*Breaking the Food Chains: An Investigation of Food Justice Activism**

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This article develops the concept of food justice, which places access to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate food in the contexts of institutional racism, racial formation, and racialized geographies. Through comparative ethnographic case studies, we analyze the demands for food justice articulated by the Karuk Tribe of California and the West Oakland Food Collaborative. Activists in these communities use an environmental justice frame to address access to healthy food, advocating for a local food system in West Oakland, and for the demolition of Klamath River dams that prevent subsistence fishing. Food justice serves as a theoretical and political bridge between scholarship and activism on sustainable agriculture, food insecurity, and environmental justice. This concept brings the environmental justice emphasis on racially stratified access to environmental benefits to bear on the sustainable agriculture movement's attention to the processes of food production and consumption. Furthermore, we argue that the concept of food justice can help the environmental justice movement move beyond several limitations of their frequent place-based approach and the sustainable agriculture movement to more meaningfully incorporate issues of equity and social justice. Additionally, food justice may help activists and policymakers working on food security to understand the institutionalized nature of denied access to healthy food.

This article examines the concept of food justice through comparative case studies of two racially and spatially distinct Northern California communities. Food justice places the need for food security—access to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate food—in the contexts of institutional racism, racial formation, and racialized geographies. Our analysis highlights the ability of food justice to serve as a theoretical and political bridge between existing work on sustainable agriculture, food insecurity, and environmental justice.

The West Oakland Food Collaborative[1] and the Karuk Tribe of California frame their food insecurity and high rates of diet-related diseases not as the result of poor individual food choices, but from institutionalized racism. We follow how each community highlights the political and economic histories through which their key food producers, African American farmers and Native American fishermen, were denied the land and water necessary for food production. In addition to poverty, the contemporary racialized geographies (Kobayashi and

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Peake 2000) through which institutional racism shapes the physical landscape prevent many black and indigenous communities from purchasing the quality of food they once produced. Lack of geographic and economic access confines their choices to processed, fast, and commodity foods. Additionally, black and Native American communities suffer from elevated rates of diet-related illnesses such as diabetes. Activists in the communities we study pursue food justice through a diverse array of strategies including challenging state policy and the creation of alternative food systems.

From these case studies, we demonstrate that the concept of food justice allows sustainable agriculture scholars to better contend with institutional racism and environmental justice theorists to connect disproportionate access to environmental benefits to social science analyses of race (Pulido 2000). Moreover, it is our hope that the concept of food justice may create political alliances between proponents of the environmental justice and sustainable agriculture movements through an understanding of food access as a product of institutionalized racism.

Ecology and Equity: Building Theoretical Bridges

While environmental justice advocates have long argued that low-income people and people of color suffer disproportionately from the burdens of environmental degradation, recent scholarship has also begun to emphasize the problem of disproportionate access to environmental benefits. Attention to environmental benefits helps the environmental justice movement to solidify its connection to larger democratic projects such as eco-populism (Szasz 1994), ecological democracy (Faber 1998), and just sustainability (Agyeman 2005). The sustainable agriculture movement, on the other hand, focusing primarily on the environmental benefits of fertile soil, clean water, and pesticide-free food, has often ignored the role of race in structuring agriculture in the United States (Allen 2004). Although the term sustainability includes both ecological protection and social justice by definition, sustainable agriculture activists have primarily aligned themselves with the environmental rather than environmental justice movement (Alkon 2008). Following a brief review of existing literature within sustainable agriculture and environmental justice, we offer two case studies in which activists situate their own lack of food access within historical processes of institutional racism, racial identity formation, and racialized geographies.

Bringing Social Justice Back into Sustainability

The sustainable agriculture movement has traditionally focused on technical solutions to problems of ecologically devastating food production, making use of the work of university extension agents and agroecologists. Social scientists, however, have portrayed an agriculture system embedded in specific, historically produced social relations as responsible for social and environmental

problems. Foster and Magdoff (2000) trace social scientists' interest in sustainable agriculture to Marx's use of soil science in illustrating the environmental consequences of agriculture embedded in a capitalist economic system. The increased industrialization and consolidation of agricultural firms occurring since Marx's observations have held dire consequences for the soil and water on which food production depends (Buttel, Larson, and Gillespie 1990).

