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# The Poughkeepsie Farmers Market: Whiteness and the Logic of Food Access

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**The Poughkeepsie Farmers Market:  
Whiteness and the Logic of Food Access**

David A. Orkin  
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Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography

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Adviser, Professor Mary Ann Cunningham

## Abstract

The Poughkeepsie Farmers Market was the epitome of the Poughkeepsie Farm Project's mission to create a "just and sustainable food system in the Hudson Valley." While the farm itself had been operating for many years prior to the program, it had taken on a social justice agenda when it decided to extend its programs from the wealthier Town of Poughkeepsie into the post-industrial, food insecure City of Poughkeepsie. However, after eight years of a struggling farmers market, the Poughkeepsie Farm Project decided to cut the funding for the project, thus ending its direct presence in the City of Poughkeepsie.

The main question of this senior thesis is that of the relationship formed between the Poughkeepsie Farm Project and the residents of the City of Poughkeepsie through the space farmers market. How is it that a well-planned, well-intentioned project such as the farmers market was not received by the residents of the city? In answering this question, I maintain that this socio-geographic relationship is necessarily one of race, as it was an unspoken, yet guiding principle of the organization's work. By synthesizing different theories of urban development, whiteness, and social movement participation, I hope to shed light on how race influences the work of movements to create equitable participation in the food system. It is only by having an open and honest conversation about race that we will be able to create a just food system. I hope to be one of the many voices of that conversation.

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I would also like to thank Mary Ann Cunningham, my patient, wise, and caring advisor, Joseph Nevins for helping me through my minor life crises, and Rosie Achorn-Rubenstein for her constant support throughout this project.

And of course, my unceasingly loving parents.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction: Whiteness, Farmers Markets, and the PFP

In my time working with the Poughkeepsie Farm Project in the summer of 2012, race was never mentioned when we spoke about our work. I brought up this issue to the staff to the best of my ability during the “politics of food and farming lunch,” but a table of white, blank faces stared back at me. While staff members thoughtfully engaged with the subject of whiteness, coming out of the conversation I was told that class was an important factor for our work, but not race. The programs were diverse, and that was an indication of progress.

I was frustrated at the time, but I should have recognized that talking about race is hard, scary, and oftentimes taboo for many people. I was also confused. Before officially working with the organization, I had assumed that race was an explicit component of their mission to create a “just and sustainable food system in the Hudson Valley.” The farm’s programs that explicitly address food insecurity have a distinct racial character to them. A majority of the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) members are white, while it is culturally associated with the wealthier Town of Poughkeepsie.<sup>1</sup> The organization looks to the low-income, largely non-white City of Poughkeepsie to address issues of food insecurity in what is often referred to as a “food desert.” In their goal to create a just and sustainable Hudson Valley, they aim to foster regional linkages that work within a geographic location and across social barriers.

So although there are distinct racial qualities associated with this geographic and social relationship, I never engaged in a dialogue about race while working on the all-white staff. The aforementioned conversation was more of a debate, as I argued why race was

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<sup>1</sup> The PFP is technically located in the City of Poughkeepsie boundaries, however it is associated with the Town of Poughkeepsie. A majority of patrons of the farm are not from the city and it is located on land owned by Vassar College, located in the Town (Figure 1.)

important, rather than a dialogue that sought to come to new understandings about social difference.

The purpose of this senior thesis is to begin that dialogue on race by examining the discontinuation of one of the PFP's food justice initiatives, the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market. While the market was in operation prior to the organization's involvement, the market had taken on a social justice agenda when the PFP began to manage it in 2004. In many ways, the market had represented the hopes of the organization – to create connections between the farm and the City of Poughkeepsie, to foster a community around food, and to alleviate food insecurity by increasing access to healthful, local foods. But after eight years of a struggling market and low rates of participation, the PFP had decided to end the funding for the farmers market, signaling an end to their direct presence as an actor for social change in the City of Poughkeepsie.

The main question of this thesis is that of the closing of the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market and the relationship between the PFP and the City of Poughkeepsie. Why is that a well-intentioned project such as the farmers market failed to resonate with the food-insecure populations in the City of Poughkeepsie? What is unique about the spatial and social relationship between the PFP and the City? What role did race play in the making and un-making of the market? In answering these questions, I suggest that it is only by naming and discussing issues of race that we can explain what did and did not happen at the farmers market. Through these questions, I want to reimagine what “food justice” might mean through the lens of racial justice.

What makes the project of the farmers market so interesting is that the organizers of the market had done so much to make the market as accessible as possible to the targeted low-income area. As a recent report published by the Project for Public Spaces (PPS)

indicates, there is the potential to relieve food insecurity in low-income areas through farmers markets (PPS 2012). In their intensive research of eight low-income farmers markets, PPS found that price was not a significant barrier for these communities' patronage of farmers markets. As long as the markets accept state-supported nutrition programs, shoppers find the prices of produce at the market to be reasonable.<sup>2</sup>

But not every low-income farmers market is the same, and Poughkeepsie is a unique place. The Poughkeepsie Farmers Market, under the guidance of the PFP, sought out these state programs and had changed locations to make the produce available to the residents of Poughkeepsie. So if the market was geographically *accessible*, why were there such low participation rates? Wouldn't people want to eat fresh, healthful food if they had the option? After studying the politics of food as it relates to the politics of race, I maintain that food insecurity is not necessarily a problem of access and distribution, but ultimately one of poverty and oppression. The farmers market was a manifestation of the mission of the PFP, which seeks to increase food access. But the logic of food access – that given the options, people will change their diets and their lives will improve – does not address the underlying relationships that produce certain people as lacking and certain people as having.

While the problems “food access” and “poverty” might look similar, the way that we define the problem will lead to different kinds of solutions. In addressing food insecurity through food access, the PFP asserted that social ills associated with food in Poughkeepsie are ones of *distribution* that can be solved by providing more options. Food insecurity is influenced by many factors, but ultimately is a byproduct of a type of uneven urban development that has oppressive outcomes, such as poverty and racism.

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<sup>2</sup> These programs include the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as “food stamps”) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and New York State’s Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP).



Here, poverty and racism are *structural* phenomenon. They do not happen only to individuals, but are part of patterns that systematically prevent certain people from receiving the full benefits of society – such as healthful food. Structural phenomena continuously produce the same kind of results. We can say that racism is a structural phenomenon because people of color are continuously prevented from opportunities in society.

To discuss food insecurity in terms of poverty and racism acknowledges that it is a structural issue and a feature of an oppressive society. Oppression, in the way that I use it, does not refer to its traditional usage of one group expressing tyrannical rule over others, but a more nuanced meaning. In our current society, oppression is used to signify the systematic forces that continually prevent certain groups of participating in society.

Young (2005) describes oppression as “the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society” (41). The story of the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market shows how oppression manifests itself even when we mean to counter its effects. But because oppression often times functions invisibly, we can only work against it if we acknowledge it outright.

### Talking About Race: The Oppression Framework

If we define the problems of the city as relating to *oppression* then we can gain a deeper understanding of how food insecurity is an expression of class and racial politics. In reconsidering food insecurity in the city through an oppression framework, we will shift the way we think and talk about food insecurity from a problem of access to one of poverty and racism, two forms of structural oppression. It is within this new framework that we will be able to create a food politics that moves beyond questions of distribution and towards racial

justice – what I argue must be the centerpiece of a truly just and sustainable Hudson Valley food system.

I find the oppression framework useful because it takes the focus of analyses off of the individual and onto *systems* that produce inequality and violence. This is not to say that oppression only functions in the realm of the structural and not the interpersonal – that would be to deny the countless acts of hate and violence in our society. However, for the purposes of my project, the oppression framework will help explain how the positive intentions of the farmers market were not met with the anticipated impact.

It is important to note that while an oppressed group is not directly associated with an individual oppressor keeping them down, oppression cannot exist without privilege. Here, privilege refers to the unearned benefits that certain groups receive based on their social identity. Although many people in privileged positions work hard, they are granted certain rights in society simply for being who they are. For example, I worked very hard in High School to get accepted into Vassar. I was fortunate enough to have small class sizes and good teachers in a public school. Did I work hard? Yes. But I have achieved a certain level of higher education because I had the privilege to grow up in a good educational environment. My primary education is considered a privilege because other people do not have it.

Because some people receive society's privileges over others, the maintenance of those privileges contributes to the subordination of other groups through systems of power, not individual acts of hate. To continue the education example, I was able to receive my education because I grew up in an affluent, white town. Not because some schools are randomly chosen to be funded properly and some are not. But rather than relying on ideas that place blame on individual people (it is my fault that some schools do not receive

funding), the oppression framework looks at how we are all implicated in recreating both privilege and oppression. If I were to examine my education through this framework I could ask, why is education a privilege? How is it that some are able to receive a proper education and some are denied that basic right?

For those of us who occupy privileged identities and are interested in doing something about this uneven, unjust relationship between privilege and oppression, we can work in *solidarity* with oppressed peoples in order to become an *ally*. When we think about helping people, we might create a situation in which we are lifting them up to our standard. But if privilege always rests on oppression, we should instead work on emancipating ourselves from the relationships between haves and have-nots, privileged and oppressed. We can stand in solidarity with others when we recognize that our liberation from this relationship requires cooperation. When we try to learn to work together towards a more just society and stand against both privilege and oppression, we become allies. So instead of asking, “How can I help?” we should ask, “How can we challenge our own privilege in order to work in solidarity?”

It was after learning about this framework that I came to understand why we never spoke about the racial dynamics of our work at the PFP. The food access approach does not consider privilege as a barrier to solving issues of food insecurity. But, as I argue through this project, it is only by looking at issues of both privilege *and* oppression that we can hope to work towards a truly just food politics. We begin by asking the very hard questions like, how does our privilege prevent others from receiving basic rights such as food?

### Why study race?

People of color are underrepresented in alternative food practices, yet they are disproportionately affected by the violence of industrial food systems, like hunger, food

insecurity, and unsafe working conditions. I define “alternative food” or “community food” as those practices and institutions that seek to change the way food is grown and consumed by providing alternatives to conventional agriculture. Alternative food institutions, such as the PFP, seek to create a more just and sustainable food system. These efforts are in response to what are considered the undesirable social and ecological effects of industrial or conventional agriculture.<sup>3</sup> The PFP is just one of many efforts to simultaneously address ecological and social issues, working towards what Agyeman (2004) calls, “just sustainability.”

The work of alternative food movements attempts to address the injustices of conventional food pathways, yet many do so without addressing race. Race, along with class, gender, and sexuality, is just one identity category that determines how people experience social power, oppression, and privilege. Race, which is closely related to economic class, is a guiding principle of our society.

Here, I would like to define exactly what race is. Race is not a biological fact. Race is a *political category* that is subject to change. Igantiev (2005) recounts how, prior to the African-American migration to the north, the Irish and other recent immigrants were not considered white. It was when the blacks came to the North that the “Irish became white.” Race is a way of categorizing people based on how they look. Race does not stand still, but is dependent on historical and geographic context. What does it mean to be white in America? What does it mean to be white a hundred years ago? How are our lives shaped being a certain race?

Within the food system, people of color are more likely to experience hunger and food insecurity as well as to be employed in low-wage, high-risk employment (ARC 2011). In

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<sup>3</sup> I do not have the space here to adequately address the environmental and social injustices to which advocates of the alternative food wish to change. See Nestle (2007), Patel (2007), and Schlosser (2001), for example.

