

RIGHT TO (FEED) THE CITY: RACE, FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, AND FOOD JUSTICE
ACTIVISM IN POST-HURRICANE KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

by

CATARINA MARIE PASSIDOMO

(Under the Direction of Hilda E. Kurtz)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the emergence and flourishing of grassroots “food justice” activism in the city of New Orleans in the years following Hurricane Katrina. Its primary goals were (1) to investigate the extent to which food justice and food sovereignty discourses and activism interact with and affect the material and social realities of the frequently low-income communities of color in which they are situated; and (2) to examine whether such activism helps or hinders pre-existing efforts to alleviate hunger, overcome racism, and promote social justice at the scales of the neighborhood and of the city. This research utilized qualitative research methodologies and critical theoretical perspectives from urban geography, critical race studies, and agrofood studies to examine how food activism both constructs and contests racialized subjectivity in an urban context. Through a critical cultural perspective of race and the right to the city, I argue that food projects initiated and maintained by white exogenous groups *on behalf* of communities of color risk exacerbating the very systems of privilege and inequality they seek to ameliorate. This dissertation argues for a re-positioning of food justice scholarship and

activism, which focuses on systemic change through power analyses and the strategic nurturing of interracial alliances directed by people residing in the communities in which projects are situated.

INDEX WORDS: Food studies, Critical Geographies of Race, New Orleans, Right to the City

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For the little one, and all those who came before.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Eight years after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and exposed the city's pervasive racial and class inequalities, low-income New Orleanians still struggle to obtain sufficient fresh food, and the ravages of racism are nuanced, but pronounced. In New Orleans and throughout the United States, racial and economic disparities in access to nutritious food have become prominent concerns within academic and mainstream public discourse. Consequently, food activist groups and organizations in the global North are struggling to articulate a movement that encompasses their demand for a food system that is not just safe, but also socially just, anti-racist, environmentally sustainable, transparent, and democratically controlled. Among critical responses to the perceived perils of the industrial food system, the food sovereignty movement's vision of radical transformation within the food system—which demands the democratic right of peoples “to define their own agriculture and food policies” (Peoples Food Sovereignty Network 2002)—offers, at least conceptually, a visionary and holistic response to challenges related to human and environmental health, and social and economic well-being. What is still unclear, however, is the extent to which food sovereignty and similarly articulated food justice discourses and activism interact with and affect the material and social realities of the frequently low-income communities of color in which they are situated, and whether they help or hinder pre-existing efforts to alleviate hunger, overcome racism, and promote social justice. This dissertation addresses those questions by examining food

sovereignty activism in the city of New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina as understood by both activists and community members.

The theoretical context for this research draws on insights from the fields of urban geography, critical race studies, and agro-food studies to examine how food activism both constructs and contests racialized subjectivity in an urban context. This project thus utilizes theories of the socio-political construction and transformation of urban space to argue that (1) ideologies of justice and sovereignty within the food system are enacted and experienced in ways that accord with specific socio-political, ideological, and spatial contexts; and (2) that the ability of food projects to effectively combat racial and class inequities depends upon local conditions that foster grassroots activism. In order to assess these arguments, this project utilized mixed qualitative methods to examine the discourses and ideologies that frame food justice and food sovereignty activism in New Orleans, and to investigate the perceived social and material outcomes of those projects for communities of color. This dissertation situates food justice and food sovereignty activism in New Orleans within a broader national context to better understand how ideologies of justice and racial equality within the food system are translated, interpreted, and enacted at the local level within New Orleans.

The primary theoretical contributions of this research arise from linkages drawn between theories of urban space, racialized subjectivity, and the paucity of research on race in the food system. Additionally, this study adds to the growing body of research on post-Katrina New Orleans, none of which has looked explicitly at food activism as it relates to social justice efforts to rebuild the city. This project's broader impacts lie in its ability to contribute to the development of more socially just and spatially sensitive anti-hunger/food sovereignty projects that work with and by, rather than for, food insecure communities of color. Its assessment of

food justice and food sovereignty projects in New Orleans offers insight into the potential for anti-racist food activism in other U.S. cities. By drawing on the perspectives of underrepresented communities of color, this research articulates and illuminates the effects of persistent racial inequality in U.S. cities, as well as the challenges and possibilities for restructuring racialized food insecurity among urban communities of color.

1.2 Research Problem and Questions

This dissertation research set out to address the following primary research questions:

1. How do food justice organizations in New Orleans characterize and respond to the presence and role of racism in the food system? How, if at all, is that characterization shaped by critical perspectives on race and racism, which argue that racism is a persistent feature of social life and policy in the United States? How, if at all, do food justice organizations in New Orleans collaborate with local anti-hunger and anti-racist organizations and community groups to address issues of racism within the food system?
2. Where, if at all, are there indications that post-Katrina food projects do or do not facilitate a ‘right to the city’ in which marginalized individuals and groups of color have renewed ability to access, participate in, and produce urban space? What individuals, groups, institutions, and/or processes enhance or hinder the “right to the city”?
3. How is the concept of *food sovereignty* translated across scales? How is food sovereignty conceptualized by international peasant organizations, such as Via Campesina, and how aptly does that conceptualization characterize food justice work at national and local scales within the United States and within New Orleans? What, if anything, does food sovereignty offer that similarly articulated concepts (such as food security and food justice) lack?

1.3 Dissertation Outline

The primary work of this dissertation was to address the research questions above, and, in doing so, to situate my analysis within specific theoretical and methodological frameworks and socio-spatial contexts. What follows is a description of the organization and content of the dissertation.

In *Chapter Two*, I detail the theoretical framework that informs the research. I share the rationale for choosing the theoretical foundations that inform my research, and present reviews of relevant literature from the three topical areas of interest. I consider theoretical contributions on the following topics: Race and the food system; the right to the city; and food sovereignty. This chapter integrates insights from Critical Race Studies and agro-food studies with conceptual ideas from urban geography to develop a theoretical framework that can both attend to and interrogate the complexities of anti-racist food sovereignty projects in urban contexts. I draw on insights from Critical Race Studies (CRS) and whiteness studies to illuminate the subtle but profound ways in which race and racism act on and through systems and institutions, including “the food system” and “the non-profit system.” While CRS scholars have rarely discussed food specifically, they offer critical perspectives on the historic and structural injustices that have contributed to contemporary landscapes of food (in)access; such broader critical perspectives are too often lacking within contemporary agro-food studies, which have tended, until quite recently, to focus on “the food itself” rather than the systems that generate it. Linking these literatures adds both theoretical and practical heft to food systems studies and praxis.

I also utilize Henri Lefebvre’s concept of the “right to the city” (RTTC) to parallel and illuminate themes within food sovereignty discourses, which proclaim a democratic right to access and participate in the construction of urban space; specifically, I consider how theoretical

contributions from RTTC can inform an investigation of food sovereignty's demand for democracy, access/appropriation, equity and justice within the food system. I consider popular and state appropriations of both RTTC and food sovereignty and argue that such appropriation represents both an opportunity and a threat for specific efforts to enact social justice.

By drawing on insights from these literatures, and highlighting fruitful linkages amongst them, I argue that theoretical understandings of race/racism, privilege, and whiteness can assist in interpreting both the desire of white people to engage in food justice work directed at racial others, while at the same time (often unintentionally) perpetuating their own privileged positioning. RTTC and food sovereignty's theoretical privileging of endogenous democratic action offers an alternative to efforts that are exogenously led. Thus, at their intersection, these literatures demand a consideration of how efforts to make (the) food system(s) more just become wrapped up in broader manifestations of social and state mechanisms that perpetuate existing power imbalances along lines of race, class, and geographic space. I conclude Chapter Two with a conceptual framework that links these three broad areas of study and informs my research analysis.

In *Chapter Three*, I review my research questions and discuss the qualitative methodology I employed for answering them. I introduce the research sample, the population from which it was drawn, and the sampling method used. The research sample consists of representatives from eighteen different food-related organizations throughout the city of New Orleans (Appendix C), as well as community members from three different neighborhoods (Hollygrove, the Lower Ninth Ward, and Mid-City). (Figure 1.1)

I also explain how I designed the study and the methods I used to gather data. These specific methods included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, internet and archival research, and content analysis of internet sources and organizational material.

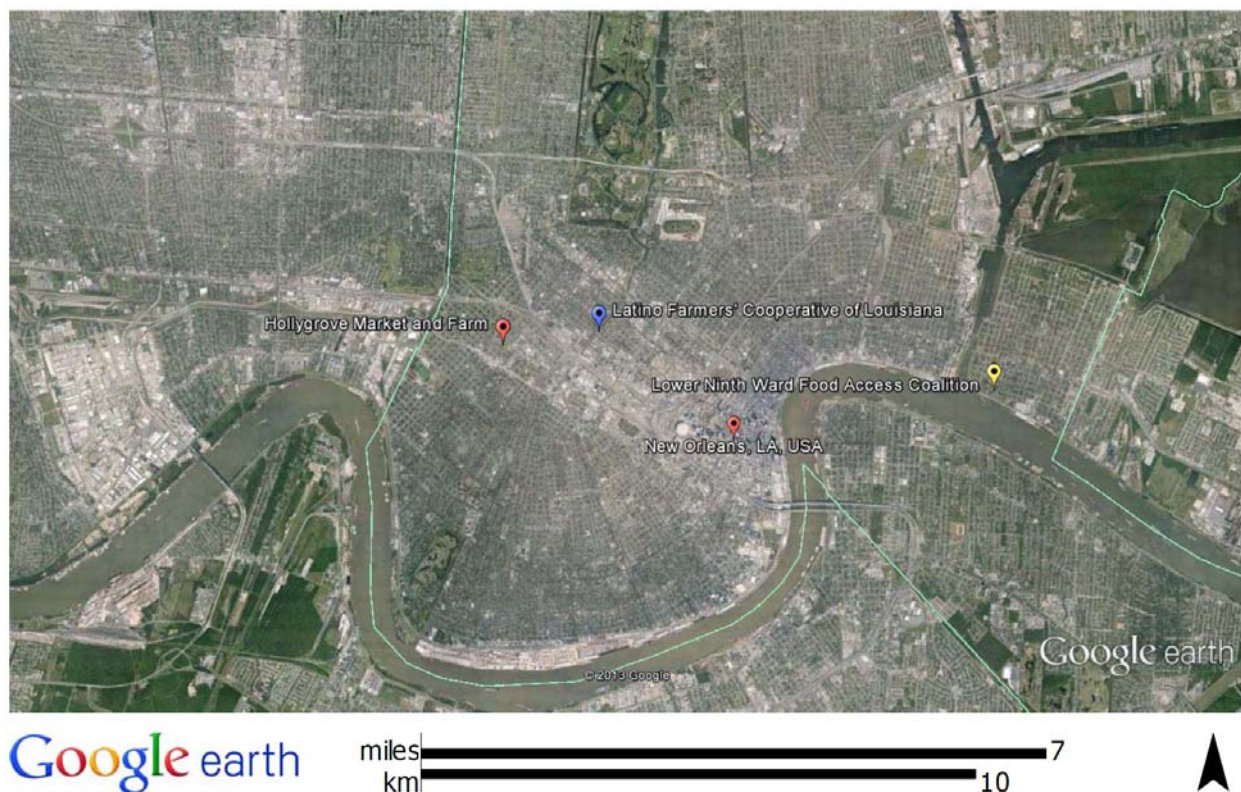


Figure 1.1: Map of Primary Research Sites

I conducted preliminary research during the summer of 2011, spent five months in New Orleans during my primary research period (January through May of 2012), and took several follow-up trips between May and December of 2012. During my primary research tenure, I utilized a snowball sampling method to contact individuals associated with every food and/or farm organization I heard about. I spent one month volunteering at each of three organizations, to develop an in-depth understanding of their operations and ideologies. At Hollygrove Market and Farm, I conducted surveys and interviews of local urban farmers at the request of market staff,

and also helped to pack and organize produce on market days. In the Lower Ninth Ward, I compiled information on zoning, neighborhood history, and demographic data to assist the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition in their efforts to develop a “food plan” for their neighborhood, and attended six out of eight community planning meetings. In the Mid-City neighborhood, I worked with the Latino Farmers’ Cooperative of Louisiana, enrolling and managing members’ applications for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or “Food Stamps”), and assisting with the day-to-day operations of the cooperative’s office. Each of these in-depth experiences, as well as participation in numerous community meetings and other food-related events, exposed me to tensions related to race and nativity, which form the basis of my analysis.

I also link particular research methods to my theoretical framework by exploring the connections between theoretical formulations of race, urban space, and power, and their empirical applications. I describe the process of data analysis and synthesis, and conclude the chapter with a discussion of ethical considerations and limitations of the research, particularly in terms of my own positionality, and how I attempted to deal with them.

In *Chapter 4*, I present the geographic and temporal context for my research by depicting the demographic, economic, and cultural conditions of post-Katrina New Orleans. I also consider broader national patterns of public interest in all aspects of the food system. I situate food justice activism within that context and present vignettes from three research sites. These vignettes introduce crucial themes for analysis, which are explored in detail in later chapters. The research sites introduced in this chapter are the Hollygrove Market and Farm, the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition, and the Latino Farmers’ Cooperative of Louisiana. Each research site illuminates themes of race and the food system in distinctive ways. This chapter also

demonstrates the unique situation of post-Katrina New Orleans as a research site and as a space for food justice and food sovereignty activism, while suggesting elements of the New Orleans story which may be instructive for or are common in other urban sites.

As my first analysis chapter, *Chapter 5* offers a response to my first research question: *How do food justice organizations in New Orleans characterize and respond to the presence and role of racism in the food system?* It draws on theoretical contributions from Critical Race Studies, Whiteness Studies, and Agrofood Studies to analyze the work of white food justice organizations and activists working in communities of color in New Orleans. It explores some of the tensions experienced by the activists themselves, and the ways in which people of color are often left out of central decision-making conversations and opportunities. I discuss efforts by white food justice activists to understand and come to terms with white privilege and racism in the food system, and profile an “Undoing Racism in the Food System” workshop attended by white people and people of color. In this chapter, I argue that organizational analyses of power illuminate entrenched and internalized racial oppression previously veiled to white food justice practitioners and advocates. Such analyses, while practically and emotionally difficult, can foster greater understanding of the presence and role of racism within the food system and within society more broadly.

Chapter 6 presents a response to my second research question: *Where, if at all, are there indications that post-Katrina food projects do or do not facilitate a ‘right to the city’ in which marginalized individuals and groups of color have renewed ability to access, participate in, and produce urban space?* In this chapter, I explore the theoretical foundations of the Right to the City framework to consider what lessons it can offer for grassroots struggles to increase access to fresh food in the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood of New Orleans. I review popular and state

appropriations of the RTTC framework, and consider some potential implications of those appropriations. In this chapter, I argue that struggles for food sovereignty, or the right to determine and shape local food systems, constitute a specific form of claims on the right to the city, and that these claims play out at the scale of the neighborhood, rather than that of the city. I characterize specific, neighborhood-scale demands for food sovereignty, such as those made by the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition, as “political moments” (Becher 2012), which, despite their locational and topical specificity, offer profound potential for broader urban social change.

Chapter 7 responds to my third research question: *How is the concept of food sovereignty translated across scales?* In this chapter, I examine the extent to which food sovereignty discourses emerged within food projects in New Orleans, and consider how those discourses compare and contrast with food sovereignty discourses at national and international scales. Like RTTC, I consider various appropriations and interpretations of food sovereignty discourse by both state and (explicitly) non-state actors, and contemplate whether food sovereignty has been embraced too easily or not critically enough. I focus on my time with the Latino Farmers’ Cooperative of Louisiana to consider distinctions between food security, food justice, and food sovereignty. I analyze the various ways in which an increasingly globalized food system acts upon individual bodies, communities, states, and broader systems and consider the ways in which food sovereignty’s alternatives can (or cannot) intervene at each of these scales.

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation, by considering the findings and interpretations in broader context, and offers actionable recommendations for academic and activist approaches to food justice and food sovereignty in U.S. cities. It also considers limitations of the research, and presents directions for future research.

1.4 Researcher positionality

Throughout the course of this research project, my own identity and the unearned privileges it earns me both informed and constrained the research process and my affiliation with it. I entered “the field” having had personal experience with “food justice activism” as both an academic and a board member of a non-profit organization. I had studied a budding “local food system” and the various markets and vendors it supported for my master’s research, and had helped to write grants that would facilitate various forms of local foods-related programming. Through this work, and attention to broad national interest (both popular and political) in local foods and farmers’ markets, health and obesity, and, more recently, food justice, it became apparent to me that these movements typically represented white cultural discourses and values. As a white person pursuing a Ph.D., I was familiar with the *habitus* that animates much contemporary food justice work in this country (although that dynamic is thankfully shifting in many places). Throughout this dissertation, I reflect on my own positionality, and the ways in which it was often reflected back to me in the people with whom I worked in New Orleans.

1.5 Rationale and significance of the research

This project has broad intellectual merit as it expands understandings of the importance of considering race and racialized space when investigating food activism. This project contributes to understandings of how urban space is produced, accessed, and contested by marginalized individuals and communities operating within the constraints of food insecurity and economic and structural decay. Furthermore, this research contributes to a growing body of scientific literature on post-Katrina New Orleans, and will be the first critical examination of food-activism there since the storm.

This project's broader impacts lie in its ability to contribute to the development of more socially just and spatially sensitive anti-hunger/food sovereignty projects that work with and by, rather than for, food insecure communities of color. Its assessment of food sovereignty projects in New Orleans will offer insight into the potential for anti-racist food activism in other U.S. cities. Additionally, this project will illuminate the effects of persistent racial inequality in U.S. cities, and some of the challenges and possibilities for restructuring racialized food insecurity among urban communities of color. Attention to both official discourses and the lived experiences of the people residing in areas where urban agriculture projects are situated affords a more complete and less romanticized account of the social and economic impacts of those initiatives, both on their own terms and in relation to similar projects in different spatial contexts. Such an assessment is desperately needed, as groups and organizations struggle to find and enact solutions to the pressing problems of urban hunger and food insecurity. Empirical accounts of efforts in a city rebounding from crisis will offer insight that may guide similar but preemptive efforts in other cities—efforts that are emerging and inevitable in this time of heightened popular and academic interest in the possibilities for developing robust and democratic alternatives to what is perceived to be a deeply flawed industrial food system. By highlighting the voices of marginalized people of color, this research has the potential to transform popular and academic understandings of how race intersects with food in contemporary U.S. cities.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the theoretical framework that informs and situates my research, by highlighting concepts and ideas from relevant literature, and discussing how they helped to both frame and inform my research questions, methodology, and analysis. I have often found myself in conversation with colleagues and mentors, discussing whether each of us is “theory-driven” or “empirics-driven.” Ideally, of course, all research projects and goals are driven by both theory and by real-world manifestations of theoretical ideas, but I do believe that each of us is slightly more compelled towards either theory or empirics. In the context of this particular research project, I was drawn initially and primarily by empirical, rather than theoretical phenomena. I had witnessed considerable (and what I perceived to be problematic) activism and discourse regarding “food justice” in both New Orleans and nationally, and I sought out theory to help me understand it better, and to equip me with the language I needed to explain that phenomena in an academically robust manner. Beyond explanation, however, I came to believe that theory could equip me with tools for reconceptualizing “food justice,” and even, potentially, for radicalizing the ways in which it is manifest. Studying the literature on race (both in the food system and within broader systems and institutions); conceptions of the Right to the City; and food sovereignty and how it differs from food justice has provided me with more than just a new language for talking about food justice projects in communities of color; it has opened

up a space for critically engaging with those projects and practitioners in real time and space, and for both re-conceiving and transforming the processes that generate new projects.

This chapter traces theoretical contributions of critical race studies; urban geography and the right to the city; and food sovereignty discourses to illuminate the challenges and phenomena I witnessed in the realm of food justice activism in New Orleans. I begin with a section on race and the food system, to situate theoretical contributions of Critical Race Studies. Critical Race Studies offers critical perspectives on the historic and structural injustices that have contributed to contemporary landscapes of food (in)access, while agro-food studies highlights diverse perspectives on what constitutes “justice” or “sovereignty” within a plurality of food systems. Next, I outline Henri Lefebvre’s concept of the “right to the city” (RTTC) to help parallel and illuminate food sovereignty discourses, which proclaim a democratic right to access and participate in the construction of urban space; specifically, I consider how theoretical contributions from RTTC can inform an investigation of food sovereignty’s demand for democracy, access/appropriation, equity and justice within the food system. This research thus integrates insights from critical race studies and agro-food studies with conceptual ideas from urban geography to develop a theoretical framework that can both attend to and interrogate the complexities of anti-racist food sovereignty projects in urban contexts. At their intersection, these literatures demand a consideration of how efforts to make the food system more just become wrapped up in broader manifestations of social and state mechanisms that perpetuate existing power imbalances along lines of race, class, and geographic space.

2.2 Race and the Food System

While geographers and other scholars have acknowledged the multiple oppressions that enable persistent hunger and food insecurity to afflict the bodies of people residing in cities

within the wealthiest country on the planet (Heynen 2006; Mitchell 2004; Patel 2007)—a country that sends 34 *million tons* of edible foodstuffs to the landfill each year, an estimated 27% of the food available for consumption and equal to about a pound of food every day for every American (U.S. EPA 2009; Martin 2008)—little attention has been given to the ways in which urban hunger and food insecurity in the United States constitute a specifically racialized epidemic operating at multiple scales and a variety of spatial contexts. Statistics about hunger and food insecurity in the United States often obscure sociological, political and historical elements of the epidemic. As Don Mitchell has argued, the spatial manifestations of food insecurity and hunger—what he calls the “geography of hunger”—represent sites of contemporary and historical oppression, injustice, and/or outright neglect. In this section, I present statistical data relating urban food insecurity and race, and then explore political and historical factors that have conspired to produce the phenomena revealed therein. I then explore recent theoretical contributions which link systems of racial oppression to emergent movements for food justice.

In 2011, nearly 18 million households in the United States suffered from food insecurity—meaning that they had difficulty providing enough food for all family members due to a lack of resources (Coleman-Jensen, et al. 2012). While that number represents nearly 15% of all people living in the United States, a disproportionate 25% of African-American households and 26% of Latino households experienced food insecurity that year (Coleman-Jensen, et al. 2012). There is thus a racialized component to food insecurity in the United States, and this is particularly true in cities, where concentrations of non-white poor are significantly more likely to confront, as Kwate (2008) has characterized it, “fried chicken [than]... fresh apples”—a

reference to the tendency of fast-food outlets to cluster in lower-income communities, where traditional grocery stores are typically absent.

According to a report commissioned by the US Conference of Mayors in 2010, hunger and homelessness remain the most pressing issues of concern for U.S. cities, with every city in the survey reporting an increase in that year's requests for emergency food aid. The report also indicated a lack of affordable housing as a primary cause of both hunger and homelessness in cities throughout the country, and, unsurprisingly, cited poverty as the primary factor driving food insecurity. Data from the 2010 U.S. Census reveal poverty rates at their highest levels since 1983, with nearly one in six Americans living at or below the federal poverty line. Again, the statistics for people of color are far worse, with 26.6% of Latinos and 27.4% of African Americans living in poverty.

Demonstrating a high prevalence of food insecurity among urban communities of color requires more than an acknowledgment that both food insecurity and people of color cluster in cities. A 2006 report by Mari Gallagher Research and Consulting Group on food insecurity in Chicago found that majority African-American neighborhoods were the most disadvantaged when it came to accessing fresh food, followed by Latino neighborhoods (Gallagher 2006). The report linked the presence of inner-city "food deserts" to high rates of premature death due to cancer and cardiovascular disease, noting the prevalence of fast-food establishments—and near total absence of full-service grocery stores—within low-income communities of color. Studies in other major U.S. cities, including Brooklyn, NY, (Moreland and Filomena 2007) have corroborated these findings, demonstrating that people living in low-income, majority non-white neighborhoods are at the greatest risk of experiencing food insecurity or hunger. As Gottlieb and Joshi (2010: 58) argue, access is a crucial component in determining who is food secure and who

is not: “Consumers cannot eat five servings of fresh fruits and vegetables a day, as recommended by the USDA, if fresh food is not available in neighborhood stores and restaurants, if it is not affordable, or if fast food is heavily promoted and marketed to the most vulnerable.” The notion of “food deserts” has been met with considerable skepticism, as highlighted by two 2012 studies indicating that the concept of food deserts is overstated and inaccurate, despite its political purchase (Bornstein 2012).

The controversy surrounding the food desert moniker notwithstanding, there remains substantial evidence that access to high-quality nutritious food is correlated with race and class. Kurtz (forthcoming) draws on a growing body of literature on the proliferation of so-called “food deserts” in inner-city non-white neighborhoods to demonstrate the persistent negative effects of segregation on limiting access to nutritious foods. To situate the argument that structural and environmental forces have conspired to constrain alimentary availability and options for people of color, she traces the decades of systematic “corralling [of] African Americans into blighted neighborhoods from which whites and capital have fled...” generating vast swaths of urban areas that are both overpopulated and underserved (Kurtz, forthcoming: n.p.). Among these structural forces are a decades-long legacy of legalized residential segregation, followed by subsequent decades of marginally or wholly legal discriminatory practices, including ‘redlining,’ or denying home loans to areas inhabited by racial minorities. Unsurprisingly, enduring decades of real estate discrimination and rights denied had significant and devastating effects for individuals of color, including “inhibiting their accumulation of assets, depriving them of the increased equity that comes with home ownership, and devaluing the assets that they might have passed on to their children” (Lipsitz 2006: 27). Additionally, residential segregation allowed for poverty to

concentrate and opportunities to dwindle in non-white neighborhoods, while cementing structures of neglect and disinvestment in those neighborhoods.

In his influential book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, William Julius Wilson (1987) argues that the combined forces of out-migration by non-poor blacks and a restructured U.S. economy since 1970 drove the concentration and isolation of minority poor in “urban ghettos,” thus producing a “qualitatively new form of urban poverty” (Gregory 1998:7). As Williams and Collins (2001: 405) argue, “[b]y determining access to education and employment opportunities for African-Americans, residential segregation has truncated their socioeconomic mobility and has been a central mechanism by which racial inequality has been created and reinforced in the United States.” Kurtz (forthcoming) situates limited access to fresh foods among the casualties of residential segregation and inner-city abandonment, as big-box grocery stores found their desired clientele and lower rents in the suburbs.

In order to understand the specific geographies of racialized food insecurity, particularly the high levels of food insecurity amongst low-income African Americans living in cities like New Orleans, it is crucial to examine another historical legacy that makes food insecurity among African Americans particularly unjust and ironic. For roughly the first century of this country’s independence, the majority of its domestic food production resulted from the involuntary contributions of African slaves and their descendants. Between the years of 1940 and 1974, the number of African American farmers dropped from nearly 700,000 to less than 50,000—a shocking decline of 93 percent (Daniel 2013). Today, less than one-percent of African Americans make a living as farmers (Gilbert et al 2002); in contrast, fully half of all African Americans lived and worked on farms in 1920 (Ficara and Williams 2006). That there are today so few African American farmers, relative to their past prominence, is again demonstrative of

explicit discriminatory treatment, as the twentieth century saw thousands of black farmers denied loans or subsidies the USDA was doling out to white farmers across the country; indeed, by the 1970s, agricultural surplus in the country's Midwestern "bread basket" compelled the Federal government to pay white farmers *not* to produce (Ficara and Williams 2006). The transition toward input-intensive industrial farming, with its high upfront costs for chemical fertilizers and expensive machinery, effectively snuffed loan-deprived black farmers, and set in motion a legacy of dependence upon industrial systems of food provisioning, while simultaneously contributing to the black exodus away from rural areas of the South and toward cities throughout the country (Kotz 1969). As Marian Wright, an attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, argued before the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty in 1967, several hundred thousand African Americans abandoned the South at a time when farm mechanization and the withholding of food aid caused unemployment and hunger to swell amongst rural black southerners (Kotz 1969).

"People are starving," she testified. "They are starving and those that get the bus fare to go north are trying to go north. There is absolutely nothing for them to do here... I wish the senators would have a chance to go and just look at the empty cupboards in the Delta and the number of people who are going around begging just to feed their children. Starvation is a major, major problem now" (quoted in Kotz 1969: 5). Wright went on to suggest that the withholding of essential food aid to poor African Americans living in the Delta states "seemed *designed* to drive an unwanted black population" out of the region, and to cement structures of power that bestowed corporations and the state with the authority to determine how food was grown and to whom it was distributed (Kotz 1996: 5).

Mandell (2009) also demonstrates how food has been mobilized as a tool for cementing power relations. He argues that systems of ownership and control characterized by the industrial agriculture that drastically diminished the number of black farmers and set in motion the contemporary spatial and racial patterning of food insecurity, mimicking the master-slave relationship. While African and African American slaves had been engaged in the actual labor that brought food from seed to plate, it was the master who determined the quantity and quality of his slaves' diets, mostly relying upon cheap imports of grain and staples to constitute the bulk. Mandell explains the profound importance of the master/slave-feeder/fed relationship: "The master's control over the slave, including his command over self-determination in the most personal areas of her life, reproduction and eating, became essentialized—to be subject to the command of the master in all areas of your life became a characteristic of blackness...to be the fed was to be enslaved, to be black, to be powerless" (Mandell 2009: 944-945). This institutionalized system of hegemony within the food system permits Mandell to draw firm linkages between the development of our modern agricultural system and the "inequitable distribution of hunger and plenty along racial lines" (Mandell 2009: 939). Such inequality is evident in the presence of urban food deserts in low-income communities of color, disproportionately high rates of diet-related disease among those populations, and a global phenomenon of corporate dominance within the agricultural sector. While high rates of near-starvation, which Marian Wright witnessed in 1967, are thankfully much less prevalent, the systems and institutions that created them have reconfigured familiar relations to power that manifest new forms of control, governance, and bodily harm.

2.3 Race and Food Justice Activism

The flourishing of academic interest in food systems over the last decade has resulted in lamentably little attention to how race intersects with food activism, or with food systems more broadly. Scholars and popular authors have charted and critiqued a variety of food-related movements, which represent a range of interests and priorities—from human health (Nestle 2002; Lang, et al 2009) and social justice (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010), to environmental sustainability (Perfecto, et al. 2009) and animal welfare (Singer 2009 [1975]; Safran Foer 2009). These movements advocate on behalf of farmers, on behalf of consumers, on behalf of seeds, animals, fish and soil. They often attempt to restructure power relations, to question and combat the authority of multinational corporations and the states that band with them to dominate the form and flow of agricultural inputs and edible outputs around the globe (Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009). Within this framework, the discourse surrounding urban gardening projects and other forms of urban food justice work is often laden with tropes of personal responsibility and individual empowerment, and often neglectful of structural causes of food insecurity and hunger (Pudup 2008).

Thus, advocates of food justice struggle to confront both the racialized structures that characterize the dominant industrial food system (discussed above), as well as the critique that many alternative food systems are elitist and therefore discriminatory. Some scholars have thus noted a popular mandate for “ethical” food systems, but critique activists who often fail to account for the privilege embodied in the acts of defining and trying to create food systems that are *ethical*, *sustainable*, or *just* (Freidberg 2010). As Julie Guthman (2008a; 2008b) and Rachel Slocum (2006; 2007) have pointed out, the “rising” (Pollan, 2010) food movements of the past decade have most prominently emerged in “White spaces,” such as farmers’ markets and upscale

grocery stores that focus on increasing “quality” (Goodman 2003), shortening the social and economic distance between production and consumption (“localizing”) (Allen and Hinrichs 2007; Renting et al. 2003), and responding to growing concern over what has been termed the “obesity epidemic” in the United States and elsewhere (Critser 2003; for critique, Guthman and DuPuis 2006; Guthman 2011.)

While there has been some attention to the connections between systemic and structural racism and the landscape of contemporary food systems, which, like other manifestations of racialized capitalism generate spatialized constraints on food access, there has been less attention to the overwhelming whiteness of the movement for food justice, even as that movement “works” to address injustices in communities of color. Julie Guthman (2008) and Rachel Slocum (2005) are notable exceptions to this lack of attention. Using her own students’ experiences with “urban food security” service-learning projects in Berkeley, Guthman demonstrates the tendency of food justice advocates to focus on food itself, rather than on the structural inequalities that lie at the heart of disparities in food access (and the attendant health and economic consequences). As Guthman argues, “the problematic inheres in the research question itself: namely, that trying to understand how the African Americans who are the target of these efforts appear to reject them in some way replicates the very phenomenon being addressed—the effect of white desire to enroll black people in a particular set of food practices” (Guthman 2008: 433). This fundamentally flawed agenda—however cloaked in real or imagined efforts to effect social change—suggests to Guthman that “a set of discourses and practices that reflect whitened cultural histories are what animate [her] students” (p. 433). In other words, the very desire to change the *kinds of food* that people of color eat—rather than addressing the historic and contemporary systems that generate the particular *landscapes of availability* for people of

color—is in keeping with the privilege afforded to white people throughout white cultural history. Whether they intend it or not, Guthman argues, her students’ efforts “reflect white cultural desires and missionary practices, which might explain [their] lack of resonance” in communities of color” (433). While the food itself—specifically the quantity and quality available in low-income communities of color—may galvanize white people, for people actually residing in those communities, “the paucity of quality food in their communities is seen as evidence of this lack of [political and economic] power” (Block et al, 2011). This discrepancy in identifying the problem reflects, in many ways, the difficulty that inheres in seeking solutions, and may begin to explain why food justice projects aiming to promote social justice or, more specifically, to increase healthy food access for people of color, so often fail to address the underlying systems and structures that helped create the unjust food landscape that characterizes American cities. The particular manifestations of food justice activism critiqued by Guthman and others demand a theoretical engagement that offers critical analysis of race and the prominence of whiteness within movements for food justice. In what follows, I draw on Critical Race Studies to do just that.

2.4 Critical Race Studies

This section engages with Critical Race Studies (CRS) to offer a deeper, more meaningful and nuanced understanding of the racialization of food insecurity and what Julie Guthman (2011) has characterized as the “unbearable whiteness of alternative food” practice. While the central tenets of Critical Race Studies (CRS) help illuminate the challenges of structural inequality that contribute to racialized urban food insecurity, they also open up new spaces for challenging those structures and envisioning and enacting alternative outcomes. CRS

can also help identify and problematize characteristics of whiteness and white culture that permeate purported food justice work.

CRS utilizes the basic tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and additionally considers explicitly the significance of race as a methodological issue (Twine 2000: 5) and the systematic investigation of the connections between race and the law (Harris 2002: 1231). Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001: 2) describe Critical Race Theory (CRT) as constituting a “collection of activists and scholars interested in studying *and transforming* the relationship among race, racism and power” (emphasis added). As a body of scholarship commitment to social transformation, CRT aligns with David Harvey’s (1973:151) characterization of a “revolutionary theory” in that it “offers real choices for future moments in the social process by identifying immanent choices in an existing situation” and holds open the possibility of “creating truth rather than finding it.” CRT’s commitment to social transformation makes it especially useful for both examining and challenging the structures of inequality that sustain racialized urban hunger and food insecurity; this is not a body of theory that is content to ponder what is, but rather one that commits to imagining and enacting what could (or should) be. The broad body of scholarship falling under the heading of CRT combines insights from Critical Legal Studies and Radical Feminism with conventional Civil Rights discourses concerned with redressing historic wrongs. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 6-9), despite the breadth of its application, some shared understandings characterize CRT scholarship; among these are (1) racism is “ordinary,” delineating the everyday experience of most people of color and making it difficult to “cure or address”; (2) white privilege serves the purpose of maintaining structures of order and power; those characterized as “white” reap the greatest social and material benefit, thus having potentially the greatest ability but least perceived incentive to eradicate racism; (3) races are

socially constructed; despite lacking any scientific basis, racial categorization has tangible and often violent effects for people identified as belonging to the non-dominant group (4) there is such a thing as “differential racialization”—each race has its own origins, ever evolving history and boundaries, driven primarily by the labor needs of the dominant society; and (5) race interacts with other factors to comprise an individual’s identity; intersectionality and anti-essentialism dictate that no two individuals experience race, or any other aspect of their identity, in exactly the same way.

Mindful of these basic tenets, there are several themes within CRS that are instructive for scholars of food justice, particularly those engaged with research that invokes a possibility for social justice through activism. Among these themes are the valorization of whiteness, the permanence of racism, and the emancipatory potential of anti-racist activism.

2.4.1 Critical White Studies

Within CRS, Critical White Studies scholars challenge banal notions that ‘whiteness’ characterizes a sort of ‘racelessness.’ Critical White Studies questions what it means to be white, how whiteness became established legally, how certain groups moved in and out of the category of ‘white’, how and why individuals have ‘passed’ as white in different times and places, the phenomena of white power and white supremacy, and the automatic and unearned privileges attached to whiteness (Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 75). As Guthman (2011: 267) concedes, “whiteness is a messy and controversial concept to work with, variably referred to as the phenotype of pale bodies, an attribute of particular (privileged) people, a result of historical/social processes of racialization, a set of structural privileges, a standpoint of normalcy, or a particular set of cultural politics and practices.” Despite these multiple referents,

whiteness itself is often unexamined within the practices and discourses of urban food movements.

In the book *White Like Me*, Tim Wise seeks to illuminate the power of white privilege, and begins that task by highlighting the white experience of “race” as one of isolation and denial: “Although white Americans often think we’ve had few first-hand experiences with race, because most of us are so isolated from people of color in our day-to-day lives, the reality is that this isolation *is* our experience with race. We are all experiencing race, because from the beginning of our lives we have been living in a racialized society, where the color of our skin means something socially, even while it remains largely a matter of biological and genetic irrelevance” (Wise 2008: viii). Wise characterizes whiteness as a “belonging” bestowed upon white people at birth, and carrying the privilege of past advantages. To be white entitles a person to continue to reap the benefits of racial privilege without questioning either the cost or benefit of that privilege. To be white is to have the option to remain in denial about the content and power of racial privilege, despite persistent and clear evidence of that power. While whiteness is not “real” in any biological sense (Roediger 2005; Haney-Lopez 1997) and the boundaries separating those who count as white from those who do not have been remarkably fluid and slippery in this country’s history (Ngai 2004; Lipsitz 2006; Haney-Lopez 1997), the value of whiteness to white people is “real and must be confronted” (Wise 2008: x).

Most notably, for the purposes of this research, are the ways in which whiteness, and the internalized racial superiority that accompanies it, may unconsciously influence the work of white advocates who fixate on food access without first (or ever) addressing issues of privilege and power. As McKinney (2005) argues, scholars (and activists) should engage with whiteness to reveal what white people do and do not think about what it means to be white, and how

(unexamined) whiteness in particular affects the material and social realities of both whites and people of color. Sullivan (2006) further suggests that unexamined and unconscious racial privilege may in fact inflict more violence than overt racism, because it allows white people to maintain a sense of moral superiority.

Understanding the scope and significance of white-skin privilege, as outlined throughout CRS, situates the geography of food insecurity within structures of intersectional oppression that acknowledge race as the primary among multiple potential oppressions. In a discussion of the existence and impact of different forms of privilege and oppression, Tim Wise (2008: ix) emphasizes the deep and enduring nature of racism and white privilege for constraining the social and material realities of people of color: “We live not only in a racialized society, but also in a class system, a patriarchal system, and one of straight supremacy/heterosexism, able-bodied supremacy, and Christian hegemony. These other forms of privilege, and the oppression experienced by those who can’t manage to access them, mediate, but never fully eradicate, something like white privilege.” Thus, while people of color of different classes are “victimized by racism in different ways” (hooks 1990:37), the “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz 2006) that has characterized this country’s social and cultural fabric since colonial times continues to reflect patterns of privilege and denial that play a large part in determining who secures and maintains power within structures and institutions, including the food system.

2.4.2 Racial Formation Theory

Like Wise, hooks and other CRS scholars, Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994:13) argue that race “has been a *fundamental* axis of social organization in the United States.” The ways in which race and racial categories fundamentally shape the lived experiences of all people, and the ways in which racialization systematically constrains opportunities for people of color,

are all part of what Omi and Winant term “racial formation.” Racial Formation Theory examines “the socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed,” and, critically, situates these processes within social-structural, historical, and spatial contexts (Omi and Winant 1994:55). Within the context of racial formation, a “racial project” may be characterized or understood as *racist* if and only if it “creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race” (Omi and Winant 1994: 71). Because of the prominence of the established racial hierarchy in determining the composition and working of the political state (Goldberg 2002) and the formation of both basic and complex social structures (Omi and Winant 1994), many scholars and activists agree with Derrick Bell’s (1992: 92) declaration that “racism is a permanent part of the American landscape.” In *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, Bell (1992: 12) offers this prognosis about the future of race relations in America: “Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary ‘peaks of progress,’ short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance.” Acknowledging the “permanence of racism,” for Bell, is an act of defiance because doing so entails an overt rejection of ubiquitous stock stories about unqualified racial progress and notions of an enlightened “color-blindness” that naturalize racial “difference” and neglect enduring structural systems of hegemony (Bonilla-Silva 2003; L. Bell 2010). Instead, acknowledging the “permanence of racism” requires us to confront the ways in which existing “racial hierarchies” both produce and are produced by a combination of “local demographics, regional economies, local history, and national racial narratives” (Pulido 2006: 24).

Reflecting on the social and spatial patterning of urban food insecurity, the persistent racial hierarchy illuminated by these and other scholars points to a perpetuation of the institutional and systemic power hierarchy discussed earlier. Rachel Slocum (2008: 855) characterizes the neo-colonial components of “White liberal interest which wants to help” people of color to eat more healthful foods, while not venturing down the difficult road of dismantling the structural forces that contribute to unequal health outcomes in communities of color. Similarly, speaking of the well-intentioned (and purportedly “color-blind”) food activism of her students, Julie Guthman (2008: 436) argues, “the intention to do good on behalf of those deemed other has the marking of colonial projects, in that it seeks to improve the other while eliding the historical developments that produced these material and cultural distinctions in the first place.” At the same time, the stigma often experienced by those who are “fed” by federal food aid or donation programs exacerbates the imbalance of power between those who control the “ownership and command” of food, and those to whom it is distributed.

There are, however, spaces of resistance within this system of feeder and fed. Cherry-Chandler (2009: 53-54) reflects upon her own childhood, where the private sensations of pride and dignity conjured during the public act of retrieving food from a food bank allowed her family to “manage the complexities of basic survival and to find unconventional ways to practice self-reliance and negotiate self-identity in the face of disparaging imagery that portrays food-aid recipients as taking undue advantage of government entitlements and as being culturally deprived and coarse.” Cherry-Chandler’s description of emancipation from racial and class oppression starting in the mind of the oppressed is consistent with a major theme within CRT; despite the permanence of structural racism, those struggling within that system find self-

determination in the power of “radical[ly] imagining” alternative visions of socially just future geographies (Kelley 2002).

2.4.3 *Anti-racist activism*

The invocation of radical imaginaries to combat racial and class oppression must necessarily be situated within the personal and communal historical experience of the oppressed (Pulido 2006). In a comparative study of three radical anti-racist organizations in Los Angeles, Pulido argues that each of the organizations adopted the political positions they did because the racial/ethnic groups with which they identified had experienced unique processes of racial formation, which fixed each group at a specific position in the region’s racial hierarchy. Japanese Americans’ history of internment, followed by the achievement of “model minority” status, fostered the development and preservation of Asian American identity and culture. Chicanas/os’ commitment to immigration and labor concerns grew from that group’s multi-generational (and continuing) struggle to obtain the full rights of citizenship and economic mobility. The regional chapter of the Black Panther Party’s platform of self-defense and self-determination, Pulido argued, was a radical response to African Americans’ position at the bottom of the socially-constructed racial hierarchy, where political and economic structures conspired to constrain black empowerment.

Pulido draws on each of these organizations to highlight the importance of collective visioning towards the creation of a more just future. Importantly, each of the resistance efforts she profiles are grassroots in nature; while they may find support and solidarity from white allies, these are movements structured, organized, and maintained by marginalized groups themselves.

Taking inspiration from Kelley’s *Freedom Dreams* (2002), Pulido posits “Activists must dream in order to develop a vision of the kind of world they would like to live in. The visions

offered must be compassionate and humane and must reach people's hearts and souls as well as their minds. Although a vision is no guarantee of successfully remaking the world, it is a necessary first step" (Pulido 2006: 238). The argument for an historically and spatially situated struggle against multiple forms of oppression should be extended to activism for justice within the food system, which too often overlooks both the structural causes of inequality as well its locally specific manifestations. Considering Pulido's assessment of historical oppressions mediating contemporary resistance efforts, the historical justification for white involvement in food justice work in communities of color is questionable.

Since CRS is fundamentally about the ways in which the power to effect change for oneself and one's community is systematically constrained by racial systems and institutions, it dovetails effectively with theoretical contributions from Urban Geography and the "right to the city," as I discuss next.

2.5 Urban Geography and the "Right to the City"

Henri Lefebvre's "right to the city" (RTTC) framework reframes the arena of decision-making in cities to enfranchise inhabitants to produce urban space that meets their own needs (Lefebvre 1996). Lefebvre presents the RTTC framework as a radical transformation of urban space which, he argues, "should modify, concretize, and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (citadin) and user of multiple services..." (1996: 34). Among the "rights" to which urban dwellers are entitled are the rights to participation and appropriation. *Participation* implies that urban inhabitants, or "citadins" to use Lefebvre's term, should have central decision-making capacity in any action that contributes to the production of localized urban space. Lefebvre situates active participation at scales ranging from the body to the supranational, but the outcomes are, at least initially, localized within specific urban spheres.

