UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

DECOLONIZING OUR PLATES: ANALYZING SAN DIEGO AND VEGANS OF COLOR FOOD POLITICS

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in

Ethnic Studies

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

DECOLONIZING OUR PLATES: ANALYZING SAN DIEGO AND VEGANS OF COLOR FOOD POLITICS

by

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Master of Arts in Ethnic Studies

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This project focuses on discursive formations of race, gender, class, and sexuality within food justice movements as well as these discursive formations within veganism. In particular, I analyze how mainstream food justice movements in San Diego engage in discourses of colorblindness, universalism, individualism, whiteness, and consumption.
I also examine how these movements are centered on possessive individualism, or one’s capacity to own private property, as the means through which they seek and obtain liberation. Through my participant observation at several San Diego food justice events, I demonstrate that these movements often discursively exclude communities of color and poor communities as its subjects. In addition, I analyze four vegan of color sites: the song “Be Healthy” by the hip hop group Dead Prez, eco-chef Bryant Terry’s cookbook *Vegan Soul Food*, the *Vegans of Color* blog, and an anthology entitled *Sistah Vegan! Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*. Through a cultural studies analysis, I explore the ways in which these sites engage a decolonial, anti-oppressive framework to guide their vegan politics. In this project, I seek to contribute to the works of those who have written about the relationship between race, class, gender, and space, as well as the fields of food studies and ethnic studies, through a critique of food justice movements’ reproduction of common sense logics about subjecthood and difference as well as decolonial possibilities within veganism.
INTRODUCTION: Entering the Discursive Realm in Food Politics

On April 24, 2010, the first day of the third annual Cultivating Food Justice Conference held at San Diego State University, an audience member proclaimed that we should “vote with our fork” to fight against injustices associated with the conventional American and global industrial food system. The keynote speaker, Raj Patel, renowned food studies and globalization scholar, replied, “Green consumerism ultimately atomizes us as individual consumers.” Through listening to the laborers and agricultural workers, Patel instead called for a movement that incorporates policy change in relation to access to food. This is contrary to the majority of the diverse writings on the relationship between race, class, and food politics that focuses on: food access and food (in)security, particularly in relation to health and nutrition; specific “ethnic” food and its cultural/transcultural history; and how “ethnic” cuisines do or do not become assimilated in relation to the community of origin (Mintz 1986; Pinstrup-Andersen 1988; Foster 1992; Williams-Forson 1996; Opie 2008; Warnes 2008).

I agree with Patel’s suggestion. I am interested in how food justice movements present consumption as a neutral playing field in which all have the same advantages and access, regardless of intersections of race, gender, and class. I am primarily concerned with precisely how contemporary food justice movements reify individualized consumption within masculinized white settler colonialist ideologies and discourses. While Patel’s response centers policy change quite explicitly, in this thesis I focus particularly on how food justice movements discursively construct those who participate as individual consumers.
I also analyze how vegan of color sites imagine decolonial food politics, in which race, gender, class, and sexuality are central to an anti-oppressive framework. Through an intersectional approach, these vegans of color engage in a critique of colonialism, racism, sexism, classism, and unequal food access. Examining these sites allows for a different type of imaginary that is a critique to the ways in which mainstream food justice movements engage in discourses of colorblindness, universalism, consumption, and individualism.

As a vegetarianism woman of color, issues around food access, veganism, racism, sexism, classism, and colonialism have been central to my life for some time. Over the past few years, I have become increasingly interested in how large agribusiness puts small farmers out of business, the damage monocropping has done to the environment and food supply, the small selection of finding fresh produce at supermarkets, and the effects of chemicals used in conventional farming practices. I began shopping at farmers’ markets, learning about the development of CSAs, and taking part in other independent, non-commercialized ways of accessing food. While shopping at these places is an important means of resisting industrial agriculture and agribusiness, I learned that they are invested in other problematic ideologies, such as colorblindness and universalism. At the same time, I would often hear comments that vegetarian and vegan movements are a “white thing.” Beyond the superficial response of “People of color can be vegan, too,” I became interested in precisely how racial politics, food politics, and vegan politics intersect and the implications of what those intersections might mean. I began on this project to gain a broader understand of how these issues come together and possibilities for liberatory food politics.
In this thesis, I cover literature on the relationship between food justice movements, whiteness, colorblindness, and universalism, as well as some literature on space, possessive individualism, intersectionality, cultural studies, and food access. I posit one imaginary, a decolonial vegan imaginary addressed in chapter two, to suggest alternatives to another imaginary, that of “voting with my fork” discussed in chapter one. The decolonial imaginary is not a direct response to the “voting with my fork” imaginary; that is, I raise critiques of problematic conceptualizations in chapter one that are not specifically addressed or resolved in the second chapter. Nonetheless, I believe that the decolonial imaginary is the beginning of one way to think about how food justice movements might rethink issues around food and race, gender, sexuality, and class.

As large-scale agribusiness becomes increasingly omnipotent, more and more people are turning to other means to grow, purchase, and connect with food. Over the past thirty years, the United States has seen: vast increases in Americans growing vegetable gardens or container gardens as well as national growth of farmers’ markets, slow food restaurants, and the push to eat organically and locally. Now, two years into Barack Obama’s term, the first black U.S. president, ideas that the United States is a post-racial society are also increasingly prevalent. These two perhaps seemingly disparate issues gain relevance and significance in instances such as the Obamas being the first presidential family to grow an organic garden at the White House (which ironically later became difficult because of the damage done from chemical fertilizers used during past presidencies). Michelle Obama’s April 15, 2010 visit to the New Roots Community Farm in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego (a community I discuss in greater detail in chapter one) served as part of her “Let’s Move!” campaign, a project working to
fight childhood obesity through encouraging families to create community gardens, exercise, learn about nutrition, creation of farmers’ markets, and food banks¹. I would like to posit that the campaign suggests that a relationship exists between post-raciality, food politics, and social change. The relationship suggested is one which historical legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racialization are not analyzed in relation to food politics, rather, as is stated on the website, “We just need the will” to change². On the other hand, in this thesis I consider the following questions: How do we think about the relationship between people of color, gardens, consumption and liberation? How can we think about progressive food politics that does not only critique industrialized agriculture, but simultaneously critiques other systems of dominations, such as colonialism, slavery, unequal food access, racism, sexism, and classism? I hope that this thesis begins to scratch the surface of possible responses to these questions.

In the first chapter, I explore the discursive space of mainstream food justice movements in San Diego. I analyze how they are invested in whiteness, colorblindness, universalism, possessive individualism, and purchase power or consumption. Through my participant at several local food justice events, I demonstrate that these investments privilege the white, masculine, middle class subject whose access to capital enables his freedom from industrialized agriculture. In the second chapter, I explore a vegan of color politics in which critiques of colonialism, racism, sexism, classism, and unequal food access is fundamental to vegan politics. Through a cultural studies analysis, I suggest that this construction allows for a different type of imaginary in which liberation is

¹ Retrieved October 12, 2010 from http://www.letsmove.gov/
sought through a broader critique of various systems of domination. This critique also embraces, rather than obfuscates, difference and the intersection of positionalities in order to dismantle food injustice.
Chapter 1: “VOTING WITH MY FORK”: WHITENESS AND CONSUMPTION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SAN DIEGO FOOD JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

Introduction and Methods

In this chapter, I will discuss food justice movements that attempt to eradicate injustices in relation to food dissemination but discursively privilege individualism, consumerism, whiteness, and land ownership. Moreover, I argue that contemporary food justice movements rely on the notion of possessive individualism, or the idea that one’s capacity to own property and therefore exert free will constitutes how subjectivity and personhood is constructed. As Patel stated, contemporary food justice movements privilege the notion of the individual consumer as the means through which change can and should occur. As such these movements reinscribe white middle class persons as the “proper” consumers and American citizen-subjects through politics that discursively exclude poor people and people of color. More broadly, I argue that food justice movements produce ideas about subjecthood, citizenship, and nation that reinforce masculinity, whiteness, and individual consumption as normative. This takes places both discursively, through the rhetoric of colorblindness and universalism, and materially, through the notion of possessive individualism.

In this chapter, I analyze the rhetoric of colorblindness and universalism and the ways in which they reinscribe whiteness. I look at two important events in the food justice movement in San Diego, California that are emblematic of the issues I raise. One event was the film viewing of My Father’s Garden at a local San Diego coffee shop. The second event was at the third annual San Diego Cultivating Food Justice Conference, which took place at San Diego State University on April 24th and 25th, 2010. Through
my participant observation at these events, I demonstrate the urgency of the need to
deconstruct racist and classist language, logic, and ideology within food justice
movements through a critique of the prevalence of discourses of colorblindness and
universalism. Secondly, I explore how the notion of possessive individualism, or the
capacity for an individual to own land, takes on particular resonance within localized
food justice movements. In particular, the reliance on the idea of owning a garden
privileges the property-owning subject, ignoring the colonialist and masculinist
ideological underpinnings on which this notion is based. My analysis of the 2008
documentary film, *The Garden*, reveals the ways in which the politics of food justice are
embedded in claims to ownership of space (geographic and social/political) and access to
space within and among communities of color. My reading of the film suggests that poor
Latinos and blacks are excluded from the construction of the possessive individual. All of
these illustrative examples demonstrate the ways in which localized food justice
movements imagine the proper subject to be a white, middle-class, property owning
subject that privileges masculinity and consumption. These movements discursively and
materially produce ideas about food justice, race, gender, and class, subjecthood, space,
and power.

**FOOD JUSTICE MOVEMENTS AND SPACE**

Food justice movements have become increasingly prevalent over the past 30
years. Also referred to as community food movements or alternative food movements,
they critique the industrial food system as destructive to healthy, local, small-scale,
sustainable, and ecological farming (Slocum 2006: 328). These movements encourage
community-based initiatives that connect people with food, through urban or community-
based gardens, farmers’ markets, buying agriculture that has been locally grown, healthy foods in schools, food co-ops, as well as fair trade, organic, non-genetically modified, and slow foods (Slocum 2006: 329 and Kantor, 20-21). Community food movements attempt to promote fair prices, sustainable farming practices, and provide accessible foods (Slocum 2006: 327). While several “food” writers have written about class in relation to food justice movements, not as many have written about race with a few notable exceptions that I discuss below.

Localized food justice movements are constructed as leftist, progressive spaces in which persons work toward social justice in relation to food. Geographers and other theorists have interrogated the notion of space as it refers to both a geographic place as well as social location. Works on race, class, gender, and environmental movements are particularly useful to consider in my analysis of localized food justice movements because of their shared relationship to land, access to land, land ownership, and utilization of land. In Laura Pulido’s article “Race, Class, and Political Activism: Black, Chicana/o, and Japanese-American Leftists in Southern California, 1968-1978,” she argues for the importance of addressing racism and classism in contemporary leftist activist organizing to create antiracist and anticapitalist movements (Pulido 2002: 762). In her dissertation, Black Faces, White Spaces: African Americans and the Great Outdoors, Carolyn Finney argues that the racialization of the Great Outdoors, or wilderness, forests, and parks, in popular media and environmental organizations and institutions privileges white voices, histories and cultural experiences while diverse, non-essentialized African American experiences are largely absent (Finney, 2006: 4). Finney argues, “By excluding the African American environmental experience (implicitly or
explicitly), these institutions legitimate the invisibility of the African American in the Great Outdoors and in all spaces that inform, shape, and control the way we know and interact with the outdoors in the United States,” (Finney, 2006: 10). In Noxious New York, Julie Sze analyzes how spatial segregation has led to increased health risks for communities of color and low-income communities in New York City (Sze 2006). As with environmental movements, representations and constructions of food justice movements become arenas where notions of race, culture, class, gender, values, space, and national identity are produced. Not only do these theorists argue that race and space mutually constitute one another but, more importantly, that space itself is political.

In The Production of Space, French sociologist Henri Lefebvre argues that space does not solely refer to a geographic location but also a social space, or an ideological site in which the production and reproduction of social and economic relations takes place (Lefebvre, 1974). As such, spaces are relationally constructed, often via who is included and excluded. In “Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographic Scale,” Neil Smith examines how people who are homeless utilize shopping carts, also called “Homeless Vehicles” and “Poliscar,” to reclaim physical presence and, thereby, empowerment in parks, street corners, and other public spaces from which law enforcement and real estate attempt to exclude them (Smith 1992: 57-58). Smith argues that the “Homeless Vehicle” and “Poliscar” convert spaces of exclusion into “the known, the made, the constructed.” (Smith 1992: 60). In this way, access to space is not simply about being included in a particular space, but about strategies of resistance to work toward a process of political liberation (Smith 1992: 60).

Similarly, in “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,” historian
George Lipsitz has argued that African American struggles to assert physical presence by masquerading as Mardi Gras Indian tribes in New Orleans is a struggle over access to/occupation over urban space as a means of resistance to long-standing racist police surveillance, harassment, and provocation (Lipsitz 2007:10-11). As I discuss below, food justice movements are discursively and materially constructed as white, middle-class spaces that exclude poor people and people of color. To work against this exclusion is to work not simply toward inclusion, rather to work toward a process of political liberation and strategies of resistance within food justice movements. I later discuss two groups that resist this exclusion in food justice: the farmers of the South Central farm in Los Angeles and members of the People’s Produce Project in San Diego.

I argue that food justice movements can be considered a space in a number of ways. They are a marker of a variety of other social issues, such as animal rights, religious and spiritual beliefs, environmental justice issues, and issues of food access. As such, and similar to a geographic space, they contain particular boundaries, which often serve to include particular groups while excluding others. Additionally, food justice movements bear a relationship to geographic place, as they center on issues of land access/ownership, creating community and urban gardens, and growing food in the land. In the following section, I explore how localized food justice movements produce conceptions of race, class, and gender that discursively and materially reinscribe African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans as outside of these spaces.
PROPERTY OWNERSHIP: WHITENESS AND POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM

In a study on a community food coalition in central New York, Rachel Slocum found that the directors or program leaders within the organization engage in white privilege in their efforts to promote food justice (Slocum 2006: 328). Research has demonstrated that low income and poor Native Americans, Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans and whites are more likely to be obese and tend to have poorer nutrition because of lack of access to fresh and healthy foods. In response, community food organizations seek to promote urban gardening, providing cooking classes, eliminating vending machines in schools, and creating farmers’ markets in low-income communities, and supporting the use of food stamps at farmers’ markets (Slocum 2006: 329).