Poughkeepsie, all races experience food insecurity, but Hispanic and African-American groups experience food insecurity at higher rates. The PFP knows this fact, as it had helped organize the Poughkeepsie Plenty household survey, which evaluated food insecurity and hunger in the city. Led by Professor Leonard Nevarez, the study found that 26.8% of households in Poughkeepsie are food insecure by USDA standards, with Black and Latino groups experiencing this insecurity at higher rates.<sup>4</sup>

The patterns of food insecurity in Poughkeepsie are an example of structural racism. Because the way that people eat is influenced by their income, proximity of food sources, and cultural dispositions, there is no single person to point to and say, they are causing food insecurity in Poughkeepsie. If we were to examine the urban development of Poughkeepsie (which I do later in this project), we would find a history of racism that is embedded into the landscape. Although there is no perpetrator of racism, the way space is organized in our society is the byproduct of a history of racism, which persists today. Because race is perpetuated by the city itself, we have to examine how we unintentionally maintain the racism of the city and what we can do in our own lives to act in solidarity with marginalized communities.

## Methods

I organized this thesis around the study of those in power to better understand how a project that aimed to counter injustice reproduced the uneven relationships of power that define those injustices. From this study, I hope to have those who are in power learn from the lessons of the past to work towards a deeper, more effective food politics.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Nevarez (2012), the USDA defines food security as how effectively households' "can obtain food in the amount, quality, variety and cultural desirability they want" (1).

The field research component of this project was completed over three weeks in January and February of 2013, with follow-up interviews sporadically until March. In those months, I interviewed twenty staff and board members of the PFP who participated in the planning, execution, and leadership of the project using a snowball method of interviews. From baseline interviews with the Executive Director, Farm Managers, current board of directors, and permanent staff members, I was referred to past and present members who were involved in the farmers market project. The purpose of these interviews was three-fold: to understand how the different actors involved in the market understood the project's goals, successes, and failures; to gain an understanding of how people within the organization perceived the space of the market; and to gain factual information about its organization and implementation.

Going into the field-research component I had assumed, based on my time with the organization, that the farmers market would be a contentious issue. Indeed, the diversity of responses provoked from my questioning of the organization had deeply affirmed and challenged this assumption. The various emotions circulating around the market spoke to the internal debate within the PFP about the direction of the organization and the meaning of its food justice work. Although some respondents were ambivalent about the questions, many responded with extreme emotions that arose from simple questions about a farmers market. Sometimes, the very mention of the farmers market aroused very passionate responses. The diversity of responses indicated that members of the organization are still attempting to make sense of the project. It has become my objective to help that process and to figure out why these questions brought about such anger, sadness, and frustration.

## Why study whiteness?

Whiteness takes many forms, but it can be broadly described as the ideas, material practices, and condition associated with being white. George Lipsitz describes whiteness as “the unmarked category against which difference is constructed.” Whiteness “never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (1995, 1). It is the goal of this project to confront whiteness as it manifests in an everyday event, the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market. Whiteness studies is not about uncovering who is racist, but to think about what it means to be white in a society that continually and unknowingly reproduces racial hierarchy. By analyzing whiteness in this context, we will gain a better understanding of how whiteness is challenged, reproduced, and transformed through community food organizations.

I choose to study whiteness and its role in alternative food institutions precisely because it functions invisibly *until we start talking about it*. And it is when it remains invisible that it reproduces racial injustice most powerfully. The ability to not acknowledge race or racism, an all too-common trend in community food organizations, is a function of whiteness. The United States is founded on these principles of whiteness, which are in part the cause of racial injustices today. If we are going to talk about justice without talking about whiteness, we are bound to enforce power relations that maintain white privilege and prevent People of Color from receiving the full benefits of society – the benefits that many white people enjoy simply for being white.

I am not the first person to discuss whiteness as it relates to alternative food. Although it seems fairly logical that those with more money would patron markets for specialty goods, whiteness is about more than just counting the number of pale or brown faces. Whiteness is about the ideas that define a space, whether or not they are explicitly

about race, and how those ideas create the conditions on which those pale or brown faces enter into the conversation.

Whiteness manifests in farmers markets because they use, in the words of Alkon (2012), the “green economy” as the engine for social change. Unlike the mainstream economy, the green economy has developed in response to what are seen as the harmful effects of the mainstream, global economy, such as industrial food pathways. The green economy is unique because it aims to achieve social and environmental goals through the buying and selling of goods. The logic of the green economy states that by creating more demand for “green” goods, there will necessarily entail a change in production, leading to certain changes in our society.

Alkon’s (2012) study of farmers markets, race, and the green economy is careful to note that the green economy and its farmers markets are not separate from the larger, capitalist economy. People with more money are capable of creating more demand in the green economy, reflecting the power dynamics associated with capital in our society more generally. Because race and class are so intimately associated in our society, whites are capable of defining how to participate in the green economy through demand. So even though farmers markets are supposed to be spaces for everyone, whites are the most common group to patronize them because they are capable financially.

But, as previously noted, farmers markets are proven strategies for reducing food insecurity in low-income areas, many of which are communities of color. They become known as “white spaces” through the “discourses that circulate through them” (Guthman 2011, 266). By discourses, I refer to the ways of thinking and talking about food. Not everyone thinks that conventional food is harmful, or that alternative food is better.



However, the proponents of alternative food produce a *discourse* that holds ideas like “local,” “organic,” and “fair” that carry a lot of social meaning.

Guthman (2011) argues that it is through discourses influenced by colorblindness, or the tendencies to not acknowledge racial prejudice in our society, that “white spaces” are created. Farmers markets are not inherently white, but become *coded* as such through the ways that they are presented and constructed. For example, a low-income person is much less likely to feel as if they belong in a certain farmers market if they do not see anyone that they identify with (look like) or if they cannot participate in the space’s activities (the food is too expensive). Even if the food is not too expensive, they might perceive that the space is for someone else and not for them. In this way, farmers markets might become *exclusionary*. If they rely on the buying and selling of goods as the means of participation in social activism and/or environmentalism, they might exclude low-income people from taking part.

Alternative food institutions are defined as social movement organizations because they attempt to enact social change through their activities. Farmers markets, which are just one of these activities, attempt create social change through the green economy. Social movements necessitate *mobilizing collective-action frames* in order to garner participation (Martin 2003). Frames are combinations of narratives, ideologies, and stories that help people organize their experiences and become inspired to enact social change. When an individual is moved to join a social movement, they begin to identify with the goals and members of the organization.

When social movements use the concept of *place* as a central part of their frame, such as the appeal to a “local” food system or the “Poughkeepsie Farmers Market,” they might obscure social difference within that place in order to appeal to the largest audience. Martin (2003) describes how through these “place frames,” social movement organizers, such as the

PPF, will choose to prioritize some narratives or ideas over others. In this process they *universalize* residents into a homogenous group by appealing to place-based experiences.

Because whiteness functions invisibly, a white organization could unknowingly alienate non-white people in their community by making universal statements based on an experience of white privilege. If they do not take into consideration the conditions other people might necessitate in order to participate, they could wind up asserting the primacy of a white persons' experience. Universal statements are powerful when someone from a dominant identity takes their experience to be true for everyone.

Farmers markets can become engines for positive socio-ecological change when they take into consideration the *particulars* of marginalized peoples' experiences, rather than making universal statements from a dominant social position. Dupuis and Goodman (2011) argue that it is only through reconciling universals and identity-based particulars that we will be able to come to a "self-reflexive" understanding of justice. "The challenge" of creating a self-reflexive understanding of justice "becomes the discovery of practices that make society 'better' without reinforcing inequalities" (298). It is only through focusing on the *process* of forming just relationships, rather than concentrating on an abstract goal of justice that we can form true collaborations across social groups. Slocum (2006a) believes that there is the potential to achieve "anti-racist" goals through farmers markets. But only acknowledging the immense amount of privilege that currently exists within alternative agricultural institutions can only do this. We will come to a new understanding of justice when we take into account who is and is not present in the conversation.<sup>5</sup> Without this element, white and

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<sup>5</sup> I admit the irony in this statement, given that I am conducting a study of almost entirely white people and am privileging their voice over those who participated in the market. I do this intentionally, as I believe the first step in forging intergroup relationships is coming to terms with our own identities.

privileged groups are bound to reproduce the inequalities that create the uneven distribution of food.

## Findings

If you are familiar with Poughkeepsie, the PFP, or the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market, you might find that some of the racial tendencies I have laid out may resonate quite deeply, while others may inadequately describe the situation. It has been my intention to figure out how the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market fits in with this preexisting research, what it can say about whiteness, and what we can learn about race and food justice through the attempts of the PFP.

Through my research it was clear that the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market served a diverse audience when it came to race and class demographics. Those who worked at the market reported that on average about half of the sales were made through state-supported nutrition programs. People who might not have access to healthful, nutritious foods otherwise were patronizing the farmers market and were consuming healthful food through the state-supported food assistance programs.

At the same time, there were conflicting views on race reported by those who had actually participated in the market. While some respondents felt like the crowd at the market was diverse and reflected the population more broadly, others were aware of a racial tension present between the vendors and the communities of Poughkeepsie. Respondents shared feelings of frustration at this barrier, as it was the first moment many of them had come into direct contact with the class and racial differences between the PFP and City of Poughkeepsie.

Many respondents, few of whom had ever been to the farmers market, associated sentiments of social justice with racial diversity. Diversity is defined as *variety*, as opposed to

social justice, which is defined through *equity*. Variety and equity differ in that equity focuses on the conditions that people need to participate, while diversity is concerned with counting the number of different bodies. While an equitable crowd might be diverse, diversity is not always equitable. These interviewees knew that a diverse crowd frequented the farmers market and believed that the food justice mission was being accomplished. This belief was rooted in the logic of the food access mission, which equates distribution with justice. The access logic was closely related to the choice of a farmers market as the appropriate site of justice.

Farmers markets are, above all, markets, meaning that they function as businesses. When asked the question, “why did the PFP end the funding of the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market?” respondents almost unanimously cited the loss of funds that went into the market’s management and maintenance. Because the market was based on a business model, its measure of success was its financial self-sufficiency. This was seen as a necessary goal because of the instability of non-profit funding. Although profit was a measure of participation, it also gives us a clue into the mentalities that were mobilized in the adoption of a *business strategy* that had *social justice* goals.

Through this particular arrangement, in which a non-profit-organized business model was implemented in a low-income area, a narrative of sacrifice was developed that was widely circulated through interviews with the members of the Board of Directors. Responses from board members simultaneously featured an investment in the food justice mission and feelings of regret and sadness that the farmers market did not meet its goals. These feelings expressed sadness that so much effort was put into a project that was not received well by the communities of Poughkeepsie. Money, labor, and emotional investment were all put into the farmers market project, which the market participants (or lack thereof)

did not reciprocate. Generally, respondents felt like they did not have to go downtown, but did so in the name of food justice. Since this sentiment was not given back, the PFP resources were sacrificed.

At the same time that these feelings of regret were conveyed, a narrative of philanthropy was created which describes the City as in need of help and the PFP as benevolent. Within this narrative is an implicit power relation that replicates the class and racial dynamics of the City-Town divide more generally. Although there is a lot of credit due to philanthropy in providing necessary *social services*, these services, such as hunger alleviation, do little to work toward *social change*. Social change, in this context, refers to the reordering of systems of inequality that produce injustices.

While social services respond to *symptoms*, social change looks at the *causes*. Respondents oftentimes confused these two practices, leading to inconsistent ideas about what food justice might look like. Social services require the maintenance of paternal power relationships in which one group is donating to another, while social change seeks to reconsider those relationships altogether.