Appropriation articulates the right of citizens to "physically access, occupy, and use" urban space, and to produce urban space "so that it meets the needs of inhabitants" (Purcell, 2002: 103). For participation and appropriation to even be possible, Lefebvre argues, residents of a particular space have both the power and the responsibility to realize their roles as *inhabitants* within the urban system. Lefebvre characterizes *inhabitation* as more than just the physical and bodily occupation of space, so often suggested in contemporary notions of urban citizenship and private property. On the contrary, *inhabitation* implies an expectation to "take part in social life, a community, village or city" (Lefebvre, 1996:76)—in short, to value urban space for and through its *use* (city as *oeuvre*). Prior to the dehumanizing effect of capital and its emphasis on *exchange* value (city as commodity), *inhabitation* was thus the central feature of urban life. The radical potential of asserting the RTTC lies in acts of appropriation of space by inhabitants, which "provides a direct challenge to the prioritization of exchange values that is pursued by neoliberal regimes of urban governance" (Butler, 2012: 145).

In a sense, then, the space of the city and the nature of urban citizenship are co-constitutive. David Harvey argues, "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city" (Harvey, 2008: 23). Because enactment of the RTTC requires high levels of community engagement and a deepening of "the social" within cities, it is also a right to change the city by changing ourselves. Smith and McQuarrie (2012: 3) emphasize this potential by engaging the changing nature of urban citizenship, arguing that claims on the RTTC "mobilize people on the basis of propinquity and membership in a more legally ambiguous community than the nation-state." That is, vital urban citizenship and the distinctive civil societies it fosters may trump citizenship claims and identity formation at broader scales, generating a renewed "consciousness of the city and of

urban reality” as dynamic spaces for political intervention (Lefebvre, 1996: 80). Inhabitants can, through claims on the right to the city, begin the work of changing the city by changing their perception of and relationship to it.

Such a characterization of the transformative potential of RTTC framing belies the structural constraints on disrupting the status quo within cities, where exchange value supersedes use value to residents, and illuminates the need for radical repositioning of power within urban systems. Harvey (2008: 38) acknowledges that the true RTTC, as currently constituted is “restricted in most cases to a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own desires.” That average citizens lack the capacity to determine the structure, safety, and resources that constitute their built environment energizes and animates the cry and the demand of the Right to the City: the cry publicizes and announces an inherent injustice; the subsequent demand articulates and enacts a collective alternative vision.

While we are given a sense of how a renewed and revitalized RTTC may enfranchise urban residents to work collaboratively in generating “city as *oeuvre*,” Lefebvre stops short of prescribing how such a transformation of power may actually occur. His primary interest, in *The Right to the City*, is to explore the historical processes that have contributed to contemporary urban formulations, and to suggest openings for challenging neoliberal capital’s violent affront on cities and the people who call them home. The indeterminate character of Lefebvre’s depiction of *how* the RTTC may actually transform urban space is, arguably, intentionally attentive to the scalar politics of urban inhabitation; struggles for the RTTC are inherently spatialized, and, as a result, there is no specific formula for universally enacting new forms of urban citizenship and claims on the RTTC. The particular circumstances characterizing specific struggles determine how the fundamental vision of the RTTC is made manifest.

Such flexibility has practical appeal, and the central message of RTTC—that citizens, rather than corporations or the state, should have ultimate decision-making power in issues that directly affect them—has earned considerable caché amongst urban activists and scholars. Much discourse and activism that explicitly utilizes a RTTC framework does so in an effort to support grassroots efforts to enact systemic, structural, or specific changes. While some of this work engages deeply and critically with Lefebvre’s original framing, most of it, Purcell (2002: 103) argues, does not:

Few in or out of academia have offered a detailed exposition of just what the right to the city would entail, and they had not developed what benefits or detriments it might have for the enfranchisement of urban residents... We lack a comprehensive explanation of what the right to the city is or how it would challenge, compliment, or replace current rights. And we are left without a good sense of how the right to the city might address the specific enfranchisement problems associated with neoliberalism.

Purcell’s critique actually aligns with a cautious perspective increasingly demonstrated by academic and activist advocates for a new RTTC, which acknowledge the danger of cooptation by the very institutions RTTC seeks to *disenfranchise*. In a report on efforts to reclaim the RTTC in Rio de Janeiro (particularly pertinent in light of upcoming global sporting events scheduled to take place there in coming years, and the historic tendency of the Olympics and World Cup to purge urban space of low-income dwellers), Marcelo Lopes de Souza (2012) comments on the risks associated with misusing the language of the RTTC, thereby opening it up for use by those seeking “specific material gains.” He and others (c.f. Leontidou, 2010) remark on the “sloganization” of the RTTC, evident in the “increasing number of politically weak usages of this expression—which has been gradually converted into a vague slogan that is used for the convenience of interests as diverse as those of emancipatory social movements, leftist intellectuals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and even government institutions and international organizations” (de Souza, 2012: np).

Even at the scale of the city (particularly in the case of larger cities), governance outside the realm of state control is virtually inconceivable within capitalist systems. For example, RTTC advocates argue that any agenda aiming to reduce poverty and increase equity within cities must acknowledge "the locationally-specific impediments to the realization of rights, and the multi-scalar nature of the state's actions that are necessary for the full realization of human rights" (Parnell and Pieterse 2010, p. 146). Such a perspective imbues the state with the capacity to determine and to enforce rights, thereby contradicting the very spirit of urban citizenship and claims on the RTTC; even when this process endeavors to be cognizant of locational specificities and multiple scales, it is not clear that state-generated rights will always (or ever) ensure the emancipation of socially marginalized individuals. As Don Mitchell (1997; 2003) has pointed out, for example, advocating for a universal and democratic RTTC becomes especially tenuous in the case of individuals who are systematically denied not only rights but also recognition as legitimate inhabitants of a particular space. For individuals lacking adequate access to nutritious food (from grocery stores, markets, or gardens), laws prohibiting the growing and harvesting of food in public parks and gardens may constitute a similar infringement on the right to the city. On the other hand, the transformation of public space by marginalized urban inhabitants of that space—enacting claims on the right to the city—may represent a democratization of the very processes by which cities take shape (Carrasco 2010), and thus a profound reorganization of existing social relations.

Systematic social reorganization does not rely on the participation by all residents of a particular city, and, in fact, that requirement would be untenable in most cases. While urban movements for the RTTC may “acknowledge and reinforce the city as a primary place of politics” (Samara, 2012: 45), they must simultaneously acknowledge and support the

transformative potential of community- or neighborhood-based movements. While city-scale rights claims offer a public image of substantive change, organizations like the U.S.-based Right to the City Alliance (RTTCA) support movements which “operate only in part of the city; all are neighborhood- and community-based, not city-based” (Samara, 2012: 45). Because the neighborhood, not the city, is the “scale of everyday life” (Samara 2012: 45), it makes sense for rights claims to be made within that scale, but the “scaling down” of rights claims does not suggest those rights are provincial or ends unto themselves. As Nicholls and Vermeulen (2012) argue, the RTTC should be reconceived as “rights *through* city;” the space of the city provides a political site for claiming rights that can then extend to larger scales. Referring to gay rights activism in the city of San Francisco, Nicholls and Vermeulen (2012: 81) point out, “the aim was not to gain rights to this one city and stop the struggle at the city gate, but to build on the relational and political advances made in this city to sustain the broader goal of gay rights in the country.” Rights claims made at the scale of the neighborhood may also serve to “catalyze rights mobilizations” at the scale of the city and beyond, which is one reason neighborhood- and community-scale initiatives should be taken seriously for their transformative potential to generate a new “trickle-up” urban social politics. Similar to the transformational potential of RTTC discourses are those of food sovereignty, to which I now turn.

2.6 Food Sovereignty

In an effort to move beyond alternative food spaces coded as white, the movement for food sovereignty in the United States employs a discourse that commits to “rebuilding local food economies in our own communities [and] to dismantling structural racism,” among other social and environmental justice objectives (US Food Sovereignty Alliance 2010). Such framing offers a powerful stance against hegemonic structures that have systematically disempowered specific

individuals and groups while empowering others (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005; Patel 2009; Schanbacher 2010), but it remains unclear how these frames fit into, structure, or impede the actual work of marginalized peoples engaged in food production or procurement. As Guthman has suggested, the discursive tactic of “inviting others to the table” does not imply a radical shift in who gets to set the table (2008b: 388); in fact, such frames may perpetuate the very systems of white privilege they purport to undermine (Slocum 2006) by failing to account for the social and historical (and racialized) contexts in which food activism is situated, and the unique identities and experiences of those individuals and groups directly and peripherally involved (Holloway 2000; Kurtz, forthcoming).

The movement for food sovereignty has been intimately tied to the forces of globalization and opposition to capitalist ideology since its inception in the early 1990s. In 1996, representatives from La Via Campesina, the umbrella organization for small farmer and indigenous worker movements around the world, linked neoliberal agricultural trade policies with increasing rates of hunger and poverty among food producers in the developing world in their “Position on Food Sovereignty,” presented at the World Food Summit in Rome (Wittman et al. 2010). The organization and the document indicated fierce opposition to structural adjustment policies that had been implemented in most developing countries since the mid-1980s in an effort to increase “food security” in those regions. While the World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO) championed free trade and export-oriented agriculture as means for promoting economic development throughout the developing world, smallholder agriculturalists in those regions blasted “trade-based food security” policies for exacerbating an already inequitable distribution of food, land and other productive resources (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005). Rather than alleviating hunger, as the World Bank and WTO claimed, structural

adjustment within the global food system served mostly to facilitate international trade, thus concentrating wealth in multinational corporations, and depriving local people of the agency to control resource use within their own territories. Initially, then, the movement for food sovereignty promoted an alternative policy framework, demanding “the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to food and to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production” (Peoples Food Sovereignty Network 2002).

While the movement for food sovereignty did not set out to resist all forms of international trade, it argued for the right of food producers and local people (those who would and did suffer the consequences of existing neoliberal policies) for self-determination, and conceptually linked residence in a particular place with the authority to manage the activities occurring there. The 2002 “Statement on People’s Food Sovereignty: Our World Is Not For Sale” enumerated the following rights of food producers within their own territories: “the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self-reliant; to restrict the dumping of products in their markets; and to provide local fisheries-based communities the priority of managing the use of and the rights to aquatic resources” (Peoples Food Sovereignty Network 2002). These demands emerged in direct response to the increasing hegemony of a global food system characterized by market distortions, corporate control of genetic material and life forms, and the consolidation of agricultural lands and assets driven by the industrialization of agriculture in less-developed countries. The processes of corporate consolidation and control conspired to generate two major negative outcomes for farmers and fisherfolk in the developing world: (1) artificially cheap staple foods, generated by subsidies to large-scale farms in industrialized countries, flooded

markets in the developing world (referred to as “dumping”), making it impossible for local producers to compete with the cheap supply of imports; (2) no longer able to produce for local markets, smallholders who stayed afloat did so by producing export crops or products, thus diminishing their capacity to produce subsistence-quality foodstuffs for their families and communities, and leading to paradoxically high levels of hunger and food insecurity among food producing peoples (Rosset 2009).

Because the negative externalities of a corporatized agricultural regime are not confined to food producers, but rather are absorbed by everyone who consumes (sufficient or insufficient amounts of) food (which includes, of course, everyone), La Via Campesina has expanded its conceptual definition of food sovereignty to include the following seven principles (qtd. in Wittman et al 2010, emphasis added):

1. **Food:** A Basic Human Right. Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. Each **nation** should declare that access to food is a **constitutional right** and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realization of this fundamental right.
2. **Agrarian Reform:** A genuine agrarian reform is necessary which gives landless farming people—especially women—**ownership and control** of the land they work and returns territories to indigenous peoples. The **right to land** must be **free of discrimination** on the basis of gender, religion, race, social class or ideology; **the land belongs to those who work it.**
3. **Protecting Natural Resources:** Food Sovereignty entails the sustainable care and use of natural resources, **especially land, water,** and seeds and livestock breeds. The people who work the land must have the right to practice sustainable management of natural resources and to conserve biodiversity free of restrictive intellectual property rights. This can only be done from a sound economic basis with **security of tenure,** healthy soils, and reduced use of agro-chemicals.
4. **Reorganizing Food Trade:** Food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade. National agricultural policies must prioritize **production for domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency.** Food imports must not displace local production nor depress prices.
5. **Ending the Globalization of Hunger:** Food sovereignty is undermined by multilateral institutions and by speculative capital. The growing **control of multinational corporations** over agricultural policies has been facilitated by the economic policies of multilateral organizations such as the World Trade

Organization (WTO), World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). **Regulation and taxation** of speculative capital and a strictly enforced Code of Conduct for Multinational corporations (TNCs) is therefore needed.

6. **Social Peace:** Everyone has the right to be **free from violence**. Food must not be used as a weapon. Increasing levels of poverty and marginalization in the countryside, along with the growing oppression of ethnic minorities and indigenous populations, aggravate situations of injustice and hopelessness. The ongoing **displacement, forced urbanization, oppression and increasing incidence of racism against smallholder farmers cannot be tolerated**.
7. **Democratic control:** Smallholder farmers must have direct input in formulating agricultural policies at all levels. The United Nations and related organizations will have to undergo a process of democratization to enable this to become a reality. **Everyone has the right to honest, accurate information and open and democratic decision-making**. These rights form the basis of good governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination. Rural women, in particular, must be granted direct and active decision-making on food and rural issues.

These principles, as articulated by Via Campesina, represent a conceptual broadening in the struggle for food sovereignty, as numerous local, national and international social movements and non-governmental organizations have incorporated or wholeheartedly embraced food sovereignty in efforts to shift agriculture and food policy (Wittman et al. 2010: 5). This expanded definition of what food sovereignty entails (democratic control over all aspects of the food system) and the spaces over which it demands governance (spaces of production, processing, distribution, consumption and decision-making) highlights the enormous potential of food sovereignty to democratize the scalar politics of food, but also betrays the possible fragility of a movement lacking conceptual or spatial specificity. Raj Patel (2009: 668) highlights the unwieldy nature of a movement that seeks democratic governance at a variety of scales, but suggests that such framing may provide opportunities for intervention at specific localities: “When the call is for, variously, nations, peoples, regions, and states to craft their own agrarian policy, there is a concomitant call for *spaces of sovereignty*. Food sovereignty has its own geographies, determined by specific histories and contours of resistance. To demand a space of

food sovereignty is to demand specific arrangements to govern territory and space” (emphasis added). Thus, while the conceptual power of food sovereignty maintains in its resistance to corporate dominance at the global scale, the particular geographies in which food sovereignty’s rights claims are made—the particular spaces over which food sovereignty demands governance—are both distinct and material. To investigate food sovereignty as *praxis* entails a spatial positioning of food sovereignty’s demands, and explicit attention to the unique social and historical factors that situate those demands in space.

So while all movements for food sovereignty are united in their struggle for and (fundamental belief in) the establishment of “radically democratic” food systems based on locally-determined rights, some initiatives involve recognizing the unique implications and potential of food sovereignty for specific local and regional populations (Wittman et al. 2005: 5). A new national movement for food sovereignty, the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance, is one such initiative working to incorporate relevant tenets of the international movement for food sovereignty, while also remaining cognizant of socio-cultural and economic conditions that differentiate the United States. While activism related to all aspects of the food system, and perceived injustices within it, has proliferated in the United States in recent years (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Pollan 2010), the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance distinguishes the struggle for food sovereignty as an all-out effort to radically shift structures of power within the food system. This is presented as fundamentally different from food *security*, which lacks explicit attention to power (Patel 2009; Schanbacher 2010), and which has been admonished by food sovereignty advocates as a watered down technical issue of how best to get food to those who need it while evading “the deeper political debate about why hunger exists at all in a world that has plenty of food” (Peck 2008:4). Instead, food sovereignty’s focus on democratic decision-making and self-

governance offers, at least conceptually, an action-oriented alternative to the contemporary progressive political agenda, which, Wendy Brown (1995: 5) argues, is “concerned not with democratizing power but with distributing goods, and especially with pressuring the state to buttress the rights and increase the entitlements of the socially vulnerable or disadvantaged.” Alternatively, food sovereignty’s explicit attention to power as it relates to food access, and to the democratic right of all people for self-determination in both the consumption and the production of their food, works to poke holes in the logic of market capitalism.

Claims to food sovereignty thus do not

“simply rehearse older notions of the sovereignty of the nation-state, nor do they reflect xenophobic or exclusively local struggles. Instead, sovereignty here refers to demands for *autonomy, solidarity, dignity, and the fundamental rights* of people and their communities to decide the future of the food they grow and consume as a form of material democracy” (Haiven 2009:2, emphasis added).

2.7 Summary and Presentation of Conceptual Framework

When I first proposed this research, and began speaking with “food justice practitioners” in New Orleans, I occasionally used the language of “food sovereignty” to gauge its resonance within the organizations I encountered there. Early in my research stay in New Orleans, I interviewed the director of the food justice organization, the New Orleans Food and Farm Network (NOFFN), after we had emailed back and forth several times. In email correspondence, I had mentioned my interest in food sovereignty in the context of post-Katrina New Orleans. When I finally met Victor in person, he expressed great interest in food sovereignty, and told me he had been reading a lot about it since we first started emailing. The second time I interviewed Victor, he indicated that food sovereignty was an appropriate term for describing the work his organization was transitioning towards—a transition he identified in the emphasis of community-driven and community-led projects, rather than projects spurred or managed by his or any other

outside organization (as earlier projects had been). Finally, a few months after that interview, I participated in an “Undoing Racism in the Food System” workshop, which NOFFN helped to organize. During that meeting, Victor reiterated the goal of food sovereignty within the New Orleans food system, and recognized that realizing that goal might (necessarily) mean organizations like his own taking a back seat and allowing community members to articulate their struggles independently, before seeking assistance from outside organizations like NOFFN. Witnessing Victor’s evolution in thinking about food justice, food sovereignty, and the complex intersections among race, nativity, activism, and the food system revealed to me the unifying theoretical potential of food sovereignty at the same time that it exposed the challenges of “enacting” food sovereignty in and on the ground.

Thus, drawing on the insights outlined here, the geographies of Critical Race Studies, the right to the city, and food sovereignty inform my research in the following ways. Food sovereignty’s “moral universalism” is instructive for a study of the specific manifestations of urban activism around food, because it affirms the notion that all people—particularly those most marginalized by discriminatory systems—have a fundamental *right* not just to food, but to all decisions regarding food. Whether or not they utilize the term “food sovereignty,” I argue, grassroots movements that work for and demand a radically democratic local food system ascribe to food sovereignty’s philosophy of moral universalism. My research examines the specific manifestations of those demands, and places them within the context of a broader international movement for food sovereignty. Contemplating the scalar politics of food sovereignty, and considering how they intersect with specific racialized histories in the United States, are also central objectives of my research. While the overarching themes and principles of an international coalition and movement for food sovereignty continue to provide a powerful

conceptual framework for situating local initiatives, my research will indicate the spatial specificity of those various initiatives. At the same time, however, the broader “movement” for food sovereignty, and the specific policies and meta-scale conceptual shifts it engenders, are potentially crucial for the viability and success of local initiatives, particularly those initiatives that intentionally position themselves as part of a broader movement.

Finally, Wendy Brown’s (1995) critical investigation of the paradoxical nature of rights provides a useful framework for considering the “emancipatory potential” of food sovereignty initiatives in the context of racialized urban space. In order to successfully evaluate such initiatives, it is imperative to examine the official discursive frames of particular schemes in relation to the everyday experiences of people living in communities where those projects are situated. In keeping with Wendy Brown’s (1995: 133) theoretical pursuit of “post political dreams of radical equality,” the right to the city framework may offer evidence for the value of historically and spatially situated rights claims that reframe the use and production of urban space by and for traditionally marginalized and disempowered groups that reside within that space. Such framing may prove useful for evaluating and increasing the emancipatory potential of food sovereignty projects to generate socially just urban spaces in a variety of contexts. RTTC’s explicit characterization of urban inhabitation as active participation in the decisions and actions that impact (city) life expressly articulates food sovereignty’s demand for self-determination, but places it within a meaningful spatial context for food justice practitioners in the global North. Like food sovereignty, RTTC implicates neoliberal economic and social policies for the disenfranchisement of “citidins,” and argues that meaningful social change can only come from within. In what follows, I consider three approaches to food justice in post-

Katrina New Orleans, to demonstrate the importance of grassroots inhabitation and participation towards achieving anything resembling food sovereignty in urban spaces of the global north.

Thus, drawing on the insights offered by CRS, RTTC, and Food Sovereignty discourses, I argue that theoretical understandings of race/racism, privilege, and whiteness can assist in interpreting both the desire of white people to engage in food justice work directed at racial others, while at the same time perpetuating the privilege that entitles them to formulate such goals in the first place. The theoretical frameworks outlined and interwoven in this chapter deeply inform and illuminate the spatial and social context of my research. At the same time, the research context presented in Chapter Four gestures towards new spaces for theoretical engagement; this chapter has therefore placed these three literatures in critical theoretical conversation, and sets up analyses that follow in later chapters.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of and justification for the use of critical ethnographic research methods for this project. In the first portion of this chapter, I outline the theoretical underpinnings of the methodology, to connect the research methods to my broader theoretical and epistemological frame. Next, I describe the research process, summarize the research objectives, and describe the methods used to address the research questions. Next, I describe the data acquisition methods in detail, and explain the process of synthesizing and analyzing data. In the spirit of critical ethnographic research, I also interrogate my own positionality and privilege as I encountered the research setting and problems, and reflect on the evolution in my own thinking on the research project. I conclude by advocating for the transformative potential of socially engaged critical ethnography, and determine that my own ability to contribute to such transformation was limited at best.

3.2 Theoretical Foundations of Critical Ethnography

Cindy Katz situates ethnographic research within a “space of betweenness” (1994: 67), through which the ethnographer engages in “self-conscious projects of representation, interpretation and invention” (1992: 495). The “betweenness” that Katz implores ethnographers to inhabit characterizes the inside/outside positionality of the researcher, who is at once enmeshed within the field of study, but also always separate from it—“an active subject in the midst of active subjects, producing space(s) and understanding space(s) simultaneously” (Fisher

2008: 163). The strategic self-positioning of the ethnographic researcher is a necessary criterion of “self-conscious” research; therefore, the challenge for ethnographers wishing to “merge our scholarship with a clear politics that works against the forces of oppression” (Katz 1994: 67) is to critically and intimately navigate the territory of the spaces of oppression while maintaining awareness that knowledge of those spaces comes from a place outside, and a place of privilege.

Self-awareness (or “reflexivity”) is not enough to overcome the power differential between the researcher and the researched, but it is a crucial first-step. Awareness of one’s own position within the research project is, according to Katz (1994: 71-72), linked to the discomfiting task of displacing one’s own power position:

“These displacements and discomforts are the issue. I, the social actor/scholar am interpolated in all of these projects, and they—practical, applied, theoretical—figure in my development... I am always a gendered, historically constituted social and political actor who works as a social scientist and teacher. I am always, everywhere, in ‘the field.’”

By being “always, everywhere, in ‘the field,’” critical ethnographers gain deep awareness and understanding of the local context that situates their work, while still maintaining an honest accounting of their non-indigenous positioning relative to that context. Rather than succumbing to the paralysis of privilege, critical ethnographers utilize the resources available to them to illuminate stories concealed by oppression, thus contributing to the formation and expansion of “emancipatory knowledge and the discourses of social justice” (Madison 2005: 5). So while ethnography “describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes,” (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 2-3) *critical* ethnography goes beyond acts of description in an effort to promote alternative understandings and to envision alternative realities.

Critical ethnographic research into the racialization of urban food insecurity can offer insight by challenging “stock stories”—or the dominant, hegemonic, and often oppressive

narratives—about race, racism, and hunger—while offering in their place a collection of what Lee Ann Bell has referred to as “concealed stories”—stories from the margins that are often repressed, forgotten, challenged or ignored (Bell 2010). As Bell argues, stories and the acts of storytelling and story-sharing can serve as powerful analytic tools, because storytelling is “democratic, freely available to all, requiring neither wealth and status nor formal education” (Bell 2010: 16). Within mainstream and academic discourses, however, some stories “count” more than others; some stories become so ubiquitous as to obtain the appearance and authority of truth, while obscuring the lived experiences of actual people. These narratives may be characterized as “stock stories” because they include familiar tropes proclaiming racism to be a “thing of the past,” and food insecurity to be a result of poor decisions, laziness, or ignorance. Because of their power and ubiquity, stock stories reveal information about what society considers desirable and meaningful; what they leave out reveals as much about the dominant culture’s failure to ameliorate (or at least honestly acknowledge) persistent injustices like racism and food insecurity.

In addition to stock stories, Bell (2010) describes three other story types, which can all emerge through the work of critical ethnography. These are concealed, resistance, and emerging/transforming stories. Concealed stories are hidden from or ignored by the dominant group, and are told from the perspective of racially dominated or marginalized groups; these stories reveal narratives about race, racism, and food insecurity that we don’t hear often or easily; they narrate the ways that race differentially shapes life experiences and opportunities; and they allow us to question how and why such stories are left out of mainstream discourse. Resistance stories demonstrate how people have resisted various forms of oppression, both historically and within contemporary contexts. These stories offer instructive examples of action

against oppressive forces, and demonstrate the role of resistance in challenging stock stories about racism and other forms of oppression. Finally, emerging/transforming stories deliberately intend to interrupt the status quo and to energize change. These stories envision communities based on justice, and catalyze action toward realizing those visions. The juxtaposition of each of these story types generates a new vantage point from which to consider forces of oppression. Therefore, challenging stock stories, exposing concealed stories, examining resistance stories, and celebrating or promoting emerging/transforming stories are all important steps in dismantling the structural inequalities that underlie racialized food insecurity and should be part of the work of critical ethnography.

3.3 Research Process

This study utilized ethnographic research methods to investigate the emergent discourses and actions that promote food sovereignty through urban agriculture as a means of empowering low-income people of color in New Orleans, Louisiana. Like many qualitative ethnographic research projects, my time in the field of New Orleans exposed me to ideas and realities I had not anticipated when I began designing the research, drafting preliminary research questions, and linking research objectives to potential methods. Despite preliminary research during the fall of 2010 and the summer of 2011, which sparked and nurtured my evolving interest in post-Katrina food justice activism in New Orleans, I found it necessary to re-evaluate my research questions and proposed methodology during the course of my research tenure in New Orleans in 2012. I provide greater detail on this iterative process in the sections to follow, but want to acknowledge at the outset that a primary goal of my research was to remain true and honest to the phenomena and individuals I encountered, which meant continuously re-examining my pre-conceived expectations of the research setting, the research process, and the individuals and groups I

encountered while working in New Orleans. This meant, ultimately, that specific elements of my research objectives and plan shifted somewhat during the course of research. I reflect on these shifts with candor, because they provide insight into the iterative nature of the research process, and the dynamic and complex nature of the specific questions I sought to address.

Below, I describe experiences I had during two periods of preliminary research in New Orleans, during the fall of 2010 and the summer of 2011. Those periods of preliminary exposure to food justice activism in New Orleans, combined with research and reading on race in the food system, global theorizations regarding food sovereignty and the right to the city, and archival research on pre- and post-Katrina New Orleans, led to the articulation of my research questions.

Field research in New Orleans spanned a period of two and half years, including preliminary trips in 2010 and 2011, a five-month primary research period in 2012 (January through May), and four additional short-term visits between June and December of 2012. Table 3.1 depicts the various stages of the research process.

Table 3.1 Research Process

Research Activity		Jan.-Aug. 2011	Sep.-Dec. 2011	Jan-May 2012	May-Dec. 2012	Jan-Aug 2013
<i>Preliminary Activities</i>	Establish Research Relationships	X	X			
	Site and Participant Selection		X			
<i>Data Collection</i>	Content Analysis	X	X	X	X	X
	Participant Observation		X	X		
	Interviews		X	X		
<i>Analysis</i>	Data Analysis		X	X	X	
<i>Documentation</i>	Write-up				X	X

3.2.1 Preliminary Research

During two preliminary trips to New Orleans, I met with leaders from food justice organizations, and visited numerous urban farms and gardens. The first trip coincided with a conference of the Community Food Security Coalition, which brought food justice practitioners and researchers from throughout the country to New Orleans for its annual meeting in October of 2010. The theme of the meeting was “Food, Culture, Justice: The Gumbo that Unites Us All.” As the conference title suggests, the meeting was intended to explore the cultural connections uniting food producers, consumers, and organizations from around the country working towards social justice in the food system. In addition to panels and plenary speakers, the conference featured tours of food projects throughout the city of New Orleans. I participated in two tours. The first brought us through some of New Orleans’ “food deserts,” where we were shown the vacant shells of neighborhood grocery stores that had not re-opened since Hurricane Katrina. The other tour highlighted “urban agriculture” and took us to a market and farm project in the low-income Hollygrove neighborhood; an urban agriculture school and “social magic lab” run out of a local woman’s backyard; and community garden projects throughout the city. Both tours introduced us to the numerous individuals and organizations who were working to address post-Katrina food access concerns in New Orleans’ most impoverished neighborhoods. I remember being intrigued to discover that most of the community garden projects we visited were managed by women of color who were “born and bred” in New Orleans. This struck me as substantively different from the food justice projects I had participated in and witnessed elsewhere, which seemed to be more likely to be managed by people from outside the community. After that initial visit, I became interested in learning more about how those projects came to be, the extent to which they were connected with other social justice-oriented projects throughout the city, and

how race (and, to a lesser extent, gender) influenced the formation and execution of food justice projects throughout the city.

I returned to New Orleans the following summer (2011), funded by a grant from the Graduate School at the University of Georgia, to conduct some preliminary research, and to follow up with many of the food justice practitioners I had met during the CFSC conference. The specific objectives for this preliminary research were to (1) identify research partners; (2) establish individual and organizational contacts and relationships; (3) assess the content and scope of urban agriculture projects in New Orleans; and (4) identify specific projects that would become the focus for dissertation research. Each of those objectives was accomplished during the two-week research period.

The process of identifying research partners and establishing organizational contacts and relationships began with a previously-scheduled meeting with the director of the New Orleans Food and Farm Network (NOFFN). NOFFN serves as the umbrella organization coordinating urban agriculture projects and food justice activism throughout the city of New Orleans. Meeting with the director of this organization enabled me to utilize this important contact to seek out other individuals and groups that I thought might also be interested in collaborating when I returned to the city in January of 2012; seeking suggestions for research participants from a primary preliminary source is a process known as “snowball sampling” (Bernard 2011). Following up on the recommendations offered by NOFFN’s director, I met with individuals from seven different organizations during my two-week stay; these included a group working to draft zoning legislation for urban agriculture, an organization promoting urban “greening” and beautification, a food bank, two groups operating community gardens in the Lower Ninth Ward, a Vietnamese urban farming community, and a Latino farming cooperative. In addition to the

individuals and groups recommended by NOFFN, I attended public meetings of groups working to dismantle racism in New Orleans, to begin to get a sense of the connections (if any) between food justice work and anti-racist organizing in the city. Through this process of initiating individual and organizational contacts and relationships, I was able to establish informal research agreements with most of these groups. In all cases, these early contacts greatly facilitated communication and the development of formal research partnerships when I returned to the city the following January.

The third objective of preliminary research was to assess the content and scope of urban agriculture in New Orleans. Fortuitously, during my visit to the city, the New Orleans Sustainable Agriculture Group (NOSAG) called a public input meeting of all individuals and organizations involved with urban agriculture, to aid in the drafting of new zoning regulations for farming and gardening in the city. While this meeting certainly did not represent the full content and scope of urban agriculture projects, it did expose me to a large number of them. During the preliminary research period, I began a database of all the individuals and groups who are involved with urban agriculture in the city as I encountered or heard about them.

The fourth objective of preliminary research was to identify the specific projects that would become the focus of dissertation research. Through my early discussions with NOFFN, I was able to determine that multiple “projects” are often situated in specific neighborhoods—rather than focusing on a particular project, it appeared more suitable to focus on the contexts in which projects are situated, and to work in specific neighborhoods. Based on work already underway at NOFFN, we discussed the benefits of my working in three neighborhoods where NOFFN has an established presence. Another benefit of working at the neighborhood scale is the ability to interface with other organizations that may also be working in the same neighborhoods;

the Lower Ninth Ward, for example, is home to urban agriculture projects initiated and maintained by at least four different organizations. Working at the neighborhood level would enable me to address the central research question of how different “food justice” groups and organizations conceptualize and address the role of race in structuring the food system. This preliminary research phase convinced me of the crucial importance of that question, and prepared me to examine it in greater detail when I returned to New Orleans in 2012.

Finally, the preliminary research period guided me in the formulation of my primary research questions, as presented in the introductory chapter of this dissertation.

3.2.2 Primary Research Period

The bulk of my ethnographic research was conducted between January and May of 2012, and was funded by a Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation. During that time, I lived in New Orleans and immersed myself in the “food justice community” of the city. I contacted individuals and organizations I had either heard about or discovered through online research on various manifestations of food justice work in New Orleans (Appendix C). I met with as many of these individuals and organizations as I could, and, where possible, attended meetings or other events organized by food justice organizations. I kept a detailed research log, in the form of a spreadsheet, where I recorded my activities during each day of fieldwork. I also wrote detailed fieldnotes at the end of each day, and kept a separate document for recording notes or questions that arose for me throughout the research process. Because I was interested in questions of whiteness and privilege, I also documented my own movement throughout the city—the spaces to which I was drawn and to which I had access, and those spaces where I was especially cognizant of being an “outsider” and was sensitive or uncomfortable about entering. In that sense, I became aware that even the most simple

movements—whether and where I exercised, ate lunch, attended church, met up with friends—constituted racial patterning demonstrating issues of access and the right to the city.

While these observations did not constitute a large proportion of my research data, I acknowledge the contextual importance of continually examining my own presence “in the field,” and how it had the potential to both interrupt and/or frame the research objectives, data collection, and data analysis.

In my “Research Log” spreadsheet, which I created in GoogleDocs™, I recorded 338 hours of research-related meetings, interviews, field-trips, and volunteer time during my primary research tenure between January and May of 2012. I conducted 31 in-depth interviews with food justice or food system activists, organizers, and community members. After completing the primary research tenure in May of 2012, I returned to New Orleans for meetings and interviews in June (twice), August, and November. In the section below, labeled “Data Acquisition Methods,” I describe the research activities I pursued to investigate the research questions listed above.

3.4 Data Acquisition Methods

The qualitative research methods described below were chosen to offer insight into the ways in which different individuals and groups experience and characterize the purpose and effects of variously formulated projects that endeavor to promote food sovereignty or food justice. By utilizing a mix of qualitative approaches, the research aimed to challenge “stock stories”—or the dominant, hegemonic, and often oppressive narratives described above—about race, racism, and food, while offering in their place a collection of “concealed stories”—stories from the margins that are often repressed, forgotten, challenged or ignored (Bell 2010).

In Table 3.2, I link my research questions to specific objectives, theoretical foundations and specific research methods.

Table 3.2 Research Questions, Objectives, Theory and Methods.

RESEARCH QUESTION	OBJECTIVES	PRIMARY THEORY	METHODS/ANALYSIS
<i>1. How do food justice organizations in New Orleans characterize and response to the presence and role of racism in the food system?</i>	Examine how that characterization is shaped by critical perspectives on race and racism; Investigate how food justice organizations collaborate with anti-hunger and anti-racist organizations and community groups to address issues of racism within the food system	Critical race theory	Undoing racism workshops Interview Participant observation
<i>2. Where, if at all, are there indications that post-Katrina food projects do or do not facilitate a 'right to the city' in which marginalized individuals and groups of color have renewed ability to access, participate in, and produce urban space?</i>	Determine what individuals, groups, institutions and/or processes enhance or hinder the 'right to the city'; Investigate how whiteness and white cultural priorities influence the form and function of food justice and sovereignty projects	Right to the city	Participant observation Interviewing Content analysis
<i>3. How is the concept of food sovereignty translated across scales?</i>	Examine the extent to which food sovereignty discourses emerge within food projects in New Orleans; consider how those discourses compare and contrast with food sovereignty discourses at national and international scales.	Food sovereignty	Critical discourse analysis Participant observation Interview

3.4.1 Participant Observation

During my five-month research period in New Orleans, and several subsequent trips of shorter length, I spent considerable time with community members at urban farms and gardens, positioning myself as "an active subject in the midst of active subjects, producing space(s) and understanding space(s) simultaneously" (Fisher 2008: 163). I worked closely with the New Orleans Food and Farm Network, Hollygrove Market and Farm, the Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana, the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition, the Second Harvest Food Bank, Parkway Partners, the Renaissance Project, Common Ground Relief, and the Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation, all organizations that have emerged or expanded since Hurricane Katrina to serve the needs of low-income people, particularly in neighborhoods where the majority of residents are people of color (such as the Lower Ninth Ward, Mid-City, New Orleans East, and portions of Central City).

I spent the first two months of 2012 volunteering as Family Social Services Coordinator for the Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana (LFCL). In this role, I worked at the cooperative five days per week, eight hours per day, and was responsible for managing SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, previously known as Food Stamps) applications and cases for LFCL clients. I met regularly with members of the cooperative who qualified for SNAP benefits—the overwhelming majority of whom were single, undocumented Spanish-speaking women with U.S.-born children—and helped them to navigate the complex enrollment and SNAP management system. While working at LFCL, I enrolled twelve new clients in the SNAP program, and managed the cases for dozens of clients who were already receiving SNAP benefits. I also participated in LFCL community outreach activities and events, served as a

receptionist in the LFCL office, and helped run the small “food buying club” and food pantry that were situated in the LFCL office.

In addition to the LFCL, I also volunteered regularly at Hollygrove Market and Farm, where I helped process produce and prepare the market for its twice-weekly CSA-style box pick-up and farmers’ market. Through this work, I became familiar with how the organization functioned and who it served. I also got to know many of the other volunteers who regularly traded their time working at the market for a box of locally-sourced produce.

Towards the end of my research tenure in New Orleans, I began working with Kendra, an organizer in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood, who was beginning a planning process for addressing her neighborhood’s lack of fresh food access. As food security coordinator for the Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED), Kendra had received funding to organize a series of eight monthly planning meetings with community members concerned with neighborhood food access. I helped Kendra prepare for these meetings by doing online research and collecting municipal and other documents discussing plans for the neighborhood, zoning regulations, maps demonstrating vacant properties, and photos of existing food businesses (mostly convenient stores and gas stations). I also attended five of the eight meetings, traveling back to New Orleans from Athens when necessary. At the meetings, I took detailed notes, which I shared with the group for their records.

I also worked with individual urban gardeners, and people living within the communities where urban gardens are situated, to understand their perceptions of urban agriculture and food sovereignty, and the extent to which their own understandings correspond with the stated goals of the organizations coordinating garden efforts. An overview of my observation protocol can be found in Appendix A.

3.4.2 In-depth Interviewing

In addition to innumerable informal conversations that characterized and animated the participant observation work, I conducted a total of 31 in-depth interviews with activists, organizers, community members, and business-owners (Appendix B); these interviewees represented a range of roles and perspectives from throughout the city of New Orleans, comprising both native and non-native New Orleanians, white and people of color. The sampling began with purposive sampling of key community leaders and other individuals, and then followed a snowball method, by which existing contacts suggested other potential research participants and interviewees.

Since I interviewed a broad range of actors, I divided them roughly into two groups (although some interview participants fell into both categories): “Group A,” consisting of “food justice activists,” comprised the majority of my interview participants. Of this group, I asked questions about organizational affiliation, work and tenure in New Orleans, the extent to which racial difference is perceived to be a barrier to operating in low-income communities of color, and the historical, social and economic processes of initiating projects within those communities. “Group B” consisted of neighborhood residents, “native” New Orleanians, and generally people who would not or did not consider themselves to be “food justice activists.” Of this group, I asked questions about perceptions regarding food justice (and other) activism in the city since Hurricane Katrina, and the degree of involvement in projects situated in their neighborhood. (See Appendix B for a full list of interview questions).

3.4.3 Archival and Internet Research

In addition to my own personal observations in the field, my interest in scale and context demanded that I spend some time considering my chosen topics as they are understood at

broader scales, and, importantly, outside the academy. For that reason, I continually worked to situate my research within broader conversations in the popular media (newspapers, blogs, and websites), to see how my own research observations compared and contrasted with national- and international-scale conversations about “race and the food system”; “food sovereignty”; and the “right to the city.” To systematically track these references, I created a Google™-Alert for each of those phrases, so that I would be alerted via email each time they appeared for the first time on a new webpage (including blogs, news sites, and anything in the Google™Scholar database). I tracked these references, noting the source, topic, content, and treatment of the theme of interest for a period of seven months (May through December of 2012). For a two-month period (May through July 2012), I performed qualitative content analysis on these web sources, as described below.

3.5 Data Analysis and Synthesis

According to Maxwell (2005), “the experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview or observation, and continues to analyze the data as long as he or she is working on the research” (p.95). Following that logic, analysis was carried out throughout the research process; analysis of initial data informed subsequent interviews, observations, and textual analysis. Qualitative data analysis software (NVivo™) and a coding and organizational tool (Scrivener™) were used to organize, code, and analyze documents, interviews, and field notes. While the data was analyzed primarily according to themes that emerged *from* the data, I analyzed the data with some expectations; I looked for themes connecting participation and appropriation to resistance and resiliency following Hurricane Katrina. Within the themes of resistance and resiliency, I expected food justice and sovereignty to represent an important space for enacting anti-racist ideologies. Discourses and

ideologies were identified as significant based on the consistency and frequency with which they emerged throughout the data sets. If initial results did not appear to remain valid in subsequent sets of data collection, they were reevaluated. Incidents of contradiction and inconsistency were analyzed and evaluated for significance, and included in the research findings. The use of multiple data collection methods, and the inclusion of diverse perspectives—those of community members, community organizers and activists, and larger-scale organizations—served to “triangulate” (Maxwell 2005) the data and offer a more secure understanding of how individuals and groups understand, discuss, relate to and initiate anti-racist food sovereignty projects.

As indicated earlier, throughout this process of data collection and analysis, I attempted to be as explicit as possible about my own positionality within the research project. Analysis, like data collection, required a constant awareness of ethnography’s tradition as constituting “self-conscious projects of representation, interpretation and intervention” (Katz 1992: 496). Rather than endeavoring to conceptualize the researcher as an objective outsider, this research understands the position of the researcher as a “subject in the midst of active subjects, producing space(s) and understandings of space(s) simultaneously” (Fisher 2008: 163). Thus, the practice and analysis of this research project contemplates and engages with these questions, as posed by bell hooks (1990):

“Within complex and ever-shifting realms of power relations, do we position ourselves on the side of colonizing mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture, towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible? (145).”

3.5.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Phillips and Hardy (2002: 3) define discourse as “an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception that brings an object into being.”

Discourse(s) are meaningful because they delineate a field of knowledge, confer membership, and or, bestow authority. Consequently, discourse analysis explores “the relationship between discourse and reality” (Phillips and Hardy 2002: 3), as well as how texts are made meaningful through processes of production, dissemination, and consumption (Phillips and Brown 1993). While discourse analysis can take many forms, this research employed “critical discourse analysis” that focuses on the role of discursive activity in constituting and sustaining unequal power relations (Phillips and Hardy 2002; Fairclough and Wodack 1997). Critical discourse analysis “treats language as social practice, recognizing that people use discourse(s) to do things, in particular social and interpretive contexts” (Kurtz, 2005: 82). In particular, discourse(s) both create and reproduce systems of meaning, social identities, and institutions; therefore, critical discourse analysis illuminates and examines the ways in which discourses create, reinforce, or contest particular ideologies and social hierarchies.

Discourse analysis guided my treatment of interview and participant observation data, and enabled me to consider language itself as a topic for analysis. For example, I considered the following questions: How, if at all, do food justice activists talk about race? (If they don’t talk about or acknowledge race as a meaningful social category in their work, what might that reveal?) What topics do they avoid? Is there a dominant ideology or perspective, or is there considerable heterogeneity in the way these topics are framed? Why is *food* considered a legitimate or worthwhile starting point for social justice? How are views shaped, reproduced and legitimized through the use of language? How might my presence, and the multiple identities I inhabit, alter the language used by my research participants? What is the speaker (including me, as the researcher) trying to accomplish? What social relationships and identities is s/he

invoking/re-producing? What bodies of knowledge is s/he relying on? Consideration of all of these questions guided my analysis of interview and field-note data.

3.5.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

I collected and analyzed various textual and visual materials, including printed documents, blogs, and other media published or generated by local, regional, and national organizations working on food sovereignty and food justice projects. Included in my qualitative content analysis was attention to whether and how these documents describe the organization's work; to what extent and how they engage race, racism, or racial inequality in the food system; and how they situate urban agriculture and other food justice or food sovereignty initiatives within the socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts of post-Katrina New Orleans. These documents include the groups' statements about policy recommendations, newsletters for members, educational handouts, and how-to-manuals and guides for starting urban agriculture projects.

In addition to groups and organizations working specifically in New Orleans, I gathered and analyzed textual information and media representations that demonstrate the presence of food sovereignty and right to the city discourse and projects in the United States and internationally, in order to situate projects in New Orleans within a larger global context of food sovereignty and right to the city discourse and activism.

