who don't have means to get to sources of that good food. And I think that the cost of good, healthy food is, in many cases, prohibitive.

I: And why do you think that is?

R: Well, there is a great disconnect between people and their food. And so, I'm sure you're well aware of where the majority of fresh, healthy food in Chicago comes from. It does not come from the communities in which it is consumed. So if you live on the North Side and you buy your fresh food at Whole Foods, it's likely that food is grown in

California thousands of miles away, requires a long journey to get to your table. There is a disconnect between people and their sources of food. And there has been for quite some time.

I: What is food justice and how does the work that you do here with your Food Justice and Sustainability Program work towards that?

R: Another great question. You know, we started talking about food justice back in 2009, I think we were one of the pioneers in this conversation. And it has a lot to do with equal and affordable access to healthy food. For that matter, clean and potable water and healthy soil and clean air. There is a disparity between those who have and those who have not and it's no surprise that often people in need are also people who are also exposed to the most unhealthy of air, have less access to healthy water, clean soil, and good, healthy food. So it's equal and affordable access so that there is not then developmental disparity between those who have and those who have not. Without good, healthy food, clean air, and clean water, there is really no chance for equal, sustainable development of all people.

I: What is the importance of growing your own food?

R: Again, I think it's got to do with the connection between people and food. There are varied steps of disconnection between people and their food. There are people who are unaware of what fresh food looks like. There are people for whom their connection with food is a frozen dinner or a carry out from a fast food restaurant. So there's a complete disconnect between the origins of that food and people who are consuming it. There are many, many people who cannot identify basic foods growing in the field, like they cannot identify a tomato plant to what an okra looks like when it's growing. Or the difference

between collards and kale and what spinach looks like. How berries grow on a bramble. And so, the farther away you get from the production of food, I think, the greater the problem grows.

I: What is the role of community empowerment in your food justice work? How has the work that you've done here transformed your community or contributed to your community?

R: Well I think that, you know, we have set this program here as a replicable model. And we want to demonstrate that folks in the community can be involved in the growing of their own food. And that it can be done in what were leftover spaces at houses of worship, in this case. So the margins around the building. So we're demonstrating that what were once unproductive lawns are now significant sources of fresh food. And I think that that, in and of itself, empower them at least to understand that if they so desire, they can grow food in these, what were once left over spaces. I think it's had a transformative effect on our community. There are within a mile or mile and a half of here six hot meal programs that receive a weekly delivery of fresh food from late June all the way through to the end of October. And they understand that our group of interfaith farmers is with them, and that they understand that we are all together in it's action and it's effort.

I: I can see that your organization values the involvement of youth as evidenced by your summer camp here. Why is it important to get youth involved in food justice work?

R: We think that we have a responsibility to help develop future leaders. And the earlier one is connected to their food system and understands that, again, bringing one closer to

food and to the environment. It's not just a food justice program but a sustainability program. And to understand, as we are doing with our Young Leadership Summer Program, understanding their relationship to the soil, to water, to plants, and to people. To understand the relationship to these basic elements. And the earlier they understand that, the better. And we have seen that have an impact on the teens that have gone through this program. They continue to come back and work with us. They suddenly have this appreciation and understanding and I would say devotion to the environment and to food that they did not have when they started. And then they go off to college and they work with their colleges on their college programs. And it is important to start to think about each and everyone's responsibility to the food system—the food system being a component of the environmental. Clearly one of the keys to, if not the central civil rights issue of our time is climate change. And as we—for each of us to understand that we have the power to affect change is one of our goals here. It's to, in a hands on way, to understand the opportunities that you have, the power that you have by being fully engaged in all these environmental issues.

I: Your organization also holds an annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Food Justice and Sustainability Weekend. Can you please speak on the legacy of Dr. King and how you are honoring his legacy through your work here?