Food justice, to the PFP, was equated with increased food access. Because access focuses on distribution, which is a symptom of a larger structure, the farmers market was a blend between social services and social change. It was aiming for social change by attempting to eradicate food insecurity, but did so by providing a service that a business provides through a non-profit structure. In moving forward, we have to reexamine how we understand the concept of “justice” as it relates to community food systems. This would involve looking at the axes of power that have not been previously considered, beginning with race.

## A guide to what follows

The remainder of my project is organized around an examination of the farmers market and possible new directions for those interested in racial justice and the development of community food systems. To contextualize my research, the next chapter analyzes the development of the City of Poughkeepsie and its relationship to processes of capital devaluation. It will investigate the urban processes that provided the basis for the PFP's understanding of Poughkeepsie as in need of intervention. The ways in which the PFP discursively produced ideas about "the city" as a site of intervention and social change actively shapes the place-frame of the PFP's food justice efforts.

The third chapter investigates how the organizers of the market understood their role in social change. In this section, I analyze my first-hand research as a means of deepening my analysis of the mobilizing tactics utilized by the PFP. By interviewing the agents involved in the market I investigate how the PFP drew upon existing knowledge of place to understand why a farmers market was chosen as the site of food justice.

From these insights into the PFP's farmers' market I hope to gain a deeper understanding of how race underwrites social movements. As a means of concluding this thesis, I will reconsider what food justice meant to the PFP and what food justice might mean through the lens of racial justice. In looking forward, I examine the possibility of a more structural approach to alleviating food insecurity through a case study of Viva Farms, a farm incubator in the Skagit Valley of Washington State. The purpose of this work is to come to new understandings of race as it relates to food politics to create what Guthman (2011) calls an "emanicpatory food politics." Although we can never escape the power dynamics of our society, we can hope to emancipate ourselves from cycles of power, privilege, and oppression by reorganizing how we understand race, food, and justice.

## Chapter 2 – White Desire and the Production of a Racialized Landscape

The association between landscapes and peoples is never coincidental. People move and settle, are placed and displaced, and come to understand those changes in vastly different ways. The goal of this chapter is to situate the work of the PFP in an urban political economy of whiteness as it has developed in Poughkeepsie. I will use the conceptual framework of urban disinvestment, also known as urban capital devaluation, to understand food insecurity as a byproduct of economic and social change. In these urban processes financial capital penetrates a city, creates fixed or immobile capital, then leaves the city. The effect of this process is geographic patterns of poverty, uneven urban development, and cities with stark class divisions.

Through urban disinvestment, whiteness creates racialized landscapes through white desire, the tendencies of white individuals to draw upon white privilege by acting in their own self-interest. Saldanha (2006) calls the spatial tendencies of whites “sticky” in their tendencies to adhere to “property, privilege, and paler skin” (18). Cities and regions are created through whites’ abilities to fulfill their desire to be around other whites. But because this ability is a privilege, it results in others being incapable of fulfilling their desires. In the making of urban space, this translates into highly segregated cities. The racism of food insecurity is produced by this segregation. It is a racism that is expressed through structural inequality and the city itself. There is no direct, individual actor, but there is nonetheless a tangible violence associated with hunger and food insecurity that disproportionately affects communities of color.

By looking across scales, we can see that whiteness is empowered by the capitalist economy to become embedded in the landscape. Pulido (2000) argues, “all landscapes are

artifacts of past and present racisms” (16), meaning that race can be seen in all spaces. For Pulido, there can be no separation between the production segregated cities and their relationship to other patterns of urban development. Pulido demonstrates that both space and racism are each social relations, and it is in the constant reproduction of these social relations that places are produced.

When we recognize that race informs the organization of cities and regions, we can begin to decode how white privilege has shaped the Hudson Valley. As Pulido maintains, “we can only understand these contemporary patterns by examining the historical development of urban space at the regional scale and that these processes are inherently racialized” (Pulido 2000, 25). I will adopt a similar stance on urban space, putting into conversation the development of Poughkeepsie with larger patterns of racial segregation at the regional scale. My duty as a geographer is to understand how spatial patterns have come to be. It is only by looking at the historical development of those processes that I can shed light on my research. As we uncover how urban development has given social meaning to Poughkeepsie, we can better understand how whiteness functions through capitalist development to spatially segregate social groups.

The racial character of post-industrial cities is not simply caused by the ebb and flow of the economy, but the ways in which the economy facilitates the fulfillment of white desire. As such, racial segregation in American cities cannot be separated from global shifts in production and trade. In order to articulate the place-specific form of whiteness produced by the PFP, I now turn to the historical spatiality of whiteness that has produced food insecure, post-industrial cities and racialized understandings of the urban space.



## Theoretical Considerations: Urban Capital Devaluation

Food insecurity in Poughkeepsie is directly linked to patterns of capital devaluation and the development of the post-Fordist economy. The post-Fordist economy is one that has transitioned out of a Fordist economy with regionally based manufacturing and stable employment, into an economy characterized by low-wage, low-skill, and irregular employment – what Harvey (2000) labels as a period of “flexible accumulation.” In this period, financial capital and production are highly mobile, capable of relocating globally through reduced financial barriers. As capital left the City of Poughkeepsie, it left a legacy of urban development that has ceased to be utilized for production and consumption. This process is often termed *urban capital devaluation* or *urban disinvestment*.

McIntock (2011) states that urban devaluation “undergirds the structural processes of uneven development and the social disruption that emerges in response” (94). In times of economic prosperity financial capital is invested into urban areas as production increases. It is in these moments of capital overaccumulation that the physical landscape of the city begins to take its form. Cities, according to Harvey (2000), function as a “spatial fix,” by absorbing capital. Financial capital is transformed into physically immobile capital in the form of buildings, streets, and infrastructure, “fixing” it into the landscape. However for every economic expansion, there is a corresponding economic slowdown or retraction. When financial capital leaves the city, the fixed capital remains. As time goes on, the formerly industrial city still retains its commercial spaces, factories, and railways, but without the industry to reinvest into the built spaces of the city. These post-industrial spaces are devalued, subject to decay, pollution, and time, giving the physical appearance of deterioration.

Although the physical aesthetics of the post-industrial city is of the built environment, it is the devaluation of labor that ultimately informs the social and racial fabric of the city. These devalued places retain the physical manifestations of capital's past with an inert labor capacity. Without strong economic foundations, cities often become sites for many of the social ills associated with impoverishment, such as crime, drugs, and violence (Lipsitz 1998, 11). With the shift to a post-Fordist economy, regions across the country have begun to feature stark class divisions. Because capital has left the formerly industrious cities, the labor power within them is left dormant through un- and underemployment. The laborers themselves may come and go, but the city itself is defined by its incapacity to mobilize labor to manufacture for the economy like it used to.

Urban disinvestment is not simply a question of morphology, but also one of the interactions between spaces and peoples. It creates urban centers of poverty that become coded as non-white through the spatiality of race. By spatiality, I refer to the relationships between society and space and the meanings derived from those relationships (Soja 1989). In the United States, capital has always corresponded to whiteness, producing a spatiality that conflates whiteness with wealth (Lipsitz 1998). Throughout American history race has had distinct spatial patterns tied to the maintenance of economic class – Jim Crow segregation and its legacy, immigration laws that target non-whites, and post-slavery migration, for example.

Practices such as redlining and discriminatory mortgage lending have specifically targeted non-white communities across the country, creating inner cities raced as non-white (Eisenauer 2001; Lipsitz 2011). Although these practices are often times explicitly racist, many times they are the result of a white desire and spatial imaginary that unintentionally undermines the well-being of people of color. Suburbanization, for example, was spurred by

a simultaneous desire to create a familial, residential space and to leave the crowded and quickly declining city. The fact that it was only whites who were first afforded the privilege of mobility, through both capitalist and legislative means (Lipsitz 2011), reflects the willingness of bureaucracies to fulfill white desire. With wealth concentrated in the suburbs, cities' services declined and the image of the post-industrial city begins to take its modern-day form.

It is through the materialization of white desire that space becomes a resource for the reproduction of white privilege. We come to associate certain landscapes and interactions with space as having a racial character. As Lipsitz (2011) writes, "Seemingly race-neutral urban sites contain hidden racial assumptions" (15), and it is through these assumptions that whites create decisions as a group that come to shape urban space. It is not that there is something inherently white about mobility and the suburbs, or explicitly non-white about 'the city.' Rather, it is through history that both race and cities define each other. As we know it, there is no whiteness without mobility, just like there are no suburbs without white desire.

This does not mean that all white people are mobile or that only white people live in suburbs. However, it does mean that the decisions white actors make en masse contribute to spatial configurations that have racist implications. As Kobayashi and Peake (2000) write, "Geographically, human beings reciprocally shape and are shaped by their surrounding environments to produce landscapes that conform similarly to ideals of beauty, utility, or harmony, values not immediately associated with 'race' but predicated upon whitened cultural practices" (394). Whiteness is reflected by a landscape that continuously fulfills white desire at the expense of others. Although many forces go into the process of capital devaluation, we can locate the PFP this history through the spatiality of whiteness. The

knowledge produced by this spatiality reflects geographic patterns of whiteness in which space is shaped by the fulfillment of white desire through the capitalist economy.

### Food Deserts: Producing Racialized Knowledge

It is through the simultaneous devaluation of cities, investment in new spaces, and the creation of racialized landscapes that food security has become a salient social issue. Food insecurity is ultimately a symptom of urban devaluation, however it is spoken about as a contained event, outside conversations of privilege and oppression. The discourse of the “food desert” focuses on the symptoms of urban inequality, but does not address the underlying processes that cause certain people to have and others to lack.

Structural patterns of food insecurity are just one part of a landscape that is shaped around the desires of whites. Across the nation as white, middle-class families left inner cities in the 1960s, supermarkets, a new form of food retailing at the time, followed. It was during this time that mainstream food retailing transitioned from locally sourced independent grocers into supermarkets with increasingly globalized commodity chains – what is now the normative form of purchasing groceries (Eisenahuer 2001). It was during the 1970s and 80s that supermarkets began to participate in urban disinvestment, as they followed the money to the suburbs. While supermarkets may find impoverished cities inhospitable for business, the capitalist response to market competition does not stop humans’ necessity for food.

The popular rhetoric around food insecurity within food justice movements largely circulates around what are called “food deserts,” or low-income census tracts that feature low rates of access to nutritious foods (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). Exemplified by the United States Department of Agriculture’s “Food Desert Locator,” which has been recently replaced by the “Food Access Research Atlas,” an interactive map that allows users to

visualize food access. Although there the term has brought increased attention to the uneven distribution of food, it also is highly problematic in its treatment of urban space. To rhetorically construct a place as the “desert” – a term associated with sterility and purposelessness – implicates both a physical and social landscape of undesirability. It also places the role of urban health on a symptom, food distribution. The term draws upon the patterns of food insecurity, but also the blighted landscape of the post-industrial, disinvested city.

To have an undesirable place also means that the people inhabiting that place are undesirable as well. The implication that urban problems are rooted in a lack of access or distribution ignores the roots of structural inequality and urban development. Both Guthman (2008a) and McLintock (2011) agree that there is a widespread recognition that food deserts are racialized landscapes. In focusing on food access, the rhetoric of the food desert shifts attention away from the root causes of hunger and food insecurity – social inequality, poverty, and racism. Until this point, I have treated these phenomena as abstract concepts, without engaging with their place-specific manifestations. I now turn to the historical development of Poughkeepsie to uncover how food insecurity, poverty, and race have become manifest in the landscape of the Hudson Valley.