Social scientists have also examined the effects of farm consolidation on rural communities. Goldschmidt ([1947] 1978) examined two paired California towns, one dominated by family and the other by corporately owned farms. He observed more stores, higher per capita income, and a greater diversity of social institutions in the former. Goldschmidt can be seen as a predecessor to the concept of civic agriculture, which links the agricultural and environmental to the "economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions of community life" and encourages community involvement in the creation of local food systems (Lyson 2004:28).

The sustainable agriculture movement consists of actors working through such diverse strategies as direct marketing initiatives (farmers markets and community-supported agriculture), urban and/or self-sufficient production (urban farms, community and backyard gardens), and policy work (food policy councils, attempts to influence the farm bill). The most prominent sectors of the movement aim to ensure the economic success of small, regional, organic farmers by encouraging consumer support for locally grown organic food.

Several scholars, however, critique the sustainable agriculture movement's ability to make sweeping social changes in the agricultural sector. While support for sustainable agriculture is largely based on broad social values consistent with Dunlap and Catton's (1979) New Environmental Paradigm (Beus and Dunlap 1990), the changes advocated by the movement come through specific techniques and practices that do not disrupt the agribusiness system (Buttel 1997). As organic farming has become more popular and profitable, it has adapted many characteristics of the industrial agriculture it once sought to replace, constraining the sustainable agriculture movement's ability to advocate for progressive change (Guthman 2004). Social justice issues are also marginalized because of the emphasis on the economic success of farmers (Allen 2004). The movement's imperative that consumers pay the "true" cost of food, rather than allowing environmental costs to be externalized, and its association with fine dining and European food traditions, demonstrate its association with white privilege and affluence (Alkon and McCullen forthcoming). Sustainable agriculture, at least as it is currently practiced, cannot transform the dominant agribusiness system.

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. Because of its focus on racialized access to the environmental benefit of healthy food, food justice can link sustainable agriculture to environmental justice theory and practice.

Theorizing Food in Environmental Justice Scholarship

In the last two decades, environmental justice scholars have successfully documented the unequal distribution of environmental toxics through which low-income people and people of color bear the health burdens of environmental degradation (United Church of Christ 1987). These communities have organized numerous campaigns against the companies responsible (Allen 2003; Brown and Mikkelsen 1997; Bullard 1990; Sze 2006). Similarities in these cases shed light on an environmental justice frame (Capek 1993) or paradigm (Taylor 1997, 2000), linking distribution of environmental toxins to a culturally resonant (Gamson and Modigliani 1989) civil rights rhetoric.

While the environmental justice movement is best known for protests against site discrimination, many activists adopt a much broader approach. Often grounded in their own experiences as victims of environmental racism, activists have worked toward pollution prevention (Szasz 1994) and the internalization of the costs of production by the companies responsible (Faber 1998) so that no community should suffer the health effects of environmental toxics. Constantly looking to broaden the environmental justice frame through the inclusion of issues generally ignored by what Brulle (2000) terms the "reform" environmental movement, activists have created a complex approach incorporating the many environmental and social justice factors affecting the places where low-income people and people of color live, work and play (Alston 1991).

Despite the central importance of food to human and environmental health, and the broad-reaching frame of the environmental justice movement, the literature devotes limited attention to food access. While Gottlieb and Fisher (1996) first highlighted an environmental justice approach to food security more than a decade ago, few environmental justice scholars have incorporated food or nutrition in their analyses. Several works in Adamson and colleagues' (Adamson et al. 2002) *Environmental Justice Reader* examine agriculture, but maintain a traditional environmental justice focus on the toxic despoiling of land cultivated by communities of color. Although some work on environmental justice in Native American communities deals with access to and protection of wild salmon, it tends to focus on the salmon's importance for Native American culture rather than its significance as healthy food (see, for example, Dupris, Hill, and Rodgers 2006; House 1999; Wilkinson 2000, 2005). While the cultural significance of salmon is fundamental, these analyses ignore its consequences

for Native American health. The concept of food justice, offered as a conceptual extension of the more inclusive idea of environmental justice and sheds light on how the food system has been shaped by institutionalized racism.