Nonetheless, Slocum found that white privilege was a major component of the community food movement in a number of ways. These include: representation of leadership (whites comprising over 80% of both leadership and board members); organizations often answer to those who fund the organization rather than to the community, and therefore, did not prioritize community leadership building or shifting power relations into the hands of community members; the use of promoting ideologies such as self-sufficiency “in a manner that obscures the racist, classist, gendered features of the food system, past and present;” organization leaders constructed racism as solely a personal rather than structural or relational issue; and community food organizations did not acknowledge or incorporate the intersections of race, gender, and class in their community strategizing (Slocum 2006: 330 and 337).

3 I discuss issues regarding access to food among poor whites and people of color in more detail in the section entitled “Speaking Truth to Power: Race and Class Deconstruction in Food Justice.”
As legal studies scholar Cheryl Harris has discussed in her article “Whiteness as Property,” whiteness is a form of property that allows access to particular forms of public and private privilege that result in material consequences (Harris 1993: 1713). Whiteness as property is particularly endemic to societies founded upon white supremacist experiences, values, and ideologies, such as the United States (Harris 1993: 1712). According to Harris, whiteness and property share the similar right to exclude others, non-whites in particular (Harris 1993: 1714). This equation is so endemic to the social structures that it is not readily visible but is pervasive throughout the American legal system. Harris argues,

In ways so embedded that it is rarely apparent, the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white have become a valuable asset that whites sought to enjoy to protect and that those who passed sought to attain—by fraud if necessary. Whites have come to expect and rely on these benefits. And over time these expectations have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law…American law has recognized a property interest in whiteness that, although unacknowledged, now forms the background against which legal disputes are framed, argued, and adjudicated, (Harris 1993: 1713-1714).

Indeed, whiteness as property has not only been justified through the legal system but has had a great effect on how social relations are structured (Harris 1993: 1718). Whiteness functions not only as a form of property in public and legal spheres but also affects the construction of identity in the political and cultural sphere⁴ (Harris 1993: 1725). The system of whiteness as property has been a vital component of maintaining racial and economic subjugation and exploitation of African Americans and Native Americans.

While African Americans were treated as property under chattel slavery, Native

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⁴ While Harris’s article primarily centers on whiteness as property under the legal system in the United States, she also demonstrates that the legal, political, social, cultural, and economic systems are inextricably linked.
Americans were denied property rights during American settler colonialism (Harris 1993: 1716). In *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, historian George Lipsitz has argued that American social, economic, and political structure gives value to whiteness both in the political and private lives of people. Whites are encouraged to invest in whiteness in exchange for resources, opportunities, and power. In addition, Lipsitz argues that a direct link exists between the advantages whites receive from this possessive investment and the disadvantages blacks receive. However, because whiteness is an unmarked category, difference and inequality are subtly reified (Lipsitz 1998).

In *Ruptures in American Capital*, Grace Hong expands upon C.B. MacPherson’s notion of possessive individualism, or “a conception of the self based on one’s ability to own property privately and dispose of it as one chooses. Basing subjectivity on property ownership defines subjects as atomized, individuated beings whose most basic right is to exercise their own free will,” (Hong 2006: 6). Hong argues that although possessive individualism is constructed as a universal and unmarked category, it is contingent upon racialized and gendered bodies, as these categories are relationally constituted (Hong 2006: 7-8). Moreover, possessive individualism is significant in that it allows the subject to exercise free will.

Similarly, food justice movements, such as community supported agriculture (CSAs) and farmer’s markets, are a rejection of the conventional American food system: factory farming, pesticide and other chemical usage on vegetables and fruits, genetically modified foods, having no relationship with the food one consumes (meaning no knowledge of where it came from, how it was grown, and how it got to your plate), among others. For the most part, contemporary food justice movements reject this set of
values and embrace Do It Yourself or D.I.Y. values such as creating urban and community gardens\textsuperscript{5}, purchasing organic foods, and purchasing produce from community supported agriculture, farmers markets, and other local farms rather than large super markets. While these movements are an important form of resistance to industrialized agriculture, they continue to be invested in property ownership as a means of seeking liberation. As described by Hong, these other values purport to represent a “truer” set of values, which allows free will to be exercised and American individualism to blossom (Hong, 2006: 17). By focusing on the idea of growing your own garden, food justice movements suggest that one’s means of finding an alternative to a corrupt conventional food industry is through one’s relationship to land ownership. The third annual San Diego Cultivating Food Justice Conference that took place in April of 2010 was a conference centered on bringing awareness to issues within the food justice movement, with workshops ranging from “Container Gardening: The Secrets Behind the Green Thumb” to “Race and Class Deconstruction”\textsuperscript{6}.

Represented at the conference were a number of San Diego food justice organizations, including two I would like to discuss in particular: Food not Lawns and Victory Gardens. San Diego Food Not Lawns is, as their name suggests, an organization that encourages people to turn their lawns into an urban garden in which they grow fruits

\textsuperscript{5} In this section, I discuss the notion of community gardens within food justice movements, as understood by writers such as Julie Guthman and Rachel Slocum. However, the ideological underpinnings of \textit{communal} gardens/food movements are dramatically different, a concept that I discuss in the section toward the end of the chapter entitled, “Space, Race and Food Politics in Los Angeles: The Garden.”

\textsuperscript{6} Retrieved on June 6, 2010 from http://www.sdfoodjustice.org/workshops.php
and vegetables. This organization centers property-owning persons with access to land as its subject, as a person who rents (be it a house or an apartment) cannot turn a lawn into an urban garden. Other San Diego organizations, such as Victory Gardens work with those who do not have access to land (live in an apartment, etc) to create an indoor garden in their home. As was stated at the Conference, Victory Gardens will come to your home and help you create indoor or outdoor container gardens for those with limited or no land space. While this organization seemingly demonstrates the flexibility of the food justice movement to work with land-owning as well as non-land-owning persons, its mission is premised upon one’s access to land and land ownership. Organizations such as these rely upon, as Hong illuminates, the capacity to own land, or owning your own garden, to exert one’s free will (Hong 2006: 6-7). This becomes the basis for which one can demonstrate a rejection of the industrial food system and exemplify individualism that is paramount in the construction of American subjectivity.

In another study on the relationship between food justice movements and African Americans in the northern California, entitled “Bringing good food to others: Investigating the subjects of alternative food practice,” Julie Guthman (2008) argued that these movements engage a set of white cultural practices which are exclusionary toward non-whites (Guthman, 2008b: 433). These movements often produce and reproduce whiteness because they tend to be located in affluent, white neighborhoods, reflect whitened cultural histories, engage rhetoric and discourse of colorblindness and universalism and utilize a colonial-like approach when addressing issues of lack of racial and class diversity (Guthman, 2008b: 431).

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In her study, she found that the consumers of food justice movements, such as farmer’s markets and CSAs were interpellated as white through the discourse used (Guthman, 2008b: 435). In particular, she discussed how particular terms used in these movements, such as “organic,” “natural,” “putting your hands in the soil,” and “local” can invoke a set of cultural practices that tend to be valued by whites as opposed to members of other racial groups. For instance, these concepts and language rely on an agrarian imaginary and ignore issues of Native American and Mexican land appropriation by white colonials, and the exclusion of African Americans from land ownership. Moreover, farming in the U.S. is primarily based on a relationship in which whites are the landowners and non-whites are the laborers, commonly exploited (Guthman, 2008b: 435).

Guthman also suggests that food justice movements embrace a “missionary zeal” that emphasizes a desire to educate others. Guthman states that this desire to educate others, “If they only knew where their food came from…” utilizes rhetoric similar to past U.S. food reform movements, which tended to be eugenics-like projects geared toward immigrants and racialized groups (Guthman, 2008b: 436). As Guthman compellingly states, “More broadly, the intention to do good on behalf of those deemed other has the markings 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,” (Guthman, 2008b: 436). Guthman argues that these aspects of food justice movements hinder the possibilities and imaginings for food justice movements as well as who will feel comfortable participating in them. Moreover, since race is always produced relationally, these movements not only produce and reproduce whitened
cultural practices, they also produce ideas about what it means to be lower-class and non-white.

That racialization, subjugation of gendered bodies, and heteronormativity are central to the founding of American democracy is essential to contextualize contemporary food justice movement. For instance, the General Allotment Act of 1887 (also known as the Dawes Act) and the added Burke Act of 1906 emphasized the notion of individual land ownership through the taking of tribal indigenous lands in Oklahoma (Olund 2002: 153). The lands were appropriated by the U.S. government and separated into individually-owned parcels, sold primarily to those considered “competent and capable,” or Native Americans who were of mixed European ancestry, and the “surplus” land was sold to white settlers and railroad companies (Stremlau 2005: 276). The Acts were based upon the conception that Native Americans would be more easily assimilated if they were owners of individualized land and encouraged to farm, rather than continue to engage in traditional means of subsistence, such as hunting, fishing, and gathering (Olund 2002:154 and Stremlau 2005:266, 276, and 280). Not only did these Acts leave approximately 90,000 indigenous in Oklahoma landless (or loss of about 90 million acres) and end hunting as a means of subsistence in the area, it also greatly affected gender relations. Women’s roles shifted from working in the fields and being the caretakers of the land to working in the domestic sphere, in line with Victorian values and customs (Stremlau 2005: 267). Many matrilineal indigenous tribes were forced to become patrilineal and women began to lose significance in the public and political sphere. Prior to parcel allotment, women could divorce fairly easily without grave repercussions; subsequently, women needed to be married to receive the full 160 acre
allotment (Stremlau 2005: 273). The joint Dawes and Burke Acts are merely one example of the ways in which those who embody racial and gender difference are deemed as the improper subjects of spatial ownership, access, and control. The further extermination of indigenous peoples allowed for white subjects to be deemed the legitimate material and ideological inheritors of U.S. lands. As such, whiteness as property was secured. Individualized ownership of land in relation to food production, masculinity, and racial otherness were understood as properly constructed only through the stability and normalization of the heteronormative, patriarchal family.

**GENDER, FOOD JUSTICE, AND SPACE: THE PRIVATE AS HETERONORMATIVE**

Localized food justice movements not only center consumption as normative, but in so doing, place issues of public interest to the realm of the private: through one’s consumption choices, through creating an urban garden with one’s private property, and one’s relationship to capital. This is demonstrated in actions that range from individual consumers purchasing food from local farmers’ markets or CSAs to protests against privatized multi-national agribusiness corporations that produce genetically modified foods, such as a February 2010 protest in downtown San Diego against Monsanto. This move of food justice movements to the realm of the private, the home or the domestic sphere to redeem “proper” values is significant, as the food justice movements reinscribe the domestic space, typically considered the realm of the feminine, as heteronormative

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8 For more information on the February 2010 protest in downtown San Diego against Monsanto, see http://www.meetup.com/commgardens-58/calendar/12635459/?eventId=12635459&action=detail or http://community.sandiego6.com/calendar/sandiego/4310562.aspx
but masculine. Moreover, the private or domestic sphere becomes the site for political change within food politics, rather than the realm of the public.

As Doreen Massey has articulated in *Space, Place and Gender*, historically, women in the West have been relegated to the space/place of the private, or the domestic, as a form of spatial control and construction and reification of gendered identities (Massey 1994: 179). This gendered division of labor has led to patriarchal relations, masculine supremacy, and the privileging of heteronormativity (Massey 1994: 194). In “Sex in Public,” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue that heterosexual culture has made itself legible through the ideologies and institutions of intimacy, or by differentiating between “personal life” and work, politics, and the public sphere. Until the mid-1990s, the most significant way in which gay men were able to connect with one another in New York was through accessing common interest spaces in the public that catered to gays such as adult video and book stores, restaurants, bars and coffee shops, and theaters and other businesses (Berlant and Warner 1998: 551). However, New York’s October 1995 Zoning Text Amendment restricted these businesses to specific areas coded as nonresidential. Other restrictions were also enforced greatly reducing possibilities for queer political community and lifestyle (Berlant and Warner 1998: 552).

As a result, the presence of queer culture in public spaces and its possibilities for public political change were altered, as intimacy, in particular queer culture, was relegated to the realm of the private. Intimacy and sexual culture came to be associated with personal life or the non-political, privileging heterosexuality through institutions of social reproduction, the accumulation and transfer of capital, and self-development. Sex came to be constructed as solely personal through heteronormative constructions of
intimacy, which suppressed non-normative or public sexual cultures. As Berlant and Warner argue, “...finally, those conventions conjure a mirage: a home base of prepolitical humanity from which citizens are thought to come into political discourse and to which they are expected to return in the (always imaginary) future after political conflict. Intimate life is the endlessly cited *elsewhere* of political public discourse, a promised haven that distracts citizens from the unequal conditions of their political and economic lives, consoles them for the damaged humanity of mass society and shames them for any divergence between their lives and the intimate sphere that is alleged to be simple personhood,” (Berlant and Warner 1998: 553).

Food justice movements are similarly founded upon intimate life or the site of the home, the domestic, the kitchen, or the family garden. Organizations such as Food not Lawns and Victory Gardens that rely upon the domestic sphere for political change, rather than the public, to work toward social justice parallel the privatization of sexuality. The assumption that food politics will resolve itself in the domestic space or the home is a similar privatization of food justice movements. Moreover, while the home is typically considered the realm of the feminine, it is reinscribed as a masculine space when it comes to food justice movements. The possessive individual, who is self-interested and can exert free will, is rooted upon masculinized ideologies of the pastoral, land ownership and the worker whose interest lies primarily in consumption.

Indeed, one of the unforeseen paradoxes of national-capitalist privatization has been that citizens have been led through heterosexual culture to identify both themselves and their politics with privacy. In the official public, this involves making sex private...replacing state mandates for social justice with a privatized ethics of responsibility, charity, atonement, and ‘values’; and enforcing boundaries between moral persons and economic ones, (Berlant and Warner 1998: 553-554).
Rather than address the need for systemic and structural political change, people can justifiably deal with issues privately through consumption. While the epitome of the domestic was once the exclusion of the masculine and the presence of the feminine, this current move by food justice movements has engaged in a reassertion of the heteronormative but through a privileging of the masculine in the domestic space. In this way, they express a particular type of labor that privileges the individualized, do-it-yourself (D.I.Y.), capitalist man’s success story that is essentially the liberal progressive 21st century possessive individual American.

**COLORBLINDNESS, UNIVERSALISM, AND CONSUMPTION**

Slocum examined 13 community food organizations in the northeastern United States. On average, the leadership positions were 84% white compared to 16% people of color and the board members were 89% white and 11% people of color (Slocum 2006: 330). Thus, those who experience food insecurity were not represented in the leadership in addressing food insecurity issues. Secondly, the intersections of race, class, and gender were obscured and seen as insignificant in the ways that the organizations strategized, made priorities, and built alliances in relation to food politics (Slocum 2006: 330). In this way, the organizations in Slocum’s study reinforced white privilege both through representation and the structure of the organization.