3.5.4 Data synthesis and write-up

Synthesizing, analyzing, and writing up my results and interpretations comprised a lengthy and iterative process. To assist in this process, I utilized the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo10™. NVivo10™ allowed me to systematically code my fieldnotes and interview transcripts according to particular themes (including, for example, discourses about

race, sovereignty, “rights” to food and the city, and so on). The organizational tool, Scrivener™ was invaluable for helping to organize my writing into manageable sections, and also assisted with the coding process.

Throughout this dissertation, I use pseudonyms to identify individuals, but identify organizations by their real names. In some cases, I use “composite characters” to recreate a particular scene; in these cases, I combine statements made by several individuals and attribute them to a composite individual. This process allows me to maintain the anonymity of individuals who would otherwise be easily recognized by their organizational affiliation and the context in which they were quoted. Additionally, I make use of narrative and vignettes (Barter and Renold, 2000) throughout the dissertation. Narratives help to illuminate particular themes that I go on to analyze in later detail.

3.5.4 Analysis in Critical Ethnography

Throughout the course of my research and writing, I became increasingly convinced of the power of critical discourse analysis as a crucial tool for critical ethnography. The systematic examination of language and discourses enabled (and, in fact, required) critical consideration of the way “official” or institutional discourses became visible within the language and ideology of my research participants, but also within my own use of language in speaking and writing. While analyzing interview transcripts, fieldnotes, organizational documents and materials—and, indeed, even when having casual conversations with friends and colleagues about “my research”—I had to consider my own way of framing issues, ideas, and processes; what ideologies might I be projecting? What ideologies have I internalized? How does my framing of the research questions and outcomes shift according to my audience? Do these subtle shifts in language reveal actual substantively different ways of thinking about the research project and the

people and ideas it investigated? I reflect on these questions, and others, in the section that follows.

3.6 Ethical Considerations and the Research Process

During the course of my research in New Orleans in the spring of 2012, it became increasingly apparent that I needed to reconsider and revamp my research approach and methodology. While the research questions themselves remained generally unchanged, my thinking on how to approach the research evolved over time; I became less comfortable with the idea and action of burdening people with my research unless I felt there was some way that I could compensate them for their thoughts and time. This precondition (which was, essentially, an ethical one I imposed upon myself) precluded me from seeking out neighborhood residents with whom I had no previous connection and attempting to interrogate them on intimate topics such as food procurement, race relations, and power distribution within their neighborhood and city.

Initially, and as I planned this research, my intention and hope was to focus my research with two distinct groups in an effort to capture the diverse ways in which food justice activism was characterized and practiced in the city, and to understand how perceptions of that work vary according to variables of race, class, and nativity (whether or not people organizing and running the project were born in New Orleans). In that planning, I conceptualized the first group of interviews (Group A) as organization leaders and “food justice activists,” to better understand how these individuals, groups, and organizations conceptualize their work in low-income communities of color. Included in this group would be social workers, NGO representatives and leaders, and regional and local representatives from national food justice or food sovereignty organizations. The questions for this group were to focus on the goals and objectives of their programs; their outreach and programmatic strategies; their perceptions of the individuals and

communities in which they work; and the grounds they use to interpret and measure their own advocacy work and/or food sovereignty and social justice efforts.

During that planning period, the second group of interviews (Group B) was to be with community members in neighborhoods where urban agriculture and food sovereignty projects are situated. The purpose of these interviews was to understand how neighborhood residents (or "citadins," to use Lefebvre's term for urban residents) characterize the presence of urban agriculture in their neighborhoods; the extent to which residents actively participate in the project; their perception of the project's effect on food security and sovereignty; their reaction to the presence of NGOs and other community organizations in their neighborhoods; and the indication of "food sovereignty" and/or "social justice" as favorable outcomes of the presence of urban agriculture.

Due to issues of access, trust, and a concern for the comfort of people living in the communities in which I was working, I determined that maintaining those boundaries around groups of interview participants was counterproductive, and potentially quite disruptive. I noticed, early on and increasingly throughout my research tenure, that long-time residents of New Orleans had been battered by what was colloquially known as "Katrina fatigue" or "research fatigue." These terms capture the phenomenon of waves of disruption brought upon residents of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina: first, there was the storm and its violent and destructive aftermath; next, there was abandonment (or at least perceived abandonment) by the State, and the bureaucratic hurdles that made both short- and long-term recovery burdensome (at best) and untenable or impossible (at worst); finally, there were the outsiders, coming into the city with various perspectives, goals, and agendas. Some came to help with the rebuilding effort; some to better understand what had gone wrong in the days, weeks,

months and years leading up to and following Katrina; and some, like me, came to the city to understand the impact of the storm on various segments of the population—to “give voice” to their frustration, to offer some kind of validation, and to illuminate lessons that might be instructive in other places and times. By the time I showed up in New Orleans, more than six years after Katrina, residents who had returned to homes, neighborhoods, and lives in various states of disarray had been poked, prodded, interrogated, and approached by strangers of many stripes, seeking to understand how that must *feel* to lose so much, so quickly. People were tired of talking about Katrina, and tired of talking to people with their own ideas and agendas—frankly, tired of talking to people like me. I was forced to confront the possibility that individual people could respect me *personally*, while resenting my presence as both an outsider and as someone who wanted something. I needed to humbly and honestly appraise my purpose for being in the city: it was to obtain information that would be serviceable to me as a researcher, and specifically, as someone who needed to write a dissertation and complete a degree. My new goal, in all its humility, was not to liberate anyone (except maybe myself, from my own lofty expectations)—but to do my work, with as little violence and disruption as possible. I acknowledge this as a potential limitation of the research, but ultimately I was committed to respecting the needs and privacy of individual community members, which, ultimately, meant that a majority of my interviews were with food justice practitioners and activists. In the tradition of critical ethnography, I was conscious of my ease of access to certain spaces, and relative difficulty in accessing others. I was forced to consider that (and why) it was “easier” for me to approach and to interview people who are “like me” in many ways, and, consequently, to question what this revealed about the very patterns of privilege I set out to examine.

3.7 Summary of Methods and Conclusion

Drawing on the insights of bell hooks, this research takes the position that

“committed cultural critics—whether white or black, scholars or artists—can produce work that opposes structures of domination, that presents possibilities for a transformed future by willingly interrogating their own work on aesthetic and political grounds. This interrogation itself becomes an act of critical intervention...” (hooks 1990: 55).

In order to stage a critical intervention that gets beyond stock stories about race and food insecurity (or any other manifestation of structural inequality), it is necessary to confront these issues where they occur, but also to overtly articulate a response to the causes and consequences of oppression at all scales. At the scale of our own bodies, this requires those of us who are white to confront legacies of inherited discrimination, to contemplate the ‘political reality’ of white privilege “as part of [our] critical enterprise” (hooks 1990:124), and to thoughtfully examine the ways in which we, as scholars and activists, are raced (and classed, and gendered) in specific and meaningful ways. We must maintain this self-reflection while simultaneously critiquing “essentialist notions of difference” (hooks 1990:130), which perpetuate the very systems of power and influence we are working to disrupt.

Beyond the scale of individual bodies, critical ethnography can intervene at the scale of the community, which Steven Gregory (1998: 11) identifies critically as “not a static, place-based social collective, but a power-laden field of social relations whose meanings, structures, and frontiers are continually produced, contested, and reworked in relation to a complex range of sociopolitical attachments and antagonisms.” This perspective of the community as socially- and politically-mediated space frames Gregory’s (1998: 5) ethnographic intention in *Black Corona* to “challenge and put to rest the trope of the black ghetto” and to expose the “complex and shifting interrelation of race, class, and power in American society.” Thus, highlighting the unique experiences and voices of individuals, and situating their previously concealed stories within

specific spatial contexts—rather than depersonalizing the issue, working from faceless statistics, or generalizing to the point of obfuscation—can provide a more nuanced accounting of racialized urban food insecurity at the community scale.

Crucially though, community-scale investigations are situated within broader structures of dominance and oppression; increasingly, it is necessary to critically examine broader scales of influence that have far-reaching implications (at the scales of communities and individual bodies). Critical ethnographic research needs to consider spaces of resistance and transformation within the scales of the state and the world economy, where policies and practices consistently work to impede (or, in rare cases, encourage) progressive action. Deep engagement with the intersection of race and urban food insecurity would consistently consider how relations of power at all scales constrain access to food and reinforce structures of dominance, setting in motion generational cycles of food insecurity and hunger within chronically disinvested urban areas.

The “scalar politics” of scholar-activism (Heynen 2009) constitute a two-way street of critical intervention; while our daily practices and engagements “in the field” offer insights that enable us to “scale up” the work of ameliorating urban food insecurity, our academic pursuits should engage theory that enables us to first envision the revolution of systemic change, thus enabling closer scales (our communities, institutions, and bodies) to enact that vision. Critical race theory’s historically grounded yet radically imagined alternatives to contemporary systems of structural inequality demands proactive, concrete, and grounded visions that are equal to the challenge of dismantling racism and eradicating hunger and food insecurity in our own communities and beyond.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEXT

4.1 Introduction

Food justice activism in New Orleans has developed apace with efforts throughout the United States to generate diverse and sustainable food systems that provide adequate nutritious food for all people. As in other cities throughout the United States, the vast majority of food justice advocates and activists in New Orleans are white. Despite demographic shifts following Hurricane Katrina, which left the city “richer, whiter, and more educated” than it was before the storm, New Orleans is still a mostly black city (GNOCDC 2012). Also, as in other U.S. cities, communities of color in New Orleans suffer disproportionately high rates of institutionalized disinvestment and structural inequality—in “majority-minority” neighborhoods, schools are poorer, access to health services is dismal, and residents have fewer (if any) options for purchasing affordable nutritious food close by (Dyson 2006).

The pervasive phenomenon of spatialized racial inequality has been well-documented (c.f. Massey and Denton 1993) but is often all too easy for white America to ignore. The high-profile exposure of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina and the federal levee failures, which devastated the Gulf Coast in August of 2005, forced white U.S. Americans to reconsider entrenched myths about “equality and justice for all” in the twenty-first century. Katrina happened to come at a time, and in a place, when and where racial and class oppressions were overshadowed by tropes of color-blindness and national pride, and couched within the post-9/11-context of stark neoliberal policies and rhetoric that venerated individual achievement and

toughness above solidarity and compassion. As many scholars have argued, the sheer visibility of the violence and death absorbed primarily by poor people of color following the storm exposed the country and world to U.S. state and social policies of abandonment and betrayal that pre-date the storm by decades at least (Braunn and McCarthy 2005; Giroux 2007).

In this chapter, I offer a portrait of post-Katrina New Orleans, to situate my research in space and time. I focus on the important ways in which New Orleans has changed since Hurricane Katrina, but also discuss the entrenched effects of racism and segregation, which created the geographies of vulnerability that determined the fate of so many in the wake of the storm. Next, I discuss how the post-Katrina influx of volunteers and well-intentioned outsiders helped to shape the landscape in which newly established food justice projects emerged. To highlight the various forms these projects can take, and the distinctive ways in which they emerge, I draw three vignettes of food justice projects situated in different geographic and social contexts; these vignettes introduce themes and phenomena to be analyzed in subsequent chapters.

4.2 Situating New Orleans as a Post-Disaster City

In the years since the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-constructed levee system failed to hold back the surge of Lake Pontchartrain into the city of New Orleans in August of 2005, the disproportionate destruction Hurricane Katrina caused in low-income predominantly non-white neighborhoods has been well documented (Dyson 2006; Pastor et al. 2006; Bullard and Wright 2009; Braunn and McCarthy 2005). In Orleans parish, flooding or damage displaced an estimated 272,000 African-American residents, accounting for 73% of the population affected by the storm in that parish (Gabe et al. 2005). Recently released data from the 2010 decennial U.S. Census reveals the city “lost” 118,526 African Americans since 2000, compared with 24,101

whites; this number, of course, does not reflect all the people who were displaced by the storm, but rather the “net” loss between 2000 and 2010. Immediately following the storm, the number of black households in the city proper suffered a 72.2 percent drop (Louisiana Recovery Authority 2007). Because majority-African American neighborhoods suffered the most severe housing damage, black residents returned to the city at a much slower pace than did white residents, even after controlling for socioeconomic status and other demographic factors (Fussell et al 2009); the percentage of Latinos living in the city actually increased following Katrina (Plyer 2011). An influx of mostly-white, mostly-educated, mostly-middle-income “rebuilders,” combined with a slower rate of return for African Americans, has made New Orleans whiter and wealthier than ever before (Luft 2008; Mildenberg 2011).¹

4.2.1 Pre-Katrina Inequities: Segregation and Vulnerability

Prior to the storm, structural inequalities contributed to a higher vulnerability among the African American population in New Orleans (Bullard and Wright 2009). As Bakker (2005: 797) observes, the “uneven geography of Katrina’s devastation has roots in the uneven geography of New Orleans...The American South’s segregated past is still visible in the spatial and social geography of cities such as New Orleans, where housing for black, working-class communities is located in the least desirable areas, with limited employment, social services and amenities.” Lewis (2003:51) describes the racial patterning of the city as “less malevolent” than the strict segregation that characterized northern cities during the middle decades of the twentieth

¹ Despite the ubiquity of statistics like these, and the power of the Census and other counting measures for demonstrating numerically the disproportionate effect of the storm on people of color, they must be approached with some hesitation, as the effect of state counting mechanisms, ultimately, for people of color (for “racialized others”) remains unclear and ambivalent. Invoking Goldberg’s racial state theory requires attention to the problematic potential of racial categories, such as those called forth in census data discussed herein. As Goldberg and others have argued, state measurement apparatuses that rely on racial categorization can exacerbate racial inequality by reifying socially-constructed racial categories. Rather than throw the proverbial “baby out with the bathwater,” I refer to this data for what it reveals about disproportionate exposure to risk and death, but acknowledge the potentially negative implications of doing so.

century, but notes that “the poorest blacks simply lived where they could,” typically “along the *battures* or the backswamps.” These were areas situated close to poorly constructed artificial levees and lacking adequate flood protection. Even as the city continued to grow, and wealthier African Americans moved “up” (quite literally, to higher ground), poor blacks continued to live in increasingly isolated low-lying areas, cut off from decent housing and educational and economic opportunities (Dyson 2006:7). While all urban landscapes are social products (Lefebvre 1991), in the case of New Orleans—an unlikely city constructed on what Pierce Lewis (2003:20) has described as an “evil site”—the ubiquitous acts of racial exclusion and unequal access to resources “led to a [localized] concomitance of poverty and vulnerability” (Ballard-Rosa 2010:179). By the time Katrina struck, nearly all the city’s extreme poverty neighborhoods were predominantly black; these racially- and economically-segregated areas bore the brunt of the disaster (Fussell et al 2009).

In 2000, five years before the infamous storm, 34% of the city’s African-American population lived below the poverty line, compared with 11% of the white population (US Census Bureau 2000). The corralling of low-income African Americans into underserved and vulnerable neighborhoods, while “the upwardly mobile black Mainstream was steadily moving out,” either to the suburbs or to New Orleans East, permitted the persistent poverty and invisibility among what Eugene Robinson (2010) has referred to as “Abandoned black America.”

4.2.2 Post-Katrina Visibilities: Lifting and reinforcing the Veil

Although people living in New Orleans were cognizant of a bifurcated class system based largely upon race, this social reality had been effectively veiled from the national consciousness until early September of 2005, when the “natural” disaster of Hurricane Katrina exposed the highly constructed racial inequalities persisting in New Orleans and, by extension, other North

American cities (Sanyika 2009). As was quickly and violently revealed after the levee breach, and throughout the “response effort,” Katrina was every bit as much a “social disaster” as a natural one. Reflecting on Katrina, Neil Smith (2006) argues, “in every phase and aspect of a disaster—causes, vulnerability, preparedness, results and response, and reconstruction—the contours of disaster and the difference between who lives and who dies is to a greater or lesser extent a social calculus.” Indeed, while the historical and cultural importance of African-Americans in New Orleans is often celebrated and understood as generating a complex socio-cultural landscape (Lewis 2003), the storm and its aftermath brought the harsh implications of social differentiation and segregation into sharp relief; New Orleans was not, evidently a “post-racial” city after all (Steinberg and Shields 2008).

What was, perhaps, most extraordinary about Katrina and its aftermath, was not the continued pattern of state abandonment of poor, mostly black residents, but that this abandonment was “rendered *visible* for all to see, a shocking failure on the part of an administration that ha[d] gone the extra mile to carefully stage what counted as ‘news’ in America” (Braunn and McCarthy 2005:802). That there existed disproportionately high rates of poverty among African Americans was something this nation knew, in the abstract; Katrina, however, “gave the numbers flesh and bone and blood. And voice: *We’re still here*” (Robinson 2010: 109).

While the long-suffering poor and racial minorities gained visibility in their misery following the storm, the ubiquity of that imagery served, to a certain extent, to reinforce popular notions of a city besieged by crime and poverty and fraught with senseless black-on-black violence. Dyson (2006) highlights the ways in which media representations of survival mechanisms following the storm played into prominent stereotypes about race and class. Dyson

references two captions to Associated Press (AP) photos describing similar scenes of people wading through water carrying food items in their arms. The first photo, of a black man, bore the caption “A young man walks through chest deep flood water after *looting a grocery store* in New Orleans on Tuesday, August 20, 2005”; the second photo, of two white people, was accompanied by a caption reading, “Two *residents* wade through chest-deep water after *finding bread and soda from a local grocery store* after Hurricane Katrina...” (qtd. in Dyson 2006: 184, emphasis added). In addition to perpetuating negative racial stereotypes against people of color, portrayals of black “looters” and white residents who “find” food had an additionally harmful effect; they neglected both the complexity of the African American community in New Orleans, as well as the structural forces that contributed to the poverty of so many people of color in New Orleans and elsewhere. So while Katrina raised the visibility of racial and class inequality in New Orleans (and, again, presumably elsewhere), the sensationalist nature of media portrayals enabled those of us on the outside to “ignore the true roots” of poverty and racial inequality, roots that “branch into our worlds and are nourished on our political and religious beliefs” (Dyson 2006:3).

Katrina thus both lifted and reinforced the “veil” (DuBois 1999 [1903]) of racial inequality. On the one hand, Katrina revealed “the way the nation still thinks and feels about black people” (Dyson 2006: 138); those thoughts and feelings were on display in media and popular interpretations of the disaster, which “confirmed a long-held impression of New Orleans as a prime example of the black, decadent, crime- and poverty-stricken city that is the antithesis of an American national mythology that, in its essence remains white, wholesome, safe, wealthy, and rural or suburban” (Steinberg and Shields 2008: 16).

4.2.3 Demographic shifts: A whiter and wealthier New Orleans

It was into this milieu that thousands of well-meaning people flocked to the city from throughout the nation and world in the months and years following Hurricane Katrina, to help it rebuild and recover. They were driven variously by anger at a broken system, a religious or humanitarian commitment to offer support to those in greatest need, a desire to participate in the salvation of a distinctive and important American city, or any number of other reasons—many good, and some less so (c.f. Klein 2007). These individuals, families, churches and community groups joined existing non-profit organizations or founded their own, recruited volunteers to assist in the rebuilding of homes and schools, helped to clean up debris, and advocated on behalf of those who had lost their homes or worse in the wake of the storm. Many of them remain in New Orleans, now nearly eight years later, and have no intention of leaving the city anytime soon; many intend to or already call it home.

In 2013, the economic and social impact of this migration is still unfolding. In 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau identified New Orleans as the fastest growing large city in the country between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2011 (US Census Bureau 2012). The Greater New Orleans Community Data Center examined postal service data from that same period to determine that 66 of New Orleans' 72 neighborhoods have experienced population gains since 2010; heavily flooded neighborhoods have grown the fastest, as both new and returning residents occupy rehabilitated homes and properties receiving multi-family tax credits (Ortiz and Plyer 2012). While many pre-Katrina residents did return home in the months and years following the storm, the rate of return correlates closely with race and class; within three months of the catastrophic flooding, fully one half of white residents had returned to the city; fourteen months after the storm, less than one half of residents of color had come home (Fussell et al 2010). Fussell and

colleagues' study of Displaced New Orleans Residents identified housing damage as the major factor slowing or preventing the return of displaced residents, but fail to account for the steady flow of non-residents into the most devastated neighborhoods.

After spending three weeks volunteering with a prominent relief organization following Katrina, Molly McClure (2005) contrasted the mobility of the many "activists and volunteers" with the long-time residents still stranded in other cities throughout the U.S. Reflecting on her time spent volunteering, she asks, "How did it come to be that we are able to travel to and around New Orleans, while many survivors still can't go home?" McClure's musing points to the often awkward and uncomfortable reality acknowledged by many well-meaning people who have contributed to the rebuilding effort. Bierra et al add, "Unfortunately, white progressive and radical Left volunteers that have come to 'rebuild' in the name of altruism and charity also contribute to the changing demographics of the city" (2006: 39). Utilizing terminology that might make "white progressive and radical Left volunteers" bristle, Luft (2008: 23) points to the accelerated risks of gentrification in a disaster zone with a limited housing stock, where "the occupation and purchase of limited space [and] the whitening of culture" are counter-productive to genuine rebuilding.

Still, the "unintended consequences" of exogenous rebuilding efforts accompany tangible products that have enabled many to rebuild their homes and return to their communities. Thus, native New Orleanians' feelings towards both temporary and long-term "transplants" are nuanced and complicated. My extended research experience in the city taught me that native New Orleanians are kind to visitors, proud to show off their city, and generally grateful for the material and personal or time contributions of long and short-term volunteers and relief workers; at the same time, however, native New Orleanians are suspect of outsiders' intentions and may

be hesitant to accept various contributions—whether in the form of physical labor, food and seeds, or redevelopment plans—in the spirit in which they are offered.

4.3 Situating Food Justice Activism in Post-Katrina New Orleans

Among the many efforts and initiatives to emerge and expand in the years since Katrina have been projects and programs that endeavor to increase access to nutritious food among low-income communities. In 2009, New Orleans ranked among the ten most food-insecure cities in the United States (Food Research and Action Center 2010). Immediately following the storm, there were literally no stores open, and no places from which to obtain fresh food. People did what they could to get by; one Latina drove around town in her van, selling tacos for \$1. The New Orleans Food and Farm Network, a local food justice organization quickly drew up maps of the city, indicating where people could find any kind of food—any restaurants or corner stores that had reopened were included in their map. Backyard and community gardens, too, emerged as viable and necessary sources of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Since 2005, however, the pace of food-related activism and alternative food project development in the city has accelerated considerably. From new food cooperatives, food banks and farmers markets to community gardens and other forms of urban agriculture, alternative modes of food production and distribution within the city have mobilized different strategies for addressing a perceived lack of access to affordable, nutritious food for all residents. New Orleans' legacy as a "food city" has contributed to its renaissance among well-known hometown chefs and their broadening clientele of residents and visitors who seek locally and sustainably sourced, high-quality fare. These expectations of and demands for quality have transformed the agricultural awareness of many wealthy and even middle-class people in New Orleans and elsewhere, and have facilitated the emergence of new modes of food provisioning for both

residents and visitors; while residents seek out farmers markets and organic food cooperatives in greater numbers—and frequent the shiny and bourgeois Whole Foods in the Uptown neighborhood—visitors may make reservations months in advance at Antoine’s or Commander’s Palace, where the menus feature humble-sounding regional fare, like Cotelettes d’agneau grillées for a mere \$43.75.

Very few people would argue that initiatives such as these, which increase the purchasing of craft, artisanal, and locally-sourced food products among wealthy people, constitute “food justice” for people who struggle to feed themselves and their families. However, mainstream enthusiasm and support for “food with a face” may be at least partially responsible for the plethora of initiatives aiming, with various motivations, to “bring good food to others” (Guthman 2008). Among people of means, access to preferred high quality food items typically means access to markets and restaurants that offer sought-after items of reasonably high quality, and “access” may be defined as within easy driving distance. Access to land for growing or raising one’s own food is, in many cities, a romantic notion not even the rich can realize, despite the historic use of gardens in the United States for subsistence and survival in times of need (Lawson 2005).

While gardening—particularly the backyard variety—was prominent in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina, the powerful role of mostly exogenous nonprofits and volunteers following Katrina shifted the form and function of gardening projects throughout the city. While backyard gardens historically have provided important supplemental (or even fundamental) nutrition and served as leisure or recreational spaces for residents, post-Katrina community-scale gardening has relied heavily upon popular tropes suggesting the alimentary, salutary, environmental, and social benefits of gardening at family and community scales. The purported

benefits of urban agriculture and community gardening have become common parlance, as national-level efforts to address a so-called “obesity epidemic” and foster more localized food systems are embraced and promoted by First Lady Michelle Obama, food celebrities and chefs like Jamie Oliver, and increasingly well-known authors like Michael Pollan and Eric Schlosser. These national-level discourses have fomented a groundswell of support from communities throughout the country, but most prominently among well-educated, mostly white people of some means—precisely the demographic that was drawn to assist with the rebuilding of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. The sudden availability of approximately 44,000 vacant lots, representing roughly 20% of all residential addresses in the city (Plyer and Ortiz 2010), following Katrina facilitated conceptually, among food justice advocates, a physical “empty space” for enacting and materializing food justice. The following section characterizes the different ways in which groups comprised primarily of either “white transplants,” local people of color, or long-term and recently arrived Latino residents conceptualize and enact food justice work.

4.4 Three Approaches to Food Justice in Post-Katrina New Orleans

In the section that follows, I present three vignettes that demonstrate how three distinct food justice projects have materialized in separate neighborhoods or communities of New Orleans. These vignettes lay a foundation for the analytical discussions I present in subsequent chapters, by illuminating some key themes that characterize food justice work in New Orleans. Each vignette represents a different community struggling to make sense of challenges related to food justice, and working towards a specific plan of action. The vignettes draw from meetings I attended during the course of my research, between the fall of 2010 and the fall of 2012, as well as interviews and conversations I had in both research and social settings. All three vignettes

present composite scenarios to both respect the anonymity of research participants, and to introduce relevant themes that will be discussed analytically in subsequent chapters.

The first vignette describes an effort by mostly white exogenous food justice advocates, and relies heavily upon conversations I had with those advocates, during which I asked them to reflect on the process of developing their project in a low-income community of color; these conversations, combined with participant-observation of the project and organization, enabled me to generate the composite characterization that appears below. This vignette introduces themes of white privilege and race in the food system, which I explore analytically in Chapter Five.

The second vignette draws on my notes and observations from a series of meetings organized and attended by residents of the primarily African American Lower Ninth Ward, in their struggle to increase access to healthy foods within their neighborhood. The vignette is a composite characterization of a series of eight meetings of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition and members of the Lower Ninth Ward and Holy Cross neighborhoods, which took place between April and December of 2012. This vignette introduces themes of access, appropriation, community participation and the right to the city, which I explore analytically in Chapter Six.

The third vignette offers a snapshot of my experience volunteering with a Latino food justice organization, and draws on observation and interviews to characterize how leadership and members of that organization characterize food justice and food sovereignty. This vignette introduces themes of translation, advocacy, and the state, which I explore analytically in Chapter Seven.

4.4.1 Vignette 1: Hollygrove Market and Farm

Among white food justice advocates, the mental calculus that equates specific food projects and programming with improved livelihood outcomes for poor people of color typically goes something like this:

PROBLEM: Poor people do not have grocery stores in their neighborhoods, and in most cases they lack transportation to get to a supermarket to purchase fresh nutritious foods. This leads people to choose food from fast food outlets or convenience stores, which is easier to access than “fresh” food, both economically and physically. Eating the food offered at these kinds of places makes people fat, unhealthy, and likely to die before they otherwise might. The food procurement options of specific communities correlate with race and class, meaning there is an explicit injustice underlying the basic act of providing food for oneself and family. Hence, poor people lack self-determination when it comes to food; they are constrained by the limited food landscape in which they live (this is often termed a “food desert”), and they lack viable options for healthy food they can afford. People need to be liberated from this false choice, and should not have to rely on the paltry possibilities laid out for them by entities that clearly are not concerned with their health and well-being.

In New Orleans, one solution to the access problem has been to consider the productive potential of all the lots that once held houses and families, still vacant since Hurricane Katrina flooded entire neighborhoods in 2005. Why not put those empty lots to good use by growing food? This could solve a number of problems. Overgrown or unkempt lots could be made aesthetically pleasing, rather than signaling despair and decay. They could become spaces for community members to come together in solidarity, to break free from the shackles of the global-

industrial-corporate food system by taking matters into their own hands, sowing seeds of revolution, redemption, and resistance to the oppression that constrains them.

Gardens, and their promise of empowerment and self-sufficiency, offer an elegant and alluring solution to the related problems of (healthy) food access and obesity, one often attractive to potential funders. But not, incidentally a simple one, or one that is easy to implement. Three years after he helped create a market and farm in the primarily African American neighborhood of Hollygrove, Steve Canfield, a white man who is a non-native but “pre-Katrina” resident of New Orleans, describes the long and arduous process for getting the project off the ground.

“After Katrina, I was working on community development projects in the Hollygrove neighborhood, when a friend—who worked with a social services agency at the time, invited me to help start a Community Development Corporation in the neighborhood. The purpose was to help residents come back to the neighborhood, to navigate the ‘maze of programs’ that emerged after Katrina, and to focus on neighborhood revitalization as well as training and planning programs.”

Like most neighborhoods in New Orleans, the boundaries of Hollygrove are not official or firm. The City Planning Commission, the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, and residents of the neighborhood all have slightly different distinctions for bounding the neighborhood. The Carrollton-Hollygrove Community Development Corporation, which emerged after Katrina to help “revitalize the neighborhood” and develop affordable housing infrastructure, bounds Hollygrove at South Carrollton Avenue, the Jefferson Parish line, Interstate-10, and South Claiborne Avenue. Those boundaries enclose an area of .62 square miles, home to 4,377 people in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). The neighborhood was badly damaged by the storm; by the 2010 census, 33% of homes remained unoccupied. The racial and

economic demographics of Hollygrove have not changed much since 2000; the neighborhood is still 94% African American, and one of the poorest in the city.

Steve continues the story of collaboratively founding a market and farm in Hollygrove after Hurricane Katrina: “Hollygrove was a food desert. What we wanted to do was to get fresh fruits and vegetables into the neighborhood. We thought about starting a market but were told by the folks who run the Crescent City Farmers Markets that a farmers’ market would be too much work, and probably wouldn’t survive. So we pursued other possibilities. We thought about trying to sell fresh fruit and vegetables at existing corner stores, but when we visited the corner stores we learned that fresh produce is too expensive for it to sell well; the stores would have to sell it at a loss for people to actually buy it. That was the perception anyway. So, finally we decided we could start our own store. But at the time [early fall 2008] we had no money, no nothing. We signed a lease for the current location, on the edge of the Hollygrove neighborhood, in September of 2008. We partnered with the New Orleans Food and Farm network to apply for a couple of grants, found a couple of farmers, and started selling produce by calling people up and asking them if they’d be interested in purchasing a box for \$25.”

I ask Steve whether, after the long and arduous process of getting the project of the ground, there had been any shift in goals or priorities, or if Hollygrove Market and Farm (HMF) serves the functions it was originally intended to. By the time I interview Steve, I had been volunteering at HMF for several months, and perceived it to be a vibrant market space that catered mostly to white customers who drove into the neighborhood once or twice a week to purchase a box of fresh produce, local dairy, or hormone-free and free-range meat. Two or three neighborhood residents tended plots in the garden space surrounding the market, but the leadership of the organization was mostly white and not from the neighborhood. Because of

these observations, I was curious to hear how Steve would characterize the current priorities and purpose of the organization.

He responded to my question, “The original mission was to make fresh fruits and vegetables available to Hollygrove and surrounding neighborhoods, but we always knew that the customer base would be much larger than that. The profit we got from selling to people outside the neighborhood could subsidize our sales to Hollygrove residents. We give lots of gift certificates [to neighborhood residents], and they get a 20% discount when they shop at the market. But still only about less than 10% of the sales go to people in the neighborhood. Certainly now our mission has evolved. We realized—we’re really supporting these local farms. Small-scale rural farmers, and a growing number of urban farmers. So our mission is evolving to support small farms. And one of the greatest successes of the market has been turning a blighted lot into green-space. The market brings tons of people into the neighborhood who otherwise wouldn’t set foot there. It has fostered tremendous neighborhood revitalization.”

Steve’s characterization of the evolving mission of Hollygrove Market and Farm, and its efforts to engage the community in a project that largely excluded it during early phases of decision-making was, I discovered, endemic of post-Katrina food justice projects throughout the city. Despite initial—and genuine, I would argue—missions to enhance food access and improve health outcomes for neighborhood residents, the mandates to secure and maintain funding and to remain viable as either a nonprofit or LLC in many cases trumped the organization’s founding social justice principles. In Chapter Five, I explore how this process of “mission creep” is related to issues of race and racism, and I explore how white food justice advocates understood and articulated the role of white privilege in their work. Drawing on interviews, observation, and participation in an “Undoing Racism in the Food System” workshop, I highlight the complex and

pervasive ways in which internalized racial oppression acts to constrain the efforts of well-intentioned food justice work.

4.4.2 Vignette 2: Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition

The Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood (consisting of Holy Cross and the Lower Ninth Ward) had a pre-Katrina population 19,515 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Mostly black and working class, 60% of neighborhood residents owned their own homes, and most had been in their families for generations. Prior to the storm, the neighborhood contained a diversity of locally-owned businesses: barber and beauty shops, corner stores, eateries, day care centers, public schools, and 72 churches. Historically, the neighborhood contained numerous truck farms, and backyard gardening was common in the decades before Katrina.

The near-total destruction of the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and subsequent investment and charitable efforts by big name celebrities like Brad Pitt, pushed the neighborhood into international purview. The levees protecting the Lower Ninth Ward breached in two places, sending a surge of water that lifted homes from their foundations and tossed cars about like playthings. The floodwaters reached twenty feet in the lowest lying parts of the neighborhood, and in some cases did not recede for over a month. The devastation of this part of the city is hard to overemphasize. 100% of the neighborhood was flooded, and even those residents whose homes were marginally habitable were not allowed to return until nearly two months after the storm. Return to the neighborhood has been slow and appears to have stagnated; the 2010 census counted 5,556 residents, just 28% of pre-Katrina levels (GNOCDC, 2012).

The Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition (LNWFAC) formed in the spring of 2012, as project of the Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development

(CSED). LNWFAC is a collective of residents of the Lower Ninth Ward who are frustrated by the slow pace of recovery, and especially their neighborhood's lack of a grocery store or other option for accessing fresh food. Kendra, CSED Food Security Coordinator, organizer with the LNWFAC, and second-generation resident of the Lower Ninth Ward, described the importance of food access for her community:

“Food security remains a vital element of any sustainable community—and in fact is a return to the traditions of urban farming and independent living rooted in the Lower Ninth Ward...The Lower Ninth Ward is considered a ‘food desert’ by the USDA. There is no grocery store. The stores that do sell food items offer a limited variety of junk food, processed foods, and prepared foods. Since Hurricane Katrina, the community has struggled with redevelopment and one of the core issues has been lack of food options. Businesses are hesitant to open in an economically depressed neighborhood with drastically decreased population...Our vision is to have the Lower Ninth Ward speak as one voice on what we want for food access in our neighborhood. As a community, we must define what it is that we want, whether it be a grocery store, an urban farm, or better food policy, and take the steps to attain it” (personal communication).

Enacting this vision has required steady and deliberate work, and significant community participation. Decisions have been made via consensus over the course of eight monthly meetings, each with a specific purpose and plan. As food security coordinator, Kendra moderated the meetings, but all neighborhood residents were encouraged to contribute ideas and thoughts throughout the planning process. Over the course of eight meetings, the group accomplished the following tasks, according to the framework laid out at the first meeting: (1) defined a healthy food system as “a community-controlled environment that is planned strategically by the community, where we have the food we want and need, and where the market is sustained by educating the vendors and consumers, involving the youth, creating jobs, and respecting our culture”; (2) assessed the food access needs of the community, by surveying existing options and juxtaposing them with what they desired for their community; (3) explored, through research and conversation, what other communities have done to solve their food access problems; (4)

reviewed existing plans for the City of New Orleans and the Lower Ninth Ward to determine how LNWFAC actions could align with those; (5) examined how racism has shaped the current food access situation, by organizing a two day “Dismantling Racism in the Food System” workshop; (6) articulated a vision statement (“The Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition envisions a strong and proud Lower Ninth Ward community where access to fresh, quality food is convenient and affordable”) and mission statement (“Our mission is to increase access to fresh, quality, convenient and affordable food in the Lower Ninth Ward through researching, soliciting, and supporting projects that will meet the food needs and quality standards of the Lower Ninth Ward community”); (7) worked to understand and articulate the obstacles that have constrained food access; (8) collaboratively determined what the community wants and needs in terms of food access; (9) brainstormed actionable solutions to food access problems; (10) produced a detailed food action plan, which incorporates immediate actions, short-, intermediate- and long-term plans to reach agreed-upon goals. The group has worked in collaboration with the City of New Orleans and other area nonprofits to secure funding for projects at each time-scale, and hosted a popular and successful “Grocery Store for a Day” event in the neighborhood to draw public attention to their food access struggle (Harden 2012).

The efforts of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition represent claims by neighborhood residents on their right to appropriate and reshape urban space to meet their needs. As I argue in Chapter Six, these efforts constitute neighborhood-scale claims on the right to the city, and highlight the importance of neighborhood autonomy in both envisioning and enacting these claims.

4.4.3 Vignette 3: Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana

During a preliminary research trip to New Orleans in the summer of 2011, I met with Evelia, the director of a nonprofit organization working to increase food security for Latinos in New Orleans. Early in our introductory meeting, Evelia asked me to tell her about my research. I described my interest in food justice organizing and activism in New Orleans. She responded by saying, “how do you define ‘food justice’? Because I don’t think much of that is really going on here.” This response, of course, caught me off guard. Evelia proceeded to give me two examples of what food justice means to her. The first was a community garden project that her organization, the Latino Farmers’ Cooperative of Louisiana (LFCL) had established in the Central City area of New Orleans. She said the garden was really lovely, and Latino members of the cooperative used it frequently, not just to garden, but also to gather, to cook and eat, to commune. They had some chickens in the garden. It wasn’t too long before one person in particular was complaining, saying they didn’t have a right to have chickens in the garden. This person—this white man, who served on the board of the organization that had granted the garden space to the LFCL—succeeded in closing the garden. To Evelia and the other Latinos who used and valued the garden space, condemning the garden was a clear case of racial discrimination. By failing to accept the cultural practices of the Latino community to use the garden as a communal gathering space, Evelia explained, the white man used his power to eliminate those practices that did not meet his own understanding of what a community garden should be.

Evelia demonstrated the second example of “food justice” by presenting me with a petition entitled, “Define client eligibility policy at Second Harvest Food Pantries to facilitate equal access to food.” The petition addresses a practice at local food pantries that prohibits giving food to anyone who does not possess a valid U.S. drivers’ license or other form of

government-issued identification. Food access is prohibited to individuals possessing foreign passports or foreign government-issued IDs. Evelia and the LFCL protested the practice of denying emergency food to undocumented individuals, and felt that all people—regardless of their immigration status—should have access to emergency food when necessary. Despite New Orleans’ long connection with Spanish heritage and culture, the city was not a major destination for Latin American immigrants until after 2005. Evelia explained that more than 33,000 Latinos have moved to New Orleans since Katrina, and have been instrumental in helping to rebuild the city. Despite their contributions, Latinos are often the victims of wage theft or other practices that take advantage of their unfamiliarity with the English language and American legal system.

Evelia explained that each of these examples is truly about *food*—they are about getting real food into people’s bodies. They are about justice because, in Evelia’s eyes, that universal need *is denied on the basis of race*. Evelia spoke with conviction and passion about institutional racism within the food system (and everywhere in society). She said she was puzzled to hear me use the term food justice in New Orleans, because she felt that people in New Orleans refuse to acknowledge racism, despite it being a crucial feature in determining who has access to what food and why. She criticized people—typically white people—who like to use the terms “food justice” and “food desert” without ever really defining what they mean. She asked me, rhetorically, I hope, “how do you know what justice is if you are a white person?” To Evelia, food justice is completely inseparable from institutional racism.

During my time volunteering with the Latino Farmers’ Cooperative in 2012, I came to understand the extent to which food access was severely circumscribed for non-resident, non-English-speaking immigrants who rely on state benefits programs to meet their families’ subsistence needs. Most of the members of the cooperative had an agricultural background in

their country of origin, but lacked the space or time to continue the cultural or subsistence practice of growing food. Evelia and the LFCL helped enroll qualifying members in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), which the LFCL saw as crucial for increasing “food security” among its members. Over time, I came to see the paradox of relying upon SNAP benefits; they provided crucial (though insufficient) aid in feeding families, but appeared to tether those who were able to ultimately access SNAP benefits to the very system of corporate food and agriculture that may have likely contributed to their exile from their country of origin. The links between struggles for “food sovereignty” in the Latin America, and the struggle of Latino immigrants in New Orleans to access funds to procure cheap processed food became increasingly apparent as I spent more time working with the LFCL. In Chapter Seven, I explore these themes, as well as issues of translation, and the distinctions among food security, food justice, and food sovereignty, in greater detail.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided the context for situating the analysis of pertinent themes from each of the three vignettes and the projects that inspired them. Because of the unique and challenging circumstances of post-Katrina New Orleans, this chapter also worked to unpack and “unveil” the interlocking systems of oppression and disinvestment that have contributed to creating the spatially and temporally specific landscape in which my research is situated. By providing a geographic and historic context for the research, I highlight the ways in which my findings reveal themes that are both specific and universal. Post-Katrina New Orleans constitutes a distinct space and time for situating food justice activism, but there are elements to its story that correspond and link with narratives that have become dominant in other spaces as well. Among these are prominent discourses about food justice and food sovereignty, and the role of

race and racism in constraining not just food access, but also the ways in which struggles over food access are articulated and fought. In the chapters that follow, I unpack and analyze these discourses by considering the spatial and temporal context of post-Katrina New Orleans, suggesting broader implications for similar projects in dispersed spaces.

CHAPTER 5

RACE AND FOOD JUSTICE ACTIVISM IN POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

5.1 Introduction

During a preliminary research expedition to New Orleans, in the summer of 2011, I attended a public forum on urban agriculture at Hollygrove Market and Farm (Figure 5.1). By this time, the market had been open for over three years, selling a CSA-style produce box for \$25, as well as other locally-produced meats, dairy, eggs, breads, produce, and specialty food items. In addition to the market, the Hollygrove Market and Farm grows food on site, some of which is sold in the market. HMF staff and local community members tend a dozen or so community garden plots. A large section of the farm is managed by a “mentor farmer” who grows produce to sell in the market, but most of the food sold in the market comes from small farms throughout the region. Below, I present a vignette from that evening’s meeting, in which I generate composite characters² to convey the tone and content of the meeting, without attributing direct quotations to specific individuals (Barter and Renold, 2000). The vignette serves as an introduction to the ways in which both implicit and explicit racial tensions under-gird food justice work in New Orleans, and demonstrates some of the ways that white food justice activists struggle to articulate and overcome those tensions. I utilize the vignette to implicitly pose some preliminary responses to my first research question: “How do food justice organizations in New Orleans characterize and respond to the presence and role of racism in the food system?”

Following the vignette, I explore this question in greater depth through a review of Critical Race

² For a detailed description of composite characters, and an explanation for their use in this research, please see the methods section of this dissertation (Chapter 3).

Studies and its intersection with writing on race in the food system, and within food justice activism specifically. Utilizing theoretical insights from those literatures, I then consider the intersection of race and food justice activism in New Orleans, and analyze a two-day “Undoing Racism in the Food System Workshop” which I attended during the summer of 2012. I conclude this chapter by arguing that a liberal *habitus* of whiteness (Alkon and McCullen 2010) pervades food justice activism in New Orleans as elsewhere, but power analyses such as those afforded by the PISAB workshop can effectively challenge that tendency.