Research Approach

Data on the West Oakland Food Collaborative (WOFC) came from three primary sources: participant observation, semistructured interviews, and a survey of customers at the West Oakland Farmers Market.[2] During 18 months of participant observation, Alkon took on a variety of roles including regular customer, volunteer gardener, researcher, and observer at the farmers market, WOFC meetings, and events and activities organized by WOFC member organizations. Copious notes were taken and later coded, allowing patterns to emerge. Eighteen in-depth interviews were conducted with WOFC participants and farmers market vendors. Interviews lasting approximately 1 hour were recorded and transcribed. The survey was administered to 100 farmers market customers over the course of 3 weeks through a sample of convenience.

Norgaard began her research in 2003 at the request of the Karuk Tribe. Tribal members had been less than successful articulating their concerns through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission process on the relicensing of the Klamath River Hydroproject. The tribe sought to seek greater scientific backing for their claims. Data on the Karuk case study are drawn from four main sources: archival material, in-depth interviews with Karuk tribal members, Karuk medical records, and the 2005 Karuk Health and Fish Consumption Survey. The 2005 Karuk Health and Fish Consumption Survey was distributed to adult tribal members within the ancestral territory in the spring of 2005. The survey had a response rate of 38 percent, a total of 90 individuals. Additional medical data has been obtained from relevant federal, state, and county records (Norgaard 2005).

Both researchers recognize the particular tensions that can arise in relationships between white researchers and communities of color. Alkon worked diligently with several individuals active in the West Oakland Food Collaborative to ensure that the community would benefit from her research. To this end, she has edited grant applications for several WOFC member organizations and hired a research assistant who was raised in West Oakland to aid in the distribution of surveys. Research on the Karuk tribe sought to achieve goals specified by tribal members that would correspond to the tribe's existing political needs. All aspects of the research process (interviews, survey design, and implementation) were carried out under direction of or by tribal members themselves.

Culture and Agriculture: The West Oakland Food Collaborative

In an old, partially refurbished Victorian home in West Oakland, now home to the Prescott Joseph Community Center, a group of activists sit around a long

wood table discussing projects and strategies for the procurement of food justice. While the group is by no means entirely African American, discussions of institutional racism and inequality pervade many aspects of their work. Among other projects, those attending WOFC meetings run school and community gardens, cooking programs, and food distribution efforts focused on supplying healthy food to this low-income, predominantly African American neighborhood. The most prominent example of the WOFC's work is a weekly farmers market through which African American farmers and home-based business people sell organic produce, flowers, homemade jams, sweets, and beauty products.[3] Farmers markets are most commonly associated with the sustainable agriculture movement's promotion of small, local farmers. This market, however, emphasizes antiracism. Indeed, one market vendor described the market's primary purpose as "empowering black people."

Although the produce featured at the market is much less expensive than in wealthier neighborhoods, it struggles to attract customers unaccustomed to this kind of shopping. While the market is extremely small, it is a lively place. Customers and vendors, the majority of whom know each other by name, catch up on the week's events while shopping for the week's provisions. The farmers market celebrates African American culture through the products featured (such as black-eyed peas, greens, and yams), the music played (mostly soul and funk) and the special events celebrated (such as Black History Month and Juneteenth). The radical potential of merging racial identity formation with sustainable agriculture is recognized by one market farmer, who claims "this market fights the systems that are in place to keep down sharecroppers like my father and grandfather." Like other environmental justice efforts, the WOFC emphasizes racism and inequality, connecting environmental issues to the lived experiences of low-income people and people of color (Bullard 1990; Novotny 2000).

One of the most egregious instances of racism highlighted by the farmers market is the discrimination experienced by African American farmers. In the words of one vendor, the West Oakland farmers market is different from others because "we have black farmers . . . you don't see a lot of black farmers." WOFC members attribute the historic decline of black farmers nationwide to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s denial of loans, subsidies, and other support that enabled white farmers to transition to mechanized agriculture (Gilbert, Sharp, and Felin 2002).[4] In 1997, the USDA settled a class-action lawsuit on this issue, though black farmers and their descendents have reported difficulties claiming their portion of the settlement (Wood and Gilbert 2000). Discrimination against black farmers created an agricultural sector dominated by whites and deprived African Americans of a source of wealth and access to economic and environmental benefits.

The goal of the West Oakland Farmers Market is, in the words of one prominent WOFC member, "to connect black farmers to the black community." This view is reflected by the market's customers; a majority of those surveyed (52%) claim that support for black farmers is their most important reason for market attendance.[5] Several surveys also included responses to open-ended requests for additional information with comments reflecting this theme, such as "my consciousness about the plight of black farmers has grown." These responses suggest that the concept of food justice might productively connect access to environmental benefits to theories of racial identity formation (Omi and Winant 1989).