In a similar vein, Julie Guthman has argued that there is a proliferation of rhetoric of colorblindness and universalism in Californian alternative food institutions, which results in the exclusion of the poor and people of color and affects the way in which food politics is understood generally. Similar to Slocum’s use of the term community food
movements, the alternative food institutions that Guthman discusses include farmers’
markets and community-supported agriculture (or CSAs), where people pay for a weekly
or biweekly box of fruits and vegetables from a particular farm to ensure support of local
farms (Guthman, 2008a: 388). Alternative food activists praise farmers’ markets and
CSAs as ideal spaces where it is presumed that “these institutions shorten the social and
economic distance between producers and consumers, build community and participatory
democracy, and otherwise serve as sites of contestation against a globalized food
system,” (Guthman, 2008a: 388). However, people of color, and particularly African
Americans, do not participate in these institutions in proportionate relation to the
population (Guthman, 2008a: 388). CSA managers interviewed reported that most of
their customers were white and, though farmers’ markets were more ethnically diverse,
very few farmers’ markets were established in communities of color (Guthman, 2008a:
392). Guthman argues that this fact is largely due to the overarching rhetoric of
colorblindness and universalism among managers of farmer’s markets and CSAs, which
then impacts how these spaces are coded and how these institutions cater to their
clientele.

While 74% of farmers’ market managers and 69% of CSA managers stated that
they would like a more diverse customer base, the percentage of CSA managers willing
to consider strategies to attract more ethnically diverse populations dropped to 59%
(Guthman, 2008a: 392). Some of the managers Guthman interviewed used the discourse
der of colorblindness when asked what attempts they would make to diversify their customer
base. Moreover, one of the ways in which whiteness as property is protected is under the
rhetoric and ideology of colorblindness. Colorblindness is the concept that race is simply
a matter of color and that color does not matter (Harris 1993: 1768). Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has discussed colorblindness as an example of how racial inequality is produced in seemingly nonracial ways (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Colorblind racism, or the notion that race is no longer a determining factor in how people of color and whites fall in the social, political and economic spectrum, maintains the current racial order as well as white privilege without naming who gets marginalized and who gets rewarded (Bonilla-Silva 2006).

As Harris argues, colorblindness “denies the real linkage between race and oppression under systematic white supremacy. Distorting and denying reality, both definitions [biological determinism and colorblindness] support race subordination,” (Harris, 1993: 1768). Those who embrace colorblind policies purport them to be unbiased or “neutral” but they in fact privilege whiteness as a racial category (Harris 1993: 1768-1769). Similarly, Guthman argues that CSA managers used colorblind rhetoric and refused to acknowledge racial difference in the distribution of resources, the ways in which society is structured, and how groups are implicitly or explicitly treated, for fear of being depicted as racist or simply because it is believed that these differences do not actually exist (Guthman 2008a: 390-391). Several managers did not want to respond to questions about the racial or ethnic demographics of their customers, arguing that the questions made them feel as if they had to be “politically correct” as they expressed a desire to ignore difference (Guthman 2008a: 393).

Other managers invoked a discourse of universalism, the belief that values held by whites are normative and shared by most others. Universalism often takes form in aesthetic practices that are not apparently racialized as white but are white cultural
practices. Universalism also ignores the differences of other groups, resulting in the notion that they must be educated or are justifiably marginalized (Guthman 2008a: 391). For instance, as discussed earlier, the use of terms such as “putting your hands in the soil” and property owning do not explicitly privilege members of a particular racial, gendered, or social class. Upon further inspection, however, we see that these notions are premised upon pastoral, whitened, masculinized, and colonial histories, experiences, and perspectives. When asked how to attract a more diverse clientele to the farmers’ markets, some managers responded that it was not necessary to try to attract particular groups because what they presented at their markets should universally attract everyone (Guthman 2008a: 392).

Moreover, when asked why they thought that poor people and people of color did not participate in farmers’ markets and CSAs as much as people of European American descent, manager responses stated personal characteristics such as people of color not being as educated, not caring about their quality of food as much, not being as conscious about their health or simply not being “into” healthy, local, organic foods. Discussions of structural inequalities related to access to food and cost were not mentioned as potential reasons (Guthman 2008a: 393). Thus, as Guthman states, structural inequalities are often written off as cultural differences, lack of education and/or personal characteristics (Guthman, 2008a: 393).

**MY FATHER’S GARDEN**

On Tuesday, March 23, 2010, I attended a viewing of the film My Father’s Garden at a local coffee shop in the Normal Heights neighborhood in San Diego, California. The film was produced in 1996 and describes the historical shift of farming
without the use of pesticides or chemicals to what is now “conventional” farming, or the use of chemicals and pesticides in produce farming practices. It analyzes the damage of chemical farming in relation to bodies, soil, and food. Here, I focus on the Question and Answer session that followed, in which colorblindness and universalism were prevalent themes that were raised along with the idea of individual consumption. The particular type of discourse of universalism and colorblindness are contingent upon one’s consumptive power, one’s relationship to capital and individualism as a means of seeking liberatory food justice practices.

As the session began, the Q&A moderator asked the approximately thirty audience members what we do to combat the conventional industrialized food system. Of the thirty audience members, the audience was overwhelmingly white, while three of us were people of color. Many audience members responded that they grow their own gardens in their homes. Another common response, which is also quite common in the food justice movement, was the idea of “Voting with your fork” or “Voting with your dollar.” The notion of voting with one’s dollar or fork refers to the notion that people should demonstrate their resistance to the industrialized food system through their consumption choices, such as buying from local and organic producers as well as from farmer’s markets and CSAs. This position suggests that we assert our subjectivity and positionality as individual consumers in the (literal) market place. Thus, one exerts one’s

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9 I did not take a survey or verbally query those present at the film viewing how they self-identified racially or ethnically. Thus, my assessment that there were three people of color present is based solely upon physical characteristics, which can be very problematic, given that I do not know how those present would self-identify. However, given that I decided to include this ethnographic work in the thesis after my participation the day of the film, I have chosen to include my observations.
power through one’s purchase power and one’s relationship to capital. However, poor people and poor communities of color often do not have enough money to purchase the more expensive local or organically grown food. For these groups, subjectivity and power are unrealized within the framework of voting with one’s fork.

One woman at the film viewing raised this issue during the Q&A, stating that everyone does not have the capital to vote with their fork and must purchase whatever food is most accessible and affordable to them. She later raised the issue that large, multi-national corporations damage a country’s ability to self-sustain and grow food by depleting it of its resources and damaging the environment, then these corporations say, (her words) “Oh look at them, they can’t grow their own food.” This quote points to the relationship between countries in the global north, the global south, and privatized multi-national corporations. These relationships have become increasingly intertwined since the January 1, 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

NAFTA, an economic trade agreement between the U.S., Canada and Mexico, focused particularly on free trade within agriculture (Patel 2007: 48). Significantly poorer than Canada and the U.S., Mexico would purportedly benefit from the wealth of the two other countries. However, as has now been well documented, NAFTA virtually destroyed the Mexican corn economy, a significant source of livelihood in Mexico. As Patel states, corn was “[r]esponsible for 60 per cent of the land cultivated in Mexico at that time [NAFTA] was concluded, a source of livelihood for three million producers, and 8 per cent of the population,” (Patel 2007: 48). On the other side of the border, U.S. corn farmers were subsidized for machinery, fertilizer, credit and transport, meaning that U.S. corn was sold and bought at lower than what it had cost to produce it,” (Patel 2007:
49). As a result, it was much more expensive to produce corn in Mexico than in the U.S. The United States government flooded the Mexican agricultural sector with U.S. corn, contributing to the crash of the Mexican Peso, with a 42 percent devaluation of the peso against the dollar (Patel 2007: 49). Mexican corn farmers, lacking money, technology and access to other types of crops, faced grave difficulties (Patel 2007: 50). Suicide rates among many corn farmers increased, as they found themselves unable to feed their families and unable to sustain themselves with corn as their livelihood (Patel 2007: 50-51). At the same time, however, the U.S. has introduced numerous new crops into the Mexican agricultural economy in order to financially benefit the U.S.

NAFTA represents one example in which the U.S. government depletes a particular part of the economy in a significantly poorer country, specifically rural jobs in relation to corn in Mexico for U.S. profit. As can be read from the comment of the woman at the film viewing of *My Father’s Garden*, the notion of “voting with my fork” must be contextualized within the racialized, colonialist logic of global capitalism. It is not simply a matter of independently determining what to purchase, without regard to racial and class dynamics. In this way, the idea of “voting with my fork” takes on universalist and colorblind ideological undertones, as it refuses to acknowledge how one’s racial and class positioning can be a determining factors in one’s access to land, one’s resources and ability to grow particular foods, and one’s resources that determine how food choices/purchases are made.

Another participant in the Q&A following *My Father’s Garden* raised concerns in relation to the lack of racial diversity in food justice movements in San Diego. An older gentleman stated that “we” need to work with communities close by and learn from
“their” farming practices. In particular, he mentioned that Hmong, Philippino, and central African populations in City Heights do not need to be told by “us” (presumably the primarily middle class white audience in the room) how to farm, eat locally and organically because they have done so in their native countries before moving here as well as while being in the U.S. The man raised this issue twice and, each time, the issues he raised were not directly addressed. Like the woman who raised issues of class, when this man raised issues of race and class and implied how the food justice movements discursively inscribes lower class racialized bodies as outside of these spaces, people again responded with the concept of “Voting with my fork,” “We’ll grow our way out of this” or “We’re going to change things one purchase at a time.” These examples of discourses of colorblindness and universalism express the idea that everyone can be liberated through their relationship to capital. They ignore the racial and class positionalities of those who are poor and people of color. This rhetoric implies that those who simply care enough will make the necessary changes via their consumptive practices.

While I was unable to speak with this participant directly, it seems that this speaker was referring specifically to the New Roots Community Farm, located in the City Heights neighborhood in San Diego. City Heights, the most ethnically diverse neighborhood in San Diego, is 87% non-white, primarily comprised of immigrant community members, including people from El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Laos, Mexico, the Philippines, Somalia, Thailand, Vietnam, among other countries. 74% of the population makes less than $40,000 per year with 38% of community members living in poverty. The New Roots Community Farm is farmed by residents of City Heights. This information is according to the most recent U.S Census data. More demographical information City Heights can be found at http://www.sandiego.gov/planning/community/profiles/cityheights/ under Demographic Information or at http://profilewarehouse.sandag.org/profiles/cen00/sdcpa1456cen00.pdf
Although language that embraces universalism, colorblindness, and whiteness are prevalent within localized food justice movements, there are those involved who attempt to disrupt these discourses and their underlying ideologies. On Saturday, April 24, 2010, I attended two panels at the Cultivating Food Justice Conference. The first was entitled “Race and Class Deconstruction” facilitated by Lacie Watkins-Bush, a member of Activist San Diego and the Mennonite Society. In this panel, Ms. Watkins-Bush argued that food justice movements in the United States must be understood within a racist and classist history, discussing issues such as redlining, apartheid, supermarket scarcity, food deserts (or as she called them “food swamps” or “a glut of bad food”) in order to work toward food justice. For instance, Ms. Watkins-Bush discussed how the Chief Executive Operator of Whole Foods Market chain has publicly stated that he will only set up future Whole Food stores in “established and aspirational” communities. As Ms. Watkins-Bush explained, the language of “established and aspirational” neighborhoods refers specifically to middle class areas, both white and mixed race/ethnicity, where Whole Foods will be almost certain to profit. However, she linked the history of redlining and what she referred to as “apartheid” with supermarket scarcity and food deserts. Noting that redlining in the U.S. led to white flight from particular communities, resulting in unofficial apartheid, Ms. Watkins-Bush stated that this has currently led to increased
supermarket scarcity, or a lack of supermarket presence, in poor, non-white communities\textsuperscript{11}.

Ms. Watkins-Bush is explicitly referring to what Lipsitz has called “the racialization of space and the spatialization of race,” (Lipsitz 2007: 12). Lipsitz argues,

The lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension. People of different races in the United States are relegated to different physical locations by housing and lending discrimination, by school district boundaries, by policing practices, by zoning regulations, and by the design of the transit systems. The racial demography of the places where people live, work, play, shop, and travel expose them to a socially-shared system of exclusion and inclusion (Lipsitz 2007: 12).

In particular, a study conducted in San Diego, California demonstrated that supermarkets have twice the average amount of “heart-healthy” food in relation to convenience stores and four times as much as neighborhood grocery stores (Morland et al 2002: 24). In a different 2002 study completed on the effects of locality to supermarkets on healthy diets in selected neighborhoods in Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, and North Carolina, over eight times as many blacks lived in poor neighborhoods as in higher wealth neighborhoods. Supermarkets were four times more prevalent in predominantly white neighborhoods than in predominantly black neighborhoods (Morland et al 2002: 27). Because blacks were less likely to have a car or truck per household, regardless of wealth, it was more difficult for blacks to get to a supermarket if there was not one nearby (Morland et al 2002: 26). Supermarkets tend to have a larger selection of “heart-healthy” foods while neighborhood convenience stores tend to have very few “heart-

\textsuperscript{11} I was unable to locate the particular quote to which Ms. Watkins-Bush referred, however my focus is primarily on how she, as an activist within food justice movements in San Diego and a representative of Activist San Diego, understands the relationship between local food justice movements, race, and class.
healthy” options (Sallis et al 1986: 217). In addition, fast food restaurants were more prevalent in poor neighborhoods and less prevalent in wealthier neighborhoods. Fast food meals have been found to be low in calcium, vitamins A and C, and fiber, and are high in calories, total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol (French 2000: 1354). Non-whites and low-income persons were more likely to eat fast food because of a lack of access to supermarkets and the affordability of fast foods (French 2000: 1357).

These studies demonstrate that the availability of food stores heavily influences the dietary choices people have and make. People who reside in poorer communities and communities of color tend to have more difficulty accessing healthier foods than those living in wealthier, white communities. The “apartheid” or supermarket scarcity to which Ms. Watkins-Bush referred demonstrates how racial and spatial segregation operate within local San Diego food justice movements. What is significant about the “Race and Class Deconstruction” panel is the way in which Ms. Watkins-Bush argued against the mainstream ideology in food justice movements. This includes: 1) attempts to ignore the histories of racial and class exploitation and the significant effects and implications for localized food justice movements and 2) imagining the normative and deserving participant of such movements as a white middle-class subject.