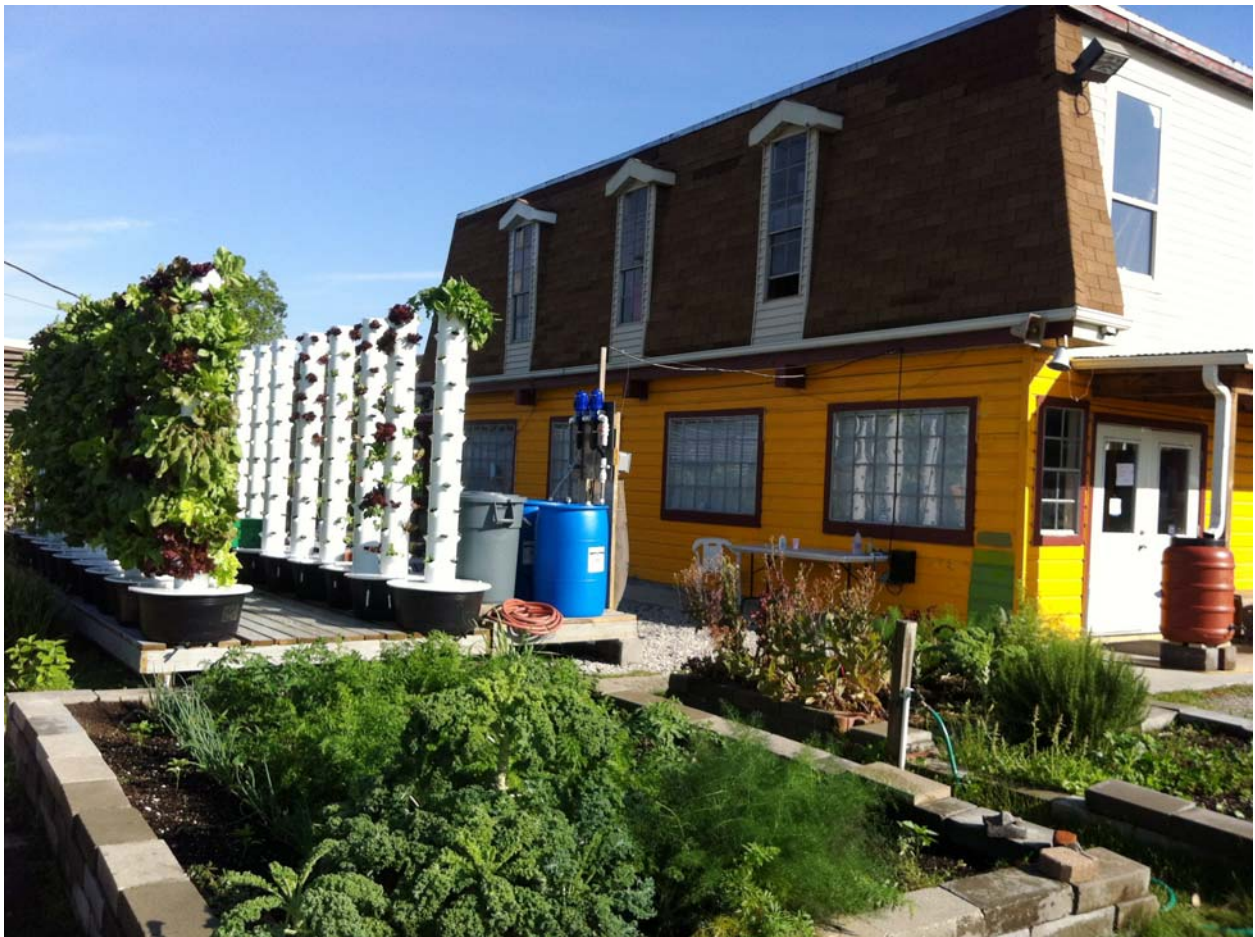


Figure 5.1 Hollygrove Market and Farm
Photo by Author

5.1.1 Vignette: Public Forum on Urban Agriculture, Hollygrove Market and Farm

For this evening's meeting, which is part of a series of meetings of people from throughout the city who are involved with different aspects of urban food production and procurement, familiar (mostly white) community organizers and food justice advocates gather at the market. Tables lining the back of the room are brimming with homemade hummus, kale chips, local vegetable crudités, and a big jug of some boozy refreshment infused with fresh rosemary and mint greets attendees. A table near the entrance to the room has information packets about food deserts and urban agriculture, copies of printed notes from the previous months' meeting, and agendas for tonight's. A jovial, somewhat bouncy white man with white hair reminiscent of Doc from Back to the Future introduces the gathering as being intentionally resistant to structure and to naming the loose grouping of individuals; instead of an organization, he says, this is a "series of meetings for like-minded (or not-so-like-minded!) people in the food world to discuss ideas, concerns and needs. The room already contains plenty of logos and plenty of egos!"

There are about 35 people in attendance; except for two African American women, all are white. We go around the room, each person introducing him or herself, and sharing three needs or requests. There is a broad range of interests represented, and many people speak of food access, education, and nutrition; a few mention "justice," but nobody says anything specifically about race. After the introductions, the group splits into smaller groups to discuss specific topics: (1) Soil/composting; (2) Community outreach and connectivity; (3) Research and Education (including documentation and measuring efforts to show to government and funding agencies); and (4) Pending zoning legislation for urban agriculture.

This meeting is the second in a series of “round-table discussions,” and follows up on a meeting of similar actors a month prior that identified major priorities for food systems activism in the city, as well as values, barriers, and methods for effective collaboration. The four major priority areas identified in the previous month’s round-table (and which formed the organizing principle for tonight’s meeting) were: (1) building dirt; (2) awareness; (3) growers; and (4) connection. The sectors and individuals identified as “missing from our conversation” included: (1) grocers and distributors; (2) government representatives; (3) chefs and (4) farmers.

In relation to the “awareness” piece of the discussion, the group has decided to launch an outreach campaign to help spread awareness about the benefits of urban agriculture and community gardening. I sip my herb-infused cocktail as someone dims the lights and another person in a leadership position from the “loose grouping of individuals”—a young white woman with dark hair³—directs attention to a power-point presentation that appears on the screen behind her. The current slide is titled “The Benefits of Urban Agriculture.” It contains a bulleted list and a photograph of two middle-school aged African American boys standing in a garden, covered in dirt and smiling at the camera. The bulleted list includes:

- ❑ *Healthy communities*
- ❑ *Education for kids (of all ages!)*
- ❑ *Affordable food that’s easy to access*
- ❑ *Removes blight and reduces crime*
- ❑ *Builds community connections*

“As you can see,” the woman continues, “there are a number of documented and

³ As in much ethnographic writing, the woman and dialogue presented in this portion of the vignette are composites based on several individuals and conversations I encountered while volunteering and attending meetings at HMF. The composite character and speech protect the identities of those individuals involved, but accurately convey the sentiments and ideas espoused, as I encountered them during the course of my research.

potential benefits of community gardens and other forms of urban agriculture. Gardens help generate communities that are healthy both physically and spiritually—people who garden report high levels of peace and satisfaction, and are less likely to suffer from diet-related diseases associated with the Standard American Diet, including diabetes and obesity.

“A garden can teach useful self-sufficiency skills to both kids and adults, and can even reinforce lessons kids learn in school about plant biology and the environment. Perhaps most importantly for kids, gardens can divert kids who may otherwise end up on the street engaging in criminal activity, or otherwise in front of a television wasting their minds all day long. Gardens provide an outlet for kids’ energy, while teaching them important lessons about hard work, patience, and personal responsibility.

“Next, and perhaps most obvious, is the fact that gardens provide food! Numerous studies show that the healthiest food is food that was grown organically, without chemical fertilizers or pesticides, and that was grown locally and harvested recently. A community garden allows you to know exactly where your food is coming from and how it was grown. You can walk right over to the garden and harvest your vegetables for that day’s meals, ensuring the highest freshness and quality. And you can grow exactly what you know you like to eat! Planting seeds and waiting for the food to be ready to harvest does take time, and requires patience, but it’s worth the wait because you end up saving so much money in the long run! This means that you’re guaranteed to get healthy food much more cheaply than you could find it in a (hypothetical) grocery store. I say hypothetical, of course, because there isn’t one in this neighborhood.

“Ok, next on the list: Urban agriculture helps reduce blight and crime. The current landscape of blighted or overgrown lots send a signal that people don’t care what’s going on

here—it looks like a space that is being allowed to return to a jungle, like a wild frontier that permits any sort of renegade activity or criminal behavior. When you invest the time and energy in creating a garden, you're sending the opposite message: this is a place people care about and look after. People have worked hard to create this space, and they'll defend it from any sort of lawlessness that might deem to take it over.

“This leads to my next point. Gardens help to foster a sense of community. As you all know all too well, this community was devastated and splintered by the levee and government failures following Hurricane Katrina. It has been seven years, and the population is still only 60% of what it was before the storm. There has been a lot of commitment to help rebuild the neighborhood, but the wounds of Katrina are still healing, and the process of recovery is long and hard. In order to continue to recover, we need to work together in solidarity, with compassion, and with shared vision. We can't do that if we live far apart—one or two occupied houses on a block as we have in many parts of the neighborhood now. We need spaces to gather and connect and form new relationships. This community will never be the same—I was not here before the storm, and I know a lot of you, like me, came afterwards to help rebuild. But we want to be welcomed into this community as trusted and trusting individuals. I really think gardens and community spaces like this one can help to make that happen.

“There has been a lot of resistance to all the ‘outsiders’ who came here after 2005, and I get that, even though I'm one of them. I know it must be hard to see your whole world destroyed, and to feel so abandoned by the people and institutions that should have been there to protect and support you. But those of us who came did so because we were also angry about the way you were treated. We wanted to help because we could see that the government wasn't doing its job, and things were just crazy and bad down here. I'm sorry to bring up such a painful past in this

way; I just think this history is so important to the work we're trying to do here now. We need to show people in this community that we aren't going anywhere—that we have a real investment in making this place good again, and I think gardens are not the answer, perhaps, but can be an important piece of the complex puzzle of recovery. They can help us get to know one another, to build relationships and form community, to not see each other as strangers but as neighbors.”

The woman who had been speaking looked out at the sea of white faces and was again dismayed that her message was not being received by the people for whom it was intended. She understood that most of the people in the room—with the exception of those two African American women—already knew and felt everything she described. “How will we ever get beyond ‘preaching to the choir’ about this stuff?” she later reflected to me. “Why is it always white people from outside the community at these meetings, talking about what’s best for people of color, trying to initiate projects in their neighborhoods? What should we be doing differently? Is it even worth it? Maybe we don’t know what is best for people—even thinking we do sounds so arrogant and wrong-headed; I definitely don’t want to come across or be that way. At the same time, though, I do believe there is enormous potential in food sovereignty—in this notion that communities should be able to determine how they feed themselves and their families; it’s such an important component of self-determination to have agency when it comes to food. Real agency—not false choices between McDonald’s and Burger King, one corporation or another—but choices about how our food is grown, and whether producing and consuming food is beneficial or harmful to the earth, animals or people. There is no one answer to any of those questions, so there should not be just one way as there is now—the way that privileges the power of corporations, which have the ability to influence policy and generate enormous profits while

people get sicker and the planet gets more polluted. There simply has to be another way (or ways, actually).

“But it is so frustrating to have that awareness and want to share it with the people who are so badly impacted by the power of agribusiness, and to feel shunned by them. Why don’t they come to these meetings? Why can’t they show up and join in this fight? I know people are busy and have other battles—a lot of people in this community are trying to raise children by themselves, while holding down more than one job, and still rebuilding their homes and lives after Katrina. But still I feel sometimes like people have just given up and accepted that this is the way things are. I don’t want to give up on people, but I don’t know how better to reach out and engage them and make them care.”

This vignette captures some of the complex sentiments expressed by many of my research participants during my time in New Orleans, and speaks to broader national-scale conversations about who is engaged in food justice work, where, why, how, and on behalf of whom. After the meeting, I spoke with one of the two African American women in attendance, identified as Kendra throughout this dissertation, and asked her to share her thoughts on how she felt the forum had gone (she later published a response, entitled “Racism in Food Policy in New Orleans.”) In that written response, she said “it angered me to see that the majority of participants were white—despite this being a majority-black city—and many of those were not New Orleans natives. In this city where so much of our population was displaced by the levee breach during Hurricane Katrina, and with most of the folks unable to return being low-income and black, this racial imbalance was especially troubling.” To analyze the themes introduced in this vignette, and in Kendra’s response to it, I first review scholarly treatment of how race

intersects with food systems and food justice activism, and then refer to that work to guide my analytical treatment of specific incidents and sentiments observed throughout the course of my research.

5.2 Critical Race Studies and Food Justice Activism

In Chapter Two of this dissertation, I introduce central themes and tenets from Critical Race Studies (CRS), as well as emerging scholarship on how race intersects with food justice activism, and with food systems more broadly. Among the central tenets or convictions of CRS I discuss in Chapter Two are these: (1) racism is an ordinary and everyday reality; (2) white privilege, as part of that reality, serves to maintain structures of order and power that appear to benefit white people, but actually harm society as a whole; (3) despite the fact that “races” are socially constructed and therefore malleable and even arbitrary, racial categorization has had, and continues to have, profound material, social, psychological, economic and political impacts; (4) processes of racial categorization and classification are historically situated, serving primarily to satisfy the labor needs of the dominant society; and (5) race and racial classification mark but do not comprehensively characterize individual experience and identity-formation (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). In this chapter, I draw on those broad themes from CRS, and trace how scholars have worked with them in research on the food system. Specifically, I consider what that literature can suggest about how whiteness and white cultural priorities influence the form and function of food justice work, and whether or how the basic understandings of Critical Race scholars permeate the discourses and practices of food justice practitioners in my research site.

5.2.1 “Whitewashing Race”

According to Brown et al (2003), a majority of white people in 21st century United States have deeply misguided understandings concerning the persistence of racial privilege and racism. They describe three features of many white Americans’ contemporary beliefs about race: First, they think the Civil Rights revolution of the 1960s was successful, and that Civil Rights laws have effectively diminished the unfortunate cultural practices of racism and discrimination. Second, they believe that any persistent racial inequality is attributable to a failure on the part of racial minorities to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by struggles of the Civil Rights era. Third, they feel that the United States is becoming increasingly “color-blind”—meaning that race matters less and less—so there is “little need or justification for affirmative action or other color-conscious policies” (Brown et al, 2003: 2). Furthermore, the authors argue, the main concern of many white Americans with regards to race is “only whether they are, individually, guilty of something called racism” (Brown et al, 2003: 4). This tendency to think of race and racism as individualized and internalized—as “feelings”—rather than as systems or structures inherent to societies represents a central failure in white Americans’ capacity to acknowledge racial realities and to operate effectively within them.

Perpetuating this tendency are cultural and political systems that portray whiteness as an unmarked category, despite its power to shape social relations, space, and individual and collective identity (c.f. Holloway 2000). A collection of geographers have endeavored to attend to the ways in which whiteness marks space in meaningful ways that are often rendered invisible (particularly to people who identify as white). Shaw (2006) traces the emergence of “whiteness” as a subject of research, and examines different ways in which whiteness has been conceptualized. She critiques academic treatments of whiteness that have largely focused on

“processes of empowerment that enable the designation of difference,” but which fail to explicitly problematize “the concept of white/ness itself” (Shaw 2006: 852). Instead, Shaw suggests reorienting the field of whiteness studies away from its Anglo ethnic orientation, thereby “decolonizing” it and enabling “fuller examinations of the many capacities of whiteness” (Shaw 2006: 852). Dwyer and Jones (2000) also argue for a “socio-spatial epistemology of whiteness,” which orients whiteness and whiteness studies within specific contexts that complicate essentialized categories and traits of “whiteness.” Their central argument is that “disclosing the geographically and historically contingent construction of whiteness can certainly help to denaturalize White Identity—the normative and often unspoken category against which all other racialized identities are marked as Other” (Dwyer and Jones 2000: 210). They argue that conceptualizing whiteness as *epistemology*—that is, as a particular way of knowing and valuing social life—rather than as a category or object, forces whiteness (and those bodies who claim it) to confront and attend to the “constitutive process by which all identities are constructed” (Dwyer and Jones 2000: 10).

Similarly, Frankenberg (1993: 4) adds that whiteness “carries with it a set of ways of being in the world, a set of cultural practices often not named as ‘white’ by white folks, but looked upon instead as ‘American’ or ‘normal’.” This normalization of whiteness and white cultural practice enshrouds those who identify as “white” within a space of absolution, where beliefs and practices are not socially coded as “raced” but as pertaining to individuals. Taken together, Dwyer and Jones’ and Frankenberg’s characterizations offer an epistemology that problematizes, denaturalizes, and makes historically and geographically contingent the notion and expression of “whiteness,” while at the same time suggesting that intersections of race with

other systems of difference mark space and the bodies occupying it in ways that are meaningful, relational, and constantly evolving.

5.2.2 Race and the food system

While there has been some attention to the connections between systemic and structural racism and the landscape of contemporary food systems, which, like other manifestations of racialized capitalism (c.f. Omi and Winant 1994) generate spatialized constraints on food access (c.f. McCutcheon 2009), there has been less scholarly attention to the overwhelming whiteness of the movement for food justice, even as that movement “works” to address injustices in communities of color. Julie Guthman (2008), Rachel Slocum (2005), and Alison Alkon (2012) are notable exceptions.⁴ Using her own students’ experiences with “urban food security” service-learning projects in Berkeley, Guthman demonstrates the tendency of food justice advocates to focus on “food itself,” rather than on the structural inequalities that lie at the heart of disparities in food access (and the attendant health and economic consequences). As Guthman argues, “the problematic inheres in the research question itself: namely, that trying to understand how the African Americans who are the target of these efforts appear to reject them in some way replicates the very phenomenon being addressed—the effect of white desire to enroll black people in a particular set of food practices” (Guthman 2008: 433). This fundamentally flawed agenda—however cloaked in real or imagined efforts to effect social change—suggests to Guthman that “a set of discourses and practices that reflect whitened cultural histories are what animate [her] students” (p. 433). In other words, the very desire to change the kinds of food that people of color eat—rather than addressing the historic and contemporary systems that generate the particular landscapes of availability for people of color—is in keeping with the privilege

⁴ Geographers' interest in the connections between race and the food system has increased considerably, as evidenced by a series of sessions and panels at the 2013 meeting of the Association of American Geographers on that topic.

afforded to white people throughout white cultural history. Whether they intend it or not, Guthman argues, her students' efforts "reflect white cultural desires and missionary practices, which might explain [their] lack of resonance in communities of color" (433).

While the food itself—specifically the quantity and quality available in low-income communities of color—may galvanize white people, for people actually residing in those communities, "the paucity of quality food in their communities is seen as evidence of [a] lack of [political and economic] power" (Block et al, 2011). This discrepancy in identifying the problem and its causes reflects, in many ways, the difficulty that inheres in seeking solutions, and may begin to explain why food justice projects aiming to promote social justice or, more specifically, to increase healthy food access for people of color, so often fail to address (or even adequately acknowledge) the underlying systems and structures that helped create the unjust food landscape that characterizes American cities.

In her comparative ethnographic study of two Bay Area farmers' markets, Alkon (2012) highlights the processes that code particular alternative food spaces as either black or white. The North Berkeley Farmers Market features organic-only standards for vendors, has a clientele that is mostly affluent and white, and is situated in the "so-called gourmet ghetto, a striking name given that its high-end boutiques and restaurants are the antithesis of the poverty the word *ghetto* implies" (Alkon 2012: 3). Despite the affluence of the market's clientele and its bourgeoisie ambiance, the market organizers demonstrate a commitment to social justice through programming aiming to increase access to and consumption of healthy foods among people living in low-income communities and communities of color. As Alkon notes, however, this programming "takes place outside the physical boundaries of the market, and not all customers are even aware of it. The North Berkeley Farmers' Market's location in an affluent,

predominantly white neighborhood feeds into the perception by some that local organic food is a luxury good” (Alkon 2012: 4). Alkon compares this “white” farmers’ market with the West Oakland Farmers Market, which “sits beneath the elevated rail and freeway lines that segregate the lower bottoms from the rest of the city” and offers a striking contrast to the association between local food and cultural elitism on display at the Berkeley market. Despite the differences, however, both markets engender “deep personal ties among market participants” and serve as lively neighborhood gathering spaces (Alkon 2012: 5).

Alkon and Norgaard (2009: 289) also develop the concept of food justice activism as that which is explicitly attentive to the “contexts of institutional racism, racial formation, and racialized geographies.” The authors utilize a comparative ethnographic approach to demonstrate how food justice activists in two different contexts utilize environmental justice frameworks to bridge food access concerns with broader socio-structural struggles for justice. This conceptual bridging, they argue, has both theoretical and practical benefits for both environmental justice and sustainable agriculture movements, as they work to offer holistic appraisals and coherent solutions to problems of mutual interest. Most importantly, perhaps, is explicit and central acknowledgment of the “institutionalized nature of denied access to healthy food,” so often lacking from sustainable agriculture initiatives and movements (Alkon and Norgaard 2009: 289). As they argue, “while scholarly critiques of the sustainable agriculture movement call broadly for more attention to social justice issues, the concept of food justice contextualizes disparate access to healthy food within a broader and more historicized framework of institutional racism” (p. 292). While this *potential* is certainly a profound one, in what follows I demonstrate that *who* is claiming the mantle and work of “food justice” matters; the concept of food justice is not, in and of itself, sufficient to adequately challenge landscapes of privilege and access. As Alkon

argues elsewhere, with McCullen (2010), the “prevalent whiteness” of movements for justice and sustainability may in fact impede or constrain their ability to effect meaningful social change, even when white food justice practitioners acknowledge their privilege and position. They observe that such whiteness—manifest as both a “clustering of pale bodies” and as “a set of white cultural practices” shaping space—can, and often does, inhibit the participation of people of color within alternative food systems, and can, therefore, “constrain the ability of those food systems to meaningfully address inequality” (Alkon and McCullen 2010: 938). Finally, Alkon and McCullen identify an “affluent, liberal *habitus* of whiteness” that inflects food justice activism. As Alkon and McCullen (2010: 940-941) explain, “[t]his whiteness is affluent in that it requires comfort with expensive products such as gourmet foods and politically liberal in its regard for environmental concerns and cultural diversity.”

Within this progressive *habitus* is an acknowledgment of white privilege and, at least discursively, a commitment to anti-racist practice, thereby complicating, as above, the socio-spatial manifestation of whiteness. They argue, “it is not only oppressions, but also privileges that merit an intersectional approach that views race as constructed through class and vice versa” (Alkon and McCullen 2010: 941). Such a characterization illuminates my observations of white food justice practitioners in New Orleans, as I describe next.

5.3 Race, Nativity and Food Justice Activism in Post-Katrina New Orleans

Having reviewed other ethnographic characterizations of the ways in which whiteness and white culture permeate food justice projects in other cities, I turn now to my own observations and analysis of the dynamic and quickly evolving landscape of food activism in New Orleans. Due, in part, I argue, to the longstanding racial tensions laid bare following Hurricane Katrina’s devastation (see Chapter Four), traditional narratives of white cultural

habitus inflecting social justice projects are complicated in the unique context of post-disaster New Orleans, where rapid demographic change and a sudden availability of exogenous ideas, funding, and individuals profoundly shaped the process of food justice (and other) work in the city. Broadly speaking, and following Alkon and McCullen’s (2010) characterization of progressive white *habitus*, I found that white food justice practitioners in New Orleans were not oblivious to the ways in which race and racism permeated the landscapes of food access and activism; on the contrary, they expressed considerable concern over the tendency of *most non-profit* work in the city—not just food-related projects—to be organized and run by white people who had come to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. As I discuss below, however, this awareness of tensions around race and nativity fostered some critical discussion among young white progressives, but little in the way of substantive organizational efforts to subvert traditional patterns of racial privilege and dominance. As this chapter’s opening vignette demonstrates, many white food justice practitioners came to New Orleans with passionate beliefs about the potential of urban agriculture to redress the social and economic devastation of Hurricane Katrina. They held these beliefs despite frustration over an inability to connect with neighborhood residents, and even as they sensed there may be something deeply misguided about first initiating projects and *then* seeking input and participation from neighborhood residents.

5.3.1 Whiteness: Conscious and Unconscious Privilege

About a month into my research tenure in New Orleans, I participated in a two-day Undoing Racism workshop facilitated by the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond.⁵

⁵ Later in this chapter, I discuss another workshop I attended, also hosted by PISAB. While the second workshop was organized food justice practitioners, with the intent to connect food access to institutional racism, this first workshop was the standard 2-day “dismantling racism” workshop that PISAB organizes and delivers throughout the country. Later in this chapter, I discuss the “Dismantling Racism in the Food System” workshop in detail.

Workshop attendees were a mixture of community organizers working in New Orleans (some “native” and others not), professionals seeking a more robust experience than typically offered in “diversity trainings,” and a group of (mostly white) college students from Oregon who had come to New Orleans for an “alternative Spring Break” (building houses in the Lower Ninth Ward and learning about racism). At the workshop I met two white women, Laura and Jennifer, who had moved to New Orleans during the previous year to work in community organizing and alternative education. They invited me to join a reading group they had formed with other community organizers, to read and discuss Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I had always wanted to read the book and was eager to see how Freire’s philosophy resonated with these two women who had come to “do” community organizing in New Orleans. I also suspected the book may resonate with me personally, as I had begun to question the ways in which my own white-skin privilege (and my peculiar positioning as “researcher”—simultaneously inside and outside the field of study) was perhaps inadvertently reinforcing entrenched power relations.

The *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Reading Group consisted of between five and ten young, white progressives who had been in New Orleans for anywhere from a few weeks to a few years. One was a “native New Orleanian,” but the rest had come from throughout the United States to work in non-profit organizations or to teach the city’s recovering school system. While just Laura and Jennifer had recently participated in an Undoing Racism workshop, all members of the reading group were evidently accustomed to speaking about white privilege, and immediately drew connections between Freire’s discussion of community work and the workshop’s discussion of internalized racial oppression. During our reading group meetings, we all came to question and consider the effect, and effectiveness (or harm) of ‘trying to work alongside the

oppressed.’ We challenged ourselves and one another by critically considering whether there is a role for each of us, as individuals and members of groups with specific and overlapping privileges, in struggles against multiple oppressions. We understood that, as Freire would have it, our work should be primarily in the category of support, but also in deep self-reflection. It struck me, and others in the reading group as I later learned, as ironic to situate our conversations precisely within an entirely white space: a vegan potluck comprised of produce earned through a few volunteer shifts at Hollygrove Market and Farm, a back porch strung with white lights, a large vegetable garden in the backyard in this gentrifying neighborhood: wasn’t this *scene* precisely the problem we were critiquing in our discussion of Freire’s *Pedagogy*? We acknowledged the eloquence and attendant discomfort of Freire’s argument that “washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.” How, then, might Freire judge *us*? The simultaneous desire to “do and be good” while struggling to confront our own white privilege resonated with Alkon and McCullen’s (2010) description of the liberal *habitus* of whiteness that pervades food justice work.

Having entered the food activist network in New Orleans as both a researcher and a participant, I learned quite quickly that the social network connecting people interested in and working within “the food movement” was a tightly woven web with many overlapping connections. While volunteering at Hollygrove Market and Farm, I came to know (and in some cases became good friends) with other market volunteers. One woman, Mia, had arrived in New Orleans just a month or so before I had, in December of 2011, with an important difference being that she had ridden her bicycle across the country, from Portland, Oregon to New Orleans, hauling a cello the distance. Mia and I met during a volunteer shift at HMF, at the end of which

she invited me to a weekly Shabbat potluck at her house the following Friday. I eagerly accepted, both out of a desire to meet more like-minded folks, and also because I sensed I was being drawn into a community of progressive “transplants” that were unexpectedly becoming a primary focus of my research, at the same time that I was becoming one of them. At the Shabbat, I was surprised to see Laura and Jennifer, whom I had met at the Undoing Racism workshop, and who had invited me to join the Freire reading group. They also knew Mia through volunteering at HMF, and they shared several mutual friends who were also active with various food justice organizations throughout the city. At the Shabbat, like in many other social settings, I was asked to describe what I was doing in New Orleans, and what my research was all about. Typically, I responded to this question by saying that I was researching “food justice activism” in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. When I offered this response at the Shabbat, Laura challenged me somewhat by responding, “Activists? Are there activists here?” I was a little surprised by this response, because I assumed Laura considered herself to be an activist. She explained, however, that her activism in New Orleans was focused on immigrant and labor rights; she felt strongly that what I described as “food justice” was a far cry from true activism.

Laura was of the opinion that most of what gets called activism—mostly nonprofit work in New Orleans (and elsewhere)—is not activism at all, because it doesn’t do anything to challenge the structures that make their nonprofit work seem necessary in the first place. She argued that nonprofit work masquerading as “activism” or “organizing” is not just a farce; it is also potentially very destructive for a few reasons. First, it often actually buttresses systems of injustice and inequality by reinforcing dominant power structures (and the state/corporate/white hegemony that characterizes them). Secondly, it allows people to think they’re “doing good,” to think they’re “effecting change” through their meaningful nonprofit work. This delusion distracts

socially-conscious people, who might otherwise be interested in dismantling “The System” from endeavoring to do so. Instead of action or activism, most nonprofit work leads to band-aids, window-dressing, or whatever your chosen metaphor for outcomes that may succeed at generating attention from funders but don’t actually address the root causes of the problem.

Laura and Jennifer were both quite involved with immigrant rights organizations in New Orleans, and helped to organize and support a May Day rally and march in support of undocumented laborers. While this sort of mobilization was feasible and visible in support of labor issues and immigrant rights, Laura expressed frustration and concern that “food activism” wasn’t actually happening—that the sorts of projects we were seeing (and, in many cases, supporting either with our dollar or our labor) were really more about meeting the needs of the so-called “activists” rather than addressing underlying injustices. Laura’s critique resonated with my own observation, articulated by Alkon and McCullen as an “affluent, liberal *habitus* of whiteness” that simultaneously embraced anti-racist practice but still could not resist constructing project-scale solutions to what are discursively understood to be systemic problems.

This internalized critique of whiteness and its influence on food justice organizing was articulated by others “within the movement,” as well. Karlina, a white woman who ran a successful non-profit urban farm that utilized agriculture as a training and economic development tool for a diverse group of youth, recognized the significance of race in both her personal and organizational identity and work. The farm, a collaboration of Tulane University and several area non-profits, has a mission to empower young people through the meaningful work of growing food; high-school students from several area high schools are hired to work on the farm after school and to attend classes related to agriculture, ecology, and even social justice. Having lived in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina granted Karlina a certain amount of

“street-cred” with local residents not easily earned by those who had arrived since the storm. While Karlina was not a native New Orleanian, her long tenure in the city, spanning the epochs before and after the storm, enabled her to reflect on the impact of “other” newly arrived white folks who were less familiar with the city’s specific racial geographies. She commented to me, “I think people underestimate the extent to which everyone subtly perceives things—space in the city—as either a black space or a white space. Like bars. It's like, oh, that's a black person's bar, or that's a white person's bar, and it doesn't mean there's not white people in the black person's bar or vice versa, but it's tacitly understood that it's one or the other people's space. And that's—it's not, like there are places that totally blur that line, but I could name for you on one hand what those spaces are, because they're rare.”

This general failure on the part of white newcomers to the city to recognize the ways in which spaces are racially coded has had significant impacts on the form and function of nonprofit work since Hurricane Katrina. Despite acknowledging this tension herself, Karlina admitted that her own organization suffered from the very structural constraints she was critiquing: “We are two white leaders of an organization that serves primarily African American youth, so it's not like we have this figured out, but we did set at the beginning this intention to create an organization...that everyone feels like they can connect to.” Central to living out that intention was a “commitment to diversity,” which meant “taking the time that it will take to invest in people that don't have all the access to education...” Karlina realized that she could “staff this organization with twenty white interns, you know? And not even have to pay them. A lot of my work is saying 'no.' Saying, ‘I’m sorry, we're holding that space for someone that doesn't have the, even necessarily the understanding that they could just call me up, and be like ‘Can I get an internship with you?’”

While Karlina and the other co-executive director of her organization expressed a commitment to diversity, and to developing a Board of Directors that is half people of color, their current configuration (some African American staff and partners but otherwise entirely white leadership) suggests that such diversity was not a preemptive concern in the development of the organization. Karlina articulated clearly why diversifying the board was important for the success of her organization and especially for the youth it was intended to benefit, stating that “our goal is to have 50% people of color on our board, because we recognize that we don't have the diversity on our staff, particularly in our leadership—it's two white people running the organization. We don't bring the diversity in terms of leadership that we feel is in keeping with our mission. What we want to do is develop a board that has half people of color, and I think that will be a great opportunity for us to get more checks and balances in terms of how that group feels that we're doing towards reaching this goal.” While Karlina's goals are certainly laudable, her efforts to diversify the board *after* establishing her organization's 501(c)(3) status and operating as a full non-profit have in fact alienated her organization from some prominent African American activists in New Orleans, who perceive the organization's white leadership as endemic to broader racial tensions throughout the city, as I explain below.

5.3.2 Inter-organizational and Inter-racial Dynamics

The racial constitution of particular organizations within the city also seems to have a strong influence on how successfully those organizations can collaborate towards mutually sought after goals, and even how they interpret and evaluate one another's work. A profound example of this came in an interview with Adrien, an African-American man and a native New Orleanian, who runs a network of CSA-style urban gardens. He expressed resentment toward the many “newcomers” who were now participating in the city's “food justice” movement, and

spoke particularly passionately about the educational farm project run by Karlina's organization. While the organization recruits and hires student workers from a diversity of racial and economic backgrounds, Adrien saw the farm as a place where Black kids went to work in a field while a white man and woman (the co-directors of the project) looked on: "Picture this," Adrien says to me, "There's this farm in [a public park]. A bus full of high school baseball players drives by the farm on the way to the baseball field. What do they see? A white woman in a big hat, sitting and watching over a field of young black men, working. Do you see? Do you see why that makes my heart bleed?" In my own observations, Karlina (as the "white woman in a big hat") participated in the farm labor alongside the youth, who were a racially diverse group of high-school aged boys and girls. That Adrien's powerful perception of Karlina's organization was factually inaccurate is, arguably, beside the point; his visceral sense that the organization—as one conjured up and directed by white people and enrolling primarily youth of color—exacerbated structural inequalities, while Karlina and her co-executive director created the organization with the explicit goal to *empower* youth of color, illuminates the deep and complicated ways in which internalized racial oppression inflects even (and especially, in some cases) those projects that explicitly aim to challenge such oppression.

Another example of the disconnect between white food activists in the city and the Latinos and African Americans, who are most often the victims of food injustice, emerged in a conversation with Evelia, the director of the Latino Farmers' Cooperative. She told me of a time in her organization's recent past when she was discussing the issue of accessing new land for community gardening with a young white male intern. The intern suggested that community gardens could be set up in the "neutral grounds"—the wide medians that separate opposing directions of traffic on the city's larger roadways. Upon hearing this suggestion, Evelia tried to

explain to the young man that it simply was not an option for people of color to garden in highway medians. Never mind any of the legal or other barriers that might confront white people of means; there was no possibility whatsoever that people of color would expose themselves to the public scrutiny and harsh words they would surely receive if they were to attempt to garden in such a visible space. She explained that as Latinos, “we want to be hidden.” The desire for anonymity (or at least concealment) was not something to which the white intern could personally relate; it had not occurred to him either that growing food in visible spaces did not necessarily carry the “hip” or even subversive caché for people of color it had for many white people.

5.3.3 Spatial Memory

Related to the racial disconnect in how food projects operate are disparate perceptions and memories of particular spaces. As indicated in the vignette that opened this chapter, a central challenge of Hollygrove Market and Farm has been to shake the perception among neighborhood residents that the market is a primarily “white space.” In an interview with Gerald, an African American man who participates at HMF as both a community gardener and a vendor, he explained that the land now occupied by HMF sat adjacent to a segregated park during the Jim Crow era.

“That park goes back of course to the days of segregation, and that park was more or less considered a white park. During the time of segregation, blacks didn’t go into that park. It was the law of the land, segregation was... When integration came about, the powers that be took over that park, and the powers that be still run the park, of course. People are somewhat conditioned to things. During segregation they were conditioned not to go into that park. And I think after all of these years have passed, it’s not such a strange phenomenon [that the area remains relatively segregated], because conditioning remains in place with a lot of folks even today... That park has become more or less identified with this place [HMF] as far as the community is concerned. And therefore, there’s not much use as far as minorities go.”

While the white leadership of HMF was aware of the segregated history of the neighborhood, they were less inclined to connect spatial patterns from the past with contemporary attitudes and manifestations of *de facto* segregation. The fact that historic patterns of racial segregation seem to be repeating themselves is greeted with a combined sense of befuddlement and inevitability. Interestingly, however, the “coding” of HMF as a “white space” seems to have intensified, not diminished, over time. When the market and farm had their groundbreaking in 2008, they hosted a groundbreaking party that attracted tremendous support and participation from neighborhood residents. In an interview with Sophia, who had worked as a community organizer for both HMF and the New Orleans Food and Farm Network, she described that groundbreaking ceremony as one filled with hope and gratitude on the part of neighborhood residents. She characterized the community organizing that accompanied the establishment of HMF as “us reaching out to people who didn’t know that they wanted something,” but argued that community support for the project was initially quite strong and has faded over time for a variety of reasons. Central among these is the organization’s increasing focus on financial viability, which I discuss below. But also important is the perception that the market and farm is a “white space” identifiable by the obvious presence of white bodies, but also by the influence of white cultural *habitus* (Alkon and McCullen 2010) and by spatial memories of the past.

For example, Kendra, an African American woman active with the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition, expressed her frustration at being one of only two people of color at the “public forum” presented in this chapter’s opening vignette. Such lack of representation from people of color—particularly those living in the Hollygrove neighborhood—was a sad commentary on the failure of HMF to resonate with the local community. Noting the near-

complete racial homogeneity of the gathered group, despite its geographic situation in a neighborhood that was over 90% African American, Kendra questioned how word was spread about the forum, and who was invited to the initial planning and creation of this group. She argued that, while the near-total whiteness of the meeting wasn't intentional—and may in fact have been a major disappointment for white organizers, “no policy meeting should take place without proper representation from the people who will be most affected.”

Similarly, I later asked Evelia from the Latino Farmers' Cooperative why she had chosen not to attend the public forum at HMF. In her characteristically blunt way of speaking, Evelia reiterated her perception that white food justice advocates were largely alienated from the communities they intended to serve. She said this was evident, to her, in the physical space of HMF. “Look at Hollygrove,” she says, “that fancy building, and that beautiful little farm. People in the neighborhood know that wasn't meant for them. You can't just go to people later on and say, ‘Oh, you are welcome to come in here too!’ and expect them to show up!”

5.3.4 “*Mission Creep*”

The mission of Hollygrove Market and Farm, as articulated in its founding documents and maintained to this day, is “to increase availability of fresh produce to Hollygrove, surrounding under-served neighborhoods, and all of New Orleans while promoting sustainability through support of local farmers and the local economy as well as acting as a demonstration site for environmentally sustainable practices” (Hollygrove Market and Farm). I spoke to several staff members and volunteers about this mission and how it relates to the primary work of the LLC currently. Individuals I interviewed seemed to express a consensus belief that the mission

of the organization had “evolved” somewhat (although its public articulation remained unchanged until 2013), and that this evolution was due in part to challenges related to race.⁶

Vanessa, a staff member at HMF, said the greatest impact for the local neighborhood had been in providing access to free community garden spaces. Otherwise, she felt that HMF leadership had “had a challenging time actually affecting the Hollygrove residents and getting them to come in and gain more access to [the market].” She also felt the organization had done a good job serving as a demonstration site for environmentally sustainable practices, by emphasizing local agriculture, teaching customers about composting and other sustainable practices, and increasing use of recycled materials in the market. A partnership with an emerging hydro- and aeroponics company led to the development of a large demonstration space for growing plants without the use of soil; the produce harvested from the system are sold in the market, and the system itself advances HMF’s role as a demonstration site for sustainable or innovative agricultural practices. Ironically, however, the space-age appearance and prominent placement of the aeroponic towers may serve to further alienate the neighborhood residents who were intended to be the primary beneficiaries of the market and farm in the first place.

In many ways, the challenges HMF has faced is meeting the social justice and food access goals that initially justified its existence (to funders, to the neighborhood, and to the community partners that established the LLC) are the challenges confronted by many non-profit organizations. In an effort to remain sufficiently financially viable to meet the goals laid out in their mission statement, HMF had to invest in economic development by broadening their market component and increasing sales to people of means (typically white people from outside the neighborhood). The market expanded its operations from two to five days per week, with a

⁶ As of September 2013, the mission of HMF, as stated on its website, has officially evolved to “Hollygrove Market and Farm exists to increase access of fresh, local product to residents of New Orleans” (www.hollygrovemarket.com).

steady stream of customers eagerly embracing the market's ready provision of fresh local produce, meat, eggs, dairy, breads and other items. However, as the market has attracted more customers, and thus become more financially viable, it has done so at the expense of the neighborhood residents it was initially intended to serve. As Alkon and McCullen (2010) note, one of the ways in which a "white space" becomes coded as such is through the dominant presence of white bodies in that space. In privileging the economic imperative in an effort to sustain a social one, HMF inadvertently drove away the people they had hoped to help. Read even more cynically, the eventual economic success of the market depended first upon exploitation of the surrounding neighborhood, whose demonstrable need for "assistance" and "food desert" status helped HMF to secure the institutional funding and support it needed to open in the first place.

One response to the observation that current practices don't match the original mission of the organization has been to claim a process of "evolution" within the organization. Steve, one of the founders of HMF, conceded; "Certainly now our mission has evolved. We realized—we're really supporting these local farms. Small-scale rural farmers, and a growing number of urban farmers. So our mission is evolving to support small farms." Despite this "evolution," the official mission statement remained unchanged until 2013. Others affiliated with HMF do not appear quite as comfortable dismissing the discrepancy between mission and praxis. John, a full-time staff and board member of HMF suggested that the mission needs to be explicitly changed to reflect the way HMF actually works. "It [the mission] can't be about helping people by allowing them to shop in our market. People [in the neighborhood] get that. They don't see that as a community mission; they see it as advertising. If our goal is to support local farmers, that's great. But it's different to talk about helping the neighborhood."

Evelia, from the Latino Farmers' Cooperative, suggested a more radical diagnosis to the problem of mission creep.

“In my opinion, in general, not just talking about farmers market and initiatives like that that are created to assist people of color and food justice issues and end up serving the rich and famous so that they can eat more and more healthy—it is created by white educated people that even though they feel bad about the others, at the end of the day they're going to do what makes them happy, and what they know how to do. Self-interest. I mean, I know they don't see it, and they don't want to see it. It's nice to talk about, 'Oh yeah, we want to see how we can serve the community, but I'm not willing to do this, I'm not willing to do that.' Okay, if you really want to [help], you can't continue serving white people on Saturday morning. You have to stop it.”

While Evelia's rhetoric may have come across as harsh to many of the committed staff at HMF, the staff's awareness of “mission creep” and of racial tensions more broadly was evident in my conversations with and observations of them. In fact, I argue that an implicit understanding of entrenched power imbalances throughout the city's rebuilding effort helped facilitate conversations that liberal white activists may evade in other geographic contexts. Because the situation of (post-Katrina) New Orleans shone a harsh light on racial and spatial inequality, white progressives could not help but consider their positionality and privilege. While much of this consideration happened internally, or in small groups like the Freire reading group, I was also fortunate to participate in an effort to make explicit connections between race, racism, and food justice activism, through a 2-day “Undoing Racism in the Food System” workshop. In the final section of this chapter, I offer a detailed vignette of the workshop, revisiting themes from throughout the chapter and offering critical responses to them.

5.4 Undoing Racism in the Food System Workshop

During the summer of 2012, thirty-seven food justice practitioners from five organizations (the New Orleans Food and Farm Network, the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition, Common Ground, the Grow Dat Youth Farm, and Hollygrove Market and Farm)

partnered with the New Orleans-based People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB) to conduct a two-day workshop on the topic “Undoing Racism in the Food System.” PISAB is known nationally for their powerful two-and-a-half day workshops, which expose both white participants and those of color to the systems and institutions that created and continue to foster reified racialized access to resources and opportunities. After considerable analysis of both historical processes and contemporary conditions, facilitators share PISAB’s “official” stance on race and racism: racism is defined as *race prejudice plus power* and it persists because of the power it affords to people who identify as white. In what follows, I reflect on the workshop, to consider what PISAB’s epistemological framing and the experience of workshop attendees reveal about how food justice work is situated and enacted in New Orleans.

The idea for the workshop emerged through conversations between Kendra, who had spearheaded the Lower Ninth Ward Food Planning process (described in Chapter 6), and board members of the New Orleans Food and Farm Network. For Kendra, “the food system” is just like any other institution or system in the United States; because of her personal and intellectual understanding of this country’s history of “racial formation” (Omi and Winant 1994), Kendra identified key injustices within the food system as racially-based. Specifically, she and other residents of the Lower Ninth Ward saw dismantling racism as a prerequisite to increasing fresh food access within the Lower Ninth Ward and other similar communities of color. Kendra had worked with NOFFN in the past, and knew that the organization wanted to learn how to critically confront and engage with the historic and contemporary ways in which race and racism constrain food access (and, relatedly and importantly, food activism).

Kendra explained to me why she approached NOFFN about organizing the workshop, and what she hoped it would accomplish:

“We needed to have a conversation [about racism], you know. So I started talking with NOFFN about doing an Undoing Racism in the Food System Workshop, because I know it was something that they were concerned about too. In the work that they do, I knew that they did not want to be an organization who, like a lot of urban agriculture organizations around the country that work in predominantly African American neighborhoods, it seems like they’re generally led by white people and people who are not from the area. And I knew that they did not—at least they say that they don’t want that... So I approached them about us doing it together. I felt like it was really integral to our [Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition] process in creating a food action plan, because we need to have a clear understanding of why things are the way they are to begin with. And just kinda be on the same page about that. And I wanted us to approach creating a food action plan through the lens of, how do I put this? Not to be in a position of being victims all the time, of, you know ‘racism has done this to us,’ but just to be aware... And, because food is like racism—it’s something that’s all around us to the point where we don’t really think about it. [I wanted the workshop to address] how a system that’s founded on white supremacist racism has affected what we see today in our food system in the Lower Ninth Ward.”

Specifically, Kendra and other residents of the Lower Ninth Ward were eager to engage in critical and creative dialogue about the many ways in which race and racism had influenced rebuilding and nonprofit work in the city since Hurricane Katrina. Kendra’s sentiments about non-profit organizations suggest a general distrust on the part of many local people towards “outsiders” who played such a large part in shaping the re-development effort.