Not only have African Americans been stripped of their abilities to produce healthy, culturally appropriate food, they are also unable to purchase similar items. WOFC members, along with food justice activists in many parts of the United States, popularize the term "food desert" in order to describe the lack of locally available healthy food (Wrigley, Margetts, and Whelan 2002). Many scholars have observed a positive correlation between the existence of grocery stores and income (Chung and Meyers 1999) and a negative one between grocery stores and the percentage of African American residents (Morland et al. 2002).

One WOFC participant, currently organizing to open a worker-owned grocery store, describes the obstacles residents face in obtaining fresh food:

> West Oakland has 40,000 people and only one grocery store. [The many] corner stores sell generic canned goods. You have that option and then the fast food chains is the other option. So what people have the option to buy is putting more and more chemicals and additives and hormones and all of these things into their bodies.

With nearly 1.5 times as many corner liquor stores as the city average (California Alcoholic Beverage Control [CABC] 2006) as well as an abundance of fast food establishments, West Oakland is typical of low-income, African American food deserts in other cities (Block, Scribner, and DeSalvo 2004; LaVeist and Wallace 2000). WOFC members describe the process through which large grocery stores closed urban locations in favor of suburban ones as "supermarket redlining," likening it to racist lending policies and further linking their own work to a broad and historicized antiracist resistance. Through food justice activism, WOFC members link their own food insecurity to institutional racism and its historic and present-day effects on the built environment (Kobayashi and Peake 2000; Massey and Denton 1998)

Not surprisingly, residents of this food desert experience high rates of diet-related health problems such as diabetes. WOFC members racialize and politicize diabetes in much the same way that environmental justice activists portray asthma (Sze 2006). In the words of one food justice activist, who recently relocated to Oakland and became involved in many of the WOFC's projects, "diabetes kills more people in our communities than crack!" (Lappe and Terry

2006) In Alameda County, African Americans, more than other racial groups,[6] are twice as likely to suffer from diabetes (CDC 2002).

WOFC members link these health disparities to the lack of locally available healthy food. According to one market farmer, a son of Arkansas sharecroppers who has extensive training in herbal and Chinese medicine: "I've seen the African American people's health declining. It's not having access to healthy food, to a good lifestyle." Another vendor describes how the WOFC's projects provide that access:

> It's the whole process of learning how to grow things and reclaim [public] space and to live sustainable and healthy [lives]. And what it means to understand that, okay, you're prone [to] diabetes. [How do you] counteract that? 'Cause that's a huge thing in West Oakland, and [the WOFC has] things that help you live a more sustainable life knowing that you're prone to diabetes.

The WOFC deploys an analysis that attributes high rates of diabetes to food insecurity, which in turn results from institutional racism.

Because this analysis ties a place-based instance of environmental injustice to a more systemic and historicized understanding of racism, the WOFC's solution focuses on local food and local economics rather than attempts to attract corporate economic development. In the words of one farmers market vendor: "I don't want Safeway or Albertsons. They abandoned the inner city. They sell poison. They pay crap wages. Independent business is the most important thing." Instead of chain grocery stores, the WOFC emphasizes "community self-sufficiency" and the ability of marginalized communities to provide, at least partially, for themselves. One WOFC participant describes the goal of her activism in the following way:

> [It's about] building a community that takes care of each other's needs. And we can self sustain outside of the dominant system. . . . We want to buy and sell from each other . . . in a way that helps us sustain our neighborhoods or our communities. That's different than consuming in a way that sustains a mega business that's separate and distinct from us.

The WOFC's projects aim to address the needs of low-income, predominantly African American, West Oakland residents through the development of local food and local economic systems.

The West Oakland Food Collaborative's food justice activism combines antiracism with the creation of a local food system. For this reason, their case offers important insights on the development of an environmental justice approach to food and its consequences for theorizing and achieving environmental justice and sustainable agriculture.