### The Racial and Economic Geography of Poughkeepsie

Poughkeepsie, a modestly sized city of 32,000, is located 75 miles north of New York City, halfway to Albany. Over the past two centuries, since its incorporation in 1799, Poughkeepsie has seen changes concomitant with regional trends of formerly prosperous manufacturing towns. Since the mid-twentieth century, with the shift from a regional manufacturing economy to a globalized service economy, the downtown core has become

pockmarked by urban disinvestment. Although Poughkeepsie is a part of these national trends, the city has experienced them uniquely, resulting in a distinct economic and racial geography. Within this geography, white desire has taken the spatial focus of the region away from the City of Poughkeepsie through suburbanization and the geography of IBM, the major employer of the region.

From its earliest days up until the beginning of the twentieth century, Poughkeepsie was an important hub along the Hudson River for trade and transportation. The city was a site of manufacturing, with businesses funded, organized, and owned by local capital. By the beginning of the twentieth century, these locally owned businesses had all but virtually disappeared and the city began to be directly shaped by external capital. The main employers in the area became the large factories with increasing connections to national economies. Poughkeepsie's manufacturing sector has steadily declined since the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Despite that decline, the downtown of Poughkeepsie was the main retail center of the Hudson Valley until the mid 1960s (Flad and Griffen, 2009).

It was during this economic turn, from a diversified local economy to one predicated on intraregional trade, that Poughkeepsie saw massive waves of migration into the predominantly Anglo city. By 1920, Poughkeepsie had seen large numbers of Italian, Polish, Jewish, and African American migrants move into the city. It was in this time that the City of Poughkeepsie began to take on new racial meanings through shifting demographics. These groups founded enclaves in the city, giving the urban fabric a new texture. However, as time went on and racial formations in the United States began to change, European immigrant groups were incorporated into the category of "white" (See Ignatiev 1995, for example). Whiteness for these European groups facilitated mobility out of the city, as jobs began to relocate in the Town of Poughkeepsie in the 1940s.

Today, there are no clearly discernable German, Irish, Polish, or Jewish neighborhoods in the City of Poughkeepsie, while the North Side has consistently remained a black neighborhood (Flad and Griffen 2009, 63; Figure 2). This continued geographic pattern is a legacy of racism. Since the early seventeenth century, blacks had been kept as slaves throughout the North. Since emancipation, they have continuously been confined to certain areas of the City of Poughkeepsie, immobile at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

In the early twentieth century, when blacks began to migrate from the South, Poughkeepsie practiced “de facto” racial segregation. “No signs labeled facilities as being for whites only, but the ‘colored’ knew which spaces they should not enter” (Flad and Griffin 2009, 93). While shifting conceptions of race facilitated some migrants movement out of the city, African Americans in Poughkeepsie have historically been contained to the neighborhoods directly North of Main St.

The influx of African Americans began an era of racial tension in Poughkeepsie that has occasionally erupted in violence. From Klan attacks on black churches such as in 1924, to a “riot” that erupted in 1941 between 3,000 African Americans and 1,000 Polish residents, Poughkeepsie has seen its share of racial violence (Flad and Griffin 2009, 96; 165). This racial segregation of the City and Town of Poughkeepsie is the legacy of a period of race-based violence.

It was in this same time that the suburban towns of Arlington and Red Oaks Mill were established, foreshadowing the mass suburbanization of the post-world war II era. These towns remain predominately white, with the black populations contained in the boundaries of the city (Figure 2). The exodus of whites from the city of Poughkeepsie to the surrounding towns and suburbs was facilitated by the new presence of the International

Business Machines (IBM) Corporation in 1941. Since that time, and up until the 1990s when IBM began to downsize, IBM was the largest economic presence in the region.

IBM's success originally began with the Second World War, signifying its growth in the region as a localized manifestation of national growth. IBM was originally a subsidiary of the Munitions Manufacturing Company, and eventually absorbed its parent corporation in 1943. IBM's huge successes in technological manufacturing provided the impetus for economic growth for the region. IBM's generous benefits and sustained growth made it the primary employer in the region. IBM originally located in the town of Poughkeepsie, drawing the spatial focus of the region's economy further away from downtown and into the suburban regions. As IBM grew, it expanded into nearby East Fishkill, Kingston and Ulster County becoming the economic base of the mid-Hudson Valley.

With jobs being located around the mid-Hudson Valley, the City of Poughkeepsie's economy steadily declined. In an effort to revitalize the economy, in 1966 the city government began planning the East-West arterial – the current foundation of the city's urban geography. The highway joins Routes 44 and 55 through to the Mid-Hudson Bridge and was originally idealized as a method of bringing commerce back to Main street. A 1966 New York Times article outlined the debate circulating around the plan, which framed an opposition between bureaucrats versus the homeowners of the area. Despite Mayor Richard Mitchell's claim that the project would bring the "least amount of damage to the least amount of people," the highway displaced one hundred and seven housing units and continues to deteriorate the quality of life for those living within the city (Special to the New York Times 1966; Flad and Griffen 2009, 214).

Since then, the Arterial continues to define the experience of the city. The construction of the highway expanded Mill Street and Church streets from one-lane roads



into three-lane highways. Such an expansion necessitated that the streets push up against the pre-existing houses, replacing front yards with noise, traffic, and concrete. Inevitably, housing value decreased and the neighborhoods around Main Street became rental properties serving low-income peoples. The highway does not only diminish the atmosphere of the neighborhood, but it has proved to be a source of violence, as there have been many reported deaths on these particular roads (Berger 1998). There are scarce paths crossing the roads, making it inhospitable for pedestrianism and isolating low-income people within the city. For those passing through Poughkeepsie, the highway does not make one want to stop and spend time on Main Street, but actively participates the movement through urban space and out of the city.

Contrary to its goals of urban revitalization, the E-W arterial decentered Poughkeepsie as the spatial focus of the Hudson Valley. Where once the city had been the trade hub of the Hudson Valley, the arterial bisected the city allowing commuters to move through space without regard for the city itself. Urban space, through the arterial, became a vessel through which the government could facilitate the economic growth of the region while ignoring the needs of the City. Although urban planners and politicians broadly construed the plan as a new, regenerative geography, it was the “primary factor in the demise of Main Street as the major retail area in the county” (Flad and Griffen 2009, 214).

By the time the first wave of Latino migration took place in the 1970s, industry had begun to disinvest from the City. With its proximity to the agricultural sector to the north, Poughkeepsie was a hospital urban environment for migrant laborers. By the 1990s the Hispanic Population increased by 85% (Flad and Griffen 2009, 329). Latinos in Poughkeepsie are predominately from the state of Oaxaca, as many migrants come to the United States through social networks and bi-national community ties. Specifically, La

Cienega, a Oaxacan town of 3,000, has sent a quarter of its adult men to find work in Poughkeepsie (Flad and Griffen 2009, 300).

Latino populations now predominately reside around Main Street, a neighborhood contained by the E-W arterial on the north and south sides (Figure 3). According to the 2000 census, this tract is the lowest in City. However, the low-income rates do not represent the economic progress Latino migrants have made by coming to the United States. Flad and Griffen (2009, 300) describe these migration patterns as “landscapes of opportunity,” as Latino migrants were able to reshape the city to fit their needs. Still, the physical geography of the city works to restrict socio-spatial mobility for those within the City, despite the new economic opportunities granted to recent migrants and their descendants.

### Setting the Stage for Food Justice in Poughkeepsie

The morphological and economic change of the urban landscape was not without shifts in the social makeup of the city. The economy of City of Poughkeepsie has consistently declined since IBM’s decision to locate in the Town, creating an economic and racial divide between the Town and City. However, the dominant image of urban blight very much obscures social relations in and between landscapes. It was in this context that the Poughkeepsie Farm Project, an organization located in the Town of Poughkeepsie, began to interact with the spaces of downtown.

The whiteness enacted by the PFP was one that intentionally introduced itself to a post-industrial landscape, despite the fact that the physical and economic geography of the region diffuses attention away from the city. The speed of arterial, the empty storefronts, and prosperous towns nearby facilitate the impression of Poughkeepsie as an abandoned space of desolation – that of the “food desert” – in contrast to the wealth found next door.

This knowledge of the city mobilized by the PFP was of a deteriorated social landscape in need of intervention. Racism is built into the landscape not only through racial segregation, but also the way that urban space is understood. Dwyer and Jones (2003) consider the “epistemology” of whiteness as involving certain identity-based ways of “knowing and valuing social life” (210). It is from the white outsider that the City of Poughkeepsie was treated as void of resources (the food desert), rather than a site of social resources. In attempting to bridge the geographic divide between the Town and City, there has to be an effort to revalue the social relations that have been historically discredited.

## Chapter 3 – Remembering the Market

The Poughkeepsie Farmers Market was the materialization of the PFP’s mission to create a “just and sustainable food system in the Hudson Valley.” In this chapter, I will recount the story of the market and explore the significance of this materialization to the organizers of the market. The Poughkeepsie Farmers Market had attempted to bridge the geographic and social barriers between the PFP and City of Poughkeepsie by increasing access to the consumption of local, organic foods. Through my first hand research, I will demonstrate that the organizers implicitly understood the dynamic between these two actors, yet it was never formally verbalized or discussed within the organization. This lack of dialogue within the organization led to conflicting views on the meaning of the PFP’s food justice work.

As noted previously, I choose to focus on the study of race because it was a factor that was not explicitly discussed in my time at the PFP, yet it highly influenced the work of the organization. Without acknowledging this organizing principle of our society we are bound to thinking within pre-established, oppressive relationships that continuously and systematically prevent certain communities from receiving the benefits of society. By looking at the history of the market through the stories of those who had organized it, I will uncover how whiteness had functioned at the market and within the organization.

A common thread throughout the interviews was the difficulty respondents had in talking about the subject of race. In many cases, the conversations we had about the subject were the process by which staff and board members began a critical dialogue that I believe is necessary for a holistic vision of justice. If the PFP is interested in working towards a “just and sustainable” food system, then this dialogue must be had on an institutional level within

the organization. As we will see, it is when these dialogues happen honestly and openly that race transforms from a difficult conversation topic into a pathway for food justice.

## The Story of the Market

2002 was the first year the PFP had managed the market. Prior to this first year, the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market was one vegetable stand on Main Street managed by a local food bank. The vendor was not selling his own vegetables and by the time the PFP had gotten involved, the food bank's operations were closed. For those within the organization, it was clear that the PFP had taken over management to invigorate the market and to start providing local produce to residents of Poughkeepsie. They saw the potential for a "thriving" and "vibrant" farmers market that functioned as a community space. In 2002 the PFP began to take on a leadership role to achieve this potential.

The first years were spent establishing the market. A former farmer for the PFP stated, "We went every week with a lot of vegetables and basically made no money. It was not a good situation." From those first years, the PFP had received small grants from the city government and a local private foundation to hire a full-time market manager. Sales increased when a New York State grant was used to buy a wireless electronic benefits transfer (EBT) machine so the market could accept state-supported food assistance programs. Since that time until its closing, nutritional programs such as SNAP, WIC, and FMNP supported from one third to half of the sales. As time went on, the food access mission was being accomplished as low-income people in the City of Poughkeepsie were buying the farm's produce.