The second panel I attended, “Speaking Truth to Power and Each Other: Moving Toward a Just Language and Logic,” was facilitated by Diane Moss and Robert Tambuzi, both organizers of the People’s Produce Project (PPP), a southeast San Diego food justice organization. The People’s Produce Project is a grassroots organization started in October of 2008 that works toward goals of food security, food sovereignty and sustainability, community building, and promoting health for those living in southeast
San Diego\textsuperscript{12}. A small organization comprised of approximately 20 community and interested members and volunteers\textsuperscript{13}, the PPP is focused specifically on bringing a certified farmer’s market that “accepts and promotes food stamp use;” creating community gardens and farms and promoting the use of edible landscaping or “multi-functional landscapes that provide returns (fruits, vegetables, etc.) on your investment of water, fertilizer, and time.”\textsuperscript{14} Southeast San Diego is a region comprised largely of low-income African Americans and Latinos\textsuperscript{15}. Ms. Moss and Mr. Tambuzi, active members and organizers of the People’s Produce Project, connected issues of priority in the organization to their panel discussion at the Cultivating Food Justice Conference. They discussed the importance of understanding that social movements have a set of philosophies that must be put into a language with which everyone can understand and connect.

Mr. Tambuzi encouraged what he called “class suicide” or the notion of doing something against one’s own class interests for a more vulnerable population; he emphasized that class suicide should not take place in a manner that is paternalistic or maternalistic (as he stated) but in a manner that promotes respect, self-determination,

\textsuperscript{12} Retrieved on May 28, 2010 from http://www.projectnewvillage.org/ppp/
\textsuperscript{13} I became a member of the People’s Produce Project in May of 2010 and this number is based on my assessment of membership from meetings attended.
\textsuperscript{14} Retrieved on May 28, 2010 from http://www.projectnewvillage.org/ppp/
\textsuperscript{15} According to the most recent Census data from the year 2000, 76% of the working population in Southeast San Diego make less than $40,000 annually with 37% living in poverty; 62% make under $30,000 annually with “Hispanics,” “Black or African Americans,” and “Some other race” making up 88% of the population. Retrieved on May 28, 2010 from http://profilewarehouse.sandag.org/profiles/cen00/sdcpa1469cen00.pdf taken from the webpage http://www.sandiego.gov/planning/community/profiles/southeasterndsd/index.shtml under the Demographic Information section.
allows for self-definition, and engaging with people as other human beings on the planet. Similar to Ms. Watkins-Bush’s panel, Mr. Tambuzi and Ms. Moss’s discussion sought to open the space of food justice movements, not simply as mode of inclusion, but to reframe its ideological underpinnings. This is further exemplified by Mr. Tambuzi’s assertion that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines the term “organic” simply as “more money.” This sarcastic statement critiques the USDA’s, and private national and multi-national food companies’, price increase on foods labeled “organic.” While I did not have an opportunity to engage in a more in-depth conversation with Mr. Tambuzi regarding his perspectives on organic foods and farming, it is clear that he was critiquing particular class inequalities in the food justice movement.

While Ms. Watkins-Bush’s panel focused more specifically on material space, and access to particular types of foods and supermarkets, Ms. Moss and Mr. Tambuzi’s panel was more directly aimed at discursive space and how the language of food justice movements is alienating for poor people and people of color. Their demand to radically change founding ideologies and logics of the food justice movement that are racist and classist work toward a politics of liberation that allows not only for a greater inclusion of a variety of groups but also a radical alteration of how food justice movements are constructed and produced. Moreover, the relationship between the material and discursive is significant in relation to food justice movements as they encompass both spatial dimensions. Below, I discuss particular aspects of food justice movements as they relate to material space in the documentary film, *The Garden*.

It is vital to interrogate how the previously discussed colorblind, universalist imagining that relies on one’s ability to consume can prohibit other possibilities for food
justice when it produces universalist assumptions about the relationship people have to the economy, cultural forms, legal rights, and placement within the nation-state. Food justice movements based on possessive individualism, masculinized notions of agrarianism, consumption, and whiteness rely on change taking place in the realm of the private (the home, the domestic sphere, and through individual consumption practices), rather than in the public sphere. Community-driven food justice movements embody possibilities to disrupt the (seeming) stability of these conceptions, such as is exemplified in the 2008 documentary film, *The Garden*.

**SPACE, RACE, AND FOOD POLITICS IN LOS ANGELES: THE GARDEN**

*The Garden*, a 2008 documentary film, further exposes us to the complexities of the relationship between space, race and class, food politics, and power. The film reveals the struggle of local farmers to continue to farm on a 14-acre plot of land in South Central, Los Angeles that they farmed on for over twenty years. The crux of the story is the struggle that ensues when the previous owner/developer reclaims the property. As I have discussed, the food justice movement has been discursively constructed as a white middle class to upper class space. Since the farmers depicted in the film are poor and working class Latinas/os, they do not fit the normative conceptualization of members of the food justice movement. While the film is not depicted as being part of the food justice movement, the farmers are indeed fighting for issues related to food justice, as they struggle for access to land and capital to purchase land for the purposes of growing produce. Toward the end of the film, the owner/developer, Ralph Horowitz, agrees to sell the land to the farmers for $16.3 million dollars (although he re-purchased it from the city for a mere five million dollars three years earlier). When the farmers raise the entire
amount of money within five weeks and make Horowitz an offer to purchase the land, he reneges his offer. He states,

Even if this group raised $100 million dollars, they could not buy this property. It’s not about money. It’s about I don’t like their cause. I don’t like their conduct. When did the kind of ‘you owe me’ mentality come in and how good is this for America? Is this good for our country, everybody is owed and nobody is obligated? What they should have said to the taxpayers of Los Angeles and to me is, this is a gracious country. Thank you for letting us have these gardens. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

In this quote, Horowitz constructs ideas about property ownership and nationhood through conceptions of race, claims to rights in relation to food politics. His statement is reminiscent of anti-immigration (and anti-Latino) arguments that Latinos who come into the U.S. unappreciatively take resources that “rightfully” belong to American citizens. Arguing that the “you owe me mentality” is bad for the “gracious” United States country, the nation becomes constructed as a site that legitimately excludes Latinas/os, immigrant or not. Horowitz is indignant that the farmers, poor and working class Latinas/os, would challenge his “right” to the land as a property owner and claim their own rights to the land.

*The Garden* reveals another critical component in the food justice movement: struggles among black and brown communities for access to land and claims to land. Throughout the film, the farmers are in constant struggle with two African American women, city councilwoman Jan Perry and community organizer Juanita Tate, over who can speak for the desires of the “community.” The film depicts the two women as colluding with Horowitz and helping him secretly and illegally re-purchase the land in exchange for money. Whether or not this is true, this aspect of the film exposes the
longer-standing tumultuous relationship between African Americans and Latinas/os in South Central in relation to limited land access. The farmers claim to speak for the community in their charge that the community wants the garden while Perry, Tate, and others in Tate’s organization, Concerned Citizens for Central Los Angeles, claim that the community wants a soccer field, not a garden. This is further exemplified in statements made by Tate’s son that “The time is up for the farmers to stop being seen as the community. They are not,” and Tate’s statement that the struggle is not solely over the garden itself but also about “the advantage they’re [Latinos] taking from my [black] community.” At one point in the film, Tate states, that the “community” is 73% Latino, 43% undocumented, and 9% African American and says that it was her efforts that enabled Jan Perry’s election to office by “putting 20 kids on the street.” These comments speak to a division among the black and brown communities in South Central. They may be demonstrable of the sentiments of some African Americans who see themselves as more deserving of particular rights and resources than “newer” immigrants because of the limited access to resources, such as land use. Similar to Horowitz, Tate’s policing of Latino community members incorporates nativist undertones.

The film raises questions about rights, access to land usage within communities of color, and the politics between “newer” Latino immigrant communities and African American communities who have a longer history in Los Angeles. While these groups have a different relationship to the notions of rights, access, and material resources, they are similarly marked as outside of these spaces, both discursively and materially. Thus, the notion of possessive individualism cannot address the complexities of the issues raised in *The Garden*. Community members seeking access to the South Central land,
both the farmers as well as those in support of Juanita Tate and Jan Perry, are not interested in “voting with my fork.” Instead, in their struggle over the land, they unveil these long-standing issues that speak to the relationship between food justice movements, race, class, rights, and national belonging, issues left undisussed in organizations like Food Not Lawns and Victory Gardens. *The Garden* suggests possibilities for communal gardening that are not premised upon the possessive individual, power through consumption, and masculinized, white settler colonialist ideologies and discourses. Instead, the implication is that discussions about community or communal gardening must incorporate broader discussions about race, class, access to land and resources, immigration, legacies of colonialism and imperialism, intra-community conflicts, disparities among differing communities of color, and how profit is often prioritized before people, in terms of the (in)ability of people of color to access food and land.

**CONCLUSION: MY MOTHER’S GARDEN**

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that food justice movements imagine the normative subject to be a masculinized, white subject who can obtain liberation through his power of consumption. This applies both to the discursive and material spaces of food justice, through discourses of colorblindness, universalism, possessive individualism, as well as one’s relationship to capital and material land. Representations and constructions of food justice movements become arenas where notions of race, culture, class, gender, values, space, and national identity are produced. Not only do these theorists argue that race and space mutually constitute one another but, more importantly, that space itself is political. As such, it is also a site ripe with possibilities for political and social change.
San Diego food justice community movements privilege the possessive individual, who enacts change through his power to consume within the private sphere, exemplified in the title *My Father’s Garden* and in organizations such as Victory Gardens and Food Not Lawns. The experiences and struggles of the South Central Los Angeles farmers suggest possibilities for *communal* food justice organizations that disrupt these ideological underpinnings, as does the People’s Produce Project (PPP). The PPP, comprised primarily of women of color, works against this ideology by working to create gardens in local southeast San Diego churches; interrogating the meanings and implications of terms such as “local” and “organic” and their ideological investments; working to bring affordable and culturally appropriate food to the southeast San Diego farmer’s market; ensuring that their upcoming farmer’s market accepts food stamps; recognizing and honoring the work of women of color as activists in food justice, both historically and contemporarily; and working with local southeast San Diego grocery stores and liquor store owners to determine how they can work together to bring affordable, healthy food to the community. At the September 22, 2010 meeting, members of the PPP discussed that San Diego community gardens are problematically insular, rather than actually working to build community—thereby critiquing the individualized, universal logic that undergirds mainstream food justice movements.

Thus, the way in which community food organizations and food justice movements are discursively and materially structured is already being challenged by the South Central farmers and the People’s Produce Project, as well as by many other organizations, nationally. Changes are occurring in terms of representation, how space is being accessed and utilized, and critiques of privatization through an emphasis of the
need for changes in public policy. Not only are these shifts necessary in terms of policy and access, but also ideologically. Groups like the People’s Produce Project and the South Central farmers demonstrate that we must change the way in which food justice politics are imagined. In the following chapter, I examine how particular sites of vegans of color articulate imaginings of veganism that fundamentally and radically integrate race, gender, sexuality, and class politics with their vegan politics to construct a decolonial, anti-oppressive vegan philosophy. While chapter two is not a direct response or solution to the issues I have raised in this chapter, the imaginary that I present offers us possibilities for discursive and ideological constructions in food politics that understand food, race, gender, class, sexuality as fundamental to vegan liberatory politics.
Chapter 2: TOWARD A DECOLONIAL VEGAN IMAGINARY

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze how vegan of color spaces explicitly address the importance of intersectionality in the development of a vegan politics as they relate to race, class, gender, and sexuality. I focus on the following sites: the Vegans of Color blog, hip hop artist Dead Prez’s song “Be Healthy,” eco-chef, food justice activist, author Bryant Terry’s cookbook, Vegan Soul Kitchen, and Sistah Vegan, a collection of essays, narratives, poems, and other writings by black female vegans. The sites address issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, geographic space, flavor and enjoyment of food, in varying ways but similarly engage intersectional approaches that enable critiques of colonialism, racism, sexism, classism, and unequal food access.

The contributors to the Vegans of Color blog, Dead Prez, Bryant Terry, and the contributors to Sistah Vegan do not discuss or approach race, gender, class or sexuality in the same manner. For instance, participants in the Vegans of Color blog explicitly acknowledge and work against not only racial and class oppression but also gender and sexuality. On the other hand, in “Be Healthy,” Dead Prez does not explicitly analyze racial oppression but critiques inequalities in food access in a manner that privileges racial difference. In the Sistah Vegan anthology, black female vegans discuss their motivations for becoming vegan and the ways that veganism intersects with other positionalities, such as gender, sexuality, race, class, spirituality, body image, and parenting. Many narratives include contributors’ view of veganism as a liberatory practice against multiple axes of oppression. Moreover, Dead Prez’s use of music and Bryant Terry’s use of cooking and food itself to construct a decolonial vegan politics
contribute an aesthetic dimension that adds texture that is not reducible to the written word.

I am not attempting to situate any one of these sites as representing a “real” veganism or what veganism “should” be. Nor is it my intent to suggest that all people of color believe that intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality are significant to a vegan politics. In fact, it is quite likely that many people of color who are vegan would not identify with the categorization of “vegans of color.” Therefore, my intention is neither to conflate any particular positionality, such as “black” or “woman” nor argue that all vegans of color experience their veganism in the same manner. In fact, the contrary is precisely what I seek to explore: For those who do articulate the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality as fundamental to the construction of their vegan philosophy, how do they imagine a variety of narratives that engage difference and allow for alternative understandings of veganism? How do these imaginings overlap, contradict, complement, or illuminate one another? In what ways do they offer alternative possibilities for how veganism is and can be constructed through anti-colonialism, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-classism, and a critique of unequal access to food?

**VEGANISM AND POPULAR CULTURE: REPRESENTATIONS OF WHITENESS**

Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci has discussed the significance of popular culture or, civil society, in the ideological struggles to obtain and maintain hegemony. He posited two types of “wars” that are to be distinguished from one another but interconnected in practice. Gramsci argued that the war of manoeuvre was a physical frontal attack on the state, a frontal attack that takes place in one series of events (Forgacs, 1988: 226). The war of position, on the other hand, is to be understood as an
on-going ideological war that takes place in the realm of civil society. According to Gramsci, “Civil society is a site of consent, hegemony, direction, in conceptual opposition to the state (political society) which is a site of coercion, dictatorship, domination. Civil society is therefore, for Gramsci, at once the political terrain on which the dominant class organizes its hegemony and the terrain on which opposition parties and movements organize, win allies and build their social power,” (Forgacs, 1998: 244). Civil society, or the terrain of culture, is the particular space where power, hegemony, and ideologies are contested and negotiated among the masses and the powerful.