Battling Corporate River Management on the Klamath

In the Northern part of the state, the Karuk Tribe of California has mobilized its demand for food justice by lobbying the federal government to block

the relicensing of four dams on the Klamath River. These dams prevent the Karuk tribe from sustaining themselves on their traditional foods, which include salmon, lamprey, steelhead, and sturgeon (Norgaard 2005). In addition to lobbying, tribal members have engaged in a variety of protest strategies including working with commercial fishermen and environmental organizations to achieve greater visibility; pleading their case at meetings of the dam's multinational corporate owners, directors, and shareholders; and participating in numerous regional protest activities.

The Klamath River dams disconnect the Karuk from their food sources in several ways. The dams degrade water quality by creating standing water where blue green algae blooms deplete oxygen and create toxic conditions downstream. Levels of the liver toxin mycrocystin were the highest recorded of any water body in the United States and 4,000 times the World Health Organization (WHO) safety limit in 2005 (Karuk Tribe of California 2006). The dams lack fish ladders or other features that would allow the passage of native salmon. When the lowest dam was built, Spring Chinook Salmon lost access to 90 percent of their spawning habitat. Around this time, most Karuk families reported the loss of these fish as a significant food source.

One tribal member describes the devastating effect of the dams on the Karuk food system as follows:

> A healthy riverine system has a profound effect on the people on the river. I have six children. If every one of those kids went down and fished and caught a good healthy limit . . . you could pretty much fill a freezer and have nice good fish all the way through the year. But now, without a healthy riverine system, the economy down here on the lower river is pretty much devastated. All the fishing community is devastated by the unhealthy riverine system.
>
> —(Ron Reed, Traditional Karuk Fisherman)

The dams and their ensuing environmental degradation have wreaked havoc on the food needs of the tribe.

The Karuk tribe articulates their right to traditional foods not only as an issue of food insecurity but of food justice. They locate their current food needs in the history of genocide, lack of land rights, and forced assimilation that have so devastated this and other Native American communities. These processes have prevented tribal members from carrying out land management techniques necessary to food attainment.

This tragic history provides context to understand the ability of the federal government to license a dam to a multinational corporation within Karuk territory. It is the dams themselves, however, that have had the most sweeping and immediate effect on Karuk food access. Until recently, Karuk people have experienced relatively high rates of subsistence living. Elder tribal members recall their first visit to the grocery store:

> I can remember first going to the store with mom when I was about in the fifth and sixth grade and going in there and it was so strange to buy, you know, get stuff out of the store. Especially cans of vegetables, like green beans and stuff; Mom used to can all that. And bread. I was about 6 years old when I saw my first loaf of bread in the store. That was really quite a change, I'll tell you.
>
> —(Blanche Moore, Karuk Tribal Member)

Traditional fish consumption for Karuk people is estimated at 450 pounds per person per year, more than a pound per day (Hewes 1973). Up until the 1980s many Karuk people, especially those from traditional families, ate salmon up to three times per day when the fish were running. Karuk survival has been directly linked to this important environmental resource.

When the dams were built, the Karuk tribe was stripped of access to much of its traditional food as well as the ability to manage the river ecosystem. In contrast to the traditional diet, present-day Karuk people consume less than 5 pounds of salmon per person per year. Self-report data from the 2005 Karuk Health and Fish Consumption Survey indicate that over 80 percent of households were unable to gather adequate amounts of eel, salmon, or sturgeon to fulfill their family needs (Norgaard 2005). As of 2006, so few fish existed that even ceremonial salmon consumption is now limited.

Like West Oakland residents, members of the Karuk tribe cannot purchase the food they once procured through a direct relationship with the nonhuman environment. Most Karuk do not believe in buying or selling salmon. Even if tribal members were willing to buy salmon, replacing subsistence fishing with store-bought salmon would be prohibitively expensive. Replacement cost analysis conducted in the spring of 2005 puts the cost of purchasing salmon at over $4,000 per tribal member per year (Stercho 2005). In the communities within the ancestral territory, this amount would represent over half of the average per capita annual income. While the Karuk are denied access to an environmental benefit because of institutional racism, they cannot replace that benefit through purchase because of poverty.