R: Again, a great question. I think this will be our seventh year. In honor of Dr. King's birth, we put on for our community a food justice and sustainability weekend that involves really education and advocacy and for these issues of food justice and sustainability. And really what inspires us about Dr. King is the idea that, in it's most basic way, that through love you solve many problems. And what we're trying to

demonstrate in this weekend is love for each other, love for the environment, love for all the components of the natural world. And really it is a weekend where that sort of is the undercurrent of all of it. And it allows us then the opportunity to demonstrate the kind of work we do here and to share that collective knowledge and effort with the larger community. It is a weekend. It's totally accessible. It's free and open to everyone. Free of charge. And it is a weekend to demonstrate the importance of these issues, in honoring Dr. King's legacy, and to emphasize the importance of the community and equality that is essential, the essential equality of all of us.

I: What work do urban gardens and other alternative food pathways do that the current mainstream food system does not?

R: We think of this actually as an urban farm at this point. Not much splitting hairs between an urban garden and an urban farm. But we think that it has a significant impact on the food system. What we're demonstrating is how one congregation can transform unproductive landscape into food production. Our annual yield is somewhere on the order of two and a half tons, five thousand pounds of food. Now that may sound like a lot, and it is, it's probably one of the largest growers and donors of food in Chicago, but if you think that the average adult should be eating three to four hundred pounds of fresh produce a year, you do the math and you find out that really we are providing essentially enough fresh food for about twelve or thirteen or fourteen people a year. Now, we are probably the sole source of fresh produce for six hot meal programs within a mile or mile and a half of here. Clearly they're not getting enough fresh food. But if we can produce that amount of food on two churches and one synagogue, think about how many churches and synagogues there are in the Greater Chicagoland area, how much unproductive

landscape there is, how many schools with unproductive lawns, how many fire stations with unproductive lawns. If those lawns were transformed to food production, I think it can have a significant impact not just on supplying those folks with fresh produce, but also in increasing awareness of that value of land. Land is a limited resource, especially in an urban area. And I would say wasted on lawn in those areas that have enough sunshine to grow food is a reckless demonstration of an unsustainable land used. So not only are we having an impact on the food, on the availability of fresh food, but we're also trying a ripple effect, a replicable model to bring awareness to the larger, and to the country. It's a nationally recognized program to bring awareness throughout the country that land is a precious commodity and it should be used to its maximum advantage.

I: How can we fight injustices such as racial inequality or disparate access to these major resources that we all need through urban farming?

R: Great question. I think that when you build a community-wide program, and when you keep company with the people in your community, week after week, year after year, I think that that has a really powerful effect on the community. Farming at this scale is a ten and a half month a year project. And the food deliveries go through June to October, so June, July, August, September, October. For five months on a weekly basis, we visit hot meal programs with food. We bring food to hot meal programs, soup kitchens in this community. And we visit with the cooks, and the people who—when I say visit, we bring food, we talk to them, they at times come and harvest with us. We, likewise, talk to people in the neighborhood where we are farming. When a community sees that there's a group of folks that, week after week, month after month, year after year—we're in our seventh year—when they see that we take our community, we feel as if we are just a part

of this larger community and we demonstrate that by doing this work for the community, within the community. Remember that the food is all delivered within a mile or mile and a half of where it's grown. That's our walking community. These recipients, who were unaware of KAM Isaiah Israel seven years ago are not acutely aware of it. These recipients will say to us, these are people, some of them who sleep in the park, some homeless people will see some of our farmers on a cold, dark evening in late September and say to them "you need to go home and get some rest. You need to go eat. Would you like to eat with us tonight in our kitchen?" It's building those types of community. Week after week, month after month, year after year, it demonstrates that it's not us and them, but it's our community, our walking community. And we're all in this together. And I think that has a really salubrious effect on the community.

I: Do you have any final words/thoughts that you'd like to share?

R: Well, I'm really pleased that you're doing this project. I'm really very pleased about that. That you find this meaning, this kind of work. And that you've chosen this to be your thesis project. I think that I'm very optimistic about our future, but it will require all of us, all of your classmates, all of us to understand that we have a role in the environmental issues. It's not a task that we want to outsource to politicians or to big business. Each of us has a responsibility to our food system. Each of us has the responsibility to our environment, to the ecology of our planet. Each of us does. And you're demonstrating that you take that responsibility seriously. So I'm quite impressed by that and I'm honored that you're here.

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