“It really sickens me, that organizations like—and I haven’t read any of NOFFN’s grant proposals, so I can’t speak factually about that—but...grant proposals generally use demographic information, they generally paint a story of why they’re needed, why their organizations are needed. So I’m just tired of these organizations writing grants to help poor black people, and black people are not leading them, black people—especially poor black people—are not the ones who are at the forefront of these. ... I think they need to look at, you know, ‘How am I getting the word out?’ And the first thing they’ll say is, ‘We just hire the best people.’ Well, look at that, analyze: Who is the pool of people? How are you reaching them? What criteria are you using? There are so many different things. You know, NOFFN never offered me a job; I’m not saying it’s because they’re racist, but I’m saying...they just have to analyze themselves.”

Kendra's experience and frustration with exogenously-led rebuilding efforts dovetails with a central feature of PISAB's approach to facilitating workshops on dismantling racism. The workshop began with one of the facilitators, Sean, proclaiming, "before you can empower somebody, you need to know how they became disempowered." PISAB's trainings are premised on this argument, and situated within a context that critiques much community organizing work as being insufficiently attentive to structural inequalities in practice. Despite discursive references to systemic or structural inequalities, the actual programming of non-profit organizations tends to be geared towards fixing individuals and their behaviors (for example, their eating habits). Therefore, PISAB's workshop teaches, there is a significant difference between the language we use as community organizers and the concrete effects we have on our communities. Additionally, as community organizers or people who work for non-profits, we shouldn't ignore that we make money off poor people. That is, non-profits employ people to fight poverty (or manifestations of it, more precisely); therefore, the very existence of poverty actually benefits the people who are working to "fight it." This tension requires that community organizers/organizations and non-profits conduct a power analysis, to critically examine who has power within an organization, and why. Conducting a power analysis entails asking and addressing the following questions: What is the mission statement of the organization, and who wrote it? For whom is that mission statement written? How much does it rely upon provocative language that can help the organization to get money from funders? Does the mission statement correspond with the actual work of the organization? Does it elide or evade the "real issue" or underlying problem(s)?

To demonstrate the need for more and greater power analyses among non-profit organization leadership, the PISAB facilitators asked workshop participants to collaboratively

characterize “poor communities everywhere” according to what they have and what they lack. Participants were then asked to consider all of the systems and institutions that have the power to shape poor communities (Figure 5.1).

Before even speaking about race, this exercise demonstrated the pervasive and predictable outcomes of structural disinvestment in “poor communities,” which go by many names: “ghetto,” “barrio,” “minority area,” “target area,” even the politically-correct but usually euphemistic “community of color.” By generating a portrait of a generic “poor community,” workshop attendees were able to identify the multiple and overlapping systems that both create and constrain “typical” poor communities in urban areas of the United States. Among the systems and institutions the group identified as having particularly powerful impact on the form, function, and way of life of poor communities were housing, criminal justice, education, banking and lending, agriculture and food, public health, immigration, taxation, immigration, nonprofit, religion, media, transportation, government, retail and corporations, military, insurance, emergency management, and philanthropy (a long list, to be sure, but likely not exhaustive). PISAB facilitators asked workshop attendees to consider how can each of these systems (can or does) serve as a foot of oppression against poor people. Or, as one facilitator phrased it, how could the system in question “kick oppressed people in the ass”? These systems, of course are all interconnected; when prompted to devise a list of all of the ways in which the education system may facilitate the oppression of poor people, we discovered how closely tied that system is with the criminal justice and housing systems, among others. It becomes very easy to see how oppression is reinforced through these interlocking systems.

- Foundations are given a tax shelter, and poor people serve as a crutch; history of foundations—why do certain foundations have so much money to begin with?
- 501(c)(3) designation developed in 1954 after *Brown v. Board* to quiet dissension among oppressed peoples
- NGOs are often too busy filling their own needs, creating programs, etc., to fix the system
- Funding opportunities/grants/foundations often change the mission of the organization
- Acquiring money requires technical expertise in grant-writing/cultural connection to foundations; successful NGOs often get that way because of “who they know”
- Network of nonprofits can be confusing to people; often there are many different organizations with very similar missions; this can confuse people and drive them away.

Again, the group acknowledged this list was not meant to be comprehensive, but it demonstrates an awareness of the many harms that can (and often do) accompany non-profit work, even that which is initially envisioned as “empowering” or “emancipatory.” The discussion of interlocking systems of oppression served to situate subsequent conversations revealing the prominence of racism as the “biggest foot of oppression.” Like the “other Big Foot,” racism is often portrayed as a shadowy character that may be hard to see, and which many people don’t believe exists. As Lucy, one of the PISAB facilitators argued metaphorically, we “know that Big Foot (theoretically) exists because of the prints it leaves. The same is true of racism. While many people may claim racism is ‘no longer a problem,’ its material and psychic effects are evident everywhere.” Such an understanding of racism as a pervasive yet often-overlooked contributor to the problems non-profits endeavored to “treat” elicited considerable response from workshop attendees. One white woman, who serves on the board of NOFFN but is also involved in labor and legal rights struggles within the Latino community, commented that thinking about racism as (perhaps the most vicious) among many systems that constrain food access helped her to move away from thinking about solving access problems with (just) “actual food”:

“As we were talking and we made this list [about how the education system could be a foot of oppression], the first thing I thought about with food and the education system was actual food. That kids aren’t eating breakfast before they go to school...or, you

know, there's no gardens in schools, we don't teach kids how to grow food in school, we don't teach them the value of recipes from their grandmothers, stuff like that. So that's the first place I went. But then, I realized that really when we talk about food and education, it's the deeper things, the more systemic things that are harder to put our minds around, that gets taught or not taught. Like these values of self-determination and autonomy and believing that your body is a vessel that deserves to be nourished with wholesome food. Believing that your humanity is so highly valued that you deserve to be healthy, to have fresh healthy food at your corner stores, that you deserve to have money to provide for your families... A lot of the activism around food and education is about getting healthy food into schools but really the deeper part of the work are these more subtle values of what's being taught or not taught. There's poison on a food level, but there's poison in the curriculum as well."

This evolution in thinking relies upon critical understanding of systemic inequalities and their manifestation and perpetuation through racism and what PISAB facilitators described as "internalized racial oppression." Facilitators defined internalized racial oppression as "accepting and acting out the definition of self—giving in to a race construct—where your race has been deemed the inferior race. You begin to accept the term 'minority.'" People of color were asked to provide some examples of internalized racial oppression they see manifest in their daily lives. One black female responded by saying "I don't know how to describe it, but I think it just comes from growing up as a person of color, you are constantly reminded of it, not just from the outside world, but your parents too. Like, every time I got bad grades, I got the 'You are black. You are female' speech. 'You are poor. You got the triple trifecta! You can't be stupid, too!' You get it from when you're little all the way up, and you never forget it."

Another black female, a guidance counselor at a local high school, offered a story of one of her students to demonstrate the pervasive negative impact of internalized racial oppression. "I had a conversation the other day with a kid who is 16 years old, he was taking an English class, and he felt like the teacher didn't like him, so he stopped doing his work. Started having an attitude in class. And it wasn't until he had a parent-teacher conference that he found out that his teacher praised him for his capabilities...that he understood how much he had hurt himself and

how much he was reacting not to who he was but to what *he thought* she thought of him.” The student had internalized a sense of inferiority projected upon him by the outside world, despite getting direct praise and encouragement from those immediately surrounding him. Such is the power of internalized racial oppression.

Kendra suggested “black people who will not hire other black people” as another example of internalized racial inferiority from her community garden projects in the Lower Ninth Ward. “People say, for instance, related specifically to the garden work, volunteer groups go here and there, and I’ve had people ask me specifically if volunteer groups were white or black, and they think—and this is black people—that if a group is black, they think they’re going to be lazy, they’re not going to do good work, and they’re happy if it’s a white group because they think that they’re going to be hard-working.” That internalized stereotypes such as these influenced the work of food justice and other organizations was universally understood. How to deal with and move beyond them was a more complicated matter.

Daryl, one of the PISAB facilitators, addressed the group, asking “Who works with black folks in this room?” Everyone raised their hands. Daryl continued, “Since you do, what is your strategy for dealing with internalized racial inferiority, as you try to organize your community? What is your plan?” The white people in the room remained silent. Kendra offered a response, “What we’re doing *is* in response to internalized racial inferiority. Self-determination is about defining for ourselves what it is that we want for our community.”

Daryl pressed Kendra, and the rest of the group, on the issue:

“You can come strong and say, ‘we’re doing this because it sounds good’ but what does that really mean as you organize your community? Because everybody in the black community is suffering from this self-hate. And you can do all the food growing and everything else in your community...but we got to know it’s a serious battle...These structures [we discussed] don’t only create injustice in food and health, and housing, but also create a sickness in us that we’ve never been treated for. ...So we need to get serious

about the work we're doing...If you don't have a strategy and a plan with all your food programs and all your other work than it's nice that you got that going on, but it has to get the sickness out of us, and you have to be serious about that."

It became increasingly clear that throughout the course of the workshop that "food growing" and other projects aimed at "empowering" people have a lot of work to do before they can speak seriously about changing the deeply entrenched systems that constrain food access and food activism.

A central component of this work is clarifying and understanding the terminology and manifestation of racism. PISAB facilitators Lucy and Daryl ask the group to define racism. "Treating without respect." "Power over someone." "Discrimination based on phenotype." The list goes on. Daryl challenges us: these definitions lack specificity; they don't give us the tools we need to dismantle racism, and thus allow the arrangement (racism) to keep working. Lucy shares a definition of racism from the Merriam Webster dictionary.

"It says, 'racism: having to do with segregation, discrimination, etc.' Et cetera! Merriam Webster! They're the ones who *wrote* the dictionary. What a powerful tool. The dictionary is supposed to be about making things clear for us, and it says 'et cetera' on something as big and important, as fundamental to our society as racism. I don't think that's unrelated to our list being all over the place. I don't think that's accidental. In here, we're all over the place on what racism is, because as a society, we don't put any value or focus on defining what racism is."

In response to this lack of specificity, Lucy offers PISAB's definition of racism as "race prejudice + power." We break apart that definition further.

"What is prejudice?"

"Pre-judgment," literally. And "what is race?" Again, the group suggests a laundry list of responses: skin color, background, head circumference, nationality and geography, ethnicity, social construct, culture, DNA, a classification system. Because of the scientific variability of so many of these responses, we determine that most popular definitions of race don't hold up. We

settle on race as a social construct with material implications and real concrete effects; Lucy reminds us that as a social construct, we need to remember that race was constructed *by* specific people with specific purposes. We begin to trace that history of race construction. Lucy tells us about the “original races” as determined by Europeans: “Negroid, Mongoloid, Caucasoid, Austroloid.” Each of these, except Negroid, which came from the Spanish word for “black,” is tied to a geographic space; Negroid is denied this connection to place, and thus dehumanized in the name of empire. Following this discussion, Lucy offers PISAB’s definition of race: “a specious classification of human beings, invented by Europeans—those people who will come to be called white—establishing themselves as the height of human achievement, for the purpose of establishing and maintaining privilege and power.” We further discuss the concept of power, describing it as “the legitimate access to systems and institutions that is sanctioned by the state.” Power means controlling the way laws are written, for whom, and who has access to benefits and protection.

We discuss the history of racial classification in the U.S. Lucy points out that the United States was the first country in the world to *legalize* racial categorization. The entire notion of “legal citizenship” is based on race. (Later, other countries followed this lead, most famously South Africa, Australia, and Nazi Germany). We discuss a series of legal affirmative action programs for whites, hundreds of years of laws to benefit white people. Lucy reminds us of the empty promise of “forty acres and a mule,” denied to freed slaves and the “fifty acres, a bushel of corn and a musket” that were actually granted to freed European indentured servants.

“You all are talking about land in here, right? Food justice and food sovereignty? So those fifty acres—all that land given away to European indentured servants...How about the Homestead Act? How was that an affirmative action law for white people?”

Kendra responded by saying, “Only white people could get land through that. Probably just white men.”

“Right,” Lucy agreed. “And their descendants have inherited all that land—it’s been a wealth-building program for white families. Other programs? What about the G.I. Bill? And the Social Security Act?...But domestic and agricultural workers were excluded from all social security reforms. That was another massive affirmative action program for white people...That’s what I mean by power—all those affirmative action programs, that don’t ever get mentioned as such...Even though the history of this country is the history of special benefits for white people, at the expense of people of color. So all white people have power, which is legitimate access to systems and institutions, sanctioned by the state...Within the white community, we don’t have the same amount of power...but as a racial group, compared to people of color, all white people have power, in a race-based system.”

The process of naturalizing and legitimizing white power and supremacy, Lucy explained, has contributed historically to the development of internalized racial superiority among white people. Lucy defined “Internalized Racial Superiority” as a multi-generational process by which people identifying as white receive, act out, legitimize, and invisibilize their unearned privileges and power. This process manifests often as arrogance and ethnocentrism, missionizing tendencies, and paternalism. The completeness of internalized racial superiority leads to white people being “like fish in water,” Lucy analogized. “We don’t even know we’re wet.” Capitalism further defines white culture, and replaces “culture” with ideals of individualism, competition, and wealth. We celebrate holidays of conquest (Columbus Day), and internalize a desire for perfection and a fear of failure. This is what leads a group of white people to get together and spend years writing a mission statement, only to later become frustrated that

they “can’t organize the people we want to help. So instead, we’ll just go ahead and do it for them.” This is usually a function of not being able to wait for people who have been systematically *disempowered* to claim their right for self-determination. By stepping in prematurely and modeling community organizing around white cultural values, Lucy explained, we exacerbate the very systems of privilege we may have sought to disrupt by organizing in the first place.

These explanations of race, race-prejudice and power led to the conclusion that, because of their relationship to power: people of color cannot be racist, and white people cannot be *not* racist. Whether white people accept it or not, they inherit power and privilege, and even internalized prejudice, that imbues them with racism. White people can choose to be anti-racist; however, this first requires acknowledgment of inherited privilege and racism.

As Daryl explained it, “When we say white people are racists, we’re not calling them bigots. We say they got unearned privilege. That means to us that white people, even poor white people, don’t get harassed by the police as much as a black person. Any black person, any person of color in this room, can be a big-time organizer, can be a community worker, but they gotta think about their children, they gotta be wondering what’s going on with their children right now. ... Most white parents don’t have to worry about that piece. We’re talking about as a collective. And people of color got to understand that difference. Because you cannot work in a multi-racial setting, holding hands saying we’re going to collaborate together, if you don’t understand the difference... White people in a black community can be more harm than good; you can be taking away a lot of life when you should be reaching out to your own family, your own community [and teaching them about racism and white privilege]”

Because race and racism have been mystified to both white people and people of color, the notion that “all white people are racist,” and that people of color *cannot* be racist because they lack legitimate power within a system of white supremacy stirred some discomfort within workshop participants, although no one contested PISAB’s framing outright. Despite the evident discomfort, arriving at a mutually-agreed-upon definition for racism helped the group to segue into the final phase of the workshop: discussing how the workshop’s insights could help frame anti-racist food justice activism in New Orleans in the future. The discussion, as may be expected, generated more questions than answers. Among these were:

1. How do we get more community members involved in anti-racist food justice work?
2. How do we integrate and apply a power analysis into our work in the food system?
3. How do we educate without being disrespectful? What is the message and who are the messengers?
4. How can black men be safe in communities?
5. How do white people work with other white people?
6. How can black groups strengthen themselves and work with white groups? How can white people be a part of that?
7. How do you build an anti-racist organization?

The group had time only to discuss the first question in any depth, and generally concluded that community organizing takes significantly more time and effort than traditional non-profits have the energy or resources to dedicate. Exploring the pervasiveness of internalized racial oppression had revealed the extraordinary depth of systemic disempowerment that afflicts disinvested communities. As Daryl argued at the conclusion of the workshop, “People have to understand there’s a power arrangement that’s disempowered them. You have to build something up so that it will last beyond you.” In this statement, Daryl constructively criticizes white efforts to address the symptoms of racism through generating more “just” food systems, advocating

instead an approach that explicitly acknowledges and challenges race-based systems of power by relegating white people to supporting, rather than directing, roles.

Following the workshop, I asked Kendra how she had felt it went. Had it met her goals of exploring and confronting the presence of racism and white privilege in both the food system and within so-called food justice activism?

“I think, you know, black people talk about racism all the time, we joke about it [laughs], yeah, you know, we'll make jokes about it, and have this understanding that this is how things are, isn't that fucked up? Kinda, you know. But I don't know that most people really sit down and analyze, you know, this is happening because of this historical event, which is because of that, because of that, and because of that, you know all this stuff is interconnected. I don't know that people really take the time to do that. And I think that Undoing Racism workshop didn't really do that either. But I still think it was good, like you said, to have a space at least to start scratching the surface a bit.”

Despite Kendra's cautious critique in reflecting on the “Undoing Racism in the Food System” workshop, the conversations it facilitated demonstrated an important attempt to challenge institutional “stock stories” about race, health, and food access. While white food justice practitioners who attended the workshop generally embodied Alkon and McCullen's description of “liberal white habitus,” including a use of anti-racist discourse in the presence of a racially-mixed group, the underlying message that they may actually be doing harm in communities of color did not sit easily. The workshop represented a powerful renegotiation and reconsideration of how to go about “doing” food justice work in the city in a way that does not reinforce racialized power hierarchies. The extent to which white food justice practitioners and leaders in New Orleans alter (or abort) their practices to reflect a renewed sensitivity to racial and social justice remains to be seen.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced and analyzed the meaningful ways in which race intersects with food justice activism, and with the food system more broadly. I began by presenting a

vignette of a public forum on urban agriculture in the city of New Orleans, which demonstrated common disconnects between well-meaning (white) activists and the communities of color in which they have endeavored to situate urban agriculture and other food justice projects. Through both the vignette and later analyses, I argue that white food justice advocates are aware of these racial disconnects and tensions, but struggle with how to go about overcoming them. The woman leading the meeting in the opening vignette, a composite of several individuals I encountered engaged in food justice and urban agriculture work in New Orleans, expressed both passion and fatigue; she was committed to what she believed to be the transformational potential of urban agriculture in blighted neighborhoods, but also frustrated by that potential's lack of resonance with people residing in those neighborhoods. Complicating that tension were issues of race and nativity; neighborhood residents were mostly people of color well-rooted in New Orleans and in their particular neighborhood, while project leaders were almost entirely young, white progressives who had moved to New Orleans in the years following Hurricane Katrina.

To help unpack this tension, I utilized central tenets from Critical Race Studies, as well as other scholarly work exploring how race (and particularly whiteness) intersects with food justice activism. Collectively, that body of work both problematizes and denaturalizes whiteness while demonstrating the prominence of an “affluent, liberal *habitus* of whiteness” (Alkon and McCullen, 2012) within efforts to promote a more just food system. A component of this *habitus* is a failure to comprehend the racialized histories and geographies that generate the systems and institutions governing everyday life, including the broadly defined and manifest “food system.”

Reflecting on my research observations and interviews in New Orleans, I consider the themes of conscious and unconscious white privilege, inter-organizational and inter-racial dynamics, spatial memory, and organizational “mission creep.” Despite their separate framing,

these themes collectively convey a marginally racially-conscious food movement within the city of New Orleans, struggling to effect meaningful social change in the midst of substantial structural obstacles. The Undoing Racism in the Food System workshop helped to unpack and illuminate those obstacles, and suggests that perhaps the most meaningful role for white would-be anti-racist food justice activists is in learning to follow.

CHAPTER 6

THE LOWER NINTH WARD FOOD ACCESS COALITION

AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

6.1 Introduction

In February of 2013, the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition (LNWFAC) released a report and action plan for increasing access to healthy and affordable food within the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood of New Orleans. The release of the “action plan” marked the culmination of ten months’ concerted effort towards articulating a plan of action that would both attend to and strategically endeavor to overcome the structural barriers to fresh food access within that neighborhood. The efforts of the LNWFAC and affiliated community members are notable because of their endemic nature; while the group strategically mobilized outside resources and opportunities, they were consistently insistent that efforts would be led and articulated by and for residents of the Lower Ninth Ward. By claiming their *right*, as citizens of a particular neighborhood, to determine the form, function, utility, and accessibility of neighborhood amenities—and, in fact, to demand equitable access to amenities deemed basic and fundamental for the healthy functioning of a neighborhood and its inhabitants—residents of the Lower Ninth Ward demonstrate claims on the *right to the city* as the right to inhabit and thrive within vital urban space.

In August of 2005, a category 5 hurricane wrecked the coastal areas and towns of southern Louisiana and Mississippi, displacing more than a million people, causing at least 1,833 deaths, and incurring over \$108 billion (2005 USD) in damages (GNOCDC, 2012; Knabb et al

2005; NOAA, 2011) (See Chapter Four). Despite the undeniable power of Hurricane Katrina as a natural disaster, many argue that the extraordinary loss of life and property could have been much less severe, particularly in the city of New Orleans; a dilapidating levee system (long known to be inadequate if confronted by a category 4 or larger storm), government inaction leading up to and immediately following the storm, and a desire to preserve the historic and profitable French Quarter exacerbated the damage and destruction of the poorest neighborhoods of New Orleans (Dyson, 2006).

In the days and weeks following the storm, public news stations around the United States and world broadcast images of unmoored homes, whole neighborhoods drowning under ten or more feet of water, people stranded on rooftops with nothing to eat or drink, and the floating corpses of those who could not escape the surge of Lake Ponchartrain. That most of these images captured people of color unsettled the notion that Katrina was a “natural” disaster; on the contrary, the sheer visibility of the violence and death absorbed primarily by poor people of color following the storm has made Katrina a “touchstone for public debates about the relationship between class, race, capitalism, the state and environment in America” (Bakker, 2005:795). Thus, Katrina did not *cause* urban racial and class disparity; it merely capitalized on it and rendered it visible.

Eight years after the storm, it is useful to reflect on what Katrina has meant for the urban fabric of New Orleans. As discussed in Chapter Four, the years since Katrina have witnessed a demographic shift in the direction of whiteness and wealth, and an array of efforts to rebuild or re-imagine the city, including efforts to address food insecurity among low-income residents. Many scholars and activists have remarked on the tendency of rebuilding efforts to privilege exogenous ideologies and the interests of capital while disregarding the substantive needs and

desires of those residents who have returned home (Hartman and Squires, 2006; Luft, 2008; Klein, 2007; Dyson, 2006). Those critiques resonate throughout my own research and writing, particularly evident in Chapter Five of this dissertation. In this chapter, however, I pursue a somewhat different trajectory. Using the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood of New Orleans as a case study, I explore the applicability and transformative capacity of Henri Lefebvre's concept of *the right to the city* (RTTC) for addressing a specific grievance: a lack of fresh food access. I share stories and observations from a grassroots initiative led by residents of the Lower Ninth Ward to challenge both the systemic and specific circumstances that have circumscribed their access to fresh food. I situate their struggle within the RTTC framework to address the following question: *Where, if at all, are there indications that post-Katrina food access initiatives do or do not facilitate a 'right to the city' in which marginalized individuals and groups of color have renewed ability to access, participate in, and produce urban space?*

To contextualize this question, I begin with a theoretical engagement of Lefebvre's RTTC framework, and draw on insights from other efforts that apply the framework to actual struggles for social justice. I consider arguments that the RTTC concept is applied either too narrowly (Harvey, 2008: 38) or too broadly (Leontidou, 2010; Purcell, 2003; de Souza, 2012), and focus on those elements of RTTC that are most salient to my investigation of a particular project in a particular city. I argue that RTTC has broad applicability "in the real world;" dwelling too long in the realm of theory, and bickering over what lies within the conceptual bounds of RTTC and what does not, subsumes energies that could be better utilized in support of the struggle. With that said, however, I am sympathetic to cautionary references to the "slippery slope" that may result from trivializing the Lefebvrian formula, leading to co-optation by the

very interests from which RTTC discourse demands power be wrested (Purcell, 2003; de Souza, 2012).

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section, following this introduction, provides a brief overview of Lefebvre's formulation on the RTTC, followed by more detailed examination of pertinent themes and interventions it invites. The second section considers several efforts to materialize claims on the right to the city by both grassroots organizations and local municipalities. The purpose of this intervention is to provide a context for the various ways in which RTTC discourse is understood and appropriated in different spatial contexts, and to situate activities within the Lower Ninth Ward as implicit but significant demands on the right to the city. The third, and most substantial, section presents an ethnographic portrait of post-Katrina New Orleans, the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition (LNWFAC), and the latter's discursive and activist efforts to generate a community-controlled food system. The fourth section links themes from the RTTC framework to the rights claims of the LNWFAC, and demonstrates the transformative potential of what Becher (2012: 203) describes as "political moments": the "intentionally temporary, grassroots organizing around small-scale, specific claims." I conclude by introducing potential linkages between RTTC discourses and possibilities and those of food sovereignty. In Chapter Seven, I continue this trajectory by considering how RTTC's emancipatory vision for the city that starts from neighborhood efforts to radically incorporate the human needs for food and self-determination, can level a challenge to corporate domination of the food system, and to broader patterns of injustice as well.

6.2 Theorizing the Right to the City

In Chapter Two, I introduced the theoretical contributions of the Right to the City framework, and presented some of the ways in which activists and community leaders are

drawing on that framework to enact change in “the real world,” that is, the world outside the realm of theory. I traced major themes within the literature on the Right to the City, and suggested the relevance of those themes for my own research project and problems. In this chapter, I revisit themes from writing on the RTTC, connecting them with on-the-ground struggles to democratize urban space. I consider the political and practical purchase of the Right to the City framework, and utilize its themes to analyze the efforts of residents of the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans to address problems of food access.

Among the major themes presented in Lefebvre’s characterization of the Right to the City (RTTC), and introduced in Chapter Two, is an emphasis on the rights of urban inhabitants to participate in the decisions and processes that can alter or create the spaces in which they live. Lefebvre characterizes these as basic rights of *participation* and *appropriation*. For Lefebvre and those who have interpreted and utilized his framework, participation implies the right of residents to have central and legitimate decision-making capacity in any actions that contribute to the character or use of the urban space in which they live. Because, Lefebvre argues, “the city” is the scale at which meaningful residence in space occurs, that is the scale at which participation is both an entitlement and a responsibility of the urban resident. Appropriation extends active participation, by articulating the right of urban dwellers to “physically access, occupy and use” urban space to meet their own needs (Purcell 2002: 103). Both participation and appropriation are predicated upon active and engaged urban citizenship, in which residents are materially and socially connected with the urban space in which they live; in other words, a renewed and democratic right to the city is not simply an entitlement, but rather an active renegotiation that requires the committed and collaborative work of residents who imagine themselves as part of a vital urban fabric. Thus, Lefebvre’s characterization of the Right to the City is radical in so much

as it imagines the city not primarily as a space for private property and commercial interests (city as commodity), but rather as a space for generating robust and democratic communities (city as *oeuvre*). This social mandate, Lefebvre argues, is inseparable from the concept and practice of urbanity; city is city precisely *because* it permits and fosters social life, not because it exists as a space for the exchange of capital. Thus, Butler argues, Lefebvre's re-imagining of the right to the city commands radical inhabitance, which "provides a direct challenge to the prioritization of exchange values that is pursued by neoliberal regimes of urban governance" (Butler 2012: 145).

6.2.1 *What Rights, and For Whom?*

Despite broad scholarly and activist interest in the concept of the RTTC, and even some efforts to embrace the "capaciousness" of the RTTC framework for its ability to unify the struggles of disparate marginalized groups (Mitchell and Heynen, 2009), other scholars have critiqued the failure of RTTC advocates to identify with specificity the *kinds of rights* proffered in RTTC discourse. Attoh (2011) identifies at least three potentially incommensurable conceptions of rights that might each reasonably characterize claims on the right to the city, but which illuminate the variety—and perhaps, the inconsistency—of those potential claims. To distinguish varying conceptions of "rights themselves," Attoh turns to Hohfeld's (2000 [1919]) classic study of legal rights, to Waldron's (1993) typology of "generational" rights, and to Dworkin's (1977) notion of rights as moral "trumps" to the law. Hohfeld identifies legal entitlements as one or a combination of claim rights, liberty rights, powers and immunities. Utilizing Hohfeld's conceptualization, Attoh argues, claiming the RTTC as "merely a liberty right" or an immunity constitutes something qualitatively different than envisioning the right to the city as a power or claim right (Attoh 2011: 671). Similarly, Attoh argues that Waldron's distinction among first generation rights (as traditional liberties and privileges of citizenship),

second generation rights (socio-economic entitlements, such as housing and fair wage), and third generation rights (those attached to communities and groups, including minority language rights or the integrity of a culture or ethnicity) has material implications for the ways in which struggles for the “right to the city” are waged and won. Finally, Dworkin’s (1977:185) argument that citizens do not “have a duty to obey the law even if it invades their moral rights” depicts rights as “trumps against democratic tyranny” (Attoh 2011: 672) and, therefore, suggests that the right to the city may be conceived as a right to break the law. In presenting the diverse ways in which rights themselves can be understood, and, therefore, claimed or granted, Attoh problematizes the eagerness with which straightforward claims on the right to the city are so often made.

To buttress this argument, Attoh enumerates the ways in which RTTC scholars and advocates have addressed the questions of *what rights* and *for whom*? Among the rights claimed or proffered through the right to the city are: national citizenship (Dikec 2005); physical occupation of space (Mitchell 2003); urban form or design (Van Deusan 2005); defining what constitutes public space (Gibson 2005); autonomy, in opposition to state policy (Phillips and Gilbert 2005); freedom from police brutality or surveillance (Mitchell and Heynen 2009); housing (Marcuse 2008); adequate transportation (Bickl 2005); natural resources (Phillips and Gilbert 2006); and communal goods, like urban aesthetics or sense of community (Matilla 2005). As far as *to whom* these rights are entitled, specific claims have been made on behalf of the homeless (Phillips and Gilbert 2005; Mitchell 2003), immigrants (Dikec 2005), racial and sexual minorities, those who “live in the city” (Purcell 2005: 14), the deprived and the discontent (Marcuse 2009), and the collective of urban inhabitants (Harvey 2008: 23). I argue, along with Attoh, that such a broad conceptualization of the RTTC constitutes both its promise and its peril; if we are to make sense of and enact the radical power of the RTTC, we must demonstrate its

practical purpose amongst actual struggles in claims over urban space. As I demonstrate in this chapter, abstract claims on the right to the city may prove less meaningful than small-scale, specific claims addressing specific rights. Thus, the *scale* at which rights claims are sought, demanded, granted, and contested is of great importance.

6.2.2 *The Scalar Politics of Rights Claims*

Utilizing Lefebvre's framework, David Harvey urges embracing the right to the city as both a cry and a demand, as both "working slogan and political ideal" (Harvey 2008: 40). Thus, fulfilling the potential of the right to the city requires active citizen engagement at the scale of everyday existence—that of the city. Smith and McQuarrie (2012) argue that urban inhabitation generates radical outcomes because people become mobilized "on the basis of propinquity and membership in a more legally ambiguous community than the nation-state." As Purcell (2002) explains, the "nested scales" within which citizens operate complicate and often contradict their ability to effect changes to urban space and/or policy. Participation at the scale of the city is tightly linked to processes playing out at state, national, and supranational scales, which in most cases fall outside the purview of an individual or a group of citizens, and may counter localized progress or efforts toward systemic change. Mitchell (1997: 304) highlights the ways in which processes of globalization signal "the end of space" by "effectively masking the degree to which capital must be located" and permitting decision-makers at all scales "to argue that they have no choice but to prostrate themselves to the god Capital."

Despite this, as Fisher (2013:158) points out, community-scale organizing—effectively generating power from below—has the potential to challenge contemporary urban disenfranchisement and to build oppositional power *beyond* the grassroots, thereby having

implications at larger scales. Such is the potential significance of “political moments,” as discussed below.

6.2.3 Political Moments

While community-scale interventions may not interrupt the “annihilation of space” (Mitchell 1997) by globalized capital, they do offer “political moments” which can secure durable changes with the potential to “trickle up” spatial scales. Becher (2012: 203) defines political moments as “intentionally temporary, grassroots organizing around small-scale, specific claims.” Political moments are important, Becher argues, because they can secure durable changes for previously or historically disenfranchised urban residents, giving them “enduring control over their parts of the city in ways that other forms of politics may not make possible” (2012: 203). Political moments have three distinctive outcomes for engaged urban inhabitants, which arguably generate a new, neighborhood-scale RTTC: (1) They may mobilize people who don’t consider themselves to be especially political; (2) they can develop inhabitants’ personal commitments and abilities to access political power; and (3) they can change the function, purpose, or interest of local institutions to better meet residents’ needs.

Attentive to Becher’s characterization of political moments, in the sections that follow I utilize critical discourse analysis and ethnographic research to demonstrate the breadth of ways in which Lefebvre’s RTTC framework has been used, to situate and articulate grassroots local struggles in diverse spaces. These examples draw on struggles and articulations I encountered through a Google-alert of “the right to the city” during a nine-month period in 2012 and 2013. I then offer a portrait of a community-scale initiative in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood of New Orleans as an example of a political moment that has transformative potential for claims on the right to the city. To situate the work of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition

(LNWFAC), I introduce the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood and the city of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and position LNWFAC's demand for fresh food access within broader demands for food sovereignty and the right to the city.

6.3 Claiming the Right to the City: Popular Movements and the State

Despite the emancipatory potential of the right to the city within urban praxis, many contemporary urban theorists characterize the concept as a mere “chimera” (Harvey 2012: xvi). Despite this critique, David Harvey devotes the second half of *Rebel Cities* to an examination of recent “urban revolutions” which explicitly acknowledge and contest the continued co-constitution of capital and urban space. To situate ethnographic research on the right to the city, I first wanted to explore the ways in which explicit claims on the RTTC are being made and interpreted in diverse spatial contexts. To do this, I set up alerts in Google™ that would send me an email each time the phrase “Right to the City” appeared on the Internet or in scholarly articles. These alerts, combined with standard attention to the literature and Internet searches, exposed me to a breadth of interpretations (and, in many cases, distortions) of Lefebvre's framework for revitalizing and democratizing urban space. In the context of 21st century urban social movements, the Right to the City has come to be associated with the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the United States and with high rates of homelessness throughout the world. While the Internet may arguably be considered a privileged space itself, I discovered three broad categories of use of the RTTC concept on the Web. The first were interpretations and interventions by academics and others interested primarily in the theoretical potential or implications of the RTTC concept. The second were announcements of or reports from activist events and meetings that classify as grassroots claims on the RTTC. The final category of web sites and postings

came from state organizations endeavoring to incorporate elements of RTTC into state and local government charters or policy.

6.3.1 Theoretical Interpretations of RTTC

The first major category of Web hits on the RTTC includes academic and intellectual interpretations of the RTTC, and utilization of the framework to analyze, understand, and critique contemporary events. These include blog posts, book reviews, and transcripts of interviews with scholars or those perceived to be experts on the “concept” of the RTTC. In many cases, the “blogosphere” appears to offer radical intellectuals a space to espouse observations and critiques that loosely (or, in many cases, incorrectly) interpret Lefebvre but which are not accountable to the scrutiny of peer review. On the other hand, some blog posts appear to contain all the academic rigor and seriousness of a peer-reviewed article, yet endeavor primarily to connect Lefebvre’s theory to claims to space while rejecting the presumably inaccessible ivory towers of academia. Thus, one blogger argues that while the literature on the right to the city emphasizes “collective self-empowerment” (Friedmann 1995), discourses on the right to the city have become commonplace primarily within gatherings of already-empowered people. In a posting on the blog “Reclaiming Spaces” (which describes itself as an “international space for exchange and reflection of urban activists”), a contributor giving the name Knut reflects on the 2009 World Social Forum in Belem, Brazil, where nearly 2000 indigenous people pledged their collective commitment to the right to the city in a document entitled “Building Convergences at the World Social Forum.” While the blogger, Knut, applauds and celebrates the collective visioning and efforts evidenced in the articulation of the right to the city as the “unifying slogan or concept for the ‘convergence’ of urban social movements around the world,” s/he critiques the

lackluster operationalization of the discursive concept, which results more often in more meetings than in a convergence of demands to effect social and policy change.

6.3.2 National Scale: The Right to the City Alliance

The second category of web hits were those reporting specific interventions, events or activist claims on the RTTC. These activities situate spatially-specific rights claims (to housing, to access public space, etc.) within a broader framework of spatial justice, and utilize Lefebvre's framework to legitimate the argument that specific struggles are part of a broader project of recognizing universal human rights. Within the United States, the Right to the City Alliance (RTTCA) was the most active in this category; its website and its affiliate organizations throughout the country seem to be consistently organizing and executing events intended to demonstrate a "unified response to gentrification and a call to halt the displacement of low-income people, people of color, marginalized LGBTQ communities, and youths of color from historic urban neighborhoods" (righttothecity.org). Thus, the RTTCA is a broad umbrella organization uniting a disparate collective of racial, economic and environmental justice organizations around perceived common causes enshrined within the RTTC framework. The RTTCA was "born out of the idea of a new kinds of urban politics that asserts that everyone, particularly the disenfranchised, not only has a right to the city, but as inhabitants, have a right to shape it, design it and operationalize an urban rights agenda" (RTTCA 2012 in Fisher 2013, p. 159). The RTTCA began taking shape at a meeting of the US Social Forum in Atlanta, Georgia in 2007, where it developed a basis of unity around "broad transformative demands" (Fisher 2013: 161). Rather than a single organization with a single mission or operational focus, the Alliance brought together geographically and socially disparate organizations and initiatives from around the United States, united in their common critique of "neoliberal capitalism's

negative effects on working class people and communities of people of color” (Fisher 2013: 161). At least discursively, member-organizations also share an emphasis on developing leadership among people of color and mobilizing members, rather than allowing projects to be run or initiated by white people. Goldberg (2010) classifies the unifying principles of members of the Right to the City Alliance: (1) they are fighting against neoliberal globalization and its diverse and pervasive manifestations. Those contemporary manifestations are the consequences of historical processes of disenfranchisement wrought through the spread of capitalism; (2) Oppressions are overlapping and intersectional, so any struggle against oppression must allow for an exploration of multiple oppressions, and inclusion of any and all people who face oppression of whatever sort; (3) Because of the role they play in global capitalism, and because of their mobilizing effect, cities are key sites for struggles against oppression and for envisioning alternatives to global capitalism; (4) The central goal of “the struggle” should be mobilizing and organizing oppressed people against the systems that oppress them.

In an assessment of the discourse and praxis of the RCCA, Fisher (2013: 159-60) concludes that, despite organizational and consistency-related challenges, the RTTCA “offers an alternative politics and organizing practice that unites its member organizations, despite their different origins and emphases, into an oppositional organization that challenges the structural basis of contemporary political economy.” Recent actions and events organized and executed by the RTTCA and its affiliate organizations include campaigns to “take back the bank” (in response to the continued housing crisis in the United States and the subsequent governmental bail-out of the Wall-Street banks that profited from it), and to “Take back the L.A. Metro Transit Authority” (a local campaign to demand accountability from the MTA and to expand bus lines to low-income communities) (righttothecity.org). Notably, the majority of these claims and actions

posit the rights of urban inhabitants as being in opposition to the power of the state, providing and interesting contrast to the appropriation of RTTC discourses by the state itself.

6.3.3 International Scale: The First World Summit of Local Governments on the Right to the City

This brings me to the third category of Web “users” of the RTTC framework I encountered through my Google-search. These are individuals and representatives within the government itself. I noticed an emerging trend of elected officials, particularly at the scale of local governments, who are collaborating to incorporate concepts of “participatory democracy,” “social inclusion” and “human rights in the city” through an appropriation of Lefebvre’s framework. The most powerful example of this appropriation is the international consortium of municipal officials, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and its Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy, and Human Rights (CISDP), which organized a “First World Summit of Local Governments on the Right to the City” in December of 2012.

In November of 2012, I submitted a paper in response to a scholarly paper competition accompanying a meeting organized by the United Cities and Local Governments’ (UCLG) Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights. My paper was selected, and I was given the opportunity to participate in the two day summit on the Right to the City in St. Denis, France. The meeting brought together representatives of local government from sixteen countries throughout Europe, Africa, East Asia, Latin-America, and North America. The purpose of the gathering was to share experiences and insights concerning policy actions at the local level that can contribute to the creation of democratic and socially inclusive urban spaces. The summit consisted of a series of round-table discussions on themes ranging from the management of public space and the right to housing, to ensuring “human rights in the city” and confronting economic alternatives at the local level. With the aid of hard-working translators, I

listened to elected officials from all over the world speaking of rights to free health services, to affordable housing, to education, to equality and non-discrimination, and, primarily, to decide what “the city” can and should be and do in the future.

A primary focus of the summit was to share strategies for the UCLG to gain recognition from the United Nations as an “observer” so that “local voices [could be] heard at the global level.” As representatives of local governments, the group argued that the United Nations needs to seriously consider the role that local and regional governments can and do play in bringing together various actors in civil society. Much attention was given to outlining the history of meetings, summits, and declarations that had preceded this gathering and had affirmed the critical concern of establishing and declaring human rights within urban space. There was the World Habitat II Summit, in August of 1996, where local authorities and cities were first recognized by the United Nations for their role in economic and regional development. There was the forum in Barcelona in 1998, which “made human rights in the city a critical requirement.” December of 2011 brought the Global Charter for Human Rights in the City, and now, one year later, the Final Declaration on the Right to the City. As these previous meetings were provided as examples of positive actions toward achieving social democracy and radically reconfiguring the right to the city, I could not help but wonder what, precisely, have been the outcomes of each of these charters and declarations? Beyond just declaring a commitment to “generating the right conditions so everyone has access to basic rights,” it remained unclear what precise actions are being taken to generate those conditions.

Some anecdotal successes were offered. The two-day summit provided numerous opportunities for those gathered to share their experiences and suggestions for achieving “human rights in the city.” These included breakfast programs for school-children in Burundi, the

development of a “Human Rights Indicator” to measure and improve quality of life in South Korea, and a non-profit cooperative housing project in Montreal. The final declaration from the summit announced a commitment to pursuing a process of collaborative local governance, so that “the right to the city, understood as the equitable usufruct of cities within the principles of sustainability, equality, solidarity and social justice, becomes tangible reality in all of our cities and metropolitan regions” (uclg.org). The shared sentiment of those gathered at the meeting was that a renewed and democratic right to the city could be achieved (or at least attempted) “through the implementation of innovative local policies concerning the management of public spaces, housing and endogenous, social and solidarity-based development” (uclg.org). Such an interpretation of the role of the state as a body that resists the dominant influence of corporate capital was simultaneously refreshing and bewildering.

Participating in the summit was an interesting experience. I was the only person in attendance from the United States, although there were several people who had traveled from throughout Canada to participate. Coming from the neoliberal context of the United States, it was surprising to hear so many local authorities and government officials speaking of rights to participatory democracy and social inclusion, striking a tone that would sound radical within an American political context. Despite the discursive detail regarding the rights of urban inhabitants, there was a tangible disconnect between such statements and the material realities of people living just outside the Stade de France, where the summit was taking place; a large squatter settlement occupied the space underneath a bridge outside the national stadium, which had been constructed in advance of the 1998 World Cup. While we at the meeting lunched on fine cheeses and wine, the “inhabitants” we conjured in our declarations of social justice and participatory democracy slept out in the cold and rummaged through trash bins for food. Was our

gathering, and the money that was spent to fly me across the Atlantic Ocean, among many other costs, capable of transforming urban space so that marginalized people might be better “represented”? What was the real purpose of our gathering? The opportunity to network, to share best practices and to discuss possible collaborations, while re-committing to the work of representing local municipalities and the people who reside within them, were notable intended outcomes of the summit. What is less clear is what happens next—how do these international meetings affect the way local leaders perceive of and generate a newly democratic right to the city? Aren’t those people attending the meetings already the fortunate ones? These persistent questions drew me back to my research, and to the efforts of a grassroots organization in the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood of New Orleans to remedy their “food access problem.” I had been invited to the summit in France to present my research findings, which argue that claims on the right to the city that are specific, localized, and community-driven have the potential to interrupt broader patterns of social injustice as they are manifest at the neighborhood scale. I discuss those findings and their connections to and implications for the RTTC framework below.

6.4 The Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition

In Chapter Four of this dissertation, I provided a demographic portrait of the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. In this section, I enliven that portrait by drawing on characterizations and descriptions of the neighborhood from long-time residents, particularly with regard to the evolution in food access over the past several decades.

6.4.1 The Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood of New Orleans

The Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood of New Orleans was not formally developed until the mid-nineteenth century; before that time, it was mostly marshy swampland. As the city of New Orleans grew, the area now known as the Lower Ninth Ward became a destination for poor

immigrants from Italy, Ireland and Germany; free people of color; and other marginalized populations. The ward was officially designated as part of the city of New Orleans in 1852, but was not prioritized as a space to be protected by sophisticated flood protection and drainage systems, which were being used to secure wealthier parts of the growing city (Landphair 2007). The 1923 completion of the Industrial Canal reinforced the isolation of the Lower Ninth Ward, serving as a significant spatial barrier between the neighborhood and other parts of the city (Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1 The Lower Ninth Ward.
Source: Wikipedia.com

Demographic change in the Lower Ninth Ward during the 20th century offers a micro-scale demonstration of broader residential population trends throughout the country. While the neighborhood was actually quite racially “mixed” (according to contemporary racial

classifications), the evolving and expanding category of “white” and the heightened racial tensions of the middle of the 20th century contributed to massive white flight from the neighborhood (Campanella 2007). In the years following WWII and up until 1970, the non-white population of the Lower Ninth Ward increased from 31% to 73% (Landphair 2007). Hurricane Betsy, (the “original” big storm) flooded the Lower Ninth Ward in 1965, speeding up the process of white flight and marking the true beginning of institutional abandonment of the neighborhood. According to a report compiled by the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition (LNWFAC), the last mid-sized grocery store in the neighborhood closed its doors in 1987 (LNWFAP 2013).