As in West Oakland, healthy, culturally appropriate food is not available within a convenient distance to tribal members. Tribal members must drive up to 40 miles each way to acquire commodity foods and up to 80 miles each way to shop at supermarkets. According to a nutritional analysis of the local store, it is nearly impossible to access fresh, healthy food on a limited budget:

> The local grocery store in Orleans is lacking in variety and quality of fresh produce and other food products. . . . In addition, the prices are high, making it financially difficult for a family to get adequate nutrition. The yearly median Karuk tribal income is $13,000 or $270 per week. Yet the average cost for a two-person family to eat healthy foods, based on the prices of foods available at the local grocery store in Orleans, is estimated at approximately $150 per week. Note that this represents 55 percent of the income of an average family for the week!—(Jennifer Jackson, 2005, p. 11)

Tribal members link the lack of access to traditional foods to the need for government food assistance:

> Instead of having healthy food to eat—fish—we are relegated to eating commodity foods that the government gives out. That's our subsidy: high starch foods, things that aren't so healthy that the Karuk people are pretty much forced to eat.—(Ron Reed, Traditional Karuk Fisherman)

Self-report data from the Karuk Health and Fish Consumption Survey indicate that 20 percent of Karuk people consume commodity foods.[5] Commodity foods tend to be low in essential nutrients and high in complex carbohydrates and fat (Jackson 2005).

Because of the greatly reduced ability of tribal members to provide healthy food to their community, the Karuk experience extremely high rates of hunger and disease. Recent data from University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA)'s California Health Interview Survey (Diamant et al. 2005) show that Native people have the highest rates of both food insecurity (37.2%) and hunger (16.9%) in California (Harrison et al. 2002). The estimated diabetes rate for the Karuk Tribe is 21 percent, approximately four times the U.S. average of 4.9 percent. The estimated rate of heart disease for the Karuk Tribe is 39.6 percent, three times the U.S. average (Norgaard 2005).

Diabetes is described as a new disease among this population and is the consequence of drastic lifestyle and cultural changes (Joe and Young 1993). Tribal members account for both the severity and the sudden onset of diet-related health problems:

> Our people never used to be fat. Our people never used to have these health problems that we are encountering today. Diabetes is probably the biggest one but not the only one. The ramifications of the food that we eat and the lives that we live. High blood pressure is another one. I have high blood pressure. My mother had diabetes. I'm borderline, I'm pretty sure. You can certainly tell that our people never used to be fat. Now you can't hardly find a skinny person around.—(David Arwood, Traditional Karuk Fisherman)

Tribal members posit this dramatic shift as a consequence of their denied access to salmon and other traditional foods.

The Karuk tribe is the first in the nation to deploy the concept of food justice in order to link declining salmon populations caused by the dams with high incidences of diabetes and other diet-related diseases. The tribe frames declined river health and the ensuing loss of salmon as a direct result of institutional racism. The Karuk have been stripped of access to an important resource as well as the ability to manage their ancestral land. Because of cost and distance, the tribe cannot purchase what it once produced. Tribe members must rely on locally available unhealthy alternatives and commodity foods—or in too many cases, go without. Because of this process of denied access to traditional or replacement foods, diabetes researcher Kue Young (1997:164) writes that the

"resolution of the major health problems of Native Americans requires redressing the underlying social, cultural and political causes of those problems." In other words, food access must be connected to the historical process of institutional racism that created food insecurity. Tribal activists make this connection through the concept of food justice.

Conclusion: Political Implications and Alliance Building

Members of the West Oakland Food Collaborative and the Karuk Tribe clearly share similar experiences. Through access to land and water, black farmers and Karuk fishermen once provided the bulk of their community's food needs. Today, West Oakland residents and Karuk tribal members live in food deserts. They cannot purchase what they once produced on their own. Activists link this lack of food access to their community's elevated rates of diabetes and other diet-related illnesses. Furthermore, both groups frame their grassroots struggles for food justice as attempts to reclaim their ability to produce and consume food.

We use these case studies to demonstrate how the concept of food justice can help the sustainable agriculture movement to better attend to issues of equity, and the environmental justice movement to articulate sustainable alternatives. Moreover, it is our hope that the concept of food justice may create political alliances between the two movements. These theoretical and practical alliances depend on a broader understanding of how racial and economic inequality affect the production and consumption of food, a project we will continue to develop in a forthcoming anthology called *The Food Justice Reader*.

Theoretically, food justice links food insecurity to institutional racism and racialized geography, reshaping thinking within the fields of sustainable agriculture and environmental justice. Scholars and activists in the sustainable agriculture movement have done well to challenge the corporate control of food production systems and identify resulting impacts to the long-term viability of soils and surrounding ecosystems. As food is increasingly controlled by large corporations, ecosystems suffer and communities have less control over local foods. Yet sustainable agriculture scholars and activists have not yet understood the ways that race shapes a community's ability to produce and consume food.