As time went on the market gained momentum, but never was able to reach its three-part goal of becoming financially self-sufficient, facilitating community interaction, and

increasing access to healthful, locally grown foods. Of these three goals, the market was most successful in creating a community space on Main Street between the years of 2004 and 2011. At this location, in the downtown of Poughkeepsie near many government and professional offices, the market witnessed a melding of people from different racial and class backgrounds. Using grants from the Dutchess County Arts Council, the market held thematic events geared toward the communities within the City of Poughkeepsie. Staff members described specific events such as Latino Day, Afro-Caribbean Day, and a performance by the Poughkeepsie High School Step Team.

Through these events and the weekly market, the PFP was able to draw a diverse crowd to engage the white and non-white communities alike. Unlike other farmers markets that serve only a middle-class audience, the Poughkeepsie farmers market had become a community space for the diverse residents of Poughkeepsie.

Despite the successes of the Main Street market, it was seen as lacking because most of the products being sold were the prepared foods, not the locally produced vegetables from the PFP. Restaurants from the city such as Janet's Jerk Stop and Mole Mole would vend at the market, catering to a more professional, lunchtime crowd from the offices on Main Street. Although these vendors were successful and the market had become a community space, the PFP's ultimate vision for the market was centered around the expanded sale of locally produced vegetables.

For the 2011 and 2012 seasons, the PFP decided to prioritize the food access mission by changing locations. By locating near the Walkway over the Hudson and Pulaski Park, the PFP hoped to cater to households affected by food insecurity. However, this came at the expense of the revenue from the lunchtime crowds of Downtown. It was in these moves that the market saw its decline. It necessitated revenue through vendor fees, but in

the two moves the project saw fewer and fewer vendors as patronage decreased. In its final location at Pulaski, the market went from eight to three vendors. Even though it was never financially self-sufficient in its ten years, the declining revenue and vendor fees was a clear indication that the market was not meeting its goals.

While profit was seen as a necessary component because of the high-cost of managing the market, it was never the PFP's primary motivation. Yes, farmers markets are above all businesses, but the ultimate purpose of the market was the fulfillment of the PFP's mission to increase food access in the City, thereby creating a "just and sustainable food system in the Hudson Valley." This food access mission was absolutely accomplished during the market's years of operation. However, it was accomplished on a small scale without a profit, making it an untenable model for increasing community interaction and expanding food access.

## Findings

The field research component of this project was completed over two months in the winter of 2013. All questions asked of the staff and board members of the PFP related to the functioning of the organization, how the farmers market reflected the mission, and respondents' personal opinions about why the funding for the project had ended. Through these stories shared during interviews, narratives of philanthropy and sacrifice were developed that indicate a shared, but unspoken, set of norms and ideas about the relationship between the City of Poughkeepsie and the PFP.

These narratives mostly spoke to the significant amount of financial and emotional investment that was put into the project without the expected returns – financial or otherwise. The market was not widely received by the residents of the city, organizers

believed that the farm's resources were sacrificed on a project that did not meet their hopes. Because the PFP did not need to go downtown, and did so because they thought it was the right thing to do, the market was coded through ideas of philanthropy, or the donation of excess resources. The narratives of philanthropy and sacrifice reinforced each other, demonstrating a shared understanding of the power the PFP held in its decision to go downtown.

Responses were generally consistent in demonstrating shared understandings of the project's purposes. All respondents had cited the market as the enactment of the organization's food justice mission. In response to the question, "How is the mission of the organization reflected in its programs?" interviewees cited the farmers market, prior to its closing, as the primary arena through which a "just and sustainable food system" was being achieved. In response to the question, "Why do you think the funding had ended?" interviewees cited the project's inability to become financially self-sufficient. This response explained why respondents believed the market to be generally unsuccessful, despite its successes in community-building and food access. Generally, the responses to these questions were consistent. Beyond the realm of the financial, however, there were highly divergent opinions about the market, signaling inconsistent understandings about the organization's presence in the City of Poughkeepsie.

The two most contentious questions I asked were in regard to the decision to end the funding and the racial dynamics of the organization. Two groups emerged from the responses to these questions – those who had never been to the market and those who participated in the running of the market. The former group, mainly members of the board of directors, mainly lamented the financial state of the program. The latter group consisted of the staff members who had participated in the space of the market. This group not only



spoke to the financial state of the project, but also the interpersonal aspects their time in the city.

While there is variation within each of these groups, the most consistent variable between the two is the experience of participating in the market. I will refer to “staff members” as those who had worked at the market, while “board members” will refer to those who had not been to the space of the market. Both groups recognized the strengths and limitations of the market, but it was only the staff members who could vocalize the problems of the project beyond financial concerns.

Among the differences between these groups were the responses to the question “What role do you think race played at the market?” Board members generally had very little experience at the market, as almost none of them had been to the actual space. These respondents had very little to say about the topic of race. On the other hand, the staff at the market had shared many experiences of coming face-to-face with the realities of poverty and food insecurity in Poughkeepsie. Many of these respondents cited those stories as critical moments in their development of a racial and class-consciousness.

The staff members who had worked at the market had cited specific experiences confronting racial and class differences. It was clear that the type of interactions at the market were new for many of them. A former farm apprentice recounted how her experience at the market had helped her formulate a racial and class-awareness. She had witnessed the market’s failed attempt to resonate with the intended communities, forcing her to reconsider the value she places on local foods.

Price was very difficult for me. I felt that customers would come up and ask about something and then say, “Woah that’s way too much,” or, “I can get that at Stop and Shop for this amount of money.” And I would do my best to say, “You know this is grown right here, I grew this, and we didn’t use any chemicals.” People actually said, “I don’t care about chemicals! Give me the chemicals! If its two dollars cheaper a pound, it could be

radioactive!” I was just like, No! Don’t do that to yourself! But that’s the situation that people are facing. They said, “I just can’t afford it, I can’t make my weekly budget.”

This staff member had come to realize the limitations of the food access approach. The food for the customers was accessible, but it did not meet their needs, as there were other aspects of their lives that prevented them from buying the food. This staff person recognized how the goals of the food access mission only partially acknowledged the needs of the residents of Poughkeepsie.

Other staff members who had worked at the market echoed this sentiment. One respondent, a Vassar student, was shocked to hear the news that the market was financially unsustainable, considering that over half of the sales used government assisted programs, such as SNAP, WIC, and FMNP. So even though the market was being patronized, she had to come to terms with the realities of poverty in the city.

Alternatively, the group that had not worked at the market, comprised of the members of the board of directors, almost unanimously shared that they had never attended the market. This group is ultimately responsible for the budgeting of the organization and the decision to end the funding for the market. With the exception of two board members, none of the respondents spoke about the market from personal experience. All information shared about the market was filtered through the lens of the budget. This group was both geographically and socially removed from the market’s day-to-day functioning.

Although the answers from the board members varied, the question about race was generally met with confusion. The most common answer to the question was, “I’m not sure what you mean,” or “I don’t understand.” In many situations, those expressions of confusion were the only thing they had to say about the topic of race.

It is not that board members did not value the fulfillment of the food access mission or that the participants of the market did not have an understanding of the finances of the operation. What concerns me is the differing ways these groups understood the relationship between the City of Poughkeepsie and the PFP. Both groups recognized the value of the market's presence in the city. However, it was only the respondents who had spent time at the market that developed an awareness of the class dynamics of the project.

One former farm apprentice stated, "I felt like were a group of well-educated white people trying to stick our farmers market in someone's neighborhood...we don't know what they want! I just feel like we needed help." This staff member had shared her frustration in her inability to connect to the communities she was attempting to serve and the disconnection between the PFP and the residents of Poughkeepsie. By drawing attention to her need for help, she highlights the fact that a racial awareness is not equivalent to having the answers. At the farmers market, race and class had interacted to reinforce the social barriers between the PFP and the residents of Poughkeepsie. Although not everyone in the PFP is white or everyone in the city is non-white, there was a distinct socio-geographic barrier that defined the relationship between those selling the vegetables and those buying the vegetables.

However, the realizations made by staff members in the space of the market were not shared with the members of the board. Respondents spoke a lack of communication within the organization, as well as a lack of dialogue about the meaning and social dynamics of the social justice aspects of their work. As another farm apprentice had noted, "When I first started working, I didn't think that profit mattered at all," indicating a disconnection between the facilitation of the food justice mission and the views of the board of directors, which focused on the lack of profit.

These different ways of remembering the project produced a tension within the organization. The interracial experiences of the staff members in the space of the market determined the way in which they understood the project. However, the members of the board could not recount similar stories or experiences, either from personal experience or from the staff members. Many of the farmers, interns, and students who had helped run the market specifically mentioned that they did not interact with members of the board of directors. Although there were meaningful experiences at the market dealing with issues of social difference, they were not discussed as an organization.

Here we can see a surface level tension between the market's conflicting roles as a potential agent for social change and as a profit-yielding business model. While these two goals are not contradictory, they became opposing through the market's inability to produce a profit while expanding fresh food options in a low-income area. In the words of one board member, emotions of sadness and loss arose from the "unfulfilled potential" of a "lost opportunity." Not only was there a disconnection within the organization, but between the needs of the residents of Poughkeepsie and the desires of the PFP. The PFP had wanted to see change in the city, but this change was not received by city itself.

## Discussion

### Philanthropy & Sacrifice

The opposition between the needs of the city and the desire of the PFP produced feelings of philanthropy and sacrifice that pervaded the interviews. To develop feelings these feelings requires a dominant social position, signifying an implicit understanding of the power relationship between the PFP and the City of Poughkeepsie. As one staff member who had participated in the market had put it, "It seems foolish to say that race didn't play a

role in the context of Poughkeepsie, New York, of all places!” Indeed, it was only those who had consistently worked at the market who were capable of actually verbalizing a sense of racial awareness. The discourses around philanthropy and sacrifice indicate that the distinct power relationship between the PFP and the City of Poughkeepsie was implicitly understood, but that many members of the PFP lack the language to productively articulate exactly what that relationship was.

One reason why this relationship is hard to talk about is because it deals with a difficult subject – race and social difference. As far as my research shows, there was no discussion within the organization as to how social difference affected its work. However, the social power held by whites was fundamental to the project itself. The market functioned through an act of white privilege (a white organization had placed their operation in a low-income, non-white neighborhood), yet respondents had difficulty talking about what that meant. Because of this confusion, the work of the farmers market was incapable of addressing the needs of the residents of Poughkeepsie – needs that stem from social injustices.

In expressing frustration about the direction of the food justice mission after the decision to end the funding for the market was made, the former Executive Director of the PFP had stated, “We are not a social services agency, we are a systems change agency.” However, this was the only interview to distinguish between social services and social change. The comment was made in reference to the confusion between the two, a blurry area that the farmers market had occupied. This blurriness was expressed through the narratives of philanthropy and sacrifice developed by the staff and board members. Ultimately, these narratives were produced because the farmers market was a *business model*

that meant to effect *social change* that had inadvertently become a *philanthropic* program somewhere between social services and social change.

Kivel (2007) distinguishes social services from social change work: the former “addresses the needs of individuals reeling from the personal and devastating impact of institutional systems of exploitation and violence,” while the latter “challenges the root causes of the exploitation and violence” (129). All interviews with members of the board invoked the support of local food banks through food donations as the primary area through which food justice is achieved since the support of the farmers market had been withdrawn. These hunger alleviation organizations, which rely on donations and limited state funding, fulfill the work of social services, rather than the radical social change described by the mission of the PFP. Although social services such as hunger alleviation are necessary, they do not work towards a restructuring of resources and power that prevents the systematic violence of hunger.