The struggle over cultural hegemony is especially present within the realm of popular culture (Hall, 1992: 24). This struggle is not simply or solely about obtaining domination; rather it refers to the unequal and consistently changing balance of power that moves between and among various groups. As cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall has argued, “…it is about changing the dispositions and the configurations of cultural power, not getting out of it,” (Hall, 1992:24). In this way, popular culture is a contradictory space filled with the collision of ideas regarding authenticity, popular forms, commodification, narratives and representations of experience, homogenization, heterogeneity, appropriation, expropriation, power, capital, and culture (Hall, 1992: 26).

As discussed in the previous chapter, food justice movements engage in ideologies and discourses that privilege whiteness, consumption, masculinity, and heteronormativity. In this chapter, I will situate how particular understandings and practices of veganism work against these constructions but also toward food justice. In particular, I will examine how particular vegans of color sites, like Bryant Terry’s Vegan Soul Kitchen, Dead Prez’s Be Healthy, the Vegans of Color blog, and the anthology
Sistah Vegan produce decolonial, anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-classist conceptions of veganism. In so doing, the participants work toward changing the space of veganism itself through decolonizing, anti-racist/sexist/classist, and anti-oppressive analyses.

Currently, in the U.S. veganism is often thought of specifically as a dietary practice, yet it is more helpful to think of veganism as not solely limited to a dietary practice but also a way of life. Veganism can often be a marker of a variety of other social issues, such as animal rights, environmentalism, spirituality, consumerism, and health issues. Veganism is present in a variety of settings: vegan restaurants, animal rights organizations, environmental organizations, subcultures ranging from Rastafarian Ital to white working class punk scenes, in homes, in blogs, in music, academia, at conferences, and other spaces. Articles on veganism and cultural identity include writings on how people define veganism and practice it differently as a social movement (Cherry 2006), factors that affect the reasons why one might choose to become vegan (McDonald 2000), and the relationship between veganism and animal rights activism (Munro 2005), among others. While a limited number of scholarly writings on veganism exist, very few (which I discuss later in this chapter) speak to the relationship between veganism, race, gender, class, and sexuality. It is vital to understand the significance of race, gender, class and sexuality to a vegan politics because it affects how we understand the construction of veganism.

Official vegan organizations, such as the Vegan Society and American Vegan Society (AVS), suggest reasons why certain types of people might engage in veganism. This includes animal rights, environmental concerns, spiritual development, and health
concerns, to name a few. Like scholarly articles on veganism, these organizations do not speak to a relationship between race, gender, or class. The Vegan Society encourages veganism for the benefit of people for a “healthier, more plant rich diet;” for the benefit of animals because “Concern about factory farming and animal welfare has never been greater;” and for the benefit of the planet because over the past 50 years world meat production has quadrupled, leading to “malnourishment in the developing world, global warming, widespread pollution, deforestation, land degradation, water scarcity and species extinction,”. The American Vegan society provides a variety of reasons why one may be vegan: “An equitable, ethical relationship between human and other living creatures; The physiological human design; An enlightened concept of repairing and maintaining health; Practical solutions to the population explosion; Spiritual development,”. These organizations certainly do not speak for all vegans, or represent the diverse reasons for which one might be vegan or the numerous ways in which veganism is practiced. Nonetheless, they are the two most well-know vegan organizations and, thus, attempt to indicate the way in which veganism should be understood, according to their ideological frameworks. In contrast, the sites that I discuss in this chapter specifically construct a vegan politics founded upon a decolonizing, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-classist, and anti-oppressive framework.

Arguably the most well known animal rights organization is People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), established in 1980. PETA, the largest animal rights

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17 Environbooklet, Eating the Earth, p. 3
18 Ibid
organization in the world with more than two million members,\textsuperscript{19} has been known to use extreme (racist, gendered, classist, and other) tactics in their activities toward ending animal cruelty and promoting vegetarianism. As a highly influential and, one could argue, leading voice for vegetarians and vegans in the U.S., it is important to examine the type of discourse PETA utilizes and promotes. In particular, PETA has engaged in tactics that do not allow for a critique of broader issues of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression. Rather their tactics are intended to bring attention specifically to animal rights and the organization itself.

For example, a February 12, 2009 posting on the Vegans of Color blog entitled “PETA ‘Protests’ as the KKK,” critiques a PETA protest in which demonstrators dressed up as members of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) at the American Kennel Club at the Westminster Kennel Club Show in New York City. The blogger who wrote the posting, Joselle, characterizes this incident as simply another of PETA’s “continuing racism, misogyny and run-of-the-mill contempt for people and animals alike.”\textsuperscript{20} While this particular instance is certainly not an example of colorblindness, it obfuscates the complexities among and differences between racism and animal oppression, and does not explicitly work against structural racism itself. PETA’s “in your face” and highly visible strategies work to shock the viewer, rather than create an understanding of the complicated nature of systemic racism. Other problematic PETA demonstrations include comparisons between livestock mistreatment and U.S. chattel slavery of blacks, the

\textsuperscript{19} Retrieved April 11, 2010 from http://www.peta.org/about/
sexual objectification of women, and the violation of laws and customs of indigenous reservations.\(^{21}\)

These sites within popular culture, the American Vegan Society, the Vegan Society and PETA, that are visibly and explicitly vegan exclude any writings about how veganism can be constructed alongside a decolonial framework that simultaneously seeks to end racial, gendered, and class oppression. In line with my arguments from the previous chapter, they are premised upon universalist worldviews that assume that everyone, regardless of race, gender, class, and sexuality, can enter into the realm of veganism in the same manner and with the same stakes.

**INTERSECTIONS OF VEGANISM, RACE, GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND CLASS**

Many (eco)feminist scholars have produced work on the relationship between the consumption of meat and patriarchy, sexism against women, and misogyny (Griffin 1970/2000, Warren 2000, Adams 1990/2003, Donovan 1995). These theorists have argued that both the subjugation of women and the subjugation of animals are interrelated and, to be eradicated, vegetarianism should be practiced (Bailey 2007: 40). These arguments are based on the similarities between how women and animals are treated under patriarchy, including physical and symbolic sexualized violence against women, access to meat consumption, and patriarchy’s logic of domination (Bailey 2007: 40). However, these writings have not incorporated the significance of race within their discussions.

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Even scarcer is the body of literature that analyzes the relationship of veganism to race, gender, sexuality, and class. Based on the sites that I previously discussed, we are led to believe that veganism is a raceless and colorblind space that has no implications for race, gender, sexuality, and class. In the May/June 2010 issue of VegNews, an online magazine that provides information on vegetarianism and veganism, an article entitled “We the People” similarly argues that race, gender, and class have no bearing on one’s vegan politics. Writer Michael Parrish DuDell attempts to respond to the widespread belief that veganism is a white, middle-class movement.

Parrish DuDell’s article is a response to writers and academics who have argued that mainstream veganism is classist, enables white privilege and alienating to numerous groups of color. This includes Breeze Harper’s Sistah Vegan anthology (2010) and Johanna Eeva, the founder of the Vegans of Color blog, (both of which I discuss in more detail later), Eric Prescott, vegan activist and documentary film maker, and John Phillips, co-founder and executive director of the New York League of Humane Voters, an organization that attempts to pass laws to protect animals (Parrish DuDell 2010: 48).

Additionally, a study published online in October of 2009 included a survey of vegans who described their racial identification (Harper, 2009). Almost 800 of the 1102 respondents identified as being of European descent (Harper, 2009). This was an online study, which included responses from people across the country. While this study is not representative of all vegans and is limited in that it is representative of those who have access to a computer, likely to be middle to upper class vegans, it does speak to the

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22 For more information on the VegNews website, please see http://www.vegnews.com/web/home.do
overwhelming majority of white vegans within a middle class, online population.

However, after engaging in an “experiment” in which he spent $37.38 for one week’s worth of groceries at his local Super Wal-Mart, slightly under the average amount spent per person in the average family of four according to the US Department of Agriculture, Parrish DuDell concludes that race and class have no impact on one’s becoming vegan (Parrish DuDell 2010: 49-50). He states that while food shopping “my cart was full of 10 different vegetables (none of them organic), three types of grains, plenty of beans, nuts, and seeds, and even a few specialty packaged products,” (Parrish DuDell 2010: 49-50). Parrish DuDell concludes,

Although this experiment required a bit of creative maneuvering, it proved that a healthy, well-balanced plant-based diet truly can be affordable for most citizens and left me even more convinced of what I had initially suspected: It isn’t race or class that stands in the way of creating a more diverse movement, but instead a lack of education about the nutritional benefits of a vegan diet (Parrish DuDell 2010: 50).

He also states, “While at one time it might have been correct to say a healthy plant-based diet was only accessible to the privileged, today the reality is that compassionate eating is a possibility for just about everyone,” (Parrish DuDell 2010: 51).

Parrish DuDell’s argument conforms with Julie Guthman’s criticism mentioned in chapter one: that the prevalence of whiteness and classism within food justice is not rooted in material or ideological inequalities, rather a lack of education. Guthman asserts that this worldview is dangerously similar to white settler colonial ideologies in which those with knowledge (whites) must carry the burden of educating and saving those who are ignorant (people of color). Parrish DuDell does not analyze the ways in which these colorblind, universal assumptions construct veganism as a movement in which the
intersections of race, gender, and class must be analyzed to understand how people of
different positionalities might approach veganism differently. Moreover, Parrish DuDell
does not examine the ways in which the Department of Labor’s study could be
methodologically flawed or the ways in which racism and classism work systematically
to result in lack of physical proximity/access to grocery stores, supermarkets, or even
Super Wal-Marts.

Aime Louise Harper, a scholar who studies the intersections between critical race
theory, geography, and veganism, found that a vegan blog, entitled Vegan Porn, situated
itself as a progressive animal rights and vegan site while simultaneously reinforcing
white privilege (Harper, 2007). In her study, *Cyber-territories of Whiteness: Language,
“Colorblind” Utopias, and “Sistah Vegan” Consciousness*, Harper states that bloggers
on Vegan Porn objected to her use and spelling of the term “Sistah,” or the use of
Ebonics, along with her stated desire to build community among self-identified black
female vegans (Harper 2007: 35). In the fall of 2005, Harper had posted a request for
papers for an upcoming anthology she would be editing, *Sistah Vegan* (one of the sites I
discuss in more detail later). She specifically requested the participation of black female
vegans, or “Vegan Sistahs,” and this posting was forwarded to various vegan blogs and
websites. *Veganporn.com* was one blog site that received this request and, in Harper’s
analysis, many bloggers engaged in racist language and rhetoric (through textual

The blog, assumed to be a colorblind space, since it lacked any direct discussion
of race as significant, centers on veganism and animal rights as the basis for the online
community. These bloggers equated those who use Ebonics, including Harper, as being
uneducated and illiterate and elevated the use of Standard English over slang, Ebonics and other forms of English (Harper 2007: 38). A particular blogger engaged in what Harper refers to as “cyber-minstrelsy” or the online mockery of Ebonics as a means to demonstrate the supposed inferiority of blacks (Harper 2007: 42-43). The use of Ebonics was depicted as degenerate, equated with lack of education, gangs, criminality, drug abuse and addiction, and reverse racism (Harper 2007: 44 and 57). The bloggers privileged the use of Standard English as normative and those who refused to do so were viewed as deficient (Harper 2007: 45). The bloggers never used explicitly racist language or racially derogatory terms, yet via their engagement with colorblind rhetoric, they reinforced white privilege. As Harper argues, “cyberspace is a reflection of how power- along the lines of systemic whiteness, race, and racialization- functions in the off-line world,” (Harper 2007: 49). In fact, for these bloggers, race and gender were viewed as inadequate and unjustifiable reasons for which to build community and solidarity and work toward social justice (Harper 2007: 59). Harper argues that members of oppressed groups who are forced to use a communication system created by their oppressor are forcibly experiencing a form of textual linguistic imperialism (Harper 2007: 67-68).

While Harper’s study refers specifically to one vegan blog in which colorblindness, universalism, and cyber-minstrelsy were practiced in relation to veganism, it certainly serves as an example of how racial difference is deemed deficient, particularly when considered in relation to the other vegan sites I have discussed. The emphasis of the American Vegan Society, PETA, and the Parrish DuDell article on colorblindness and universalism imply that racial difference is irrelevant, non-existent, or problematic, while Harper’s analysis demonstrates that when racial difference is made
apparent, the relationship between whiteness and power is also made clear. In the section that follows I discuss how intersectional approaches to veganism construct a politics that works against the privileging of whiteness, masculinity, classism, racism, and other forms of oppression.

**INTERSECTIONALITY AND VEGANISM**

Critical Race Theory scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw utilizes the notion of intersectionality, which I find particularly useful for this project. Intersectionality refers to the ways in which race, gender, and other subjective markers work in tandem rather than separately to produce particular struggles. In “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” Crenshaw discusses intersectionality in relation to how women of color experience male violence as both a form of racism and sexism, rather than one or the other (Crenshaw 1996: 279). She states,

…many of the experiences black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking separately at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences, (Crenshaw 1996: 280).

While in this particular article, Crenshaw focuses on the categorizations of race and gender, she acknowledges that other positionalities, such as class and sexuality, are equally significant in understanding how subjectivities and the social world are structured (Crenshaw 1996: 280). I apply Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality to explore how vegans of color privilege the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other subject formations as a vital component to their vegan decolonial practice. Their
constructions of veganism make manifest a vegan politics that is anti-oppressive and anti-colonial.

While intersectionality speaks to the lived experiences of women of color, Crenshaw’s analysis is not to be applied in a monolithic or reductionist manner. Stuart Hall’s analysis of black popular culture is extremely helpful in how to consider intersectionality. Black popular culture is a site of contestation and contradiction (Hall, 1992: 26). As Hall discusses, black popular culture is not a site that describes some sort of “truth” about black experience. It is, instead, where identities, subjectivities, experiences, and representations are imagined, both internally, among black people, and externally, to an outside world (Hall, 1992: 32). In this way, black life should not be understood as experienced outside of the politics of representation—in fact, there is no way to escape the politics of representation—but as (partially) produced and constituted through representations and imaginings (Hall, 1992: 30).