Moreover, a food justice framework links food access to broader questions of power and political efficacy. While many sustainable agriculture advocates and scholars implicitly assume that all communities have the ability to choose ecologically produced food, the concept of food justice can help to illuminate the race and class privilege masked by this approach. Access to healthy food is shaped not only by the economic ability to purchase it, but also by the historical processes through which race has come to affect who lives where and who has access to what kind of services. Because it highlights institutional racism and

racialized geographies, food justice may therefore encourage the sustainable agriculture movement to embrace a more meaningful approach to social justice.

Attempting to survive as both a movement and an industry, sustainable agriculture has formed alliances with the consumption of elite, gourmet food. This prevents activists from critiquing the capitalist system of food production responsible for environmental degradation. Through a food justice approach emphasizing race and power, there may be space for sustainable agriculture activists to build coalitions with proponents of environmental justice. This coalescence may allow food activists to engage in a more fundamental critique of the global food system and the local stratification that results from it.

Additionally, the concept of food justice may allow sustainable agriculture activists to access the discursive power of the environmental justice movement. An antiracist approach to agriculture can borrow from the civil rights rhetoric that has become a master frame in U.S. society. This may make the concept of sustainable agriculture more culturally resonant to the low-income people and people of color who lack access to healthy food. Therefore, deploying the concept of food justice may enable sustainable agriculture and environmental justice activists to form new alliances.

Beyond naming food access as a dimension of environmental inequality, we hope the concept of food justice will contribute to environmental justice work in the following ways. In articulating a demand for access to healthy food, these cases contribute to the developing focus on racially stratified access to environmental benefits within environmental justice. Unfortunately, it is not only the extent of environmental degradation that has intensified in the past half century, but also the degree of social inequality. For this reason it will become more and more important for the environmental justice movement to place attention on access to environmental benefits. Additionally, because food is often central to communities' collective cultural identities, the concept of food justice can illuminate links between environmental justice activism and the process of racial identity formation. These dimensions address both Pellow's (2004) call for scholarly attention to process and history and Pulido's (2000) injunction to connect environmental justice to social science analyses of race.

As an issue, food justice may help environmental justice activists to galvanize a more proactive, solution-oriented approach that can compliment its political pressure for government and corporate responsibility for localized epidemics and toxic pollutants. While some environmental justice organizations have moved toward a "pollution prevention" perspective, they have only begun to envision alternatives to environmental injustice conversant with traditional notions of environmental sustainability (Agyeman 2005; Pellow and Brulle 2005; Peña 2003). Because the sustainable agriculture movement has historically privileged the construction of alternative food systems over other kinds of

activism, this issue can add an additional strategy to the environmental justice lexicon. Finally, it is also our hope that through the use of these case studies, activists and policymakers working on food security will understand the institutionalized nature of denied access to healthy foods in these communities.

ENDNOTES

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[1]Although the WOFC ceased to operate formally in 2005, many member organizations continue to work toward its principles. The WOFC remains a useful framework for discussing the network of activists addressing food justice issues in West Oakland.

[2]During my fieldwork, the farmers market was run by the WOFC. It had originally been founded by David Roach, whose Mo' Better Foods was one of the WOFC's member organizations. After my fieldwork, Roach became the farmers market's sole manager.

[3]While the WOFC focuses on African American farmers, Mexican, Hmong, and more recently, white women farmers have also been included. Nonfarming vendors are overwhelmingly African American residents of either West Oakland, or nearby predominantly African American neighborhoods. The WOFC's promotional activities emphasize the African American farmers while treating nonblack farmers as allies. While produce sold at the farmers market and other WOFC projects need not be certified organic, recognizing that the cost of certification is often prohibitive, farmers use the phrase chemical-free to connote organic growing practices.

[4]Although the decline of African American farmers took place in the rural south, it has direct bearing on African Americans living in West Oakland. Each of the African American farmers, as well as many of the other vendors, is directly descended from southern sharecroppers.

[5]Other choices included good quality food, support for local farmers and small businesspeople, convenient location, and atmosphere.

[6]Native Americans were not included in this data.

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