Social services function through philanthropy to end the immediate effects of suffering. Philanthropy responds to and maintains power dynamics between the “helping” and “helped” groups. King and Osayande (2007) argue that while philanthropy aims to end the immediate effects of suffering, the root of that suffering is the oppressive, unequal relationship of power that philanthropy rests upon. Food insecurity and hunger in Poughkeepsie are directly related to persistent poverty, a condition that is maintained by an inequitable distribution of resources. In essence, the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market had attempted to rectify the injustices of inequity through an inequitable relationship.

However, the ideal of the market did not take into account this relationship of power. The ideal, as articulated by the interviews, was not a philanthropic endeavor tied to social services, but a business model that effected social change. Through the sale of the

PFP's vegetables, a "just and sustainable food system" would have been created. The nature of the relationship forged through this transaction was not taken into account by the market organizers.

Martin (2003) argues that through an *ideal* of change social movements are capable of garnering collective action. But because the ideal of a widely supported, profitable business model was never reached, the members of the farm began to lose motivation. In the words of one staff member, "The PFP has basically been footing the bill for what it couldn't fundraise, taking funds from other programs that were paying for themselves to make it happen. There was an attempt to make it better, but that didn't work." In taking money from other programs, the farmers market transformed the energy around the ideal into a melancholic narrative of sacrifice. A lack of community response from the city created sentiments of dejection, as the continued loss of resources indicated not a story of transformative change, but one of a social service. The energy that originally defined the market was lost, leading the organization to end the funding for the project.

Respondents felt that the resources that were put into the market were sacrificed because the organization chose to forgo other opportunities, such as providing more CSA shares, donating the vegetables to food shelters, or even selling their produce at a more lucrative market. This narrative of sacrifice described the market as a failed endeavor. With a benevolent intention, the PFP had inadvertently recreated the inequitable power relationship that defines social services and philanthropy, even though their vision for the market was the transformation of the food system in the Hudson Valley.

### Talking About Race

From my field research, it is clear that those respondents who had personal experiences at the market had come to new understandings of race, however difficult they

might be to articulate. These respondents came to their own conclusions as to why the market was not successful based on the relationships formed through the space of the market. In response to the question about race, these respondents were able to draw upon those experiences to describe new experiences of racial awareness. The board members, on the other hand, lacked those interracial experiences in the space of the market. It was these experiences, shared by those who had worked at the market, which helped create new understandings about social difference.

In the few moments shared with me in which the staff members had questioned their racial privilege, they revealed a *relational* understanding of race. A relational view of race considers identity to always being formed through a relationship of difference. For example, I have power and privilege as a white person because there are people who are categorized as non-white who are barred from these privileges. Together we form a relationship of privilege and oppression. Dominant forms of whiteness feature *static* or *non-relational* views of race, which consider racial categories as entities unto themselves (Dwyer and Jones 2003). When those who had participated in the market came into contact with people of different social identities, their own privilege was revealed through a relationship with another person.

We can see whiteness working towards a new, non-dominant form through the experiences at the market. For those who had participated in the market's activities, it became a space of interracial interaction in which whiteness was understood differently by whites themselves. Dominant form of whiteness denies racial privilege, yet the staff members shared memories of the space that attempted to grapple and make sense of that privilege. Slocum (2006b) argues, "Whiteness, capable of endlessly transforming itself, can change its tendency to reproduce and enforce racial oppression." However, this can only be



accomplished when the dominant form of whiteness is challenged and we learn to engage with a *relational* understanding of race.

Part of this relational view recognizes that race is not just about bodies, but how those bodies aggregate into the institutions of our society. I am not only white, and I not only have power because I am white, but I belong to certain institutions that are defined by the power of being white. This institutional whiteness allowed the PFP to established itself downtown through the social power of whiteness. Although not everyone in the PFP is white and there are plenty of white people in the City of Poughkeepsie, race and class interact to give distinct privileges to white institutions. While a diverse audience might have frequented the market, it was a white space because it was enacted through institutionalized white privilege.

In critiquing the whiteness of the PFP, I do not mean to condemn their efforts or to equate whiteness with evil. In fact, a relational view of race will allow us to broaden how we might imagine the role of race in alternative food. Instead of race being a barrier to conversation, we can openly acknowledge race to learn a vocabulary around our own privilege. This vocabulary will lead to a more complete understanding of food justice work. Indeed, whether or not race was an explicitly discussed component of the organization, it defined the way the organizers of the market understood their work. As Dwyer and Jones (2003) argue, whiteness has an epistemology that determines whites' "knowing and valuing of social life" (210). So although many of the interviews did not necessarily mention race, it is a form of racialized knowledge because it was produced by the experience of white privilege.

Central to the knowledge produced by white privilege are "universals." These are ideological statements that do not seem ideological. They stem from the experience of a

dominant social group and are taken to be true for all social groups. The frustration and sadness expressed by board members around the closing was within the context of a universal belief that farmers markets are the proper way to engage with alternative food. However, because they were geographically removed and did not engage with the realities of the space of the market, they did not form a similar racial consciousness that the staff members at the market had.

In the relational view of race that was produced through the space of the market, the staff of the PFP questioned the beliefs they once thought were universal. For example, the universal belief that there is value in organic farming practices held by the farm apprentices was upset by the realities of the customers' budgets. By coming into contact with people from different identity groups, the staff members were able to take into consideration different sets of beliefs that revealed their own white privilege and the institutional whiteness of the PFP.

For the board members who had not participated at the market, the interviews showcased the phenomenon of colorblindness, or the tendencies to not acknowledge race. Colorblindness stems from a post-racial ideology that states that race is no longer an important factor in our society. Lipsitz (2011) argues that the post-racial ideology insists, "color-bound injustices require color-blind remedies, that race-based problems should be solved by race-blind remedies" (15). Whiteness, in its ability to deny difference through colorblindness, is made an even more powerful force through universals, which naturalize the experience of white privilege. Without acknowledging race in a social justice context, colorblind policies and attitudes inadvertently recreate white dominance by universalizing the experience of white privilege.

The colorblind policies of the organization made the market incapable of addressing factors that limit certain people from creating a “just and sustainable food system in the Hudson Valley.” Yet the market proved to be a space of cross-cultural interaction in which staff came to understandings of social difference. This new knowledge of the realities of poverty in Poughkeepsie are necessary in determining the future direction of the organization and the kinds of relationships that will foster racial and food justice.

A lack of dialogue about race within the organization has led to some members understanding the racial encounters in personal terms and others believing race to be outside of the organization. However, the experiences at the market produced a racial awareness, not a critical understanding of the regional and institutional racial dynamic. In order to move into a space of critical engagement, the PFP has to begin a dialogue about the politics of its work. These kinds of dialogues about race and social difference can help guide the future of the organization.

But unlike the space of the market, which fostered interracial experiences, these dialogues should concentrate on the condition of white privilege. It is only by examining our own assumptions and privileges that we can approach others as potential agents of social change, rather than philanthropists and recipients of social services. It was by viewing Poughkeepsie through the lens of philanthropy that the market blurred the distinction between social change and social services, limiting its capacity to transform the food system of the Hudson Valley.

## Chapter 4 -Beyond Access: Reimagining Food Justice in the Hudson Valley

The Poughkeepsie Farmers Market was effective in increasing food access in Poughkeepsie, despite low participation. This success was seen as the fulfillment of the organization's food justice mission, which was narrowly defined as an increase in food access. By addressing a problem of distribution, the market had attempted to bridge the social and geographic divides between the farm and the city by garnering participation in the alternative food movement. The subsidized market was capable of increasing access to food as it defined social movement participation through the marketplace. In this chapter, I will explore the significance of this method of social movement participation by examining the logic of food access as it relates to larger systems of political economy. In defining the injustices of the food system as ones of distribution, the PFP confined its thinking about justice to only one aspect of the food system. The narratives of philanthropy and sacrifice present in the interviews framed the residents of the city as recipients of social services, rather than active participants in social movement. This method of social movement engagements limits potential partnerships across social difference and confines the way that we imagine possible food futures.

In exploring the dynamic of the marketplace, I will connect the localized economy of the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market to larger systems of political economy. By contextualizing what happened in Poughkeepsie to global economic systems, I will reexamine what "food justice" meant at the market and what it might mean through the lens of racial justice. This version of justice would look at how oppression manifests itself along the different stages and scales of the food system, beyond issues of access. Racial injustices take place on each of these stages – production, processing, distribution, consumption, and

waste. As a means of concluding this chapter, I will examine a casestudy of Viva Farms, a farm incubator in the Skagit Valley of Washington that works towards racial justice by rearranging labor-land relationships. Viva Farms questions a fundamental assumption we have about race in this country – that brown bodies are *workers*, not *owners*. The approach of Viva Farms looks at racial inequality throughout the entire food system, rather than just food access. From Viva Farms we can learn that if we talk about race constructively and openly, we can challenge the assumptions we hold about race that perpetuate injustices in the food system today.

By challenging these assumptions we have the opportunity to create equitable means of participation within the food system. One of these assumptions is the role that labor plays in alternative food movements. In a recently published report entitled “Good Food and Good Jobs for All,” the Applied Research Center (ARC) calls for a marriage between the alternative food and labor movements. Based on their research, I see fundamental divide between these two movements in the way they conceive of the injustices of the food system. The food movement, as represented by the PFP, focuses on reforming the *objects* of consumption – the food. The labor movement, on the other hand, focuses on the *relationships of power* that go into the food system. So while the food movement has historically focused on ecological farming and “good food,” the labor movement has been more likely to focus issues of racial and class injustices.

In learning from the labor movement, the PFP can reexamine the social relations that define the food system. By focusing on these relationships of power, it will be able to forge connections across socio-spatial divides. However, this must entail a reconsideration of what “justice” means. Through the farmers market, the PFP asserted that food justice meant an increase in access. After considering the strengths of both the “good food” and “good

jobs” movements, the Applied Research Center (2011) came to a different understanding of food justice:

Food justice seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed, and eaten are shared fairly. Food justice represents a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities.

This new definition focuses on fostering justice in every step of the food system. In employing this new definition, I hope to imagine food justice work that works to create an *equitable* food system – one that takes into consideration the different terms upon which people enter into the food system.

This new kind of food activism cannot be achieved without an ideological shift that recognizes race as a serious factor in preventing peoples’ participation in the alternative food movements. We can begin this shift by recognizing race and its hierarchies as a *relational social process* – the same realization made by the staff members in the space of the market. Saldanha (2006) argues, “When understood as an imminent process, it becomes clear that, though contingent, race cannot be transcended, only understood and rearranged” (9). Within food justice work, we have the opportunity to “rearrange” race by changing the conditions through which power operates. If we challenge the presumptions we hold about race in our society, we can reimagine what justice looks like. From this point we can ask the very hard questions like, why are all farmers white, while the farmworkers are brown? Why are people of color overrepresented in low-wage labor and underrepresented in management positions? These are the kind of questions that will lead to a holistic conception of justice.

The PFP is currently in a position to rearrange racial relations in the making a just food system. But before we can do so, we have to think about what “justice” might mean in an equitable society. In focusing solely on food access, we, along with many popular food

movement institutions, maintain an “assumption that some of the problematic things about the food system will stay the same” (Guthman 2008b, 1248). I claim that these “problematic things,” such as the class dynamics at the basis of the market approach, must come to the forefront of the conversation. I will now turn to the implications of the market approach to justice that was adopted by the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market.