While the term black popular culture has come to refer to the black community, black traditions, experiences of members of the diaspora, representations of black aesthetics, and black counternarratives, black cultural forms are not and have never been homogenous, static, monolithic, or “pure,” (Hall, 1992: 28). There exists no unifying thread that connects all black experience or representation to one essential place. The hybridity, difference and diversity within black experience cannot be reduced to one mode of understanding (Hall, 1992: 30). Hall states,

…these antagonisms [racial, gender, class differences] refuse to be neatly aligned; they are simply not reducible to one another; they refuse to coalesce around a single axis of differentiation. We are always in negotiation, not with a single set of oppositions that place us always in the
same relation to others, but with a series of different positionalities (Hall, 1992: 31). These positionalities can often destabilize one another, as they do not necessarily seamlessly coalesce (Hall, 1992: 31). As I previously mentioned, the sites that I examine in this chapter are not to be read as representative of all vegans of color or as essentialized constructions of veganism. Rather, I am interested in how they offer alternative possibilities for how the space of veganism can be constructed through notions of anti-colonialism, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-classism, and a critique of unequal access to food.

**VEGANISM AS DECOLONIAL, ANTI-OppRESSIVE PRACTICE**

Here, I examine contemporary cultural texts, a cookbook, a hip hop song, blog postings, and an anthology, to explore articulations of veganism that incorporate politics of race, class, gender, and sexuality. I have chosen the sites Vegan Soul Kitchen, “Be Healthy,” the Vegans of Color blog, and Sistah Vegan because they explicitly center a vegan philosophy that privileges these intersections. By engaging with these sites, I examine how vegans of color imagine alternative possibilities for their discursive formations. While it is possible that these authors make attempts to represent veganism in multiple ways, this chapter is not about representation per se. That is, I do not engage with these sites to demonstrate that they are reflective or representative of any particular group. Rather my interest is in how they imagine alternative articulations of veganism that enable a critique of unequal access to food and embrace an anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-sexist vegan philosophy. As Gramsci and Hall suggest, popular culture is an arena ripe with possibilities to explore how subjectivities are negotiated and constructed.
As such, *Vegan Soul Kitchen*, “Be Healthy,” the *Vegans of Color* blog, and *Sistah Vegan* are excellent sites for exploring how intersectional vegan politics allow for different kinds of imaginings.

Bryant Terry’s *Vegan Soul Kitchen: Fresh, Healthy, and Creative African American Cuisine* (2009) is a cookbook that provides recipes for soul food, southern food, beverages, and desserts that are also vegan. In his introduction “Let’s Go,” Terry describes his motivations and desires behind the creation of the cookbook. He begins by describing a collard greens recipe that he created when asked to submit a recipe for a cookbook. He wanted the recipe to reflect his “Memphis Soul (my past) mixed with Brooklyn Boom-Bap (my present) finished off with a squeeze of Oakland Free-Range Funk (my soon-to-be-future),” (Terry, 2009: xix). Terry states,

I was used to eating collards that had been simmered over low heat for an extended period of time, at least two hours, until they were a dull-green-bordering-on-brown color. While I tremendously enjoyed the rich flavor of greens (and the accompanying gravy or “pot likker”) prepared this way, I was always turned off by their appearance. So I decided that I would blanch mine in salted boiling water, drain them, shock them in ice water to stop the cooking and set their color, then quickly sauté them with extra-virgin olive oil, minced garlic, and a dusting of coarse sea salt. It was extreme departure from the way I saw greens cooked while I was growing up, but I wanted mine to appear bright, bold, and sexy! (Terry, 2009: xx)

Terry goes on to describe how the greens were cut, stacked, rolled, and sliced, to finally meet raisins and freshly squeezed orange juice in the final stage of preparation. For Terry, preparing a meal is not solely about flavor, although an important component, but also about presentation and appearance as well as a particular type of engagement with the food, “bright, bold, and sexy!” Terry asserts that *Vegan Soul Kitchen* is also about
creating a representation of African American cooking and Southern cooking as also being vegan cooking, and vice versa. He writes,

I do realize that veganism—the avoidance of meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dairy products, and honey—is antithetical to the way that African American and Southern cooking has been constructed in the popular imagination over the past four decades. For most people, African American and Southern cooking is synonymous with meals organized around fatty meats with overcooked vegetables and fruits playing a minor supporting role. But when we take a step back and remember that—before the widespread industrialization of food in this country—African Americans living in the South included lots of fresh, nutrient-dense leafy greens, tubers, and fruits in their everyday diets, what I am introducing here is not that much of a stretch, (Terry, 2009: xxi).

In this quote, Terry acknowledges the politics of representations in relation to culture, race, and food: “veganism…is antithetical to the way that African American and Southern cooking has been constructed in the popular imagination.” Yet, he does not shy away from engaging in the politics of representation, rather, through the dissemination of the cookbook, he produces representations of black aesthetics, counter to the popular narrative described: “I am pushing the boundaries of what we understand as African American and Southern cuisine,” (Terry, 2009: xxiii). Terry also states that Vegan Soul Kitchen is about addressing issues of health, such as type-2 diabetes and hypertension, creating tasty meals that burst with flavor, imagining recipes that incorporate African-diasporic ingredients with an innovative, personal twist, and encouraging the use of local, fresh, healthy foods (Terry, 2009: xxii-xxiv). Thus, Terry engages vegan politics with intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, health, geographic location, class, familial and social contextualization, globalization, and attention to flavor, presentation, and nutrition of the meals. He further creates a structure of feeling with the process of cooking, by
suggesting soundtracks, films, books, and visual arts with particular recipes, which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

“Soul food,” a term created in the 1960s, is rooted in the southern cooking of slaves during U.S. chattel slavery (Whit 2007: 46). African slaves had very limited options for food choices and food was closely regulated (Yentsch 2007: 61). Slaves taught themselves to prepare meals that incorporated traditional African, Native American, and Europeans styles of cooking and foods, including corn, potatoes, squash, pepper, European greens, and plantains (Yentsch 2007:62). Traditional African cooking techniques included, “boiling and frying, baking in ashes, fireside grilling, using earthen pits for roasting, and steaming food wrapped in leaves,” (Yentsch 2007:62). However, slaves were restricted from using ingredients that were considered staples in plantation households, “salt, pepper, yeast, cheese, vinegar, pickles and mackerel,” as well as luxury items, such as “almonds, raisins, currants, citrons, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, ginger, gelatin, lemon and vanilla flavoring, coffee, tea, wine, brandy, cordials and champagne, pulverized sugar, sugar ornaments, and candy kisses,” (Yentsch 2007:62). Common foods slaves had access to and consumed were “prawns, grilled fowl, New Orleans fish, eggs and ham, potted English salmon, preserved meat from Europe, big hominy, little hominy and cornmeal mush, African-prepared vegetables, coffee, teach, and claret,” (Yentsch 2007:62). Many other foods eaten by African American slaves incorporated indigenous foods, such as pumpkins, squash, and sassafras (Whit 2007: 49). Moreover, slaves ate different types of cooked greens, in contrast to European southerners (Whit 2007: 48). Thus, slaves were forced to be creative in their meal preparation, as what is now known as “soul food” was a combination of traditional foods and cooking
techniques from African foods and spices, Native American foods and spices, and leftover foods considered inedible to whites.

Moreover, whites kept for themselves the cuts of meat that were considered most desirable and had slave chefs prepare dishes such as roasts, steaks, and pork chops. Fieldworker slaves were allowed to use the parts that whites discarded and considered undesirable, such as chitterlings (chitlins) and ham hocks and “slaves had to chop what meat they had into small pieces and use it in stews, soups, or other mixed dishes,” (Whit 2007: 51). House slaves, or those who worked in the master’s “big house,” were typically allowed the same foods as the whites in the house, as were the mixed children of the master and a slave, if favored by the master, such as fried chicken, fried pies, and potato salad (Whit 2007: 51). Whereas Europeans colonizers discarded particular parts of the animals, African slaves ate the pig in its entirety, including stomach, ears, feet, brains, back fat, as well as other parts (Whit: 48 and Poe 1999: 14). As Whit argues, “Generally field slaves needed to make an adaptive response to the conditions that gave them less desirable (although not necessarily less nutritious) parts of a pig as well as a diet based on corn. Being that fieldwork limited available cooking time, it was necessary to find ingenious preparation techniques within demanding work schedules,” (Whit 2007: 51). For instance, this included frying a variety of foods and the slow roasting of chitlins mixed with African spices, creating a delicious meal that used the entire animal (Whit 2007: 51). Emancipation from slavery made nutrition even more difficult for freed slaves and slave families who had incredibly low wages to sustain them and were limited in the amount of agricultural crops they were able to purchase. Moreover, tobacco, cotton, and
indigo were highly profitable and, therefore, crops that a large number of landowners
were growing, rather than produce (Poe 1999: 17).

What we now know as soul food is rooted in a combination of various African
American southern cooking traditions and cuisines (Poe 1999: 1). *Vegan Soul Kitchen*
can be understood within a larger movement to reclaim the liberatory possibilities of soul
food. This reclamation has grown increasingly since the 1960s and is now a signifier of
black pride or an embracing of black culture (Bailey 2007: 46). Terry’s embrace of soul
food is a response to claims that soul food is unhealthy or responsible, because of certain
ingredients such as back fat, for deteriorating health in black communities. His assertion
that *Vegan Soul Kitchen* is intended to address health issues such as hypertension and
type-2 diabetes indexes a more recent history of unequal food access among blacks and
other groups of color, which is discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

Dead Prez, the underground hip-hop group comprised of two black Americans,
introduced the song “Be Healthy” on their 2000 *Let’s Get Free* album. Dead Prez,
comprised of members Stic Man and M1, have been creating music since the late 1990s
and are known for their politics on black liberation, activism, social justice, criticism of
the government, among other political and social issues. In the song, “Be Healthy” a
vegan politics is made clear while embracing racial and ethnic particularities. The lyrics
are included at the end of this chapter.

In this song, Dead Prez communicate that for them a vegan diet is strongly based
on a desire to eat healthily and take care of their bodies, as is made clear by the song’s

\[\text{Retrieved March 16, 2010 from}\]
\[\text{http://www.deadprez.com/inthenews/mvremix0309.html}\]
Their vegan philosophy is tied to a philosophy to keep the body as pure or natural as possible, as is demonstrated in the lines “Life brings life, it’s valuable, So I eat what comes/From the ground, It’s natural.” This is accompanied by a criticism of the consumption of items that are viewed as unnatural, such as sweets, candy bars, Excedrin or artificial pain relievers, cigarettes, and alcoholic beverages. The more explicit critique at the end of the song appears to be directed at members of the black community or hip-hop community:

Word is bond son, niggaz been livin' fat for too long, know what I’m sayin’?
Smokin' bogeys, fuckin' drinkin' all types of shit
Wailin' out, not givin' a fuck what they puttin' in they Bodies, son, know what I’m sayin’?
'Bout time niggas start thinkin' about that shit, son, know what I’m sayin’?
That shit is fuckin' makin' us deteriorate, son
Word up, we gotta care 'bout our little babies an shit, son
Niggas got kids to raise, straight up
Ya gotta start learnin' yo self, learning 'bout ya health, son.

The artists’ desire to “be healthy” is inherently tied with what they see as prevalent issues in the black community: smoking cigarettes, drinking, the deterioration of bodies and minds, care for the well being of community members, and an appreciation of life. Moreover, Dead Prez tie class politics to vegan politics as they state in the refrain, “My goal in life is not to be rich or wealthy/’Cause true wealth comes from good health and wise ways.”

These critiques must be understood within the context of the history of disease and unequal access to food for African Americans. Historically, a greater number of fast food restaurants exist in African American and poor neighborhoods than they do in white and middle class neighborhoods. For instance, a 2004 study completed in Orleans
County, Louisiana found that predominantly black neighborhoods were exposed to six times more fast food restaurants than were predominantly white neighborhoods (Block et al 2004: 214). It is likely that the convenient access to fast food leads to its increased consumption and consequently, higher rates of obesity. Moreover, liquor stores are more likely to be located in predominantly black and low-income neighborhoods (Block et al 2004: 215). Wealthy and predominantly white neighborhoods have more supermarkets and fewer grocery stores than do poor and predominantly black neighborhoods. This finding is particularly significant because studies have indicated that supermarkets tend to have more “heart healthy” foods than do grocery stores and convenience stores (Block et al 2004: 215; Sallis et al 1986) and that residents were more likely to consume “healthful products” if they were sold at their local supermarkets or grocery stores (Block et al 2004: 216; Cheadle et al 1991; Cheadle et al 1993).

Studies have demonstrated that, as a result, low income and non-white persons tend to consume more fast food and unhealthy foods (French et al 2000). Dead Prez’s critique of food consumption among African Americans takes particular resonance within the context of this history of lack of food access for low income and black populations. We can read this as a critique of structural inequalities that enable health disparities among African Americans, such as obesity. While their proclamation that one should “Be Healthy” is somewhat individualizing obesity and learning about health, it can also be read as a desire to keep black bodies healthful in a society that has historically worked in opposition to this. “Be Healthy” is an articulation that tries to work against the fallout of this history and a critique to unequal access to food divided among racial and class lines.
Another significant component of “Be Healthy” is the integration of a variety of ethnic foods. Stuart Hall discusses the deployment of ethnicity in the politics of representation. He argues that the construction of ethnicity is based on the historical, cultural, political, linguistic, and cultural differences among members of the black diaspora. Discourse and knowledge must be understood as constructed and situated within particular contexts (Hall, 1996: 446). Hall suggests,

> It seems to me that, in the various practices and discourses of black cultural production, we are beginning to see constructions of just such a new conception of ethnicity: a new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses difference and which depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities. Difference, like representation, is also a slippery, and therefore, contested concept. There is the ‘difference’ which makes a radical and unbridgeable separation: and there is a ‘difference’ which is positional, conditional, and conjunctural… (Hall, 1996: 446-447).

These concepts of ethnicity and difference are useful when thinking through Dead Prez’s deployment of numerous ethnic foods. The meals they mention, “soul food,” “curried falafel,” “barbecued tofu,” “lentil soup,” “ginger root,” “Ital stew,” and “Sweet yam fries with the green calalloo” point to a range of cultures, ethnic groups, and ingredients. Their discussion of these foods embraces the notion of difference that Hall discussed, and allows for hybrid foods to create a fusion of ethnicity, race, and food. These statements construct blackness as a cultural and geographic marker of difference in which black culture is always already hybrid and contests any notion of authenticity. In particular, what has been considered black cultural food, soul food, is a composition of hybrid foods that incorporate various cultural foods, cooking and techniques (Opie 2008: xii and Whit 2007: 48-49). Just as soul food is a mixture of Native American, African, and white northern European foods and cooking styles, the incorporation of a variety of cultural
backgrounds of the meals mentioned in “Be Healthy” builds on the notion that black culture is comprised of and embraces difference and cannot be reduced to a singular mode of representation. This reference to global foods also speaks to a practice that enables the consumption of the global, tracing the routes of roots.