6.4.2 Hurricane Katrina and a “Culture of Chaos”

In the weeks and months following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, national and international media thrust the Lower Ninth Ward out of the shadows and into the limelight as the site of tremendous despair, neglect, and death. As prominent Tulane University geographer Richard Campanella (2008: 6) noted, such a characterization thinly veiled deeper cultural and social stories about the neighborhood and the people who lived there:

“The Katrina catastrophe turned worldwide observers into new speakers of New Orleans’ lexicon of place. Hundreds of *arrivistes* trooped into the city after the deluge, and eagerly embraced the clarity of the official city neighborhood map for their reporting and research. Two of the hardest-hit areas—Lakeview and the Lower Ninth Ward—emerged in media reports as metaphors for the socio-economic and cultural-geographical chasms within the beleaguered metropolis. *Lakeview*, on the one hand, lent its name to symbolize all that was suburban, white, and middle-class: a typical American twentieth-century subdivision implicitly wealthy enough to enjoy a *view* of the *lake* but naïve enough to misunderstand the water’s threat. It flooded terribly. The *Lower Ninth Ward*, on the other hand, spoke to all that was poor, black, underprivileged and

disenfranchised: *Lower*, implying class, isolation, and topography (even though Lakeview lies lower); *Ninth*, as in “bottom-rung;” and *Ward*, that gritty, antiquated political unit unknown to many Americans except as a place for society’s lunatic fringe.”



Figure 6.2. Lower Ninth Ward Demographic Statistics.
 Source: Lower Ninth Ward Food Action Plan, 2013: 13.

Media portrayals of post-Katrina Lower Ninth Ward as a “lunatic fringe” of both the city of New Orleans and the rest of the world served to further isolate residents of the neighborhood who sought desperately to return home. During the final meeting of the LNWFAC, a long-time resident described the difficulty of returning home in the weeks following the storm, even after the floodwaters had receded: “The National Guard stopped every car at the foot of the St. Claude Bridge [over the Industrial Canal]. [They] treated us like criminals, checking everyone in the car. [It was] like martial law.”

Amidst the aftermath of Katrina, the pace and scale of change have been staggering throughout the city, with much of the rebuilding effort directed by people new to the city. In an effort to understand and explain this tendency of many projects to be directed by “outsiders,” Kendra, who directed the Lower Ninth Ward Food Action Planning process, made a reference to Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs.” In that hierarchy, basic physiological needs like food, clothing and shelter need to be met before an individual or a community can pursue higher-order needs. Meeting basic needs is a consistent problem amongst the economically poor, but in the wake of Hurricane Katrina virtually everyone who survived the storm had to struggle, for varying amounts of time, of course, to meet these basic needs. The “distraction” of struggling to rebuild a home, to educate children in the midst of a dysfunctional school system and to meet other very basic needs may have justifiably stunted organizing on the part of people most affected. There was a void that energetic and passionate “outsiders” were eager to fill. Sophia, a white community organizer with the New Orleans Food and Farm Network, articulated the situation this way: “the willingness to engage in these projects so often comes from younger white people who are not from here and can dedicate all kinds of time and energy to the project. And the project needs it. It’s not the best metaphor, but in ways they are like black holes and they just

need so much energy...and it's really hard to expect of people who've been here for a while, who've been piecing back together their lives, to be that energy source as well. It's why it's easier, I think, for outsiders to give of themselves so much. Because they aren't simultaneously grieving family members, their homes, their jobs, any number of things..."

Karlina, also a white food justice practitioner, conceded that "consistency is the most difficult thing in New Orleans. It's just incredibly hard. ... I don't know why it is the case; and it's not to say that's only the case here, but I do think we really struggle with that in New Orleans, and there's just a culture of chaos, essentially. And then I think post-Katrina there's been a lot of people who've come here and felt like 'I've done this in other places, I can do this here, no problem' and then have come up against the specific challenges of New Orleans."

6.4.3 History of Food Access in the Lower Ninth Ward

The "culture of chaos" that characterized the months and years following Hurricane Katrina in many ways just exacerbated and illuminated decades of disinvestment, particularly in economically poor neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward (Germany, 2007). In the 2013 Food Action Plan, Lower Ninth Ward residents and activists characterize the neighborhood as one plagued by systematic neglect, which "struggled with poor food access for decades" before Hurricane Katrina so visibly decimated the neighborhood in 2005. Long-time residents of the Lower Ninth Ward remember a time long ago, before Hurricane Betsy spurred the process of gentrification in 1965, when several locally-owned businesses sold fresh food in the neighborhood.

Mr. Spencer, an African American man in his seventies, recollected a time when it was relatively easy to access fresh food in the neighborhood, and spoke nostalgically about a desire to recreate those conditions: "I remember the day you could walk and there were many grocery

stores...right now we are limited...There's a lot of things you can't do in this community, because of the Master Plan...you take people my age, that have to walk that far... I'd love to see my neighborhood come back like it once was. I've lived in the neighborhood since 1951, and I don't plan on going." Despite his frustration with current conditions in the neighborhood, Mr. Spencer's comment reveals his commitment to stay and fight for the neighborhood he has called home for more than half a century.

Ms. Jones, another African American resident, added similar recollections: "I've lived in this community for about fifty-eight years, since I was in high school. I'm almost 74, so it's been a while. When I first lived here...it was two supermarkets, but we did our own gardening, so that was in addition. You'd get your meat or what have you, but then you would have chickens and all that you grew in the backyard. So that was an era in the past." Ms. Jones depiction of a Lower Ninth Ward where backyard gardening and chicken-keeping were ubiquitous was confirmed by several other long-time residents of the neighborhood.

Mr. Irving presents a similar historic portrait of the neighborhood in his description:

"I've been here since the Ninth Ward started...Off of St. Claude St. when I was a kid, farmland, farmland, all over the Lower Ninth Ward north of St. Claude. The people owned land—in those days land was very cheap, so you can't do that now. But young people took ownership of the land. People involve themselves in helping other people build their houses. We had two grocery stores as the ladies mentioned. An A&P and Peebles. You'd go north of that, would you believe that there were ten or twelve, 15 [locally-owned] grocery stores. On Flood St... two grocery stores, down the block, another grocery store. All throughout the neighborhood. These were people of the neighborhood owning, taking control of their particular situation, in spite of the fact that you had Peebles and A&P and bagel shops. On St. Maurice Street, you had a shopping center—a clothing shopping center. Not just for food. You could buy clothing on St. Maurice St. You don't have that kind of thing anymore. This was neighborhood kind of stuff."

Ms. Smith remembers the great variety of small shops and businesses that dotted the Lower Ninth Ward throughout her childhood and adolescence:

“We used to have fruit stands right at the bus stop. You could get off the bus and walk up to the fruit stand, you could walk across the street and pick up your seafood; you could go to the bus stop and get on the bus and go back home. And then at one time we had three bakeries in the neighborhood. We don’t have a bakery. And we had three. And they were in walking distance from the fruit stand and the seafood house. It accommodated those who had cars and those who didn’t have cars.”

Such a portrait of plenty seems light-years away from current conditions of food access in the neighborhood.

6.4.4 Current Food Access in the Lower Ninth Ward

Food access was a concern throughout the city of New Orleans in the days and weeks following Hurricane Katrina. In the several years since the storm, however, grocery stores and farmers’ markets have popped up all over the city to meet market demand for high-quality food (not just to address a purported “food desert” concern). While wealthier neighborhoods now enjoy a plethora of options for procuring fresh food, the Lower Ninth Ward has lacked a full-service grocery store since 1987. Existing food retail consists of ten businesses which primarily sell processed/packaged food, junk food, liquor and cigarettes (Figure 6.3). Only two offer a limited supply of fresh produce (typically onions, potatoes, bananas, and lemons); three sell fresh or frozen meat; and four are locally- or Black-owned businesses (LNWFAP 2013). The nearest full-service grocery store to the Lower Ninth Ward is located in St. Bernard Parish, roughly three miles away.

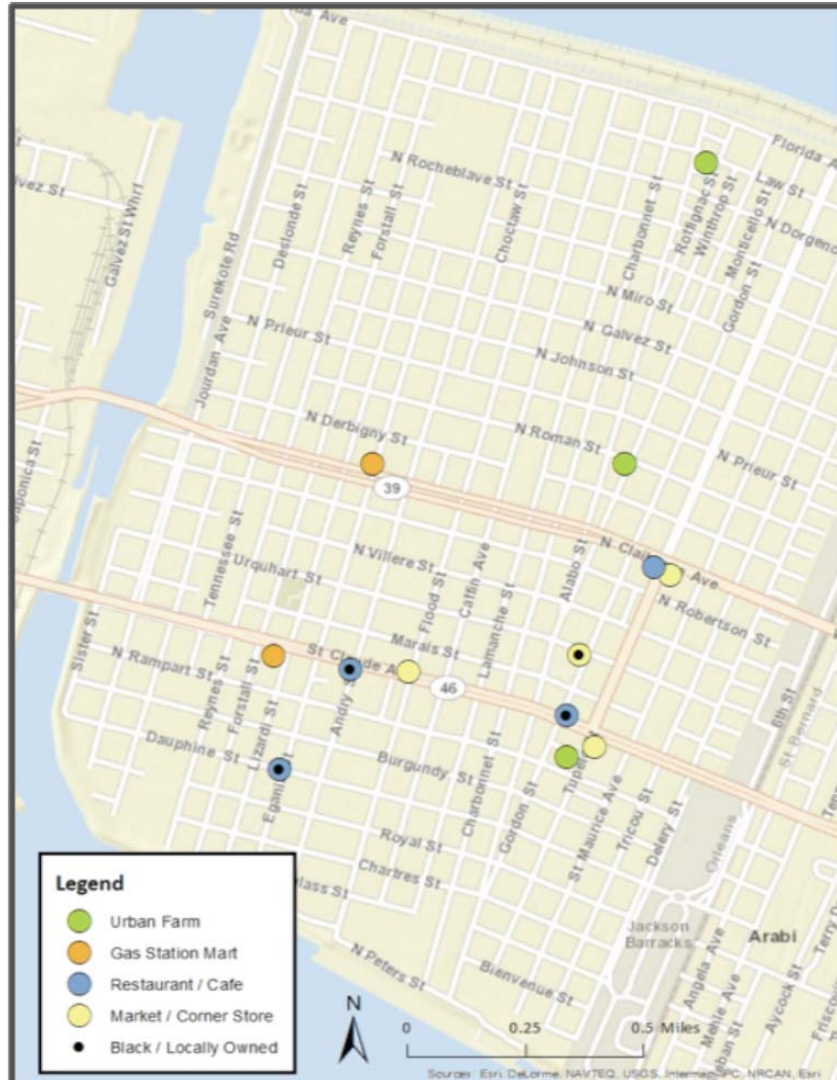


Figure 6.3. Food-Vending Businesses in Lower Ninth Ward, as of December 2012.
 Source: Lower Ninth Ward Food Action Plan, 2013: 18.

6.4.5 Emergence of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition

Residents of the Lower Ninth Ward have endeavored to demonstrate market viability of a grocery store for years. In 2009, members from the Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED) partnered with students and researchers from DePaul University, Louisiana State University, and the University of New Orleans to conduct a feasibility study, which demonstrated numerous characteristics that were perceived to afford “promise for food operator success” (LNWFAP 2013: 16). Making the economic-viability

argument has been a central strategy for encouraging the development of food infrastructure in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood. Using lack of automobile access as a component of the appeal to potential grocery operators betrays a retreat to market logic and mechanisms that in fact conflict with broader acknowledgment of the structural and systemic variables that contribute to (or, more accurately, delimit) contemporary and historic landscapes of food access in the Lower Ninth Ward and other disinvested communities throughout the United States.

The Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition (LNWFAC) emerged through efforts by CSED to address both the chronic injustice and the acute force of disaster that have conspired to circumscribe food access in the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood. CSED hired a Food Security Coordinator to organize a series of eight planning meetings of Lower Ninth Ward residents, with the goal of collaboratively creating a community-drafted plan for addressing food insecurity within the neighborhood. The first meeting was held on Friday, April 27, 2012, in the community room of a church on a main thoroughfare in the Lower Ninth Ward. Nearly fifty people from the neighborhood came out to the first meeting, to share their own visions of food access for the neighborhood. Meetings were held monthly until November of 2012, and the newly-formed Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition drew on community input during the meetings, as well as statistical research and survey data, to create its official Food Access Plan, which was released in February 2013.

The LNWFAC was founded with the fundamental understanding that “access to fresh and nutritious food is critical to the health, sustainability, and economic redevelopment of the [Lower Ninth Ward] neighborhood” (LNWFAP 2013: 5). Kendra, a Lower Ninth Ward native and resident who was hired as the CSED Food Security Coordinator, and led process of creating a Food Action Plan, described the purpose of gathering neighborhood residents to draft a food

access plan: “Our vision is to have the Lower Ninth Ward speak as one voice regarding what we want for food access in our neighborhood. As a community, we must define what it is that we want, whether it be a grocery store, an urban farm, or better food policy, and then take the steps to attain it” (LNWFAP 2013: 24). While such a framing may suggest a universal allegiance with struggles for food access and social and economic justice, the emphasis on “the neighborhood” belies a spatially-specific positioning, and animates the efforts of the coalition within a particular space and time.

The group also links “quality food” to broader struggles for spatial justice, by arguing that increasing food access would “promote sustainable economic growth and...ensure the availability of proper nutrition for residents” (LNWFAP 2013: 5). As they articulate from the outset, “only Lower Ninth Ward residents had decision-making powers in regard to the food plan,” while representatives and professionals in the areas of planning, business and food, and local government were invited to “serve in support and advisory roles” (LNWFAP 2013: 5).

In an effort to generate public-private partnerships, and to drum up political support for the effort to increase food access in the Lower Ninth Ward, the LNWFAP highlights relevant elements of overlap with the 2010 New Orleans Master Plan (*Plan for the 21st Century: New Orleans 2030*). As the LNWFAP argues, the City Planning Commission’s Master Plan for the next two decades “envisions New Orleans in 2030 as a resilient community that enhances quality of life for all and provides for equitable economic opportunities” (LNWFAP 2013: 19). Included within the Master Plan’s vision of enhanced health and human services is a commitment to provide “access to fresh, healthy food choices for all residents” by establishing and supporting healthy food retailers in locations that are accessible to currently underserved populations.

Despite this discursive commitment by the City Planning Commission, the extensive efforts of the LNWFAC demonstrate that making good on the promises of the Master Plan required the active participation of a sufficiently disenfranchised and disappointed populous that would hold the city and the Planning Commission accountable for those stated goals. Therefore, the demands of the LNWFAC towards the city do not represent any sort of radical departure from what the city itself had already committed to (but not yet fulfilled). In fact, the Master Plan's specific proposals to minimize zoning and policy barriers to temporary or mobile food vendors; to provide incentives for small stores to increase their inventory of fresh food; to encourage local farmers' markets to accept government food assistance vouchers, such as SNAP; and to support community gardens sufficiently articulate (and therefore render as reasonable) the stated desires and demands of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition. However, without the formation and active participation of the LNWFAC, it is unclear when, if ever, the Planning Commission and City Council intended to enact these provisions.

6.4.6 Actions of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition

Community Visioning Process

The first and foundational action of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access planning process (even before forming a "coalition") was to engage the community in a process of articulating a collective vision for the future of food access in the Lower Ninth Ward. The majority of the first planning meeting was given over to this process, and all neighborhood residents were invited to share their own unique desires and ideas for "what we want our neighborhood to look like in terms of food access." I include a few residents' responses here. Mary, an African American woman in her mid-forties, contributed her thoughts:

"I'm a lifelong resident of the Lower Ninth Ward. Grew up here, I had a mother who had a garden right in the back yard...I think two things I would like to see: Everything is

interconnected. But I'd love to see a mind-shift take place where we do have a community that understands the power and importance of healthy living, and having access to healthy quality foods. I've found it rather insulting that as a citizen that pays taxes in this city that I have to drive 45 minutes up to Whole Foods Market to get a decent quality apple. That's really what we're dealing with. We have to drive to try and get anything that we need along the lines of eating healthfully. I'd like to see it easily accessible to our community, and the other thing I'd like to see is to have that grocery store. We had it once when we were growing up. Those of us who are old enough can remember the A&P. I would like to see that take place again and to have that relationship with farmers so that we know we're getting quality foods. And a reduction in corner liquor stores. I'd like to see a real store put these corner stores out of business.”

Mary’s desire for a shift in “mindset” among members of her community is reflected in the broader work and discourses of the LNWFAC, which consistently remark on historical legacies of racism and oppression and the ways in which these legacies can compel people of color to neglect their own health and well-being. Additionally, Mary’s reference to Whole Foods (which is located in the Uptown neighborhood near Tulane University) demonstrates the allegiance that Mary feels for her own neighborhood, and the resentment she feels at having to shop in a neighborhood that feels foreign and unwelcoming to her.

Cindy, an African American woman in her fifties, indicated a desire for locally-owned and operated food businesses. She remarked, “I've been a resident of the Lower Ninth community for all my life. I'd like to see nice supermarket where we can shop and a place where they can hire our people to work instead of bringing in their own people, so our children will have jobs too.” This sentiment was shared by other residents at the meeting, who expressed frustration that the existing businesses (mostly gas stations and liquor stores) were owned by Middle Eastern immigrants who lived outside the Lower Ninth Ward and tended to employ, as Cindy put it “their own people,” rather than providing jobs for people living in the neighborhood.

Mr. Jones, an African American male in his sixties, reflected on changes in the neighborhood and what he would like to see in the future:

“So many things have changed over the years, because we used to have grocery stores and access to reasonable food. [Now], if I'm going to walk five blocks to the store and five blocks home I would like to be allowed the pleasure or the privilege of purchasing something I want and need with money and not having to buy this already fried chicken that's so greasy you can [read paper] through the bag...As a medical doctor and such I prefer to cook my own food because I was raised in a family where food was prepared every day; everyday, you sit down as a family and eat. I would like to see a place where we have like a multi-purpose center, co-op food store, or farmers' market. At least a dry-cleaner or something. I have a washer-dryer but I can't do my suits in there, there's no dry-cleaner in this neighborhood. So the next ten years, I know we got a lot of work to do, but it's gotta start by making a united effort to take part ourselves. We have to advocate for ourselves. Nobody's going to do it for us.”

Mr. Jones' statement raises several important and interlocking points. Like many other residents who were involved throughout the food planning process, Mr. Jones conveyed the sentiment that current landscapes of food access did not permit him to eat and procure food the way he wanted to and the way he “was raised” to. Additionally, Mr. Jones sees food access as part of a broader struggle to revitalize the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood; opening groceries and other healthy food outlets are not ends unto themselves, but are components of a vision for the neighborhood that is community-directed and therefore meets the specific needs of the community itself. The sense of solidarity and resilience that comes through towards the end of Mr. Jones' statement was a prominent feature throughout the series of food planning meetings, and was adamantly reinforced by Mr. Nelson:

“The Lower Ninth Ward is small enough to have real community, but it is large enough to have a diverse community. One where active, I should say politically active, citizens take control of their lives. Right here in the Lower Ninth Ward. Instead of asking politicians ‘what can we do down here,’ we will be telling them what we gonna do! That's a politically active community, full of citizens who have that mindset that you talked about. All right. In addition to food security, food coops, grocery stores, bla bla bla, it's all been said already. But in the community there is interlocking kinds of securities. Security for person, security for property, you know that's been a problem down here, right? That needs to change. We need to be active in networking with people

outside the Lower Ninth Ward who are in similar conditions... We need an active network, so we can learn lessons from them, and they can learn lessons from us.

Mr. Irving, who had described the prominence of farming in the neighborhood in years past (above), concurred with others who advocated for a supermarket in the neighborhood, but also cautioned about what that may mean for the autonomy of neighborhood residents: “Now, I think it's important for us to want more supermarkets. But we lose control of the neighborhood then. Control is lost. You want to gain control and keep control; you have to have small, conscious community. You have to have young people with large dreams and big ideas. You're going to change the neighborhood then.”

Assessing Current Landscapes of Access

An early component of establishing a food access plan for the Lower Ninth Ward was to catalogue the current food access “situation” in the neighborhood, thereby demonstrating a dearth of fresh food availability. The assessment conducted by members of the LNWFAC counted ten food businesses and three urban agriculture operations (as outlined above) and mapped in Figure 6.3. None of these meets the USDA’s definition of a full-service grocery store, and combined they offer only a very limited supply and variety of fresh food. The group also emphasized the fact that most of the businesses are exogenously owned, and therefore do not necessarily represent the needs and interests of members of the community. Finally, while urban agriculture is perceived to offer “beneficial features...and [to] contribute to the provision of fresh produce to Lower Ninth Ward residents,” the LNWFAP argues that the existing urban agriculture projects are “not large enough to serve the community in a self-sustaining manner” (LNWFAP 2013: 28). In fact, none of the existing projects grows food with the primary intention of providing a ready and reliable supply of fresh produce to the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood.

Forming a Coalition, Vision, and Mission Statement

To ensure consistency and accountability, committed members of the Lower Ninth Ward Food planning process formed a core group committed to attending all open/neighborhood meetings, and to meeting separately to coherently articulate the outcomes of each large group meeting. Based on larger community input from open meetings, the core group was able to articulate a vision and mission for the LNWFAC. The vision, based on collective input from residents, is for “a neighborhood where availability of fresh, quality food is convenient and affordable to everyone in the Lower Ninth Ward.” The coalition committed to pursuing that vision by first articulating its mission: “to invest in the health of our community by supporting the development of sustainable food systems in the Lower Ninth Ward as directed by and for its residents.” Part of the work of this core coalition and other active community members was to become familiar with existing plans for the district and the City of New Orleans, and to align themselves with processes already underway or commitments already made.

Undoing Racism in the Food System Workshop

In Chapter Five, I wrote at length on the ways in which racism and white privilege have had defining roles in the practice of food justice work in New Orleans and elsewhere. I argue in that chapter that tropes of “color blindness” and equal opportunity circumscribe efforts to both envision and enact food justice and food sovereignty in urban areas throughout the United States. That the work of the LNWFAC was so intentionally community-led points to an overt acknowledgment and understanding of people of color “within the movement” that racism continues to shape urban food access as one system within a broader landscape of a racial state. As the LNWFAC articulated in their published report, “We are aware of the tough situation in which the Lower Ninth Ward finds itself. We are also aware that the neighborhood had its

struggles even prior to Hurricane Katrina. Understanding how we got to this place is an important step toward feeling empowered to change circumstances and create a better future” (LNWFAP 2013: 26).

In an effort to build cross-racial allegiances, and to promote greater understanding of the pervasiveness of racism and white privilege in food and other systems, the LNWFAC partnered with the New Orleans Food and Farm Network (NOFFN) to organize an Undoing Racism in the Food System Workshop, facilitated by the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB) (See Chapter Five). NOFFN is a citywide food justice organization that works with neighborhood groups and other organizations throughout the city to promote a broad vision of food security as a basic human right. PISAB is a New Orleans-based anti-racism organization that offers trainings on the history and impact of racism in contemporary American society. The two-day workshop was free to Lower Ninth Ward residents who were participating in the food planning process, and aimed to “explore the reasons behind the glaring inequities in the New Orleans food system and food justice movement” (LNWFAP 2013: 27).

Members of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition, and other community members who participated in the food planning process and the dismantling racism in the food system workshop, see clear linkages between racism and food access in their neighborhood. In their report, the group argues, “The Lower Ninth Ward offers a stunning example of how racism has affected access to quality food...As the neighborhood’s population became increasingly black, access to food simultaneously diminished...” (LNWFAP 2013: 28). This explicit denial of “color-blindness,” and conscious positioning of racism as a central constraint on food access in the Lower Ninth Ward significantly distinguishes the LNWFAC from food justice efforts led by white people throughout the city (as explored in Chapter 5).

Grocery Store for a Day

One early and highly visible action of the LNWFAC was an event intended to raise awareness regarding food access concerns in the LNW neighborhood. For one Saturday in October, the coalition members, along with numerous volunteers, transformed a parking lot in the Lower Ninth Ward into an outdoor supermarket, complete with shelves fully stocked with fresh produce. People from throughout the city were invited to come to the Lower Ninth Ward to “make groceries” (New Orleans lingo for “grocery shopping”), and to learn about and support the efforts of the LNWFAC. The event also included a free breakfast for children, a series of educational workshops on food and nutrition, free health screenings, and live music and other entertainment. To pull off the event, the LNWFAC partnered with other New Orleans food organizations, including the Grow Dat Youth Farm (which provided produce from its City Park farm), the New Orleans Food and Farm Network, as well as many community organizations from throughout the city. The event gained national publicity, and was sponsored by both local and national organizations and businesses. While fundraising was not the primary purpose of the event, the Grocery Store for a Day raised \$2700 and “put a spotlight on the need in the Lower Ninth Ward” (LNWFAP 2013: 21).

The group also utilized the gathering during the Grocery Store for a Day event to glean information on household food access in the neighborhood. With the help of volunteers, the LNWFAC conducted a survey of Lower Ninth Ward residents who attended the Grocery Store for a Day event. They found that 71% of respondents did not live within walking distance of a grocery store, and distance and location were noted as the greatest obstacles to shopping for groceries.

Table 6.1. Short, Intermediate, and Long-Term Goals of the LNWFAC.
Source: LNWFAP, 2013: 31.

Short Term (less than 6 months) 2 Votes per person		Pros	Cons	Number of Votes
Food Stand or Truck (Mobile Grocery Store)	Farmers sell directly to consumers	Flexible; fresh produce; direct sale	Limited variety; usually fresh produce only	Bus/truck: 14 Stand: 8
	Buying Club	Consumers pool resources to buy collectively in bulk	Builds strong community relationships; can save a lot of money	Requires a lot of time and planning; may also have limited choice of foods
Existing Farm Partnership				1
Intermediate (6 months to 1 year) 1 Vote per person		Pros	Cons	Number of Votes
CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)	Consumers buy "stock" in farm; pay up front and receive produce throughout season	Fresh food; relationship with farmer(s) and other folks in community; Get to decide what farmer plants	May be risky—if crop fails can't guarantee "return on investment"; prices may be higher	6
	Healthy Corner Stores	Existing stores that are incentivized to stock fresh produce and other nutritious foods	Store already exists; convenient	Owners may lack knowledge about selling perishables; prices may be higher
Community Investment Club				1
Long Term (>1 year) 2 Votes per person		Pros	Cons	Number of Votes
Community-Owned Farm	Community pools resources and invests in farm (hires farmer; etc)	Tailored to community needs; can hire locally; youth involvement	May be difficult to raise money for upfront costs; food prices may be higher	6
	Food Cooperative	Members work in and help operate store	Tailored to community needs; can hire locally	May be difficult to raise money for upfront costs; food prices may be higher
Community-Owned Store	Similar to cooperative, but "corporation" in which community members buy stock	Tailored to community needs; can hire locally	May be difficult to raise money for upfront costs; food prices may be higher	3
School-based Grocery Store (may be connected to Edible Schoolyard; Garden Education, etc)	Students operate store and/or farm as part of their education	Collaboration between schools, families, other groups (builds community); great for students	Small in scale; may have limited hours; prices may be expensive depending on how it's run and funded	13
	Franchise Grocery Independent Grocery	Existing "chain grocer" opens franchise store	Already established brand	Limited flexibility to change
				6

Short, Intermediate, and Long-term goals outlined in the LNWFAP

Based on the goals and priorities articulated by Lower Ninth Ward residents who attended monthly meetings, and on research they had done on food access projects in other cities,

members of the “core group” established a list of possible projects or solutions for the short, intermediate, and long term. The core group brought this list of possibilities back to the larger group of residents to vote on the projects they would be most eager to pursue. After lengthy discussion about the pros and cons of proposed possibilities, the group voted on its favored solutions for the short (less than six months), intermediate (six months to one year), and long-term (more than one year) (Table 6.1). The group voted for a “Mobile Grocery store” as its favored short-term solution, a “Healthy Corner store” as its favored intermediate solution, and a “School-based grocery” as its long term solution.

Seeking Public-private Partnerships

A common sentiment amongst Lower Ninth Ward residents is that the local and federal governments and private industry have a history of neglecting, ignoring, and mistreating the Lower Ninth Ward and people of color in general. During a food planning meeting, one lifelong resident argued, “Our politicians don’t go to bat for us. The perception is, ‘you don’t have the population; you’re going to flood; y’all are poor.’ We need to work with leadership to change the perception. We need policies that steer things to this area. Policy drives a lot of things.” In an effort to build allegiances with the local government and private business sector, members of the LNWFAC met with representatives from the Food Trust and Hope Credit Union, which act as technical advisors and fiscal administrators of an initiative aimed to facilitate the opening of grocers or other fresh food outlets in underserved neighborhoods. The initiative, known as the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative, provided the LNWFAC with an economic explanation for the failure of grocery stores to open in the neighborhood in the last several decades. Among the obstacles provided were a lack of start-up funding, a perceived lack of skilled labor, low population density, and a perception that the neighborhood is dangerous and/or unprofitable.

Having discussed the considerable efforts and actions of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition, I conclude this chapter by discussing the ways in which the LNWFAC demonstrates an articulation of the right to the city framework.

6.5 The LNWFAC and the Right to the Neighborhood

Lefebvre’s characterization of the RTTC—as a radical entitlement of urban inhabitants to produce space to meet their own needs—provides a productive theoretical base from which to launch an investigation of urban food sovereignty discourse and action as articulated by the LNWFAC, because such activism operates on the premise that the ability to access, consume, and even produce culturally-appropriate nutritious food is a basic right contained within what Nik Heynen has referred to as the “geography of survival” (Heynen 2010). According to Heynen, the geography of survival comprises both the “spaces of social reproduction essential to human survival” by the very poor, as well as the spaces in which grassroots activism engages corporeal concerns of sustenance and inhabitation. I argue that themes and rights claims central to the RTTC framework also characterize discourses and ideologies contained within movements for food sovereignty, which, as I discuss in Chapter Seven, argue that individuals and communities should have the power to access and create a food system that meets their basic nutritional and cultural needs. Furthermore, I argue that the spatially-specific nature of demands for food access among low-income inhabitants—which constrain urban space to walkable scales—may more appropriately be considered claims on the right to the neighborhood (Figure 6.5). Such claims are examples of “political moments” because of their topical and temporal specificity, but they also signal towards broader struggles for justice and equality, and may contribute to rights claims at the scale of the city and beyond.

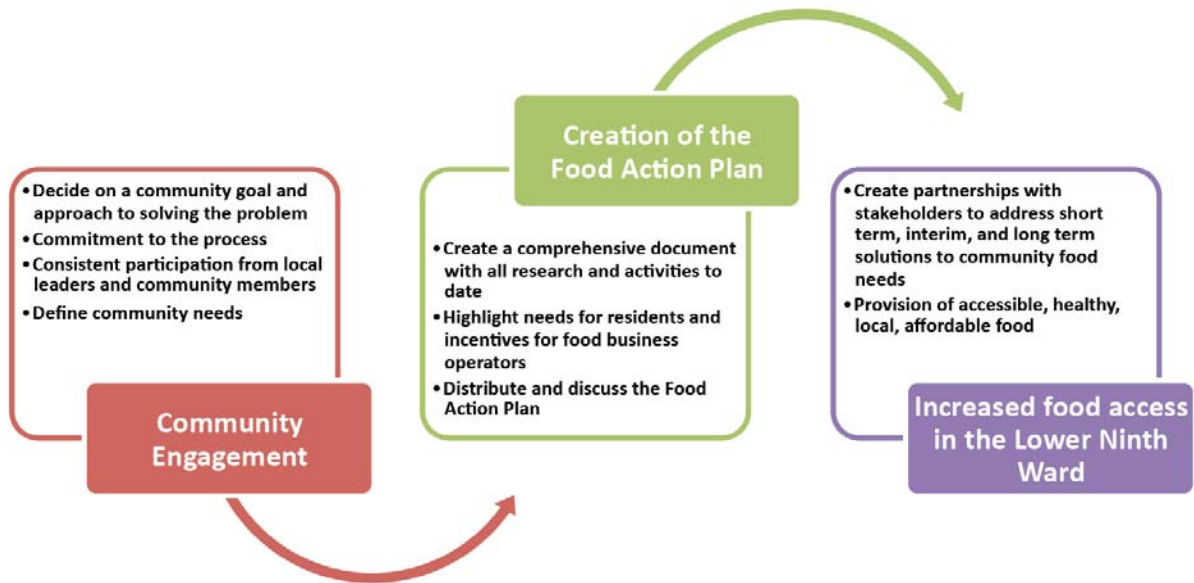


Figure 6.4. Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition’s Framework for Action.
 Source: Lower Ninth Ward Food Action Plan, 2013: 11.

6.5.1 Inhabitanance

A central theme of Lefebvre’s characterization of the RTTC is that of inhabitanance, the notion that urban residents do not just occupy physical space, but rather are socially and personally involved in the creation and use of that space. Members of the LNWFAC meet Lefebvre’s criteria as urban inhabitants; they reflect on historic legacies of segregation and oppression that have contributed to multi-generational citizenship claims within the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood, and identify themselves collectively as “a strong and proud Lower Ninth Ward community.” The group articulated their desire for, and collective understanding of an entitlement to, a “healthy food system” as one characterized by or facilitating: self-determination, respect for culture and history, youth participation, job creation, locally-owned businesses, affordability, and collaboration.

6.5.2 *Participation*

Lefebvre's characterization of participation as a central feature of a renewed right to the city inheres in the work of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition. Since its inception, the work of the LNWFAC was characterized by vital and active "community engagement" and decision-making by consensus. As the LNWFAP articulates, the initiative to devise a plan "began as an opportunity for Lower Ninth Ward residents to participate in the creation of a plan to facilitate action, firmly rooted in the belief that only the community itself can decide what the community wants and needs with regard to food access" (LNWFAP 2013:24).

The group has also worked to mobilize diverse coalitions of stakeholders to realize their particular vision of how to increase food access in the neighborhood. Through the creation of the Food Action Plan, the group hoped to characterize the Lower Ninth Ward as a neighborhood open for business, arguing that efforts to bring people and resources into the neighborhood must be linked; one will not come without the other.

Included within Lefebvre's and subsequent interpretations of the notion of "participation" is an ontological acknowledgement of the requirements of healthy and productive lives in order to facilitate civic engagement. In their own discursive framing, the LNWFAC emphasizes the importance of healthy bodies for generating vital urban spaces, and they recognize the ways in which systemic and structural barriers constrain opportunities for "optimal health" among marginalized populations. They enumerate racial health disparities, which indicate that people of color are at a greater risk of developing diabetes, heart disease, and obesity than their white counterparts, even when controlling for other socioeconomic variables (LNWFAP 2013: 15). Importantly, the group attributes the higher rate of risk not to personal decisions or community failures, but to primarily structural causes "such as income, education, work status, poor housing,

neighborhood segregation, and environmental factors, all of which are deeply rooted in historic and systemic racism” (LNWFAP 2013: 14).

6.5.3 Scale

While acknowledging the structural and systemic factors underlying racial inequities in health outcomes, the LNWFAC fought to address specific challenges within the scale of their neighborhood—precisely the scale at which they perceived they were capable of effecting change. Among the many factors influencing or jeopardizing the health of Lower Ninth Ward residents (environmental injustices, infrastructural constraints, poor access to health care, etc.), they characterize the “food access challenge” as “the easiest to address” at the same time that is “an issue of social justice that is deserved in all neighborhoods in the United States” (LNWFAC 2013: 14). Thus, the group positioned their own work within broader struggles for social justice and food activism, while focusing their efforts on the meaningful and accessible scale of everyday existence, where they felt both capable of and motivated to effect positive change within their community.

6.5.4 City as Oeuvre

As inhabitants concerned with the use value of their neighborhood, LNWFAC members join other LNW residents in opposing efforts to commodify their neighborhood in the wake of the destructions caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. “Disaster tourism” is a lucrative business in the LNW, with around thirty companies offering bus tours of the “devastation that displaced hundreds of thousands of residents” (BigEasyTours.com). Big Easy Tours charges \$50 per person for its “Hurricane Katrina—America’s Worst Catastrophe—Bus Tour,” which travels through the Lower Ninth Ward and other devastated neighborhoods. Residents of the Lower Ninth Ward have resisted these efforts to cash in on their misery and cast their neighborhood as

spectacle; as one resident told a reporter for the Associated Press, “We’re fed up and tired of them coming through the neighborhood like we’re some sideshow. After all the suffering we have been through, we deserve more respect than this.” (Telegraph, Oct. 5, 2012).

Rather than permitting their neighborhood to be characterized as a “Jungleland” (Rich 2012) or capitalized upon by exogenous greed, Lower Ninth Ward residents and members of the LNWFAC consistently work to publicly proclaim that their neighborhood is worth saving and worth celebrating. Responding to March 2012 article in the *New York Times Magazine* that characterized the Lower Ninth Ward as a “jungleland,” LNWFAC member and Food Security Coordinator Kendra (2012) countered with pride and determination:

“Contrary to the article, residents of this community are not reconciled to life in the wilderness and we don’t live in an untamed mess of overgrowth or in a forgotten wasteland. We are not resigned to anything; we are fighting to revive our community... [W]hile writing about broken people, vacant lots and weeds may be sexy journalism, the community needs the outside world to understand how implicit and unconscious bias caused by a history of racism pummeled us.”

Kendra’s response, published in the magazine *Ebony*, argued that the *Times*’ characterization was unfair and incomplete. While parts of the Lower Ninth Ward are overgrown or uninhabited, there are many parts of the neighborhood that are thriving once again, despite the odds.

Furthermore, Kendra expressed frustration that the *Times* article did not explore the structural inequalities that contributed to the formation of the landscape it described as a “jungle.” As a third-generation resident of the Lower Ninth Ward, who is now raising a child of her own in the neighborhood, Kendra felt compelled to set the record straight on both fronts: on the one hand, the neighborhood has a rich and vibrant history, rightly celebrated for its resilience and self-reliance. After Hurricane Katrina destroyed 100% of the housing stock of the neighborhood, the city of New Orleans announced a plan to convert the Lower Ninth Ward into “greenspace” (indicated by a big green dot on the proposed redevelopment plan). Pre-Katrina residents of the

Lower Ninth Ward, scattered as they were about the state, region, and country, fought the proposal to “green the Nine,” and vocalized their intention to return home to the neighborhood as soon as possible. The re-population of the Lower Ninth Ward by pre-Katrina residents accounts for less than a third of the people displaced by the storm—most have lacked the financial ability or emotional fortitude to come back. But those who have returned, and many who chose not to, acknowledge the history of structural racism that Kendra referenced in her article.

6.6 Conclusion

Lefebvre’s characterization of the Right to the City as the rights to access and democratically participate in the creation of public space grounds radical social theory within the realm of everyday existence. Individuals and groups claiming their right and ability, as residents of a particular place, to have some say in how that space is managed and to whom it offers benefits, demonstrate the powerful and transformative potential of claims on the right to the city for democratizing urban space.

Residents who experienced the destruction the levee failure caused in the Lower Ninth Ward, and who have struggled to return to the neighborhood to rebuild their homes and their lives, recognize a deep and painful racial inequity that contributed to their abandonment. Structural racism characterized the experience, and circumscribed the likelihood of survival, for residents of the Lower Ninth Ward for decades leading up to the storm, and in every phase of the rebuilding in the years since. That Lower Ninth Ward residents were predominantly African American was itself a function of structural racism; wealthier (and even poor) whites occupied the parts of the city situated on higher ground, while poor African Americans were corralled into the lower-lying, environmentally vulnerable areas. This corraling happened both during and after the *de jure* segregation of the Jim Crow era, and set in place a spatial patterning that made

primarily African-American neighborhoods more susceptible to flooding. The Lower Ninth Ward was the area of the city hardest hit—not just by the storm itself, but by the failure of the Army Corps-constructed levees that were known to be inadequate. The Lower Ninth Ward was also highly racially segregated from other parts of the city; in 2005, before the storm, it was 98% African American. Half of the neighborhood residents did not have access to cars. When then-Mayor Ray Nagin ordered a mandatory evacuation of the city the day before Katrina struck, most Lower Ninth Ward residents did not have a way to evacuate. They also had a higher home-ownership rate than most primarily low-income black neighborhoods in other parts of the country; many folks who could have left were reluctant to leave homes that were in many cases a source of both pride and a solitary source of personal wealth to pass on to their children. After the storm, money to rebuild was distributed not on the basis of the scale of destruction, but on pre-storm property values. Thus, people owning homes in wealthier neighborhoods were awarded more funds to restore homes that were less damaged. The lethargic response of FEMA and the rest of the Bush Administration is well-documented (Hartman and Squires 2006; Dyson 2006).

The food-access efforts and struggles of Lower Ninth Ward residents who prioritize their neighborhood affiliation and situate their rights claims within the space of the neighborhood, demonstrate the scalar politics of claims on the right to the city. Food access is not a citywide problem in New Orleans; like other disinvested communities throughout the United States, “food deserts” cluster in low-income communities and tend not to characterize entire cities. Wealthier parts of New Orleans (where most residents own personal vehicles anyway) have seen remarkable rebuilding and have consistent and convenient access to fresh foods within easy walking distance. The mobilization of Lower Ninth Ward residents who lack sufficient access to

fresh food was thus inherently *neighborhood*-based. Smith and McQuarrie's (2012: 3) argument that claims on the RTTC "mobilize people on the basis of propinquity and membership in a more legally ambiguous community than the nation-state" rings especially true at the scale of the neighborhood, which is the scale of everyday life, and the scale at which LNWFAC members feel capable of demanding and enacting changes to their lived urban landscape. Thus, citizenship claims by LNWFAC members also occur at the neighborhood scales. At meetings of the LNWFAC, residents introduced themselves as "born and bred in the Lower Ninth Ward" or "second [or third, or fourth] generation resident of the Lower Ninth Ward." By proclaiming the primacy of their role as Lower Ninth Ward residents to "decide what we want for our community," the LNWFAC exhibits radical urban inhabitation through claims on the right to their neighborhood.

Finally, the indeterminacy of Lefebvre's characterization of how the RTTC might be enacted suggests the need for articulations that are spatially and contextually specific. The LNWFAC's focused demand for food that is "fresh, quality, convenient and affordable," and their collaborative effort to transform the limited food options available in their community, constitute legitimate claims of the right to transform the urban space in which they live. Their efforts are an example of the transformative potential of a "political moment" (Becher, 2012) which enacts substantive change through (1) mobilizing people who don't consider themselves to be especially political; (2) develop inhabitants' personal commitments and abilities to access power; (3) can change the function, purpose, or interest of local institutions to better meet residents' needs. Members of the LNWFAC mobilized around a specific goal that they recognized as situated within a broader struggle for economic and racial justice. Their collaborative visioning and activism demonstrate the potential of neighborhood-scale political

moments to spark participation and appropriation among historically marginalized groups. Because food access represents an urgent individual and collective need, localized struggles for food sovereignty open up productive spaces from which to launch broader campaigns claiming the right to the city; the LNWFAC's grassroots structure and neighborhood-scale organizing offer instructive examples of what the beginning of a renewed right to the city might look like.

I conclude this chapter with a statement from the Food Action Plan itself, which epitomizes the political mobilizations made possible through neighborhood-scale claims on the right to the city: "The Food Planning Initiative has engendered a wholesome dialogue and has prompted the formation of a committed coalition of residents in search of sustainable solutions to improving the quality, quantity, and variety of food in the Lower Ninth Ward. Residents are motivated to create change, to advocate for themselves, and to build collaborative partnerships that facilitate progress toward actionable solutions" (LNWFAP 2013: 36).

CHAPTER 7

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY DISCOURSE AND ACTIVISM

7.1 Introduction

I had been volunteering at the Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana for a few weeks when Marina, a single, 20-year-old woman from El Salvador, came into the office with a letter from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). What follows is a vignette portrayal of my meeting with Marina, intended to introduce issues of translation and the state and their relevance for discourses of food security and food sovereignty. Following the vignette, this chapter presents an overview of nascent food sovereignty movements in the United States and a review of theoretical approaches to food sovereignty, to situate an analysis of my own research site and problems. In this chapter, I begin with a global perspective on food sovereignty, as demonstrated through a qualitative content analysis of web-based sources utilizing the term. I then narrow the focus of my analysis to the Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana, and consider what that organization can reveal about the connections amongst food sovereignty movements in the "Global South," food security and food justice concerns in North America, and the emerging tensions that arise in the translation of food sovereignty from rural spaces of the global south into urban areas of the global north. These multi-scalar and multi-sited investigations of food sovereignty reveal a dynamic and evolving concept whose material manifestations are varied, often contradictory, and spatially-specific. Such variable appropriation of the powerful tenets enshrined within food sovereignty necessitates further critique and consideration of its usage within new spaces and places; thus, I argue for a cautious and deeply

considered positioning of food sovereignty within contemporary struggles for “more just food systems” in the global North, one which is attentive to the shortcomings of food sovereignty “movements” in other places, and also to the unique conditions of the urban/Northern/Western and neoliberal spaces where food sovereignty has gained considerable conceptual purchase but attained little in the way of material or political change. By situating food sovereignty within these frames, I intend to highlight the expansion of food sovereignty discourse and activism beyond rural areas of the global South into new spaces and scales that may represent an alternative, and more benign, version of the very politics of globalization that food sovereignty so fervently resists. I argue that the globalization of food sovereignty itself demands a certain flexibility and specific attention to the politics of place if it is to remain a viable and valid pursuit in such disparate locations as Nyéléni and New York (cf. Schiavoni 2009). At the same time, trans-national coalitions for food sovereignty can continue to generate the solidarity needed to effect systemic change within a food system that food sovereignty advocates deem to be oppressive and corporatized. As a movement primarily concerned with issues of land access and tenure, and spatialized self-determination regarding food production and consumption practices, a viable and vital food sovereignty will need to attend to issues of space, place and scale, which may entail a shift in focus and priority as U.S.-based organizations take up the mantle of food sovereignty.