### Justice and Participation in the Green Economy

Farmers markets are, above all, markets. It was by way of the market that the PFP aimed to achieve social justice goals by growing a localized economy. Overall, the market was not considered to be successful because it had not become financially self-sustaining, despite of the successes of its other goals, increasing food access and building community. Through this definition of success, which ultimately relied on financial sustainability, the organizers of the market asserted that “justice” was commensurate with and definable through the growth of a localized “green economy.” It is through the “green economy,” or economic practices that aim to contribute to environmental and social change through the buying and selling of certain “green” goods, that the farmers market aimed to achieve food justice in Poughkeepsie. Yet because the green economy is a niche of the larger capitalist economy, it reinforced hierarchies of power associated with race and class, preventing widespread participation.

Alkon (2012) argues that within the green economy, ideals such as justice and sustainability become part of what is for sale. It was through the consumption of vegetables that represented “justice” and “sustainability” that those ideals would become actualized. Through the farmers market, things that cannot necessarily be bought, like environmentalism, become commodified – they are for sale in the green economy. Central

to Alkon (2012)'s argument is the relationship between localized green economies, like the one at the farmers market, and the larger capitalist economy. She argues that green economies are never outside the mainstream economy; they are simply niches and reflections.

The type of capitalism in the green economy is oftentimes distinguished from the type of corporate, global, and industrial capitalism that alternative food movements seek to separate themselves from. Dupuis and Goodman (2005) argue that movements to create local economies often time frame their economic practices as a form of resistance to the global. But in doing so, these movements, like the PFP, ignore how the "local" can also be a site of oppression.

Oppression had manifested itself at the farmers market by inadvertently reinforcing the class dynamics associated with the larger, mainstream economy. Even though the food at the market was supposed to be accessible, it still alienated those who could not practice its suggested form of consumption or those who could not identify with its goals. These people could not make the market's produce meet their budget or did not value "local" or "organic" food like the PFP does. These residents of the city were barred from participating in the creation of a "just" and "sustainable" food system.

The farmers market had worked towards a vision of justice through a change in consumption habits. This ideal largely relied on the mechanism of capitalist "market" as their strategy for social movement participation. The choice of the market as a site for social change is highly influenced by the mentalities associated with neoliberalism, the most recent phase of capitalist development. Neoliberalism, born out of the financial crises of the 1970s, is ultimately a relationship between the state and the economy in which the "free market" is



given primacy in political life. As the state begins to retract its social programs, the market and non-profit sector begin to take responsibility for social services.

To use the words of Guthman (2008b), “material neoliberalizations are inextricably bound to productions of neoliberal mentalities of rule” (1243). These “subjectivities” are ways of thinking derived from the ideology of neoliberalism, which prioritizes the market as the engine for social change. For the planners of the market, the neoliberal mentality led them to a market-based thinking that used consumption as the primary tactic for transforming the food system. When it comes to activism, neoliberal subjectivities confine how we imagine possible futures. People who might envision radical social change, like the PFP had, might “think within the neoliberal box,” thus ignoring the ways that capitalism reinforces social inequality and the injustices of the food system (Guthman 2008b).

Although this is a clear example of the type market-based thinking that is endemic to neoliberal subjectivities, it also signifies a whitened understanding of social movement participation. Lipsitz (1998) argues that because capitalism rewards those who are already in power, being white in America means that there is much higher likelihood to be rewarded by the capitalist economy. The market was organized by middle-class whites who have had, generally, positive experiences with capitalism. Although I did not interview the member specifically about this aspect, they unanimously value farmers markets (a microcosm of the capitalist economy) as important community spaces.

Based off these experiences, they universalized what it means to participate in the market as a means of achieving justice. Dupuis, Harrison, and Goodman (2011) call universalist ways of thinking about justice “authoritarian” in their refusal to acknowledge a diversity of viewpoints. In opposition to this authoritarian stance, they propose “identity-based theories of justice” that “begin by uncovering the racialized aspect – ‘whiteness’ – of

seemingly universal ideals of the good life” and argue that “all universal ideals are, in fact, embedded in particular forms of racial dominance” (289). By not examining these racialized aspects of their work, the PFP inadvertently asserted racial dominance by defining the mobilization strategies of the PFP through economic exchange.

While I do not expect the PFP to overturn capitalism in their mission to address food insecurity, I want to focus on how the question of distribution led to solutions that did not meet the needs of the communities affected by food insecurity. In focusing on access, the PFP did not take into consideration the conditions on which people enter into alternative food movements. Ultimately, the focus of the market was on the *objects* for sale in the green economy. These objects represented the ideals of justice and sustainability. The relationships formed through these economic transactions were a byproduct of the economic transactions at the market, rather than the goal of food justice work.

### Redefining Justice: Food, Labor, and Race

After considering ARC (2011)’s definition of food justice, I call on the PFP to critically reexamine the kind of tactics that work towards a just food system. There has to be a reconsideration of how injustice manifests along the entire food system, as opposed to purely within the realm of distribution. By examining the food system through the lens of labor, the PFP and other alternative food movements can move past issues of access to address the conditions on which people participate in the food system. This way of thinking about food justice can contribute to the creation of cooperative intraregional relationships between social groups.

However, I recognize that focusing on labor does not necessarily stop the violent symptoms of inequality, such as food insecurity and hunger. While the Poughkeepsie

Farmers Market was successful in addressing food insecurity, it did so through a philanthropic program that reinforced the socio-spatial dynamic between the farm and the city. This dynamic stunted the potential for an equitable participation in the food system – the goal of food justice.

In moving forward, I suggest viewing the food system through the lens of labor to reimagine the relationship between the PFP and the residents of the city. The relationship formed through the market drew upon the PFP's social power, replicating the racial and class hierarchies that produce the city as a site of poverty. The farm held the resources (the vegetables) and the city was the recipient of the services (the market). Although the market necessitated a profit for its operations, it was driven by philanthropy, coding the project as a sacrificial act. Instead of reenacting relationships of inequality in the making of justice, we have to think about what kind of relationships would allow for an effective, equitable collaboration. This does not mean espousing all privilege, but using privilege as a tool for the empowerment of others.

By focusing on labor, I want to give one example of how food movements can think beyond the confines of neoliberal thought and philanthropy in order to become social justice allies. The logic of food access lends itself to focusing on what the city lacks, whereas a discussion of the latent labor power within the city would mobilize the resources within marginalized communities. This shift would create new avenues for social movement participation through employment, labor standards, and farming that address the conditions on which people become agents for social change.

As of now, there is a racialized disparity in the type of labor employed by the PFP and the majority of farm labor in New York State. The PFP's labor source is predominately white and highly educated. The farm uses a combination of permanent and seasonal farm

staff, CSA-member volunteers, and students from Vassar College. This is not the typical face of farm labor in New York State. Minkoff and Zern (2011) estimate that between 60-80% of farm labor in the United States is comprised of migrant workers from Central America and the Caribbean, many of whom are undocumented. Unlike almost all other professions, farm workers are barred from collective organizing and minimum wage laws in New York State. This lack of legal protection results in the continued exploitation of farm laborers, working without overtime pay in exposure to harmful agro-chemicals (Almendral 2012).

Poughkeepsie is strategically placed at the intersection between migrant labor and alternative agriculture. The Hudson Valley is known for its alternative food institutions, which thrive on the demand for organic and local foods from the New York City metropolitan area (Shattuck 2013). Alternatively, Poughkeepsie's high rates of Mexican Americans are the result of a sustained relationship with "sending communities" from the state of Oaxaca (Flad and Griffen 2009, 330). Of course, there are huge disparities within both the city and the Mexican communities and I do not mean to paint a picture of a city of undocumented laborers. However, by including a discussion of the undocumented labor in Poughkeepsie I hope to demonstrate that there are huge disparities in terms of how labor is viewed within close proximity. In the following case study, I will examine Viva Farms, a non-profit farm incubator that harnesses the potential within both the food movement and immigrant communities to reorient the food system in the Pacific Northwest.

While there are many farmer-training programs in the Hudson Valley, including the PFP's intern and apprentice program, "Farming for the City," they do not serve the underrepresented communities of agriculture. These farmer-training programs operate under colorblind policies and have historically catered to young, white, and highly educated

audiences.<sup>6</sup> Alternately, migrant farm laborers and farmers of color have historically been excluded from opportunities for land ownership and agricultural entrepreneurship (Alkon 2012). By not acknowledging the racialized aspects of farming and farm labor, farmer-training programs such as the PFP's implicitly maintain a status quo that white bodies are farmers and brown bodies are farmworkers.

### Viva Farms: A Changing Racial Landscape of Farming

Viva Farms is a non-profit organization in the Skagit Valley that functions as a farm incubator. Farm incubators are an innovative form of farmer training that serve as models for new farmers. As part of this model, Viva Farms recruits new farmers, trains them in organic production, connects them to local food markets, and supplies them with resources to buy their own land. What makes Viva Farms' food justice work distinct is their approach towards labor, race, and issues of immigration.

According to Sarita Schaffer, Executive Director of Viva Farms, the organization's core is "helping people advance from employee to owner" (personal communication, 2013). In this training program, migrant farmworkers have the ability to take control of their means of production, giving them new opportunities to become agents in alternative agricultural production. Without these programs, many migrant workers have limited access to markets, centers of consumption, and other economic opportunities (Langston 2012). Viva Farms is capable of bridging this divide by prioritizing the self-sufficiency of the farmers it trains and by thinking through the different stages of the food system.

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<sup>6</sup> Exemplified by the National Young Farmers Coalition, a Hudson Valley based organization. (see [www.youngfarmers.org](http://www.youngfarmers.org))

The Viva Farms program is not an independent organization, but works in tandem with the Washington State University (WSU) Cooperative Extension and the WSU Latino Farming Program. Through this partnership, Viva Farms is capable of drawing together local resources to improve the likelihood of the early-stage success of small farmers.

While the mission of Viva Farms is specifically aimed at increasing farm ownership among Latino immigrant populations, it does not exclude itself from white participation. The farmer training classes are typically half Latino, half white. Here, young, highly educated, white farmers (similar to those who work for the PFP) work side-by-side with former migrant farmworkers. Although the focus of the organization is the empowerment of Latino farmers, Schaffer states, “it didn’t seem right to exclude folks from different educational backgrounds. They’re new farmers too, so we decided to make the program a hybrid” (personal communication, March 11, 2013).

These two groups of farmers work together during the training sessions, but because the former farm laborers have more experience in the field, they become a source of knowledge and guidance for the less experienced white farmers. While the recent immigrant’s labor and knowledge might be devalued on a conventional farm because of their class status, it is revalued on Viva Farms because of its focus on equity.

Regardless of how participants enter into the program, Viva Farms treats farming as an economic opportunity. Their model actively reshapes narratives of race and labor by facilitating movement from laborer to owner. Within this framework, individuals are capable of reaping the full benefits of green economic opportunity and fulfilling their potential within alternative agricultural institutions. In other words, Viva Farms is working towards a model of racial equity in the Skagit Valley by connecting marginalized populations to the economic opportunities of alternative foods.

## Conclusion

By bringing in a discussion of Viva Farms and farm labor, I hope to provide a source of inspiration for new ways of imagining the possibilities of alternative food and the meanings of food justice. The Poughkeepsie Farmers Market is similarly an inspiration – it questioned why healthful, ecologically produced food is the domain of the wealthy. The PFP aimed to fight what it saw as the injustices of the food system, but it did so without addressing the politics that define the everyday racial injustices of Hudson Valley. It is through these politics that transformative justice can take place.

To not acknowledge the racial dynamic of the PFP's food justice work would deny the racial geography of the Hudson Valley. The geography of the region confines communities of color to the city, drawing capital away from the urban core. The organizers of the farmers market understood this phenomenon, as it was implicitly expressed through narratives of philanthropy and sacrifice. The power dynamic of the region defines the way the PFP understands its work, despite the difficulty organizers had in verbalizing it as such. This makes sense though, because of the way whiteness functions in our society. Whiteness “is indicated less by its explicit racism than by the fact that it ignores, or even denies, racist indications” (Kobayashi and Peake 2000, 394).