Similarly, the *Vegans of Color* blog takes part in cultural politics that celebrates difference, rather than suppresses it. The blog, subtitled “Because we don’t have the luxury of being single-issued,” focuses specifically on how the intersectionality of subjectivities is vital to understanding different forms of oppression. The “About” page reads, “This blog was started (by me, Johanna, with the encouragement of some friends) to give a voice to vegans of color. Many vegan spaces seem to be assumed (consciously or not) to be white by default, with the dialogue within often coming from a place of white privilege. We’re not single-issue here. All oppressions are connected.”24 The primary contributors include fourteen bloggers who have access to create blog postings. The conversations on the blog postings range from providing information about book reviews, job opportunities to critiques of vegan writings that negate the importance of how race, class, gender, sexuality, and veganism work simultaneously. Winner of the Veg Bloggy Award in 2008 (a recognition awarded by VegNews.com25) the *Vegans of Color* blog includes postings with titles such as “VegNews” Making the ‘Exotic’ Safe for Privileged Western Vegans” (February 2010), “Don’t Use Classism and Anti-Sex Worker Rhetoric to Protest Fur” (December 2009), “For As Long As My Skin is Black I Will Be

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25 For more information on Veg Bloggy Awards, go to http://www.vegnews.com/web/articles/page.do?pageId=16&catId=5
a Devoted Anti-Speciesist” (August 2009), “Cages, Vick, and Cherry” (July 2009), and “The Cult of Veganism; Or, Shut Up and Sit Down, Little Brown Girl” (May 2008).

In the December 23, 2009 posting “Don’t Use Classism and Anti-Sex Worker Rhetoric to Protest Fur,” Johanna, the founder of the Vegans of Color blog and blogger, wrote:

Fur is for beautiful animals & scary hookers, claims an incredibly fucked-up post at the Vegan Shoe Lady. She cites a Guardian article where Ingrid Newkirk is quoted as saying, “Fur has lost all its cachet. It’s yesterday. I see prostitutes in Atlantic City wearing fur.”

The Vegan Shoe Lady then takes this idea & runs with it, suggesting that if we see a woman wearing fur in public, we should make loud comments like, “She’s probably a hooker. Tacky coat, lower-class manners – no one respectable presents themselves that way.”

Her other suggestion, should you see a person wearing fur standing outside holding coffee, is to drop change into their cup, implying that they look like a homeless person. She offers this caveat: “Please treat actual homeless people with respect – they are human beings, and many of them have untreated mental illnesses. More than 80% of young homeless people are forced to leave home, often due to abuse. True compassion extends to disadvantaged people, too, so be nice.”

True compassion extends to disadvantaged people but apparently not sex workers. Or people at the lower end of the class system. Why should we play into the prejudices of certain segments of the fur-wearing population? The post points out that wealthy fur Wearers probably don’t care about environmental or animal rights issues, which I imagine is true. But I refuse to believe that perpetuating stereotypes, prejudice, & shame is the way forward either.26

In this posting, Johanna gestures to the intersections of gender, sexuality, class and veganism. As Angela Davis has discussed in Blues Legacy and Black Feminism, for the blues female singer, the representations of the politics of gender and sexuality was informed by representations of race and class (Davis, 1998: xv). Similarly, Johanna does

not agree with the perspective of the Vegan Shoe Lady simply because she is vegan; rather Johanna’s veganism is informed by an anti-classist, anti-sexist positionality. Johanna critiques the Vegan Shoe Lady’s claim that sex workers, and even fur-wearers, are undeserving of respect and “compassion.” By engaging an intersectional vegan philosophy, Johanna works against classist and sexually exploitative ideologies.

Moreover, Johanna constructs herself in opposition to particular sects of veganism that are marked by dogmatism and class hierarchy. In the example suggested in the above posting, if someone is seen as not engaging in “appropriate” vegan behavior (wearing fur), vegans are encouraged to perform their vegan-ness through public shame: loudly stating that the person is “a hooker,” “tacky,” has “lower class manners,” and not worthy of respect. In stating that she refuses to either “play into prejudices” or “perpetuate stereotypes…and shame,” she indexes a longer history in which sex workers or lower class persons have been characterized as undeserving of respect. In addition, since the subtitle of the Vegans of Color blog emphasizes the intersectional nature of the postings, her refusal can also be read as a critique of the multiple ways in which other subordinated groups, such as non-white groups, queer-identified persons, and women, have been characterized as undeserving of respect. Johanna’s blog posting reveals the engagement of intersectionality to promote a vegan politics that opposes class, gender, and sexual exploitation.

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While on the one hand, Johanna refuses to engage in this dogmatic idealization of veganism, she does engage in a different form of class privileging. By agreeing with the notion that “wealthy fur wearers probably don’t care about environmental and animal rights issues,” she engages in a set of different assumptions that promote prejudice, but not in a manner that is dogmatic, (as is the Vegan Shoe Lady’s).
The *Sistah Vegan* book project, subtitled *Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society* is a collection of twenty-five narratives written by U.S. self-identified black female vegans on their intersectional vegan politics. As is stated on the back of the book, “Sistah Vegan goes way beyond discussions of diet and lifestyle to examine veganism’s intersection with race, nutrition, gender-identification, animal rights, spirituality, health and healing, body image, parenting, and personal and collective liberation,” (Harper 2010). The narratives include essays, poems, and reflections on a range of topics, such as how the author defines or understands veganism; how the author first came to be vegan; how a vegan diet is beneficial and important; how the author feels excluded as a black female vegan in a primarily white vegan culture; how the author feels excluded as a vegan within her primarily non-vegan black cultural community (family, friends, larger society); animal rights issues, spirituality, among others. Most narratives include a number of these themes if not all. Most significantly, these accounts incorporate an intersectional approach to veganism that enables decolonial, anti-racist/sexist/classist liberatory politics.

In a chapter narrative entitled “Veganism and Ecowomanism,” contributor Layli Phillips frames veganism as a manifestation productive of her ecowomanist practice. She defines ecowomanism as a philosophy of social change premised upon a holistic belief in creation that includes human beings, all living organisms, the nonliving environment, and the spirit world (Phillips 2010: 8). As Phillips argues, “The focus of ecowomanism is healing and honoring this collective human-environmental-spiritual superorganism through intentional social and environmental rebalancing as well as the spiritualization of human practices,” (Phillips 2010: 8). Phillips argues that veganism is a particular
practice of ecowomanism because it is rooted in harmlessness, nonviolence, and respect for all life. In particular, she views veganism as a manifestation of love and argues that love is a vital “social change modality” for both womanism and ecowomanism (Phillips 2010: 8). Phillips’s vegan politics are defined not only by harmlessness toward animals but specifically harmlessness toward women (and humans in general), which is fundamentally spiritual.

In another narrative entitled “What You Cooking, Grandma?” contributor Nia Yaa describes how her mother’s conversion to vegetarianism largely influenced her own decision to eat vegan (Yaa 2010: 93-94). After the death of her grandfather resulting from colon cancer (and she argues poor diet), Yaa began to learn about veganism through Rastafarian Ital culture, animal rights concerns, and East Indian cooking (Yaa 2010: 94-95). Yaa viewed veganism as an important practice in childrearing and raised her children on a whole foods, chemical free vegan diet. She further explored veganism through the work of Queen Afua, an Afrocentric spiritual guide and renowned herbalist, who focuses on how a whole foods vegetarian diet can contribute to physical, emotional, and spiritual well being among black women in the U.S.28 Yaa’s vegan lifestyle led to an exploration of an African-based lifestyle in which she became critical of issues of race, materialism, and spirituality (Yaa 2010: 97). Yaa concludes her narrative by stating,

My dream is to build a self-sustaining, eco-friendly African community, with a large farm and greenhouse, fresh spring or well water, solar-powered homes, and our own businesses…I feel it is important for our community to change our eating habits and lifestyle in order to prepare for the changes that are coming to the world in the future. Revolution means change, and we need a spiritual revolution that will bring an

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28 For more information on Queen Afua, see her webpage at http://queenafua.moonfruit.com/
attitude of peace and Divine Love to replace the years of violence, aggression, and oppression that have threatened the balance of Mother Earth (Yaa in Harper 2010: 100).

Yaa’s veganism incorporates an Afrocentric lifestyle that views vegan practice as important for motherhood as well as physical and spiritual health.

Other contributions also incorporate intersectional approaches to veganism but do not necessarily center spirituality as significant to their vegan politics. In “Young, Black, and Vegan,” Joi Marie Probus argues for a vegan diet as a rejection of soul food, which she states has led to rampant health problems among African Americans, such as diabetes, kidney disease, hypertension, and obesity (Probus 2010: 57). Her embrace of veganism is rooted in an anti-colonial perspective, as she attributes these health problems as stemming from U.S. chattel slavery. Unlike Terry, she does not seek to reclaim soul food as a marker of cultural pride or in a way that offers liberatory possibilities through alternative food choices. Instead, Probus views the rejection of soul food as decolonial, anti-racist practice. As a former PETA marketing coordinator, Ain Drew argues against what she refers to as the mainstream vegan perspective, in her contribution “Being a Sistah at PETA,” (Drew 2010: 61). Though an animal rights activist, she critiques PETA for disinterest in centering a black audience as part of its target audience, which she argues could help to alleviate health problems within the black community. After her continuous suggestions that PETA consider marketing strategies to address health disparities among the black community were ignored, she came to the conclusion that, according to PETA, “Apparently, Black folks wearing furs to the club was more of a problem than the health problems that plague us,” (Drew 2010: 63).
Another contributor, Melissa Santosa, argued that becoming vegan has made her aware of other social inequalities and exploitations. She states, “Becoming vegan was one of many awakenings to an authentic life of informed interdependence and respect for all life…Veganism has spawned my interest in anti-globalization, antiviolence, organic agriculture, voluntary simplicity, and faith systems indigenous to West Africa and South Asia,” (Santosa 2010: 75). Santosa argues that veganism has encouraged her to embrace a holistic approach of the world and to see how different forms of oppression are linked. In these examples, among other narratives in the book project, anti-racism, anti-sexism, and opposition to other forms of oppression are central to the way in which the authors produce their vegan politics.

For these contributors as well as others in the *Sistah Vegan* anthology, veganism is significant in its ability to form decolonial and anti-sexist liberatory practices. Importantly, for many of these Sistah vegans, their attraction to veganism as a way to circumvent deteriorating health issues among blacks is an implicit critique to food inequalities and differential food access based on race and class, as is Dead Prez’s “Be Healthy.” Finally, while all of these contributions are from women who identify as black Americans, their narratives are diverse, layered, and sometimes contradictory to one another. *Sistah Vegan* does not present a monolithic, single, unitary representation on what it means to be a black female vegan. Rather, like Hall’s understanding of black popular culture, these articulations are reflective of and productive of imaginings amongst different positionalities that are in constant negotiation. The *Sistah Vegan* anthology, along with *Vegan Soul Kitchen*, “Be Healthy,” and the *Vegans of Color* blog, are sites in which differences, racial, gendered, sexual, and class, are embraced as a
critique of colonialism, racism, sexism, and classism. In the following section, I examine the ways in which “Be Healthy” and Vegan Soul Kitchen integrate decolonial vegan practice with a broader sensory understanding of veganism and food politics.

**SENSORY IMAGININGS AND PRACTICES**

While the four sites I have discussed approach a philosophy of veganism as it intersects with other philosophies and subjectivities, Dead Prez’s “Be Healthy” and Bryant Terry’s Vegan Soul Kitchen engage particular aesthetic dimensions that are not present in the Vegans of Color blog or Sistah Vegan anthology. In the two former sites, food is meant not only to nourish via digestion but also as an entire bodily and sensory experience. “Be Healthy” utilizes musical forms that, placed within the historical context of hip-hop, give the lyrics an aesthetic quality that it likely would not otherwise have. Similarly, in Vegan Soul Kitchen, Terry’s suggestions of consuming different cultural products while cooking the recipes create a structure of feeling that completes each cooking experience. The music in “Be Healthy” and the structure of feeling created in the cookbook are intended to leave ephemeral and long-lasting feelings, senses, meanings, and ways of experiencing and engaging with the written material that cannot be reduced to the written word. What I now explore is the relationship between this lived experience as representation and as analytical framework and its aesthetic dimensions.

Although a variety of racial and ethnic groups have become (well known) hip-hop artists, hip-hop has been viewed as a distinctly black cultural form. This is because of its representational politics that gesture toward black contemporary and historical experience, vernacular, style of dress, and origins or what Stuart Hall has elsewhere referred to as “the black” in black popular culture (Gilroy, 1993: 83-85 and Hall, 1992:
When addressing the relationship between black lived experience, representation, and music, Paul Gilroy has asked, “Thinking about music—a non-representation, non-conceptual form—raises aspects of embodied subjectivity that are not reducible to the cognitive and the ethical. These questions are also useful in trying to pin-point the distinctive aesthetic components in black communication,” (Gilroy, 1993: 76). He argues that we should view black music as changing, rather than static or fixed. We must view the reproduction of black cultural traditions as existing in the “breaks and interruptions,” (Gilroy, 1993: 101).

Gilroy’s suggestion is helpful when thinking through Dead Prez’s “Be Healthy.” While the song is a hip-hop song, its beat is fairly slow and soft. The sound of the instruments, which sound like a guitar and drum, along with the occasional sound of running water give the song a soothing quality. Moreover, the use of the same loop throughout the song gives the sense that the song is on an even keel and a steady tone, making it easy and enjoyable to consume. The sound reminiscent of breaking glass does something to disrupt the smoothness of the song, yet it does not entirely alter the soothing quality. Iton has argued that hip-hop had tended to be interested in precision, details, and ephemera and, as such, is associated with masculinity, youth, heterosexuality, and lower-income status (Iton, 2008: 254). This song seems to privilege the melody and aesthetic, which seems to counter the typical notion of what hip-hop should sound like, while simultaneously, the voices of the members of Dead Prez are somewhat gruff. When the music ends and they make their critiques in the last stanza, their voices are calm yet their manner becomes more aggressive than it had been previously. The use of profanity and the anger in their voices reinscribes the aggressive masculinity that is often present in and
associated with hip-hop songs. Nonetheless, “Be Healthy” cannot be placed into an “either/or” gender category, as it moves along multiple boundaries. The always-already hybrid nature of hip-hop presents itself in this song, as well (Gilroy, 1993: 107).