7.1.1 Vignette: The Latino Farmers’ Cooperative of Louisiana

Marina walks into the LFCL office, looking flustered, and hands me a letter from the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The letter is in English although Marina speaks only Spanish. It says she missed an interview with her caseworker and

that her SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or Food Stamps) application will be terminated if she does not contact the DCFS office by January 17. The letter itself is dated January 17, and Marina tells me she did not receive the letter until after that date. I try calling DCFS, but receive a series of automated messages; when I am finally directed to the caseworker line, I am told the lines are all busy. We wait. Since Marina does not have a social security number, there is no record of her application. We'll have to submit a new application. Marina looks desperate upon hearing this news.

"Will I have to wait another month?"

"I think so," I answer. She visibly sighs, and shrinks. I equivocate. "It depends." I say this as though I have any idea how long it will take. I don't. But I want to appear competent to Marina; I want her to feel she can trust me.

Marina and I sit down to begin filling out the new SNAP application. I hand her a copy of the Spanish language version, so that she can follow along as I ask questions and type her information into the online application on the computer. The first question on the application: "How many liquid resources do you have at the present time?" I ask Marina how much cash she has right now, total.

"Nada."

I repeat, "Nada? Nada, pura nada?"

"Si, nada." So I type "\$0." The next question: "What is your monthly rent?" I ask her.

"Quinientos." I type "\$500." Next: "Do you pay for electricity, water, and other utilities?"

"Si."

"Do you pay for telephone?"

“Si.” This information establishes an immediate need for assistance. Anyone with less than \$150 cash-on-hand, or with greater expenses than income, may be eligible for expedited receipt of benefits. I’ve discovered that “may” is the operative word; the SNAP benefits system seems plagued by inconsistency. Depending on the caseworker and caseload, the expediency of the mail, the direction of the wind, luck, and seemingly any number of other factors, SNAP applicants may or may not receive a few dollars to feed their families each month. It seems terribly unreliable.

The next section of the application, chummily titled “Tell Us About You,” asks identification questions about the applicant—name, address, telephone, birthdate, highest grade level completed, whether or not she has immigration papers. I note, silently, that Marina is the same age as my sister, who is a junior at the University of Florida. Besides their age, I wonder, what might the two of them share? The space in which to type a social security number remains blank. DCFS will assign a random identification number to any client without a social security number, and this will be used to track and identify the client throughout their dealings with DCFS. Next is the section where Marina authorizes me as her representative, meaning I will be responsible for speaking on her behalf in an interview with a caseworker. I have no experience or authority to do such a thing, but Marina does not speak English, and needs someone who does to advocate for her and to serve as an intermediary between her and her DCFS caseworker who, most likely, does not speak Spanish.

Next, the application prods, “Tell Us About The Other People in Your Household.” Marina has already been through all this once, so she knows that “household” means only Marina and her 11-month-old U.S.-born son, not the three other families with whom she shares an apartment. For the purposes of SNAP, “household” essentially characterizes the people with

and for whom the applicant purchases food. Since Marina's son, Javier, was born in the United States, she can claim SNAP benefits only for him, which means Marina can expect a maximum of \$200 per month to spend on food for herself and her child (DCFS Louisiana 2012).

In the next section, "Tell Us About Your Household," the application asks about criminal history, history of abuse, existing disabilities, and whether or not someone living in the household is in high school, college, or vocational school. Marina answers "No" to all of these questions. The next section is interested in work. Since Marina answers no to the first question, "Does anyone in your household work," the subsequent questions are all moot. These include questions about for whom the applicant theoretically works and how much he or she theoretically makes and where he or she theoretically cashes his or her theoretical paycheck. There is a subsequent section on other income ("Tell Us About Other Income"), which includes possible sources of income outside of work (gifts, trust funds, scholarships, loans, contributions from family or friends, spousal support, workers' compensation, etc.). Marina's income remains at \$0.

Next, the application demands, "Tell Us About Your Expenses." Again, there is a list of check-boxes; for Marina, I check the boxes for rent, electricity, gas, water and telephone. I then type out the amounts for each expense, and to whom it is paid. In Marina's case, it is complicated, because she splits her bills with so many other people. She doesn't directly pay any utility companies, and her rent check goes to another tenant in her apartment. So I answer the questions as clearly as I am able, but fret that this may become an issue when Marina's caseworker prompts us to send proof of expenditures. We'll cross that bridge when we get to it. Luckily, we can respond "no" to all the questions about medical expenses. Also, since Marina

does not work herself, she does not have to worry about finding and paying someone to take care of Javier. Small blessings.

Marina greets the final question on the application with a laugh: “Have you or anyone in your household received, or do you expect to receive, a lump sum of money?” We both shake our heads at that one, check “No,” cross our fingers, and click “Submit.”

This snapshot of a typical morning at the LFCL illuminates a few prominent themes that emerge through an investigation of food sovereignty discourse and activism. First, as a recent immigrant to the United States, and the mother of a U.S.-born child, Marina’s need for nutritional assistance, and the fragility of her economic and social situation, highlight distinctions between food security and food sovereignty, while revealing the complexities underlying contemporary globalized food systems. A second major theme is the “outsider” status that characterizes Marina’s racial identity and social positioning within the city (and within the United States more broadly). By highlighting and defending the rights and experiences of those marginalized by the global food system, food sovereignty can help to position Marina and others like her in a way that situates her need for food assistance within broader patterns of neglect and/or outright disenfranchisement. Finally, my experience with Marina (and with many other clients of the Latino Farmers’ Cooperative) raises issues of translation at scales ranging from the interpersonal to the international. I argue that Marina’s need for a translator to assist in her efforts to access food (aid) is analogous to the challenges that confront food sovereignty discourses as they come to be understood and appropriated by individuals and organizations in new spaces and contexts. To situate an analysis of these themes within my own research in New Orleans, and with the Latino Farmers’ Cooperative especially, I first review central tenets of “the

global movement” for Food Sovereignty that have given rise to specific articulations and struggles in vastly different spaces around the globe. After reviewing theoretical engagements with food sovereignty, the subsequent section of this chapter considers the breadth of contemporary appropriation of food sovereignty tenets and discourses through a content analysis of international web sites referencing food sovereignty efforts. The intentions of the web content analysis are to capture adequately the complexity of “the food sovereignty movement,” and to demonstrate the breadth of its contemporary appropriation in the United States (and to thereby question whether it is indeed correct to suggest that such a singular movement exists at all). Finally, I return to a discussion of the themes and patterns that arose from my own field observations in New Orleans, and reflect on what they may suggest for an emerging movement for food sovereignty in the United States.

7.2 Theoretical Engagements with Food Sovereignty

In Chapter Two, I presented central themes from within the movement for food sovereignty. Among these are support for an alternative policy framework that aligns with the “rights of peoples to food and to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production,” while resisting the dominance of corporate consolidation and capitalist ideology within a globalized food system (Peoples Food Sovereignty Network 2002). Housed within the “big tent” of rights characterized by food sovereignty are primary rights of self-determination and democratic control over all aspects of the food system. This conceptual linking of residence in a particular place with the authority to manage the activities occurring there is reflective of the demands laid out in the Right to the City framework, which I discussed in Chapter Six. Claims to food sovereignty thus do not “simply rehearse older notions of the sovereignty of the nation-state, nor do they reflect xenophobic or exclusively local struggles. Instead, sovereignty here refers to

demands for autonomy, solidarity, dignity, and the fundamental rights of people and their communities to decide the future of the food they grow and consume as a form of material democracy” (Haiven 2009: 2). For the purposes of my analysis in this chapter, I review some of the central tenets of food sovereignty, and consider efforts to engage with those tenets both theoretically and in practice.

7.2.1 Food Sovereignty’s “Rights” Claims

Food sovereignty’s explicit attention to power and to the democratization of food systems offers one possible alternative to white hegemony within U.S. food justice initiatives. While the impetus for and continued momentum of an international grassroots movement for food sovereignty is in many ways territorialized within the global south, the central demands for self-determination, autonomy, and democratic food and agricultural systems have gained considerable conceptual purchase throughout the United States. As the conflicted relationship between food sovereignty and the state attests, food sovereignty’s fundamental demands for *rights*—to food, to the productive resources that generate healthy food, and all the other rights so thoroughly articulated in La Via Campesina’s classification of the rights demanded through food sovereignty (see Chapter Two)—leave open the question of who or what is responsible for granting those rights. Simply declaring rights is effective at least for mobilizing solidarity in resistance to commonly agreed-upon oppressions and support for rights determined to be lacking. To articulate the truism that “the mere declaration of a right does not mean that it is met,” Raj Patel (2009: 668) draws on Jeremy Bentham’s (2002:330) proclamation, “wants are not means; hunger is not bread.” For Patel (2009), the solution to this incongruity is a theoretical engagement with the principles of “moral universalism” in the pursuit of radical egalitarianism and democratic praxis. To bridge the gap between rights declared and rights granted, between

wants and means, hunger and bread, Patel (2009) reflects on Hannah Arendt's treatment of the "right to have rights" and on Seyla Benhabib's subsequent contribution of "moral universalism." As Patel (2009:669) argues, in order to understand what food sovereignty "looks like,"—that is, what are the spaces in which food sovereignty is made manifest, and by which actors—it is vital to examine not just the declaration of rights, but also "the substantive policies, processes, and politics that go to make up food sovereignty." These specific manifestations, or "multiple geographies" each carry within them the seeds of moral universalism implicit in La Via Campesina's food sovereignty principles, which serve as the foundation for claims to food sovereignty everywhere. In Patel's estimation, at least, food sovereignty's moral universalism opens the door to radical transformation within the global food system.

Claeys (2013: 2) argues that La Via Campesina's food sovereignty discourses have contributed to an

"alternative conception of rights...[which] emphasizes the collective dimension of claims over the individual one; targets the various levels where food and agricultural governance issues ought to be deliberated, from the local, national, regional to the international, rather than focusing exclusively on the state; and provides the tools to fight neoliberalism and capitalism in agriculture, through the defense of autonomy and equality-reinforcing food systems."

By refusing to rely on existing human rights frameworks (such as the right to food), La Via Campesina and subsequent food sovereigntists have been at liberty to define the right to food sovereignty as something qualitatively distinct from other human rights. However, by declaring the right to food sovereignty as one which all people have a right (and, perhaps a duty) to claim, food sovereignty becomes cast as a universal, though distinct, human right.

However, the spaces in which food sovereignty's rights claims are enacted matter. As Wendy Brown (1995) argues, social movements using the discourse of 'rights' run the risk of undermining the emancipatory potential of their projects by reinforcing the structures that

contribute to social domination, particularly when that discourse is abstracted to scales beyond the reach of tangible and material praxis. She cautions against depoliticizing rights when she observes: “rights necessarily operate in and as an ahistorical, acultural, acontextual idiom: they claim distance from specific political contexts and historical vicissitudes, and they necessarily participate in a discourse of enduring universality rather than provisionality or partiality” (Brown 1995: 97). Due to the “universal” nature of rights discourses, Brown argues, they tend to neglect the temporal and spatial particularities of groups engaged in social activism, presenting at least a possibility for legal recognition of rights to perpetuate systems of subordination.

In reality of course, experiences of, access to, and protection under legally granted rights are not at all equal or universal; while it may be possible for collectives of individuals to successfully achieve specific emancipatory rights (the right of women to vote; the right of African-Americans to become presidents), it is simultaneously quite possible for others to utilize the rights claims as instruments of subordination; specifically, for example, “rights” to privacy and to property can facilitate or at least perpetuate negative “social formations”—such as racial and class inequalities, the privatization of public space, the creation of ‘fortress societies’—all enrobed in egoist pursuits. Consequently, Brown argues, there is a paradox “between the universal idiom and the local effects of rights” which transpires on both a “temporal and a spatial level,” and which “prevents us from saying anything generic about the political value of rights: it makes little sense to argue for them or against them separately from an analysis of the historical conditions, social powers, and political discourses with which they converge or which they interdict” (Brown 1995: 97-98). This is a central premise undergirding my interest in food sovereignty movements that utilize a discourse of rights to generate political momentum and effect positive social change. Since it is entirely possible for food sovereignty movements to

impose structures that do not emancipate but rather subordinate by “reifying the social power they are designed to protect against,” it is essential to examine the unique rights that specific groups and organizations claim at particular times (Brown 1995: 115). It is also crucial to investigate who is claiming those rights and, if they are seeking or claiming rights on behalf of someone else (or some other “politicized identity”), whether that action may be deemed truly emancipatory, or whether it simply “encode[s]...the social powers and social formations that are the conditions of our unfreedom” (Brown 1995: 110).

7.2.2 Sovereignty, Scale, and the State

The precise role of the state in either granting or undermining the rights that constitute food sovereignty is a controversial matter. Public statements by La Via Campesina have appealed to the rights and responsibilities of “civil society” for enacting food sovereignty, as well as to the sovereign rights of states, communities, and individuals. While La Via Campesina, and the numerous organizations and communities that have adopted the language of food sovereignty, depict the right to food and to self-determination as “natural,” rather than state-afforded rights, the policy-oriented activism of these movements reveals a bias toward enshrining certain rights in new or established legal frameworks in order to lend them legitimacy. Specifically, food sovereignty movements attempt to utilize policy to “ensure farmers’ access to land, seeds and water” and to guarantee the primacy of “local markets, local production-consumption cycles, energy and technological sovereignty, and farmer-to-farmer networks,” primarily through legislation that would dismantle agribusiness monopolies and dependency-oriented transnational trade arrangements (Altieri 2009, p.2). The state, then, can be understood to be the requisite body for legitimating and granting the rights claimed by food sovereignty.

Paradoxically, though, the movement for food sovereignty is at least partially a reaction *against* the notion that the state has the ability or interest to do good on behalf of its citizens when it comes to food and agriculture; the state is understood to be sympathetic to “scientific” agriculture as a means for gaining control over the structure and functioning of civil society (Scott 1998). In *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott distinguishes between “scientific knowledge”—as the logic driving state-endorsed agricultural schemes—and “practical knowledge” or *metis*—the ancient, local or folk knowledge utilized by “traditional” agriculturalists. Within this framework, Scott enumerates four characteristics of the modern state that have contributed to the rise of scientific agriculture, and, in response, fomented food sovereignty’s demands for democratic restructuring of the food system. The first of these is “administrative ordering,” in which local or practical knowledge is simplified so that it may be made legible and subject to state authority. The second is a veneration of high modernist ideology, which emphasizes uncritical and (ironically) “unscientifically optimistic” faith in science’s ability to always know and do what is best for society at large (Scott 1998: 4). These first two characteristics are possible only if the third condition applies: there must exist an authoritarian state that espouses high-modernist ideology and is eager to coercively transform its designs into reality. The final necessary component for the success of state control schemes is a prostrate civil society that is accepting of (or at least apathetic to) the imposition of state control in social realms. As Scott (1998) argues, while even nonscientific institutions may accept the value (or, indeed, the necessity) of practical knowledge, they will seek “radically simplified designs” that will allow for sustained control over natural and human environments. Thus, in the form of subsidies, standardizations, and other licensing requirements, state control mechanisms serve to foster the continued growth of an already dominant industrial agriculture system, thus laying the

foundation for systems of dominance and control that food sovereignty movements have opposed from the outset.

The seemingly contradictory positioning of the state within food sovereignty discourses—as the body responsible both for granting the rights enshrined in food sovereignty and for disregarding them—highlights the importance of scale when considering movements for food sovereignty. The diverse realms in which food sovereignty plays out, and the many scales at which sovereignty is claimed and is or is not granted, leave open the question of precisely which entity is (or has the “right” to be) sovereign, and over which spaces. The shifting sites of food sovereignty claims and praxis thus necessitate a constant reformulation of the *scale* of the sovereign. In the context of the international neoliberal trade policies that sparked Via Campesina into action in the mid-1990s, the demand was for *state* control over agricultural practices, in concert with the best practices (Scott’s *metis*) of the agricultural peasantry. At the global scale, then, the nation-state, and the territory over which it is sovereign, comprises the space over which food sovereignty demands governance; there is an expectation that domestic policies can and should support domestic food production and food producers, and the state is both the vessel through which food sovereignty’s rights claims are demanded and the space over which a radically democratic food and agriculture system identified as meeting the principles of food sovereignty is made manifest. As of this writing, a handful of nation-states have incorporated food sovereignty clauses into their the national constitutions, including Venezuela (1999), Senegal (2004), Mali (2006), Nepal (2007), Ecuador (2008), and Bolivia (2009) (Beauregard 2009: 4). However, in some instances, state-led agrarian reform efforts in Latin America (sometimes, though not always, brandishing the discourse of food sovereignty) have

“primarily served to foment the establishment of capitalistic agriculture in the countryside,” thus spurring domestic rural to urban and international migration (Lavelle 2012).

So while supportive state policies are often considered a goal of food sovereigntists, (unsupportive) state sanctions are often the most formidable barriers to enacting food sovereignty at the scale of the nation-state (Holt-Giménez 2009). Because state policies regarding food and agriculture so often represent a complete denial of and are anathema to the principles of food sovereignty, other, smaller scales of praxis have proven more successful. In March of 2011, a group of towns in the U.S. state of Maine elected to exempt themselves from state and federal food safety regulations in an effort to legalize and promote cottage industries that were forbidden under existing law (Halloran 2011). The towns drew on a long local tradition of “Home Rule,” which invokes the town’s right to self-governance, specifically allowing local producers and processors to sell food to the public without licensing. By revoking state safety regulations, the Maine food sovereignty ordinances implicitly place the onus of care on the individual; one ordinance reads, “We have faith in our citizens’ ability to educate themselves and make informed decisions... We hold that federal and state regulations impede local food production and constitute a usurpation of our citizens’ right to foods of their choice” (quoted in Halloran 2011). As Kurtz (2013) argues, these ordinances “draw on a populist ethos and the town meeting tradition to invite direct democratic participation in pressing claims for food sovereignty” within local communities. As the ordinances themselves reveal, however, beyond the sovereignty of local communities is the ultimate authority of individual bodies to choose correctly when it comes to food.

Individual-scale claims to food sovereignty are quite often manifest through consumption practices and so-called “consumer sovereignty,” which hinge on the argument that consumers of

food (as commodity) have a “right to know” where there food comes from and how it is produced. Scott Stoneman (2009) distinguishes consumer-driven “privilege of knowledge” discourses from food sovereignty’s fundamental attention to the “right to have rights” by implicating the former in perpetuating structures of power and inequity that fomented much food sovereignty activism in the first place. Stoneman characterizes “consumer sovereignty” as having the “privilege of knowing” because it reflects an informational strategy for changing eating habits; if people have more information about the food system’s connection to neoliberal capital, Stoneman argues, discerning (and economically capable) consumer should have the option of choosing alternatives to that system. Stoneman (2009: 2) argues that “as a concept and political practice, consumer sovereignty and the privilege of knowing are not only insufficient solutions for the corporate logic which has wrought our present global food crisis and made entire populations disposable; it is the very ideological source of this inequity.” In other words, consumer sovereignty lulls people back into a neoliberal framework (better consuming) rather than promoting radical transformation of food system.

Guthman and DuPuis (2006: 442), similarly, situate individual rights claims about consumption within the same neoliberal epoch that spawned food sovereignty activism in the first place: “the notion of neoliberal governmentality suggests that there are unique ways in which subjects can act on themselves to produce their semiotic and corporeal identities within the larger context of neoliberalism.” In other words, state doctrines that deem unregulated foods to be dangerous and therefore illegal to sell and irresponsible to consume rest on the assumption that protecting subjects from death necessarily entails protecting them from their own bad choices, while at the same time urging them to be good, consuming neoliberal subjects. Meanwhile, advocates for food sovereignty maintain the right to “act on themselves” in the name

of their own and their community's economic and cultural health by choosing specific kinds (usually organic and locally produced). However, such practices, which hinge on consumption practices and economic exchange, reify the commodification of food that food sovereigntists sought to undermine in the first place.

7.2.3 Food Sovereignty's Moral Universalism

Trauger (forthcoming) lays out a conceptual framework for approaching food sovereignty through the lens of geography. As Trauger argues, food sovereignty's conceptual and material purchase inheres in the mobilization of "subversive spaces, temporary territories, and insurgent citizenship" and relies on common acknowledgment of moral universals within nature and community. *Moral Universalism* affirms the notion that all people—particularly those most marginalized by discriminatory systems—have a fundamental right not just to food, but to all decisions regarding food. Patel (2009:670) describes a moral universalist society as one in which "the equally-distorting effects of sexism, patriarchy, racism and class power have been eradicated." Only in such a society is food sovereignty possible, because, "to make the right to shape food policy meaningful is to require that *everyone* be able substantively to engage with those policies" (Patel 2009: 670). Moral universalism thus becomes a precondition for food sovereignty.

Trauger (forthcoming) argues that the concept of moral universalism links efforts in the United States to other subversive, temporary and insurgent food movements in divergent spaces where food sovereignty movements have been underway for a number of years. Drawing on examples from Portugal, Brazil, and throughout the United States, Trauger argues that contemporary manifestations of food sovereignty in the post-industrial context of the "Global North" emerge within and through the gaps of state intervention and corporate control of the

food system. Trauger's primary aim is to "position food sovereignty as a set of spatial and territorial strategies to contest state and capital and promote democracy and autonomy in the gaps that exist in state sovereignty" (Trauger, forthcoming: 2).

Whether or not they utilize the term 'food sovereignty,' Trauger argues, grassroots movements that work for and demand a radically democratic local food system ascribe to food sovereignty's philosophy of moral universalism, and may do well to reconsider discourses that revert to notions of "food security," which describe a fundamentally different approach to food access and food system change, as I discuss later in this chapter.

7.2.4 Critiques

Despite the transformative potential of food sovereignty as a conceptual framework for radically reworking industrial food systems, its broad application has been cited as both a strength and a weakness for efforts to enact food sovereignty "on the ground." The principle demands of food sovereignty, as articulated originally by Via Campesina and appropriated at various sites and scales, represent a broadening in the struggle for democratic control of food systems, as numerous local, national and international social movements and non-governmental organizations have incorporated or wholeheartedly embraced food sovereignty in efforts to shift agriculture and food policy (Wittman et al. 2010: 5). This expanded definition of what food sovereignty entails (democratic control over all aspects of the food system) and the spaces over which it demands governance (spaces of production, processing, distribution, consumption and decision-making) highlights the enormous potential of food sovereignty to democratize the scalar politics of food, but also betrays the possible fragility of a movement lacking conceptual or spatial specificity. Raj Patel (2009: 668) highlights the unwieldy nature of a movement that seeks

democratic governance at a variety of scales, but suggests that such framing may provide opportunities for intervention at specific localities:

“When the call is for, variously, nations, peoples, regions, and states to craft their own agrarian policy, there is a concomitant call for *spaces of sovereignty*. Food sovereignty has its own geographies, determined by specific histories and contours of resistance. To demand a space of food sovereignty is to demand specific arrangements to govern territory and space” (emphasis added).

Thus, while the conceptual power of food sovereignty lies in its resistance to corporate dominance at the global scale, the particular geographies in which food sovereignty’s rights claims are made—the particular spaces over which food sovereignty demands governance—are both distinct and material. To investigate food sovereignty as *praxis* entails a spatial positioning of food sovereignty’s demands, and explicit attention to the unique social and historical factors that situate those demands in space. In subsequent sections, I situate an implicit movement for food sovereignty within post-Katrina New Orleans. First, though, I turn to an analysis of Internet content addressing “food sovereignty” at diverse sites and scales. The purpose of this methodological excursion into a qualitative content analysis of web references to food sovereignty is to provide a context for the various ways in which food sovereignty discourse is understood and appropriated in different spatial contexts, and to situate discourses I encountered in New Orleans within those broad and diverse contexts.

7.3 Content Analysis: Spaces of “Food Sovereignty” on the Internet

The concept of food sovereignty has gained considerable purchase within popular and academic discourse since La Via Campesina introduced the term in 1994. Despite its origins in rural areas of the global South, the call for food sovereignty has spread throughout both urban and rural spaces in the global North, and through these processes of spatial translation has taken on new meanings and manifestations. In an effort to begin to make sense of how food

sovereignty is variously understood and claimed throughout these “new” spaces, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of a sample of Internet references to food sovereignty (similar to that described in Chapter Six on “the right to the city”). Because I am interested in discourse and the ways in which discourse both creates and reinforces particular ideologies, I wanted to understand the ways in which food sovereignty is discussed, interpreted, and associated in non-academic contexts. This would help me to better understand the extent to which popular discourses surrounding food sovereignty (and promoted by international organizations like La Via Campesina and national groups like the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance) contributed to (or, perhaps, contested) the discourses and ideologies I encountered in the field.

In May of 2012, I set an alert using the Google search engine, so that I would receive an email alert each time the phrase “food sovereignty” appeared anywhere on the Internet for the first time on a particular page. This alerted me to blog posts, academic articles, and news events throughout the world that referenced food sovereignty. For a two-month period⁷ (May 18, 2012 through July 21, 2012), I tracked and coded all content that came in through my Google alert on food sovereignty. During that period, I recorded thirty-five separate references to food sovereignty; of these, twenty-one were categorized as “Web” alerts (typically coming from a blog or organization’s webpage); twelve were classified as “News” alerts (appearing on the website of a news provider); and two were classified as “Scholar” alerts (when the phrase appeared in the title of an academic paper appearing for the first time within the Google Scholar database). Several themes emerged through an analysis of the content of these news articles, blog

⁷ I continued to review and track web references to food sovereignty until May of 2013 (completing twelve months of tracking), but found general thematic consistency among later references and those analyzed during the two month period from May to July of 2012. Therefore, I consider the two-month period of analysis a representative sample of web references to food sovereignty during the duration of my study. Themes and patterns discussed here relate meaningfully to broader patterns observed throughout the twelve-month period.

posts, and scholarly pieces. In analyzing the content of these sources, I was interested in the ways in which food sovereignty is mobilized discursively, and the scales at which these various sources situate claims for food sovereignty. It should be noted that I present this content analysis not as a comprehensive review of all Internet-based sources that reference food sovereignty, but to demonstrate some major themes that are emerging within a spatially and theoretically far-reaching appropriation of food sovereignty as a concept. I identify three major themes that characterize these references to food sovereignty across the web: (1) those that introduce and explore the concept of food sovereignty, trace its origins from LVC, and comment generally on a global food system that is perceived to be “broken”; (2) those that report, typically in a celebratory fashion, on specific efforts to claim and/or enact food sovereignty at the scale of an organization, a city, or a state; and (3) those that highlight or illuminate, either implicitly or explicitly, one or several discrepancies in the ways in which food sovereignty is conceptualized and enacted in diverse spaces and contexts. Some of the sources I found represent just one of these themes, while others represent some combination of them. Taken together, I argue, they offer considerable insight into contemporary discourses and praxis in a global movement for food sovereignty. Perhaps most importantly, they demonstrate the degree to which food sovereignty should perhaps be considered a dynamic category of diverse efforts to generate a more socially just and sustainable food system—whatever that may mean for unique actors and communities. In the sub-sections that follow, I synthesize the major themes that emerged from the qualitative web content analysis, and use these to situate my fieldwork observations and analysis in New Orleans.

7.3.1 Accounts of a Broken Food System

Despite the seeming ubiquity of terms like “food desert,” “food security,” and even “food justice” in popular and academic discourse, food sovereignty is still a relatively new or niche concept and term. For that reason, roughly a third of the references I encountered offered a (usually laudatory) introduction to food sovereignty as a novel and perhaps radical solution to the myriad problems with the contemporary global food system. For example, a blog linked to the Peace and Collaborative Development Network at Columbia University offers “A brief overview of Food Sovereignty, how it differs from food security, and why it matters” (Avila 2012). In her blog posting, as in many other sources of this type, Avila begins by attributing the coining of the term “food sovereignty” to La Via Campesina (LVC), and introduces the seven principles of food sovereignty as originally articulated by that organization.⁸ Like LVC, Avila emphasizes the distinction between food security and food sovereignty, defining the former as “availability of...and access to food,” while the latter incorporates control over decisions regarding land use and food and does not consider food aid a viable solution to access and availability concerns. To demonstrate a need for “a food sovereignty movement,” Avila and others in my web search refer accusatorily to international and transnational policies and regulations that permit land-grabbing and other power maneuvers by transnational corporations while effectively snuffing traditional or subsistence agricultural practices.

⁸ The seven basic principles of food sovereignty, as articulated by La Via Campesina in the 2007 Nyéléni Declaration are the following: (1) Food is a basic human right; (2) There is a need for agrarian reform which gives land ownership and control back to farming people; (3) Promote sustainable care and use of natural resources; (4) National agricultural policies must make domestic food production a priority to have food self-sufficiency; (5) End multinational corporations’ control over food to end the globalization of hunger; (6) Promote social peace by preventing the use of food as a weapon of war; and (7) Small farm owners must be involved in creating and formulating agricultural policies at all levels, allowing a democratic control of the land.

Often food sovereignty is invoked not as a framework for action but as an idealized alternative to existing practices. For example, in a post to his blog “The Genealogy of Consent,” Giulio Amerigo Caperchi characterizes food sovereignty as “a democratic demand for self-determination and a cry for independence” without actually articulating how such demands and cries may manifest actual changes in livelihoods. He includes a secondary, and more specific, description of food sovereignty as a right to subsistence farming (i.e. outside the oppressive influence of commercial agriculture), but offers no real indication of how a conceptual understanding of and demand for food sovereignty—as a movement situated both within and above states and corporations—may find material manifestation.

Also in this category are sources referencing particular meetings and events where food sovereignty serves as a central or organizing principle. Among these are academic conferences and meetings, gatherings of food activists of various stripes, and larger-scale international fora such as the Rio +20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. While numerous sources referenced the potential of the Rio+20 conference to shift the discussion from World Trade Organization (WTO)-led food security efforts towards indigenous-led food sovereignty, the broad international scale of the UN conference, and the apparent collusion of states with transnational bodies like the WTO and International Monetary Fund (IMF) appeared to preclude widespread adoption of food sovereignty as a framework for addressing underlying injustices in the food system that perpetuate food insecurity. A news posting by the People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty, an international consortium of food sovereignty advocates, expressed concern that the Rio +20 process was “in danger of being hijacked by the World Trade Organization” and that Rio +20 “could become a medium for another global food crisis by reinstating WTO policies and frameworks which exacerbate climate change through corporate agriculture.” While

claims such as these are largely unsubstantiated, they reveal a bias among food sovereignty advocates at numerous scales that food sovereignty is desirable or laudable not for what it *is* but more for what it is *not*; thus, the primary goal of People's Coalition of Food Sovereignty is to “develop and promote the People's Food Sovereignty as the *alternative platform against neoliberal globalization* on food and agriculture policies” (emphasis added).

7.3.2 Reports on Efforts to Enact Food Sovereignty

Perhaps the most common characteristic of the web sources I encountered was their reference to specific, localized manifestations of a broader movement for food sovereignty. These took the form of news reports, blogs, or event postings on websites, and usually also included a cursory introduction to food sovereignty and “why it matters.” These almost always reference LVC as well, but quickly turn to a description of localized circumstances that demand/constrain/necessitate a movement for food sovereignty. The scale at which food sovereignty claims are made varies considerably across these sources; I found references to food sovereignty initiatives targeting towns and villages (perhaps most famously throughout the U.S. state of Maine); Native American reservations in the United States; regions of a particular country (such as the Italian Piedmont or the San Francisco Bay Area); entire national states (including England, South Africa, Indonesia, and Australia); and even global-scale initiatives to overhaul the dominance of transnational corporate agriculture and replace it with something akin to food sovereignty.

Despite the variety of scales represented by these initiatives (or suggestions of initiatives), there is also a resounding sense that food sovereignty, which should, theoretically, signal a paradigm shift, cannot exist at one scale without also existing at every other. An essay by Raj Patel, included in the sources encountered through the web query, argues, “the

inequalities in power that characterize the food system can be found in households, corporations, regional and state governments, private philanthropic foundations, and international organizations” (Patel 2012). For that reason, we should not be surprised to find such a diversity of understandings and representations of food sovereignty popping up around the world. However, while there seems to be general agreement on what food sovereignty means *conceptually* (indicated by the ubiquitous reference to LVC and the near-universal appropriation of their definition of food sovereignty), the diversity of efforts to *enact* something resembling food sovereignty reveals much about the spatial specificity of food sovereignty (as other rights) claims. For example, numerous references to “food sovereignty ordinances” recently passed in towns throughout the U.S. state of Maine applaud these novel ordinances as “a way to encourage locally grown food” by “exempting farmers from state and federal regulations” that had previously prohibited them from selling certain foodstuffs directly to consumers (Campbell 2012; Kurtz 2013). As argued above, such ordinances do not, for the most part, remove food from processes of commodification, but rather further embed food products within specialized niche markets comprised of individuals who are interested and willing to pay a premium for specific food items that carry artisanal caché. Compare this to efforts in Accra, Ghana, where food sovereignty is invoked to describe a workshop intending to empower women farmers to adopt an “endogenous development approach” that resists international aid efforts promoted in food security discourses, while promoting the notion that “we are the solution to our own food crisis” (Knight 2012). In both the Maine and Ghana cases, food sovereignty is invoked as a localized solution to localized problems; in the neoliberal context of the United States, Maine farmers seek a viable livelihood by removing barriers to sell their products, while in the Ghana case food sovereignty is understood primarily as a mechanism for empowering women who

would otherwise have no access to independent capital. These different social, economic, and cultural contexts require and mobilize discourses and practices that meet locally-specific conditions and needs.

Finally, consider this report from Soweto, South Africa, of a local female farmer who was honored with a “Food Sovereignty prize” at the Rio +20 Summit in Brazil. Emily Tjale, who received the award because of her efforts to save seeds and help promote self-sufficient farming practices within her community in South Africa, stated that “winning the award means that I will get recognition from government funders and other stakeholders who support farming. Perhaps this will finally solve the land [grab and land tenure] issue.” While each of these three interpretations of food sovereignty aims to shift power away from transnational corporations, they envision very different paths for realizing the radical promise of food sovereignty. The Maine cases demonstrate a stance opposing state intervention, and actually represent a neoliberal framing vis-à-vis the state and “the market” (albeit for “local foods”). The Ghana case and the South Africa case embrace food sovereignty as a means of survival, but couch their efforts within state financing mechanisms and powerful NGOs that can help to support their particular interventions; in cases such as these, the state is seen not as the enemy, but as the grantor of rights to food self-sufficiency and food sovereignty. I discuss this theme in more detail below, but first turn to the final major feature of my analysis of web content relating to food sovereignty.

7.3.3 Scalar Separation

A common theme amongst blogs and websites referencing food sovereignty was that, whatever it is, there should be more of it. In an article published online and titled “The scaling up of agroecology: Spreading the hope for food sovereignty and resiliency,” Miguel Altieri

contributes to Rio+20 discussions of hunger, agriculture, and social justice by arguing that the proven social and ecological failures of industrial agriculture demand a scaling up of alternative approaches like agroecology and food sovereignty. Rather than characterizing food sovereignty approaches as traditional, Altieri envisions what he calls “peasant agriculture” as “the basis for the new 21st century agriculture,” where the principles of agroecology represent long-term viable alternatives to industrial food production models and corporate consolidation in the food system (Altieri 2012: 4). Altieri cites numerous examples from throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America to demonstrate the proliferation, economic viability, and social and cultural success of agroecological approaches and food sovereignty frameworks vis-à-vis their industrial counterparts. Despite the success of these efforts throughout the global South, however, Altieri identifies numerous barriers to “widespread adoption” of agroecological techniques and the food sovereignty framework that underlies them. These range from “technical issues such as lack of information by farmers and extension agents to policy distortions, market failure, lack of land tenure and infrastructural problems” (Altieri 2012: 15). Overcoming these barriers to “scaling up” requires “community empowerment” and “human capital enhancement,” primarily in the form of assistance to and support for small-scale agriculturalists. Altieri situates the potential for scaling up within a diverse field of constituencies, including NGOs, local markets, and different scales of governance. However, despite all of this, Altieri lumps food sovereignty amongst other variables (including “technological sovereignty” and “energetic sovereignty”) which comprise sustainable agroecological systems, but does not address how these various forms of sovereignty can possibly take hold within the political-economic frameworks of the global North, where, he concedes, “governments and donors influenced by big interests marginalize agroecological

approaches focusing on quick-fix, external input intensive ‘solutions’ and proprietary technologies such as transgenic crops and chemical fertilizers...” (Altieri 2012: 18).

In the case of the increasingly-well-known food sovereignty ordinances passed in eleven (and counting) towns throughout the U.S. state of Maine, the issue of scale is coming into play in meaningful ways as well. According to a report from the Bangor Daily News, “The ordinances pit towns against the state government, which has claimed the local rules hold no legal weight because state law trumps local ordinances” (Moretto 2013). A bill that would have protected the food sovereignty ordinances under state law was rebuffed for fear of what consequences it may engender further up the regulatory food chain; “some committee members feared passage of the bill would invite federal inspectors to ‘take over’ regulation of Maine’s food industries” (Moretto 2013). One farmer, in favor of promoting and passing food sovereignty ordinances, also invokes the importance of scale in arguing against regulations that are inappropriate for small farms. She argues, “I can’t butcher two ducks, and send one home with [a friend] for helping me, because that bird left the property and was not consumed here. That’s *scale inappropriate*” (in Moreno 2013, emphasis added).

Also in this category of web sources are those that begin to trace the spatial development of the (or many) food sovereignty movement(s) out of Latin America and, eventually, into Europe and North America. This history highlights successful efforts throughout Latin America and in some African countries to enshrine the language of food sovereignty within state constitutions, generally presenting these state-validation practices as positive and emancipatory rather than as state capture, as they may also be conceived (see Trauger, referenced above). These historical accounts also reference the 2007 Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali, where more than 500 delegates from over eighty countries gathered to draft and adopt the Nyéléni

Declaration. The declaration has become the standard definitional document of the food sovereignty movement, and is thus referenced universally.

A number of sources referenced or were generated by the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance (USFSA), which launched during the 2010 meeting of the Community Food Security Coalition in New Orleans. At a meeting of the US Social Forum in Detroit, during the summer of 2010, a group of food producers, workers within the food system, community organizers, and social activists joined together in the formation of the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance. Their intention was to expand the international agrarian movement for food sovereignty into urban and rural areas of the global North (Schiavoni, personal conversation; US Food Sovereignty Alliance 2010). As the concept of food sovereignty has gained conceptual and political purchase, however, its resonance has expanded geographically, to refer to efforts anywhere that fight for: “the people’s democratic control of the food system, the right of all people to healthy, culturally-appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (US Food Sovereignty Alliance 2010). According to its website, the USFSA “works to end poverty, rebuild local food economies, and assert democratic control over the food system” (U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance). This “work” occurs mostly through collaborations with local organizations throughout the U.S., and in solidarity with international movements such as La Via Campesina. The efforts of the USFSA are grounded in the underlying belief that “all people have the right to healthy, culturally appropriate food, produced in an ecologically sound manner.” Additionally, the alliance situates itself explicitly within complementary social justice initiatives, and sees its work as inextricably linked to social movements and campaigns associated with food justice, anti-hunger, labor, environmental, faith-based, and food producer groups. In defining food sovereignty, the alliance

refers back to LVC's definition, highlighting "the democratization of food and agriculture" and "the right of people...most impacted by global hunger and poverty...to determine their own food and agriculture policies." The discourse of the USFSA represents an appropriation of LVC's original framing, situating its definition of and call for food sovereignty within new spaces of the global North.

Having considered the broad appropriation and interpretations of food sovereignty, as demonstrated through the web sources discussed above, I now turn to an analysis of specific formulations of food justice activism within my research site of New Orleans. This analysis offers insight into the extent to which food sovereignty resonates conceptually and materially within the particular (and, often, peculiar) socio-cultural context of post-Katrina New Orleans, where efforts to address perceived injustices in the food system are diverse and often contradictory.

7.4 Spaces of Food Sovereignty in Post-Katrina New Orleans

While the content analysis described above relied entirely upon explicitly-stated references to food sovereignty, my field research took a more nuanced approach. Rather than recruit research participants already actively utilizing the discourses and ideologies of food sovereignty, I went to New Orleans to make sense of what was happening there regarding efforts to (re)build a socially-just food system (and the particular ways that differently-constituted groups articulated and envisioned a "socially-just food system"). To reiterate, a primary objective of my field research was to understand, broadly, how the concept of food sovereignty is translated across scales, and, specifically, how aptly LVC's original conceptualization (and subsequent interpretations of it, as articulated through the qualitative web content analysis described above) characterize food justice work within the specific spatial and social context of

post-Katrina New Orleans. In this chapter, I focus on one organization, the Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana (LFCL), to explore and investigate how its discourses and practices mirror or contest broader themes within the international movement for food sovereignty, as articulated above.

7.4.1 The Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana

The Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana (LFCL) emerged in early 2008 to address the social and economic needs of the city's growing Latino population (Figure 7.1). Following Hurricane Katrina, large numbers of Latinos migrated to the city from both domestic and international locations to assist in the rebuilding effort. The initial purpose of the LFCL was to foster collaboration and provide support among Latinos living in New Orleans, particularly in the realms of food provisioning and agricultural vocational training. Evelia, a native of Costa Rica who had lived in New Orleans for several decades prior to the storm, founded the cooperative with the intention to equip Latinos living in New Orleans with the skills and tools required to make a living in agriculture. This goal was grounded in two observations: (1) despite a growing demand for fresh, local produce, there seemed to be a dearth of small-scale farmers producing and distributing food within the city of New Orleans; and (2) many (if not most) Latinos living in New Orleans emigrated to the United States from rural areas, and had prior experience in agriculture, whether for subsistence or commercial purposes. Evelia thus envisioned the cooperative as a resource for Latinos seeking gainful employment, and a response to market demand for particular kinds of food commodities.

As the founder and director of the LFCL, Evelia has often struggled to convey the cooperative concept to members (who pay an annual fee to join) and to potential funders. Evelia described the use of the term "cooperative" this way: "We use the word cooperative because it

involves cooperation and it doesn't relate to any religious organization, and it doesn't have the connotation of charity....The community organizing model is based on cooperation, on community, on unity, so the community can belong. So the cooperative is basically an association of people who have specific needs and interests and can work together to solve their own issues." For Evelia, self-determination and collaboration are key components of the LFCL, although the organization does rely quite heavily upon outside funding from private foundations and public institutions and agencies like the USDA.



Figure 7.1 Office of the Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana
Photo by Author.

On paper, the organization is divided into two "parts": the "Farmer Incubator Project," and the "Food Security Project." The goals of the Farmer Incubator Project, from the inception

of the LCFL as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, were to train and advocate on behalf of Latinos who want to engage in farming or gardening for vocational or personal purposes. This was, ostensibly, the founding goal of the cooperative. Over time, however, it became clear to Evelia and the board of the LFCL that “food security” (i.e., the ability to acquire sufficient food to feed one’s family) was a primary concern within the Latino community living in New Orleans. Many new “members” to the cooperative were single women with children who were born in the United States, who saw the cooperative as a place to find community and support. To meet the needs of its members, the LFCL began seeking funding and strategies to increase food security, and thus developed the Food Security Project. At its outset, the Food Security Project endeavored to ensure the convenient and affordable access of healthy culturally-appropriate food to the Latino community.

Over time, the work of the LFCL has focused increasingly on what it terms “food security” by helping members to apply for and collect Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (previously known as food stamps). While most members themselves do not qualify for assistance because they are either undocumented or have not yet fully acquired citizenship status, their U.S.-born children do qualify for benefits, so the LFCL helps members to navigate the online SNAP application and serves as an official representative for members who do not speak English (nearly all). In addition to connecting members with state benefits programs, the LFCL runs a food pantry and small store which sells culturally appropriate foods at cost to members. The food pantry and store are both important components of what Evelia calls “food justice,” because most other food pantries throughout the city require proof of citizenship in order to collect food. Evelia argues:

“Most of the food pantry providers hesitate about serving to immigrants because they have the impression that either they don’t deserve the food or they are not qualified to

receive the food. We at the Latino Farmers' Cooperative have taken every single opportunity to tell individuals that we spend millions of dollars sending containers of food to Haiti and other countries [far away], when there is a disaster we feed people we're never gonna see, and we can't feed people that is already here, because of bias.... A human being, no matter where he is located and in what condition should be allowed to receive medical attention and food."

Evelia's argument that food justice is about addressing fundamental flaws in both the food system and broader state institutions correlates with the organization's shift in focus from community gardening activities to concerns regarding food security, while simultaneously revealing some discursive inconsistency; is the organization primarily interested in promoting "food security" or "food justice?" How does Evelia conceptualize and articulate the distinction between these two things? For Evelia and members of the Latino Farmers' Cooperative, community gardening and other localized efforts are useful for empowering and even feeding individuals, but they are thought to be only a small part of broader struggles for a more just food system. In what follows, I consider what the programming and discourses of the Latino Farmers' Cooperative reveal about broader discussions for food security, food justice and food sovereignty; and how those discourses and programming reflect or contest racialized subjectivities embedded within the socio-cultural landscapes of post-Katrina New Orleans.

7.4.2 Food security, Food Justice and Food Sovereignty

Rates of food insecurity, as measured by the USDA, are higher for Latinos than for any other group (USDA 2011). However, according to a report from the Center for American Progress (CAP) (2011), only 39% of eligible Latino families receive SNAP benefits, compared to 65% of African Americans and 74% of whites. The barriers to access for Latinos are many; among the barriers cited in the CAP report are misinformation about eligibility requirements, a complex application process, and limited eligibility for recently arrived legal immigrants. With Latinos accounting for more than one-half of the nation's population growth in the past decade

(Pew Research Center 2011), the director of the LFCL felt strongly that (1) SNAP ought to better meet the needs of this growing number of children and families—articulated and food *security*—and, moreover (2) the systemic and structural conditions that contribute to higher rates of poverty and barriers to social mobility among Latinos ought to be dismantled or at least vigorously contested—a component of food *justice*. Because of its historical and contemporary neocolonial associations, I argue that the term “food security” may address the first issue, but it cannot attend to the second.

Proceedings from the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome declare that food security is achieved when “all people, at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (World Food Summit 1996). Raina (2012) points out that such a definition cares little for the means of producing food, nor for any social, political, or economic entanglements it may engender. As Raina argues, “the food could be purchased from multi-nationals; could be dumped at cheap rates by countries/companies with excess production, thereby ‘marketing out’ or dismantling local production which might be higher priced; or it could come as food aid” (Raina 2012: np). Thus, as both scholars and activists have argued, the term “food security” lacks explicit attention to power (Patel 2009; Schanbacher 2010) and constitutes little more than a watered down technical issue of how best to get food to those who need it while evading “the deeper political debate about why hunger exists at all in a world that has plenty of food” (Peck 2008: 4).

During the Undoing Racism in the Food System workshop, which I discussed in Chapter 5, one of the workshop organizers utilized an analogy of “babies in a river” to characterize a central bureaucratic feature of nonprofit organizations; the analogy illuminates central features of

food security efforts as well. As the organizer explained, “There are all these babies in the river. So we decide we need a bunch of programs; we’ll make a ‘pull-the-baby-out-of-the-river program,” and a ‘dry-the-baby-off-with-a-towel program’ and nobody is asking, ‘Wait! Why are there babies in the river! What’s going on upstream?” Similarly, while food security focuses on dealing with the babies already in the river, it fails to look upstream to address whatever is putting them there in the first place (globalized corporate agriculture, according to most perspectives).

Food security, furthermore, is not interested in “democratizing power, but with distributing goods, and especially with pressuring the state to buttress the rights and increase the entitlements of the socially vulnerable or disadvantaged” (Wendy Brown 1995:5). This is precisely the work of essential aid programs like SNAP. Because I have seen how crucial SNAP is to families who struggle to put food on the table, I would never advocate for anything that diminishes the SNAP program *without* a simultaneous investment in “upstream” adjustments that might render such a program unnecessary. In the case of Latino/a SNAP clients I met and worked with during my time volunteering with the Latino Farmers’ Cooperative in New Orleans, I was struck by how many of them came from an agricultural background; most either gardened or were engaged in small-scale commercial agriculture in their home country before coming to the United States. Structural adjustment programs and globalized commodity agriculture made agricultural livelihoods in many Latin American countries untenable, and has contributed to Latino emigration into the United States, as people seek out better livelihoods for themselves and their families. Once here, it may take years to secure regular work, and even longer to acquire papers and their attendant assurance of fair pay and working conditions. Additionally, virtually all the new members that I surveyed while volunteering at LFCL said they purchase their food at

Wal-Mart. They do this because Wal-Mart is cheap, it is convenient, and it offers virtually all the services they need in one location. For Latino immigrants, Wal-Mart is a popular and efficient destination for cashing in or sending out wired funds. Wal-Mart does not require proof of residency or immigration status the way a bank might. Municipal bus routes stop right at the Wal-Mart parking lot, so it is also easily accessible to people lacking personal transportation. So, ironically, thousands of Latino immigrants flee their home countries each year, partly due to a broken international food system, only to come to the United States and be forced to apply for SNAP benefits to purchase the same processed industrial foodstuffs whose dominance contributed to their exile.

Because food *insecurity* is a prominent concern among LFCL members, Evelia and the board of LFCL have made food security a prominent goal, and utilize the terminology when applying for grants from foundations and organizations that are sympathetic to food security efforts. Food security's focus on the food itself, and specifically on addressing hunger, appeals to LFCL leadership, because it promises (at least in theory) to get people fed, by whatever means. While food justice and food sovereignty advocates critique food security for utilizing and relying upon the very systems and institutions that perpetuate hunger, Evelia expressed a frustration with those critiques, saying she was more interested in filling hungry bellies than in addressing the structural conditions that necessitate SNAP usage among LFCL clients. She felt that community gardening, and other efforts which focused on food self-sufficiency, took too long for people who were truly hungry.

“What food justice activists don't understand because, again, the majority are white and they really not suffering hunger ...they have the food. ... One of the experiences I had with community gardening is a lot of the people [LFCL members] told me, 'Yeah gardening is nice and everything, but I need the food NOW. I need the food NOW.' Because they don't have FOOD. They don't have the vegetables. So it's nice and its engaging and it's fun to have a group of Latinos coming to the garden, but the ones who

are desperate, whose children don't have milk in their house, who have to dilute the milk to be able to provide watery milk to their children and they don't have the sugar, they have to steal maybe food from McDonald's table. Do you think those people are going to come to the garden? They don't care. They just stay at home, saving any piece of energy they have to be able to find out where they're going to get the next meal. So the people who go out to participate in the community gardening are the Latinos who already have enough energy and food in their bodies to be able to go out and have fun, and they're not worried that much about a job, and about food security and job security. But the ones who are struggling, who are going on a day-by-day basis; they're not going anywhere. They're staying put in their houses, finding out how they're going to survive. And that's what food justice activists don't get. They create all these initiatives, but at the end of the day those initiatives are going to be received or the people who are going to participate are the ones who are ahead of the water. But the really ones who are struggling for food, they're being discriminated for food; they're staying home and not leaving home. Because they're not going to spend one dollar, two dollars in taking the streetcar to go to your community garden to see plants being grown. This is not my priority. My priority is to see who's going to give me a piece of bread."

Evelia's critique of "food justice" projects and their advocates highlights an enduring challenge for people working to promote alternative systems for food procurement and provisioning. As Dickinson (2013:1) argues, focusing on food subsidies, and the state in general, "can help us ask more coherent questions around how principles of food sovereignty might be realized in an urban context." Similarly, I argue that normalization and naturalization of the state and its discourses, in this case the discourse of "food security" delimits and delegitimizes activism outside of it. In order to appeal to funders, the LFCL is required to frame their work within accessible and familiar state systems, thereby rendering "alternative political practices... unacceptable or unthinkable" (Nyers 2006, xii). While Evelia was, I argue, right to criticize exogenous efforts to work *on behalf of* rather than *alongside* her membership base, her assessment that food security discourses and the practices they engender could best meet the needs of LFCL members was, in my assessment, misguided and demonstrative of the pervasive presence of such discourses in policy and funding circles. Despite the radical tone it has tended to strike, I argue below that food sovereignty's privileging of endogenous ideology may in fact

better articulate and address the needs of marginalized groups such as the membership base at the LFCL.

7.4.3 *“The Egg Incident” and Insider-Outsider Dynamics*

Despite ongoing efforts and struggles to increase “food security,” both Evelia and members of the LFCL acknowledged that the primary role of the LFCL for the Latino community was as a safe social space for Latinos who often felt threatened and “otherized” in their daily lives in New Orleans. In New Orleans, which has traditionally been considered a “black and white” city, Latinos occupy an “outsider” space that delimits them from feelings of belonging and solidarity afforded to many long-time African American residents of the city. Threats to this sense of safety and security arose occasionally, as in one incident I refer to as the “egg incident.”

As I was driving to the LFCL office on the first day of my second week of work at the LFCL, I received a call received a call from Evelia informing me that the office had been vandalized over the weekend. Luz, a woman from Mexico who works part-time at the LFCL, had called Evelia from outside the office to report that she’d arrived at the office that morning to find the front door, window and porch covered with eggs and flour. Evelia asked me to assess whether the vandalism was bad enough to call the police. When I arrived at the office a few minutes after 9am, I found Luz standing outside on the sidewalk. She looked a bit stricken. At first, I didn’t notice anything, but as I approached the office, I could see the egg shells littering the ground in front of the door. There was flour plastered to the door, inside the metal gate. The gate was locked with a padlock, and there was about an inch of flour sitting on the padlock. White flour coated the window screen, the top of the mailbox, and the plastic table that we use to sell produce outside (Figure 7.1).

Luz was convinced that the perpetrators were African-Americans who live in the neighborhood and don't like Latinos coming to the office every day. "No nos quieren." *They don't want us here*, she kept repeating.



Figure 7.2. "The Egg Incident." *Photo by author.*

Evelia offered a different explanation. Evelia disputed Luz's claim that it was "los negritos" because "los negritos son mas destructivos." Evelia attributed the vandalism to

“blanquitos” (white kids)—who else would be able to dispose of perfectly good eggs and flour? The egg incident, for both Luz and Evelia demonstrates the pervasive influence of internalized racial inferiority for Latinos in a city long understood to categorize people and places as black or white. For Evelia, the fact that the eggs and flour were *white* was significant. “Our eggs are brown. Our flour is yellow, made from corn. This is *white* eggs and *white* flour.” In Evelia’s mind, the act was intended to send a strong message.

Such otherizing, whether intentional or simply perceived to be so, represents an opportunity for food sovereignty to intervene by repositioning marginalized individuals and groups. At the heart of food sovereignty discourse is a privileging of indigenous knowledge and marginalized voices. Such a privileging begs the question of whether a movement for food sovereignty can be waged as primarily an advocacy effort; in the case of the LFCL, the unique circumstances, “outsider” status, and life experiences of members necessitate that they themselves be both responsible and empowered to determine the specific programming that would best meet their needs. As Evelia argued, the “food justice activists,” or people traditionally “inside” the food justice movement—typically privileged white people—can help by advocating for policy changes, but should not “force” their interests on people outside that movement. In the following statement, Evelia appears to contradict her earlier stance that “the food itself” is the most crucial issue; here, she emphasizes the ways in which race and class circumscribe food security *and* food justice in deep and pervasive ways that food justice activists tend to not understand.

“So in my opinion, food justice is...not...it’s true; devoting, and creating activities that increase the amount of food is very important. But that should only be 30% of what you should be doing. I think you should be...the food justice activists should be out there changing policies that discriminate and systematically exclude people of color and intentionally including those individuals in their own initiatives so they know what this is all about. But most of them, the white people in this business, they don’t know. And they

don't want to know. Do you know what you know now, about the LFC? About the members during this past two months? Because you are a white person. For an educated white person that comes from certain class and now that you saw them and... I bet that you didn't know a lot of the things; I bet you didn't have no clue, what it is not to have money and not be able to afford a basket of strawberries. A lot of people say, 'Oh, you should put emphasis on buying strawberries. Strawberry is good for you!' And all this nutrition educating. Yeah but when you don't have food, you don't have money, you buy three pounds of potatoes for the same amount that you can eat for days. So don't talk to me about nutrition when you don't have no money and instead you have to buy three pounds of potatoes and have to eat potatoes every day. That's what food justice activists should really think about. And ask yourself why."

Evelia's comment resonates with the discussion from Chapter Five regarding race and access to legitimate power. In the Undoing Racism in the Food System workshop, discussed in that chapter, PISAB facilitators argued that the systems and institutions that delineate social, political and economic life in this country were designed by white people, to benefit white people. When Evelia argues that "food justice activists should be out there changing policies that discriminate and systematically exclude people of color," she simultaneously acknowledges that "food justice activists" tend to be white people, and that as such they occupy "insider" positions that could be most effectively mobilized to effect policy changes. So while white food justice activists tend to have increased access to spaces of power, their spatial and social positioning *apart* from the "communities of need" where food insecurity problems are most pronounced requires dynamic processes of communication and translation between activists and community members, as discussed below.

7.4.4 Translation and Translators: Globalization and a Return to Spaces of Sovereignty

While food sovereignty, as both a movement and a concept, originated within and through rural spaces in the global south, the presence of North American organizations like the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance suggest both a spatial as well as a conceptual transitioning of food sovereignty, which appears to require conscientious works of translation as food

sovereignty becomes situated in new spatial and cultural contexts. As Dickinson (2013: 2) argues, “re-framing food sovereignty in the urban North means grappling with the messy politics of consumption in ways that put poor communities and urban poverty at the center of our analysis.” In a conversation with one of the directors of the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance, I asked whether she felt the original tenets of food sovereignty could transition cleanly into the urban/U.S. context. She felt that while certain elements of the spatial context were certainly different, and that some of those differences were significant, for the most part, “the principles [and] ideas are essentially the same: it’s about giving marginalized peoples control...it’s still about access to land and water, responding to crises, [and] political will is a central challenge” (Schiavoni, Personal communication, January 13, 2011). Anywhere on earth, she argued, marginalized peoples are left out of the policy discussions that impact them. Whether this “movement” is situated in the countryside or in the city, in the U.S. or Mali, she argued, food sovereignty offers key roles for people typically excluded from positions of power.

The case of the LFCL offers a unique opportunity to consider how food sovereignty discourses and praxis may be effectively translated into new spatial and social contexts. Arguably, recently-emigrated Latino immigrants represent a sort of “in-between” spatial category between the global North and the global South; in many cases, the corporate consolidation of agriculture contested by La Via Campesina contributed to the exile of many rural Latinos from their country of origin toward urban centers (or other agricultural areas) in the United States. Because of that personal experience of dislocation and disenfranchisement, rural-to-urban Latino immigrants are well-positioned to articulate a new geography and politics of food sovereignty in the global North. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is one U.S. based labor-rights and food sovereignty organization advocating for better working conditions

and economic and social justice for food system workers (www.ciw-online.org). While CIW began as a grassroots effort of landless migrant farmworkers in Florida's tomato-picking region (c.f. Estabrook 2012), it has since expanded its advocacy to incorporate the rights of fast-food chain and other food system workers, and focuses considerable energy in consumer education and outreach. In 2012, the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance honored CIW for its work expanding the practice of food sovereignty in the United States, further promoting a discourse that food sovereignty praxis is alive and well in the United States.

7.5 Conclusion

The concept of food sovereignty, and its demand for radical democratization of food systems, is compelling theoretically, but may prove difficult to enact at a large scale. As Raj Patel has noted, food sovereignty is recognizable primarily as something that our current food system lacks, with its apparent inhumanity, its attention to corporate profits and its production of environment-and-community-destroying 'food from nowhere' (McMichael 2009). So while food sovereignty offers up something qualitatively different, and while that vision is articulated quite thoroughly in a variety of proclamations generated by La Via Campesina and its local affiliates, it is still not entirely clear how and by whom food sovereignty is enacted in specific places and times. Surely the context of activism matters, as does the local manifestation of the identified common enemy (typically some discursive configuration of "globalized neoliberal capital"). Within these diverse contexts, what special power does the term "sovereignty" afford, that other terms, like justice and democracy, lack? Where does food sovereignty position the state? Is the state ally or foe? On the one hand, food sovereignty (in the visage of La Via Campesina) argues explicitly for the right of *states* to determine their own food and agriculture policy. This is an understandable demand, given the hostile and hegemonic practices on the part of transnational

organizations and corporations that drove Via Campesina to rise up in the name of food sovereignty in the first place. The original members of Via Campesina and, therefore, the original advocates for food sovereignty, were landless peasants in Brazil and Mali (and elsewhere) growing genetically-modified corn and soybeans to satiate the appetites of rich (and poor) North Americans and Europeans, fatten up our cows, and fuel our driving habit. To conceptualize how that same movement could have any relevance in the United States—the still (barely) reigning global hegemon, and certainly the first great exporter of the agricultural and trade practices/policies that came to foment such resentment from food producers throughout the developing world—requires adjusted approaches to sovereignty, scale, and the state. The United States, and especially cities within the United States, constitute an entirely ‘new’ front in the struggle for food sovereignty—and, consequently, demand new strategies for action—but at its very core, the principles underlying food sovereignty remain pertinent to efforts anywhere that fight for radically democratized food *systems* that both depend on and perpetuate moral universalism. What those emerging food systems will *look* like, is still very much a mystery, and will likely be as diversely operationalized as the contexts in which they emerge. What is also likely, despite the diversity of articulation, is the utility (if not the necessity) of a continued spirit of solidarity amongst individuals and communities throughout the world, united in their demand for food sovereignty. In fact, the very globalizing forces that amassed the ire of members of Via Campesina in 1996 have been, and continue to be, the very same forces that enable international-scale political action. This is important because, despite food sovereignty’s privileging of local autonomy in agriculture, the policies that prohibit autonomous food systems are supra-local—they are decisions made at the scale of the nation-state, or, in many cases, beyond even that. It is tempting to say that food sovereignty is at once a global and a local phenomenon, and, while this

sounds like a very trite assessment, in practice it is actually quite accurate. Insights from geography enable us to examine the phenomena of food sovereignty—its theoretical foundations as well as its material manifestations—at the multiple scales from which they emerge.

In addition to considering theoretical foundations and material manifestations of food sovereignty, I have contemplated the utility of food sovereignty discourses (and, by extension, praxis) for a Latino rights organization in New Orleans. I demonstrated in this chapter that state-supported discourses of food security still permeate the advocacy work of many U.S.-based nonprofits, and I argued that such discourses limit—perhaps by design—anything resembling structural change or justice in the food system. I also showed, using the LFCL as a case study, how these pervasive discourses can preclude more radical organizing, even when organizers themselves experience, understand, and critique the “watered-down” impact of food security measures. For example, in an interesting discursive twist, Evelia and other LFCL board members utilized the language of food security because that was the language spoken by federal funding agencies like the USDA. However, in conversations with me, Evelia consistently evoked structural barriers to access, discriminatory labor practices, and a general impression that the entire system is failing low-income people of color. These seemingly contradictory discourses reveal the complexity and difficulty of on-the-ground efforts to enact “just” or “sovereign” food systems. While food sovereignty has tremendous discursive potential within new spatial contexts of the United States, I envision it having little purchase as a unified movement because of these difficulties inherent to spatial translation from rural areas of the global south the urban areas of the global north. However, a *scale-appropriate* appropriation of food sovereignty, attentive to particular constraints and opportunities within local contexts, may indeed offer truly transformative food sovereignties in the future.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

8.1 Review of Major Findings

This research investigated the emergence and flourishing of grassroots efforts to envision and enact a more socially and economically equitable landscape of food access. Its primary goals were (1) to investigate the extent to which food justice and food sovereignty discourses and activism interact with and affect the material and social realities of the frequently low-income communities of color in which they are situated; and (2) to examine whether such activism helps or hinders pre-existing efforts to alleviate hunger, acknowledge and address racism, and promote social justice at the scales of the neighborhood and of the city. Through a one-year period of ethnographic research, I was able to draw the following major conclusions, which suggest a need to consider (explicitly) the broader structural forces that compel food justice projects in the first place. First: the self-proclaimed “success” or “failure” of urban agriculture and other food justice projects to address concerns regarding food access and hunger (or, conversely but relatedly, obesity) relies on a complex matrix of factors, including the race and nativity of the project organizers (i.e., whether or not they are from New Orleans), the sense of mutual social and cultural understanding amongst project organizers and community residents, and project organizers’ ability to examine and confront historic and contemporary legacies of racism and structural inequality. The relatively recent acute disaster of Hurricane Katrina has made these structural inequities more visible on the landscape, but has not necessarily facilitated robust power analyses amongst those individuals who have come to help the city rebuild. Such analyses

of how power is distributed throughout organizations and communities, coupled with historical analyses of structural racism and urban disinvestment, are crucial to any project or programming concerned with food access in poor communities. More research is needed on successfully executed power analyses and, conversely, on what happens when organizations or institutions promoting “food justice” struggle or fail to come to terms with racial and class inequities. Rosing (2012) offers potential paths forward in this regard, suggesting that academics and activists embarking on food systems development embed that work within a social justice framework *prior* to initiating projects in low-income communities.

Second, spatial patterns of food access in the city of New Orleans verify the existence of so-called “food deserts” in which residents of low-income neighborhoods struggle to access fresh food proximate to where they live. Because food access is a prominent concern and has gained national recognition and notoriety, community residents who engage in political struggles to increase food access are likely to feel empowered to demand other changes that would improve their health and livelihoods. Specific grassroots efforts to increase food access may succeed not only in changing the “foodscape,” but also in enhancing civic participation and community activism more broadly, on a range of social issues. For this reason, I argue, it is imperative that food justice activism be generated within communities of need, rather than imposed on them from well-meaning outsiders. More research is needed on the role of grassroots food activism for promoting, enabling, or enhancing broader civic participation among disinvested communities.

In addition to sharing those major findings, this chapter will revisit and respond to each of the research questions, consider theoretical contributions of the research, and contemplate future directions for related or complementary research.

8.1.1. Review of Research Questions and Major Findings

Q.1.: How do food justice organizations in New Orleans characterize and respond to the presence and role of racism in the food system?

Within this broad central question, I also asked the following sub-questions:

- How, if at all, is that characterization shaped by critical perspectives on race and racism, which argue that racism is a persistent feature of social life and policy in the United States?
- How, if at all, do food justice organizations in New Orleans collaborate with local anti-hunger and anti-racist organizations and community groups to address issues of racism within the food system?

I address this question in Chapter 5 of the dissertation, by tracing and analyzing the meaningful ways in which race intersects with food justice activism, and with the food system more broadly. Through analyses of food justice organizations in New Orleans, I argue that white food justice advocates are cognizant of racial disconnects and tensions that inflect their work, but struggle with how to go about overcoming them. The white activists I profile in Chapter 5 express both passion and fatigue; they are committed to a belief in the transformative potential of urban agriculture and other food-related projects, but are also frustrated by an apparent lack of resonance with community members. Complicating that tension were issues of race and nativity; neighborhood residents were mostly people of color who were established in New Orleans and in their particular neighborhood, while project leaders were almost entirely young, white, progressives who had moved to New Orleans in the years following Hurricane Katrina.

To help unpack this tension, I utilized central tenets from Critical Race Studies, as well as scholarly work exploring how race (and particularly whiteness) intersect with food justice

activism. Collectively, that body of work both problematizes and denaturalizes whiteness, while demonstrating the prominence of an “affluent liberal *habitus* of whiteness” (Alkon and McCullen, 2010) within efforts to promote a more just food system. A component of this way of being is a failure to comprehend the racialized histories and geographies that generate the systems and institutions governing everyday life, including the diversely defined and manifest “food system.”

Through interviews and participant-observation with food justice organizations and with a two-day “Undoing Racism in the Food System” workshop, my response to this first research question highlights the themes of conscious and unconscious white privilege, inter-organizational and inter-racial dynamics, spatial memory, and organizational “mission creep.” Despite their separate framing, these themes collectively convey a marginally racially-conscious food movement within the city of New Orleans, struggling to effect meaningful social change in the midst of substantial structural obstacles.

Q.2. Where, if at all, are there indications that post-Katrina food projects do or do not facilitate a ‘right to the city’ in which marginalized individuals and groups of color have renewed ability to access, participate in, and produce urban space? What individuals, groups, institutions, and/or processes enhance or hinder the “right to the city”?

I address this question in Chapter 6, through an extended profile of a grassroots food justice organization in the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood of New Orleans. I argue that the food access struggles and efforts of Lower Ninth Ward residents demonstrate the scalar politics of claims on the right to the city. Members of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition prioritize their neighborhood affiliation, and situate their rights claims within the space of the neighborhood, which became the meaningful space at which to enact claims on the rights to

access, participate in, and produce urban space. Food access is not a citywide problem in New Orleans; like other disinvested communities throughout the United States, “food deserts” cluster in low-income communities and tend not to characterize entire cities. Wealthier and whiter parts of New Orleans have seen remarkable rebuilding and have consistent and convenient access to fresh foods within easy walking distance. The mobilization of Lower Ninth Ward residents who lack sufficient access to fresh food was thus inherently *neighborhood*-based. At meetings of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition, residents proudly introduced themselves as “born and bred in the Lower Ninth Ward” or “second [or third, or fourth] generation resident of the Lower Ninth Ward.” By proclaiming the primacy of their role as Lower Ninth Ward residents to “decide what we want for our community,” the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition exhibits radical urban inhabitation through claims on the right to their neighborhood.

Contemplating the indeterminacy of Lefebvre’s characterization of how the Right to the City might be enacted, I argue for the need for articulations that are spatially and contextually specific. The Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition’s focused demand for food that is “fresh, quality, convenient, and affordable,” and their collaborative effort to improve the limited food options available in their community, constitute legitimate claims of the right to transform the urban space in which they live. Their efforts constitute a “political moment” (Becher, 2012), which enacts substantive change through (1) mobilizing people who don’t consider themselves to be especially political; (2) developing inhabitants’ personal commitments and abilities to access power and; (3) changing the function, purpose, or interest of local institutions to better meet residents needs. Members of the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition mobilized around a specific goal that they recognized as situated within a broader struggle for economic and racial justice. Their collaborative visioning and activism demonstrate the potential of neighborhood-

scale political moments to spark participation and appropriation among historically marginalized groups. Because food access represents an urgent individual and collective need, localized struggles for food sovereignty open up productive spaces from which to launch broader campaigns claiming the right to the city. The Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition's grassroots structure and neighborhood-scale organizing offer instructive examples of what the beginning of a renewed right to the city might look like.

Q.3: How is the concept of food sovereignty translated across scales?

This question contained the following sub-questions:

- How is food sovereignty conceptualized by international peasant organizations, such as La Via Campesina, and how aptly does that conceptualization characterize food justice work at national and local scales within the United States and within New Orleans?
- What, if anything, does food sovereignty offer that similarly articulated concepts (such as food security and food justice) lack?

I respond to this question in Chapter 7, through an analysis of food sovereignty literature and activism, and through ethnographic study of a Latino food justice organization in New Orleans.

As I argue in Chapter 7, the concept of food sovereignty, and its demand for radical democratization of food systems, is compelling theoretically but may prove difficult to enact at a large scale. As Raj Patel (2009) has noted, food sovereignty is recognizable primarily as something that our current food system lacks—with its apparent inhumanity, its attention to corporate profits and its production of “food from nowhere” (McMichael 2009). So while food sovereignty has gained considerable conceptual purchase through the work of La Via Campesina and its local affiliates, it is still not entirely clear how and by whom food sovereignty is enacted in specific places and times. I argue that the United States, and especially cities within the United

States, constitute an entirely new front in the struggle for food sovereignty—and, consequently, demand new strategies for action. However, the principles underlying food sovereignty remain pertinent to efforts anywhere that fight for radically democratized food systems that both depend on and perpetuate moral universalist principles.

In addition to considering theoretical foundations and material manifestations of food sovereignty, I also contemplate the utility of food sovereignty discourses and praxis for a Latino rights organization in New Orleans. I demonstrate in Chapter 7 that state-supported discourses of food *security* still permeate the advocacy work of many U.S.-based nonprofits, and argue that such discourses limit structural change in the food system. Using the Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana as a case study, I show that these pervasive discourses can preclude more radical organizing, even when organizers themselves experience, understand, and critique the “watered-down” impact of food security measures.

While food sovereignty has tremendous discursive potential within new spatial contexts of the United States, I envision it having little purchase as a unified movement, because of the difficulties inherent to spatial translation from rural areas of the global south to urban areas of the global north. However, a scale-appropriate articulation of food sovereignty, attentive to particular constraints and opportunities within local contexts, may indeed offer truly transformative food sovereignties in the future.

8.2 Future Directions for Research: Going “Beyond Food”

Taken together, these findings suggest a need to move beyond food in research and activism that uses the food system as its point of entry. To buttress my own argument that future food systems research and practice ought to consider food as a *lens*, rather than an end in itself, I refer to a panel of eminent food systems scholars who gathered in Los Angeles at the 2013

annual meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) to debate whether (and, if so, how) it is time to move “beyond food” in our research and activism. The panel, organized by Lindsay Naylor and consisting of Jessica Hayes-Conroy, Aaron Bobrow-Strain, Julie Guthman, Susanne Freidberg, Alison Hope Alkon, and Daniel Block, was prompted to discuss whether and to what extent food (as both a product of capitalist systems, and a system in itself) can serve as a lens for exposing and examining key issues (including labor, immigration, corporate consolidation and personhood, gender equity, and indigenous rights, among others) that are often obscured or overlooked when the focus is on “just food.” There was general consensus among the panelists that research on food systems has accelerated in the past decade, roughly keeping pace with popular and activist interest in making food systems more legible, healthful, fair, and just. Panelists also agreed that academic interest in food systems has tended to celebrate emergent and flourishing “alternative food movements” that are embedded in local communities, support and grow local economies, and side-step (lacking the power to diminish) the environmental and social costs associated with globalized/corporate/industrial agriculture. Citing evidence for popular support, particularly within certain demographics, for specific “kinds of foods” proffered through these alternative networks, studies of *non*-alternative food systems have been rare. Furthermore, going “beyond food” means considering seriously all of the *other* systems that are shaped by and reflect hegemonic ideologies; or, working in reverse, perhaps it is time to start thinking of food (systems) as a lens through which systems, structures, and institutions of dominance are made visible and, subsequently, contestable.

So, why go “beyond food”? And, for that matter, why *start* with food? In this concluding chapter, I have addressed the first question by reviewing major research findings presented in this dissertation, which suggest a need for more and deeper critical investigations of the

influence of what Alkon and McCullen (2010) have called an “affluent, liberal *habitus* of whiteness” within alternative food system praxis (and research, for that matter). In this section, I report back from the AAG panel on “beyond food,” which suggests some related possible research trajectories. I then conclude with a review the theoretical bases of this research, and consider how they may be fruitfully married in future investigations of social justice and the food system.

First, though, saying nothing of going “beyond” them, why study food systems, in and of themselves, at all? There is obviously considerable and growing academic and popular interest in various aspects of (the) food system(s). The panel described in the beginning of this section was just one of forty-six panels and paper sessions at the 2013 AAG meeting sponsored by the nascent Food and Agriculture Specialty group, which itself was formed just two years ago and grew from ten members to over 150 during the past year. Growing interest is evident in other disciplines as well, from Nutrition and Public Health, to Sociology and Anthropology, Urban and Environmental Studies; perhaps even more telling are the numerous departments and interdisciplinary programs in “Food Studies” popping up in colleges and universities both nationally and internationally (see Hilchey, 2012).

Scholars and popular authors have charted and critiqued a variety of food-related movements, which represent a range of interests and priorities—from human health (Nestle, 2002; Lang, et al., 2009) and social justice (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010), to environmental sustainability (Perfecto, et al. 2009), animal welfare (Singer 2009 [1975]; Safran Foer 2009) and food sovereignty (Wittman et al. 2010), among others. These movements advocate on behalf of farmers, on behalf of consumers, on behalf of seeds, animals, fish and soil. They often attempt to restructure power relations, to question and combat the authority of multinational corporations

and the states that band with them to dominate the form and flow of agricultural inputs and edible outputs around the globe (Holt-Gimenez and Patel 2009). Within this framework, the discourse surrounding urban gardening and other forms of urban food justice work is often laden with tropes of personal responsibility and individual empowerment, and often neglectful of the structural causes of food insecurity and hunger (Pudup 2008).

Specifically, the flourishing of academic interest in food systems over the last decade has resulted in lamentably little attention to how race and racism intersect with food activism, or with food systems more broadly. While there has been some attention to the connections between systemic and structural racism and the landscape of contemporary food systems, which, like other manifestations of racialized capitalism, generate spatialized constraints on food access, there has been less attention to the overwhelming whiteness of the movement for food justice, even as that movement “works” to address injustices in communities of color. Julie Guthman (2008) and Rachel Slocum (2005) are notable exceptions. Both authors argue that “the food itself”—specifically the quantity and quality available in low-income communities of color—tends to galvanize and animate white people; for people actually residing in those communities, however, “the paucity of quality food in their communities is seen as evidence of [a] lack of [political and economic] power” (Block et al, 2011). This discrepancy in identifying the problem reflects, in many ways, the difficulty that inheres in seeking solutions, and may begin to explain why food justice projects aiming to promote social justice, or, more specifically, to increase healthy food access for people of color, so often fail to address the underlying systems and structures that helped create the unjust food landscape that characterizes American cities.

In addition to the research priorities that emerged through my own investigations in New Orleans, panelists from the AAG panel on “Beyond Food” suggested compelling avenues for

moving beyond food in our research and writing on the food system and its various components. First, generally speaking, researchers must be constantly vigilant in questioning how products of our work may be “captured” to generate outcomes that we may deem undesirable or unjust. Second, we must remain cognizant of the ultimate goal of our research, which may sometimes mean that we pursue research trajectories that do not immediately appeal to us in the way that much ethnographic study of alternative food systems has. As Susanne Friedberg noted, food can be both a gratifying and a pleasurable thing to study, particularly when our research sites are farmers’ markets or other pleasant spaces. What may be less appealing, however, and arguably more important at this stage, are studies of corporate and state actors who shape the dominant food system. Alison Alkon asked us to consider what purchase food can give us in studies of racial formation, labor and immigration policies and practices, gender politics and performativity, the creation of and contestation around public space, and the formation of policies that facilitate or constrain civic participation and democratic ideals. In other words, how can we research (and complicate, contest, or qualify) these broader social questions *through* food? Jessica Hayes-Conroy offered other examples of how food and its associations might serve as a useful analytical lens, thinking through food to examine: bodily physicality and biopolitics; the social construction of and political investment in “health” and wellness; and the ways in which social difference is produced and reproduced both discursively and materially.

Relatedly, Aaron Bobrow-Strain argued that critical analyses using food can help to “explode the fiction of the sovereign individual,” while simultaneously exposing the limits of neoliberal and/or narrowly conceived “food justice” efforts. As it is currently conceived, Bobrow-Strain argued, Food Studies is a “public intellectual project.” While this may be fine, we could, and perhaps should, consider studies with greater social impact. In this vein, Bobrow-

Strain suggested “studying up” the corporate food chain. Rather than continuing to frame “Big Ag” as an abstraction, it is time to critically and thoroughly examine how power is constructed, negotiated, and maintained within the dominant food system. Julie Guthman agreed, pointing out that nearly all studies of food tend to focus on alternatives “relative to how most food is produced.” In order to “study up,” she argued, we need new methods and new questions; while it may be enjoyable and personally rewarding to conduct participant observation studies at farmers’ markets and CSAs, new theoretical and methodological approaches are needed to study both “Big Ag” as well as “agriculture of the middle.”

There is considerable and growing momentum in the study and practice of food systems. Work that has focused on food and agriculture as ends and means in themselves should be celebrated for the substantive changes it has made possible, and for broadening and deepening critical interest in and engagement with both dominant and alternative food systems. Now, drawing on that momentum, it is time to proceed cautiously in our research and activism, by considering the broader implications of that work as well as the systems and institutions in which it is situated. I (Passidomo 2013), along with many others, have argued for a need to go “beyond food,” through research that positions food as a *lens* through which pressing social and political issues and processes may be critically examined. Such research can capitalize on popular interest in and activism around concerns regarding food, but should take food as a starting point, rather than an end in itself. Borrowing suggestions from eminent food systems scholars, and from my own research experience, I have offered a few possible research trajectories for both scholars and practitioners interested in understanding the limitations of traditional food systems research, and in moving beyond those limitations to unveil and contest entrenched ideologies and power structures within food and the many systems and institutions with which it is connected.

8.3. A Food Sovereignty and Right to the City Framework

One way I have proposed for going “beyond food” in research and praxis is to consider the dual and complementary contributions of the right to the city and food sovereignty movements. RTTC’s explicit characterization of urban inhabitance as active participation in the decisions and actions that impact (city) life expressly articulates food sovereignty’s demand for self-determination, but places it within a meaningful spatial context for food justice practitioners in the global North. Like food sovereignty, RTTC implicates neoliberal economic and social policies for the disenfranchisement of “citidins,” and argues that meaningful social change can only come from within. The three organizations I profiled in this dissertation engage with notions of inhabitance, participation, appropriation, and sovereignty to varying degrees. Taken together, these examples suggest a radical and transformative potential in shifting discourse and activism toward these broader civic projects, and demonstrate the theoretical efficacy of both the food sovereignty and right to the city frameworks.

Empirical findings also offer some new ways for thinking about each of those theoretical frameworks. As this research has demonstrated, the right to the city *movement* has gained considerable momentum within activist networks, and its various material manifestations around the world suggest only a loose or discursive alignment with Henri Lefebvre’s original formulation. The merit or harm of this divergence is certainly a matter of some contestation. While it is beyond the scope of my analysis to critique or celebrate activist appropriation of Lefebvre’s concept (or at least his terminology), my research suggests that material experiments with claims on the right to the city offer refinements that make RTTC perhaps more meaningful in the “real world.” Specifically, my work with the Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition demonstrated the importance of *neighborhood*-scale claims on the right to the city. For residents

of the Lower Ninth Ward struggling with food access concerns, the neighborhood was the meaningful scale at which to enact claims on the right to appropriate and participate in the creation of vital urban spaces. Furthermore, while Lefebvre's original conceptualization failed to interrogate the importance of racial positionality to the formulation of claims on the right to the city, my research emphasized the absolute *centrality* of race to contestations over urban space. Residents of the Lower Ninth Ward articulated their lack of food access expressly as racial injustice, and their neighborhood-scale rights claims intentionally and consistently incorporated notions of sovereignty that were both spatial (neighborhood-based citizenship) and racial.

The prominence of racial formation and racial subjectivities is also central to the spatial translation of food sovereignty movements and discourses to urban spaces of the global North; this is particularly true in the United States, where legacies of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and continued race- and class-based apartheid plague American urban landscapes. Critical Race Theory's demonstration of the prominence of racism and white privilege in U.S. society and institutions articulates a social and economic context where food sovereignty as originally conceptualized may have little practical purchase. As Raj Patel (2009: 670) has noted, "To make the right to shape food policy meaningful is to require that *everyone* be able substantively to engage with those policies. But the prerequisites for this are a society in which the equality-distorting effects of sexism, patriarchy, racism, and class power have been eradicated." In other words, food sovereignty is an *effect*, not a cause, of radical social transformation.

Taken together, the RTTC and Food Sovereignty frameworks may be somewhat reconceptualized in the context of this research. While food sovereignty requires and demands radical social transformation, empirical findings from this research suggest that such transformation may be most practically and effectively situated within the close scales of

everyday life and resistance—here, the neighborhood. In other spaces, the manifestation may be within bodies, households, or city blocks. To appropriate, reclaim, and reconstitute space, marginalized individuals and groups must start where they are, with people they know and trust, fighting for issues and rights of personal importance. Because radical social transformation is a prerequisite to food sovereignty (and other manifestations of social justice), efforts that *start* and *end* with food may have only limited success, particularly those efforts not articulated by marginalized peoples themselves. For this reason, I conclude this chapter and dissertation by arguing that future research and praxis must endeavor to go “beyond food” in order to address more trenchant and deep-seated social problems. Doing so will ultimately generate the preconditions for just and sovereign food (as other) systems. Operating at closer scales than the nation-state or beyond enables the seeds of social transformation to germinate, take root, and flourish.

In conclusion, considering the diverse forms “food justice activism” has taken in the city of New Orleans (and throughout the United States) in recent years, I argue for the need to resituate and reframe this sort of activism in such a way that offers explicit analyses of race and power. The food sovereignty movement is still young in the United States, and is experiencing growing pains as it too struggles with crises of definition, but its fundamental commitment to restructuring power within the food system is, I argue, leaps and bounds beyond current discourses and actions that fail to account for structural and systemic racism and power imbalances within the food system. Current analyses still focus too much on food as a commodity to which people deserve access, and do not consider deeply enough how entrenched power structures exacerbate and reinforce landscapes of access. Furthermore, I argue that theoretical contributions from the right to the city concept (and related movement) can enhance

the formulation of food sovereignty discourses in the United States and perhaps offer a robust and pragmatic framework for both academic and activist projects to re-imagine (a) more just and democratic food system(s). Ultimately, both food scholars and activists may do well to consider “food itself” not as an object of analysis, but rather as a lens through which more basic (and more trenchant) structural inequalities may be made visible. We need to move beyond thinking about food as emancipatory in and of itself; if anything, when white people use food to enhance “social justice” for people of color, they run the risk of exacerbating injustice and reifying racialized power differentials. However, because food seems to effectively animate many white people, activism around food can serve to illuminate structural inequalities that may encourage them to mobilize their privilege toward broader social struggles.

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APPENDIX A

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY GARDENS

1. Who is actively involved in garden work?
2. When neighborhood residents talk with each other about the garden, how do they characterize it?
3. When community activists talk with each other about garden projects, how do they characterize them? Is this different from their characterizations when talking with neighborhood residents?
4. Do community activists talk explicitly about race? Do they employ a critical race perspective on urban gardening projects? Do they talk about “empowerment,” or “emancipation”?
5. Do neighborhood residents talk explicitly about race? If so, why and how?
6. How is the interaction among whites and people of color? Is there a balance of power? Who seems to have decision-making capacity?
7. What exactly is going on in the garden? How are gardens planned and executed? Whose idea are they? Whose “vision” is being realized? Who is doing the work? Who is doing the directing? Who is doing the organizing? Is all of this running smoothly?

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW GUIDES

Group A: Food Activists

1. Personal history
 - a. Connection to food activism in New Orleans and elsewhere. What organization(s) are you affiliated with?
 - b. Other than food justice, are there other forms of community organizing that you participate in?
 - c. Why are you involved with this kind of activism? Why is it important to you?
 - d. Do you live in one of the neighborhoods where these urban agriculture projects are situated?
 - e. How long have you been involved with current project? With others?
 - f. Are you from New Orleans? (No: What brought you here, and when did you come?) Do you anticipate staying in New Orleans? For how long?
2. Organizational information
 - a. What is the role and purpose of your organization?
 - b. Do you collaborate with other organizations to achieve those goals? Which organizations? How do you collaborate (on what projects); also what are the mechanisms for collaboration?
 - c. How is power distributed within your organization?

- d. How do you initiate urban agriculture projects in low-income communities of color? Is this challenging?
 - e. Do neighborhood residents work with you on these projects? In what ways? Who has what roles in envisioning and enacting these projects?
 - f. How do these projects relate to (or endeavor to address) some of the following issues / (How would you describe the presence of these)?:
 - i. Food security
 - ii. Food justice
 - iii. Food sovereignty
 - iv. Racial inequality
 - v. Economic inequality
 - vi. Gender inequality
3. Larger scale/food justice activism
- a. Is there anything that makes food justice activism in New Orleans unique?
 - b. How does this type of activism, in New Orleans and elsewhere, address issues of power and privilege?
 - c. (How) does this type of activism alter the landscape of the city?
 - d. How would you define food justice? Food sovereignty? Is the distinction important for you? Which more accurately describes your work?
 - e. What do you envision for the future of food activism? What do you see as important issues that this type of activism should confront
 - i. In New Orleans?
 - ii. And at the national scale/ in other cities?

Group B: Neighborhood residents

1. Perceptions of project

- a. Do you like having this farm or garden space in your neighborhood? Why/why not?
- b. Why is it here?
- c. Who put it here?
- d. Who is managing it now? How well do you know those people (who are currently managing the garden)?
- e. Do you think it will last? Do you want it to?

2. Involvement in project

- a. Are you involved with the garden space in any way? In what ways?
- b. Were you involved with planning the garden?
- c. Was it difficult for you to get involved with the garden? How did you first hear about it?
- d. Do you feel like you have a say in how the garden gets managed, what gets planted, where the food goes, etc.? If not, why not?

3. Personal history

- a. Were you living in this neighborhood before Hurricane Katrina?
 - i. Yes→ for how long?
 - ii. Did you stay through the storm, or come back? How long were you away?
 - iii. Why did you come back to this neighborhood?
 - iv. If so, how has the neighborhood changed since the storm?
 - v. Before the storm, what was in the spot where the garden is now?

APPENDIX C

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED IN RESEARCH INTERVIEWS

1. AMPS NOLA
2. Backyard Gardeners' Network
3. Common Ground Health Clinic
4. Edible City Gardens
5. Edible Schoolyard NOLA
6. Good Food, LLC
7. Grow Dat Youth Farm
8. Growing Home
9. Hollygrove Market and Farm
10. The Latino Farmers' Cooperative of Louisiana
11. Little Sparrow Farm
12. Lower Ninth Ward Food Access Coalition
13. Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation
14. New Orleans Food Cooperative
15. New Orleans Food and Farm Network
16. NOLA Green Roots
17. Parkway Partners
18. Renaissance Project
19. Second Harvest Food Bank
20. Sun Harvest Kitchen Garden
21. Tulane University
22. Women and Agriculture Network