Cultural studies and Marxist scholar Raymond Williams has also discussed the aesthetic in relation to cultural or social forms in his concept, “structures of feeling,” (Williams 1977). He argues that art, in particular visual art and literature, are often reduced to their structural form and the ephemeral and aesthetic qualities are eliminated in this relationship: “the subjective as distinct from the objective; experience from belief; feeling from thought; the immediate from the general; the personal from the social,” (Williams, 1977: 129). The experiential tensions, uncertainties, confusions, and feelings of being are omitted from the significance of being in exchange for fixed forms, social analysis and categorization (Williams, 1977: 129-130). However, art is never in a finite form and is always in the process of creation (Williams, 1977: 129). As Williams states, art and other social and cultural forms only enter social consciousness when they are actively lived in relationships between people (Williams, 1977: 130). He argues that the alternative to seemingly fixed forms is the embracing of “a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange. Its relations with the already articulate and defined are then exceptionally complex,” (Williams, 1977: 131). Williams asks us to embrace and recognize the structures of feeling, or the present, actively lived and felt meanings and values that are not yet defined. To do so, we must go beyond concepts of world-view and ideology, but also include them, to embrace the not-yet-defined, as well as that which is perceived as personal, rather than social (Williams, 1977: 132).
Bryant Terry’s *Vegan Soul Kitchen* is an example of how structures of feeling can be created through the realm of veganism. In the cookbook, he provides recipes that state the number of servings the recipe will yield, the ingredients and the instructions for cooking, which are typically present in many cookbooks. However, what makes Terry’s cookbook unique is the addition of a soundtrack suggestion to accompany each recipe, incorporating a variety of musical backgrounds, such as hip hop, funk, soul, rock, world music, and more. He includes a brief paragraph with each recipe, often memories from his upbringing, historical accounts of colonialism within the U.S., when and where the recipe originated, or simply general information about the recipe and its ingredients. These diverse contextualizations help us to situate the recipe in terms of Terry’s engagement with it as well as our own.

For most recipes, Terry also recommends books, films or visual artwork from a range of traditions, including works such as *King Corn* (film), *Sanford and Sons, Seasons 1-4* (sitcom), *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* by Walter Rodney (book), “Grounded” by Leslie Hewitt (artwork), (Terry 2009: 31, 35, 48, and 87). These works are intended to broaden the audience’s engagement with the recipes beyond simply food to be consumed. Terry’s structuring of the book encourages the reader to critically analyze issues such as corporatization of food that has led to monoculture of crops, representations of black popular culture, and U.S. white settler colonialism. The inclusion of these cultural forms creates a total and contextual eating experience for the person making the meals. The chef is encouraged to fully engage with the food, not only at the level of the flavor of the food itself, but also with aesthetic qualities that are
represented by the music, films, books, and artwork. Food is not simply an item to be consumed but also meant to nourish in a more broad bodily and sensory way.

For instance, the recipe for Power Porridge proposes the following soundtrack: “Mario Lando” by Susana Baca from *The Soul of Black Peru—Afro-Peruvian Classics*, “Brown Paper People” by Lila Downs from *One Blood—Una Sangre*, and “Angelitos Negros” by Roberta Flack from *First Take* (Terry, 2009: 132). The suggested artwork to be viewed is “El Negro Mas Chulo: African by Legacy, Mexican and Birth”: photography series by Ayana Vellissia Jackson and Marcos Villalobos and “Exile on Main Street (laberinto de espejos y trasnformación)” by Williams Cordova (Terry, 2009: 132). Terry includes the following paragraph to situate Power Porridge:

Talk about power…amaranth and quinoa are both high in protein, contain more calcium than milk, and are great sources of dietary fiber and minerals. Considered sacred thousands of years ago by the Aztecs (amaranth) and Incas (quinoa), these grains were the center of ceremonial rituals before Spanish colonizers forbade their cultivation. Over the last thirty years they have regained popularity as “superfoods.”

In addition to introducing you to one of my favorite porridges that uses both of these ancient grains, I wanted an opportunity to bring up the oft-overlooked African presence in contemporary Mexico and South America that began when the conquistadors brought enslaved Africans with them to serve as laborers. I dedicate this dish to all those who have historically dealt with the negative effects of colonialism, industrialization, and the “spreading of democracy.”

In this recipe, Terry asks us to engage historically and intellectually with the main ingredients of the porridge, amaranth and quinoa, by thinking through notions of colonialism, industrialization, and the racialization and oppression of the makings of democracy. He also suggests songs that speak to the black presence in Latin America, bringing to light shared experiences and histories of black slaves in the U.S. with black
slaves in Latin America. Moreover, his selection of the songs “Maria Lando,” “Brown Paper People,” and “Angelitos Negros” arouse feelings and senses that are difficult to express linguistically but nonetheless intrinsically give particular meanings and values to the dish. The steady beat of the drums and guitar in “Maria Lando” create a mesmerizing quality; Lila Downs’ deep, rich, and husky voice exudes a sense of power and strength; and the voice of Roberta Flack as an African American singer performing in Spanish again asks us to consider the layered, complex, and multi-dimensional historical and contemporary relationship between blacks and Latinos, both in the U.S. and Latin America. All this while smelling the cooking of sweet almond milk and the mixed scents of cinnamon, quinoa, amaranth, salt, and coconut oil provides a multi-sensory experience (informed by ideological and intellectual formations but not limited to them) that shapes how we give meaning and value to the vegan cooking experience.

Terry’s construction of race, ethnicity, geography, and food could also be read as allowing the reader of Vegan Soul Kitchen to experience and consume the Other and fetishize Otherness. In Black Looks, Race and Representation scholar bell hooks discusses that, for whites, pleasure is experienced through the commodification and consumption of racial difference (hooks 1992: 21). hooks states, “Within current debates about race and difference, mass culture is the contemporary location that both publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgement and enjoyment of racial difference…Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture,” (hooks 1992: 21). She argues, “The point is to be changed by this convergence of pleasure and Otherness. One dares—acts—on the assumption that the
exploration into the world of difference, into the body of the Other, will provide a greater, more intense pleasure than any that exists in the ordinary world of one’s familiar racial group,” (hooks 1992: 24). While hooks is specifically referring to sexual relationships in which whites hope to be changed by engaging in sexual activities with persons of color, she also argues that the consumption of the traditions, cultures, and lifestyles of Others by whites allows for a transgression of racial boundaries, relieves past guilt, denies the significance of structures of domination, and where whites consume the Other to become the Other (hooks 1992: 25).

Social theorist Walter Benjamin has also argued that objects widely produced for mass consumption, such as a cookbook, come to lose their inherent value. While Benjamin argues that the mechanical reproduction of art creates a consumer who has a detached and emotionally controlled relationship to the artwork (Johnson 1984: 58-60), Terry seems to be attempting to do the opposite. His emphasis on characterizing the food through his descriptions as well as music, book, and film suggestions seem to be a desire to establish an emotive, spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic relationship between the chef and the food that is not simply reducible to consumptive practices whose sole purpose is to seek pleasure. While cookbooks are indeed reproduced for mass consumption, Terry’s interrogation of nation as well as racial and class politics, including colonialism, localized race-based and class-based movements, and large scale agribusiness, force the reader to not simply consume blackness but to understand the complex and diverse relationships between food, consumption, race, gender, and class.
CONCLUSION: LIBERATORY VEGAN POLITICS

In this chapter, I have examined sites that work toward food justice through constructions of veganism that interrogate the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality are intertwined with issues of unequal food access, colonialism, and oppression. The sites I have examined, Bryant Terry’s Vegan Soul Kitchen, Dead Prez’s “Be Healthy,” and a blog posting from the Vegans of Color blog have demonstrated how these groups articulate decolonial, anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-classist vegan politics. Through theoretical, aesthetic, musical, visual, and dietary frameworks, these cultural products demonstrate a small variety of the ways that vegan politics is imagined through a politics of intersectionality. These constructions alter the space of veganism as one that is imagined to engage difference that is specific to racial, gendered, and class positionality rather than a colorblind, universal space.

Understanding how vegans of color construct veganism as decolonial and anti-oppressive space is significant for a number of reasons. First, it allows for difference to be highlighted in a manner that embraces difference, rather than suppresses it. This could allow for changes in representation, issues raised by Michael Parrish DuDell and Aimee Breeze Harper. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, decolonial vegan politics radically alter the ideological underpinnings of the space of veganism. As such, regardless of persons’ individual racial, gender, and class backgrounds, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-classism, and anti-oppression become fundamentally constitutive to the vegan imaginary. Thus, discussions around veganism are not only in relation food politics but also discussed in relation to racial, class, gender, and sexual politics.
Be Healthy by Dead Prez

It’s all love

I don't eat no meat, no dairy, no sweets
Only ripe vegetables, fresh fruit and whole wheat
I'm from the old school, my household smell like soul food, bro
Curried Falafel, barbecued Tofu
No fish though, no candy bars, no cigarettes
Only ganja and fresh-squeezed juice from oranges
Exercising daily to stay healthy
And I rarely drink water out the tap, 'cause it's filthy

Lentil soup is mental fruit
And ginger root is good for the youth
Fresh veg-e-table with them ital stew
Sweet yam fries with the green calalloo
Careful how you season and prepare your foods
'Cause you don't wanna lose vitamins and minerals
And that's the jewel
Life brings life, it's valuable, so I eat what comes
From the ground, it's natural
Let your food be your medicine no Excedrin
Strictly herb, generate in the sun, 'cause I got Melanin
And drink water, eight glasses a day
'Cause that's what they say

They say you are what you eat, so I strive to be healthy
My goal in life is not to be rich or wealthy
'Cause true wealth comes from good health and wise ways
We got to start takin' better care of ourselves
They say you are what you eat, so I strive to be healthy
My goal in life is not to be rich or wealthy
'Cause true wealth comes from good health and wise ways
We got to start taking better care of ourselves, be healthy y'all

Yeah, yeah, yeah, hold the fuck up, yo
We'll take this little intermission, listen what the
Fuck we gotta say, you know?
Word is bond son, niggaz been livin' fat for too long, know what I’m sayin'?
Smokin' bogeys, fuckin' drinkin' all types of shit
Wailin' out, not givin' a fuck what they puttin' in they
Bodies, son, know what I’m sayin'?
'Bout time niggaz start thinkin' about that shit, son, know what I’m sayin'? That shit is fuckin' makin' us deteriorate, son
Word up, we gotta care 'bout our little babies an shit, son
Niggaz got kids to raise, straight up
Ya gotta start learnin' yo self, learning 'bout ya health, son
Learnin' this world we live in, kid, know what I’m sayin’?
It's time to start changin' all that shit god, word up
So I'm gonna leave y'all niggaz on some shit like that, ya know what I mean?
Word up, y'all niggaz better start usin' y'all minds an shit, kid
Peace
CONCLUSION: Racial Justice within Food Justice

I hope that this project contributes to the works of those who have written about the relationship between race, class, gender, and space, particularly in its reproduction of common sense logics about subjecthood and difference. This project also contributes to literature in the fields of food studies and ethnic studies by bringing together discussions around discursive formations of race, gender, class, and sexuality within food justice movements as well as these discursive formations within veganism. In the first chapter, I critique one imaginary, that of “voting with my fork,” in order to suggest that while food justice movements are an important way in which people can resist against industrial agriculture, they can also reify normative systemic racial, gendered, and class relations. By engaging in discourses and ideologies of colorblindness, universalism, possessive individualism, whiteness and consumption are privileged. In the second chapter, I demonstrate how four vegans of color sites engage in a decolonial imaginary that embraces notions of difference to critique racial, gender, and class oppression, colonialism, and unequal food access. The second chapter serves as a critique for the normative discursive formations I posit in chapter one.

A slight disjuncture exists between the first and second chapters. The issues that I raise in chapter one are not necessarily resolved in chapter two. Rather than act as a direct response to the first chapter, the decolonial imaginary that I posit in chapter two serves as a model for how the food justice movements could rethink their ideological underpinnings. For instance, if the movements in chapter one studied the decolonial imaginary from chapter two, mainstream food justice movements might look very different. If those present at the screening of My Father’s Garden engaged in decolonial
food politics, perhaps instead of relying on consumption and “voting with my fork” as a means of liberation, conversations around gardening and farmers’ markets would have to also include conversations about 1) access to space, land and rights, 2) anti-immigration legislation and sentiments, 3) historical legacies of colonialism, and 4) unequal food access. As a result of these conversations, mainstream food justice movements could potentially work with vegans of color movements in order to resist policies such as NAFTA and the forced dependency it creates between poorer and richer countries, how it increases disparities in relation to food access, and other imperialist policies. In other words, not only would a complete re-evaluation of food production, food access, and food practices need to take place but the ideological bases on which they are premised would also need to be analyzed and discussed.

For instance, Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move!” campaign would be an excellent case to discuss these issues. The campaign works to fight against childhood obesity through critiques of lack of exercise in schools, food with poor nutritional quality being served in schools, and unequal food access in low-income communities. The campaign suggests a multi-faceted approach, encouraging changes within school dietary plans, encourages community leaders and elected officials to promote sustainable and healthy food choices, as well as advocating physical activity and community gardens. To take this one step further, to apply the decolonial imaginary would not only require a descriptive understanding of how we eat the way we do, but why we eat the way we do. For the “Let’s Move!” campaign, this would require analyses of structural racism, sexism, and classism, as well as how difference(s) becomes discursively reified as problematic.
Because a disjuncture exists between the two chapters, a number of topics could be explored in future work. Some questions to consider are: What are different organizations doing to create change at the policy level, both locally and nationally? How might I complicate what I have termed “vegans of color” by exploring the ways in which they might be invested in individualism, possessive individualism, or other problematic ideologies? Specifically, in what ways are they invested in mainstream food justice movements and in what ways do they depart? How might mainstream food justice movements and vegans of color movements work with campaigns like “Let’s Move!” to create broader social change?

The purpose of this thesis is not to suggest that persons should stop purchasing food at farmers’ markets or CSAs, rather that we should be aware of how they might simultaneously engage in discourses, such as colorblindness and universalism, that obfuscate racial inequities. As the spaces of food justice movements and veganism continue to grow, it is important to evaluate how these spaces are constructed, who is marked as outside of these spaces, and how we can deconstruct and reconstruct these spaces to make them truly just.
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