But whiteness takes many forms. The dominant form of whiteness does not speak of race and unknowingly reproduces racism through the enactment of white privilege. We can see this norm being challenged by the encounters of the staff members at the farmers market. These respondents featured a desire to understand and talk about race, working towards a transformation of whiteness.

There must be a way of being white in the world that works towards a more equitable society and just food system. Before we can be white in this way, we must cross the first hurdle – we have to start talking about race by naming whiteness for what it is. If we acknowledge that we are each a raced body, that we engage in the world as a raced body, and that everything we do and say is a product of that raced body, then we can learn to understand race as a guiding principle in our own lives.

Then again, just because we are able to talk about race does not necessarily transform our whiteness or remove our complicity in white supremacy. By acknowledging that race mediates our life experiences, we can begin to challenge the knowledge produced by that experience. I want to question this knowledge because of the way that the experience of consuming alternative food is universalized by white organizations as the key to a just food system. Yes, there is value in ecologically produced, nutritious food. Yes, food access is a factor that affects peoples' lives. However, I refuse to believe that justice in the food system is achievable by rectifying a symptom of urban poverty and structural racism.

In bringing in a conversation about labor, I do not mean to detract from the importance of work to end food insecurity. Rather, I want to reimagine what “justice” means in the food system beyond a discourse of access. Even though the farmers market was effective in addressing food insecurity, but it did so by reinforcing the oppressive relationship between the PFP and the residents of the city. By focusing on the market as the engine for social change, the PFP maintained that the proper way to enter into alternative food systems was through consumption, as opposed to a conscious reorganization of power.

Mistaking food justice as increased consumption ignores how oppression becomes manifests in the city through the food system. A transformative approach to the food system would try to liberate ourselves from the reciprocal relationships of power that are the



source of both privilege and oppression. Even though farmers markets are proven ways to address food insecurity, they do not fulfill the potential of food justice when they are an inequitable expression of white privilege.

The way that “food justice” is constructed through the logic of food access ignores how oppression functions within the work of food movements. If we are truly committed to the transforming the food system, we have to acknowledge how we as activists are complicit in its various forms of oppression. Was the Poughkeepsie Farmers Market what the PFP wanted, or was it what the residents of Poughkeepsie needed?

Or better yet, what does the PFP need? What do the residents of Poughkeepsie need? If we learn to answer each of those questions with the same answer, we can start forming the equitable relationships that will create a just food system. In order to even ask those questions, we have to engage with those communities whose voices have been left out of the conversation – those who have been left out of this study. But before we engage with those communities, we have to look at ourselves, question what we stand for, and ask how we can become liberated from cycles of privilege, oppression, and violence.

### Limitations & Future Research

Through this study, I hope to have begun the introspective process of examining how privilege and oppression function within alternative food movements. I intentionally confined my research to only the privileged members of the PFP who helped organize, manage, and budget the farmers market. I myself had not spent considerable time at the market, and could only relay information from others who had been there. Within these parameters, I have excluded the voices of those Poughkeepsie residents who had and had not frequented the market.

My own limitations in engaging the communities of the city mirror those of the PFP. I do not know the potential agents for change within the city, and I do not have the capacity to find them within this scope of this study. I cannot assume what the voices that are not present would say, or that they would even want to be a part of this conversation. I recognize that I am also learning how to understand my role in reproducing white supremacy and how I can best engage and value the (currently) unheard voices.

Despite these shortcomings, I hope to have demonstrated that in order to forge an equitable relationship between the PFP and the residents of the City of Poughkeepsie, there must be a privileging of those who have not yet been heard. I suggest future research and action that centers the voices of those communities who are most affected by food insecurity and hunger in Poughkeepsie.

In order to create a just food system, the PFP should do its best to critically engage with how its actions recreate patterns of privilege and oppression. In doing so, I want to push the PFP and all food activists to question how our own assumptions are based in racialized knowledge of food and the city. When we work through the answers to these questions, we will be able to use difference as a tool for empowerment, rather than an unspoken obstacle to social change.

Appendix A: Maps

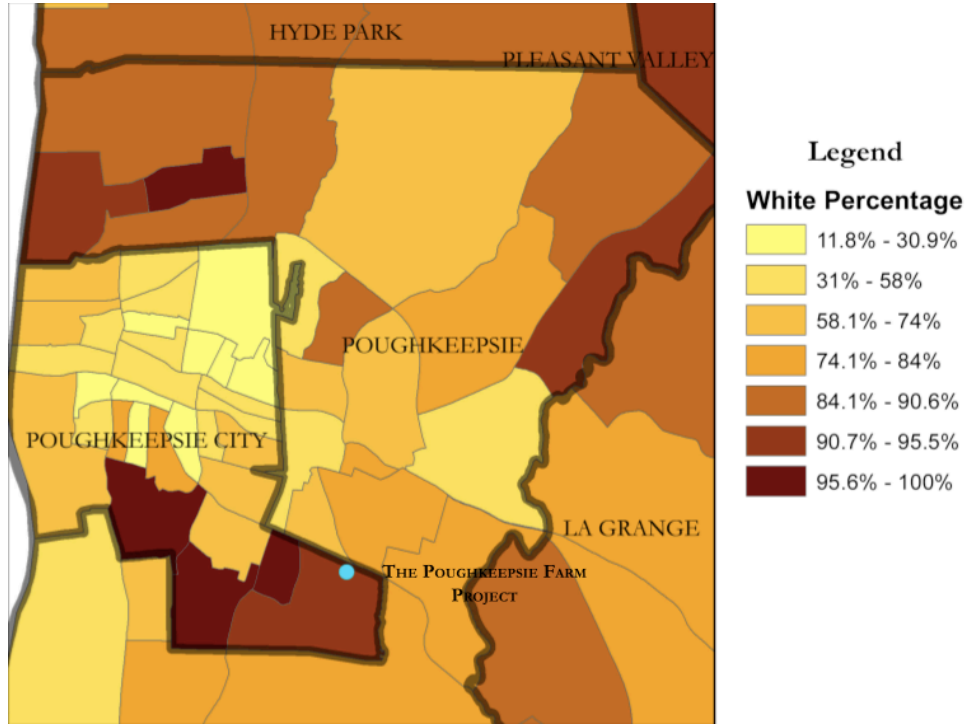


Figure 1 – Percentage of White Population per Census Tract, 2010

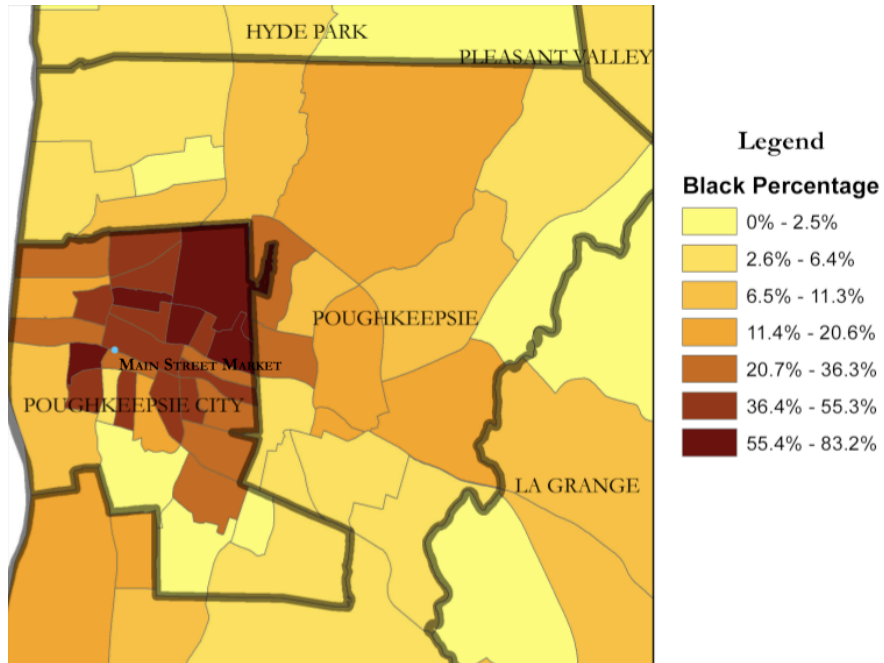


Figure 2 – Percentage of Blacks per Census Tract, 2010

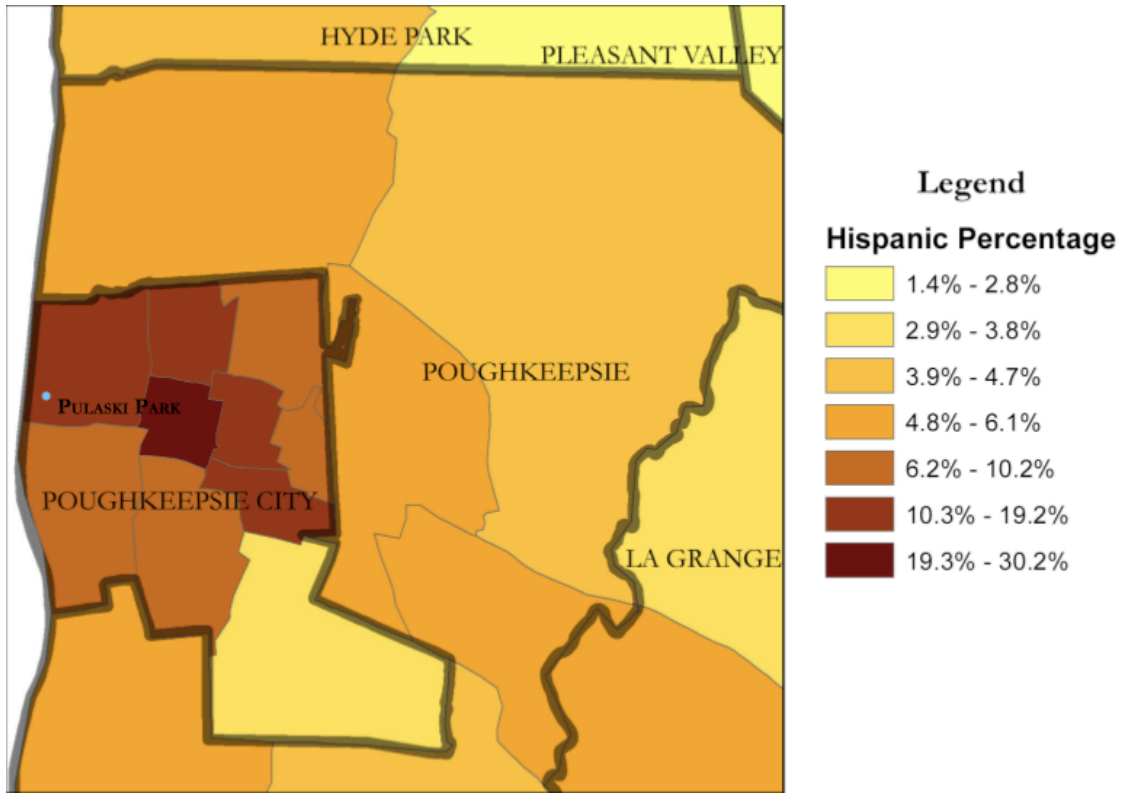


Figure 3 – Percentage of Hispanic and Non-Latinos per Census Tract, 2000

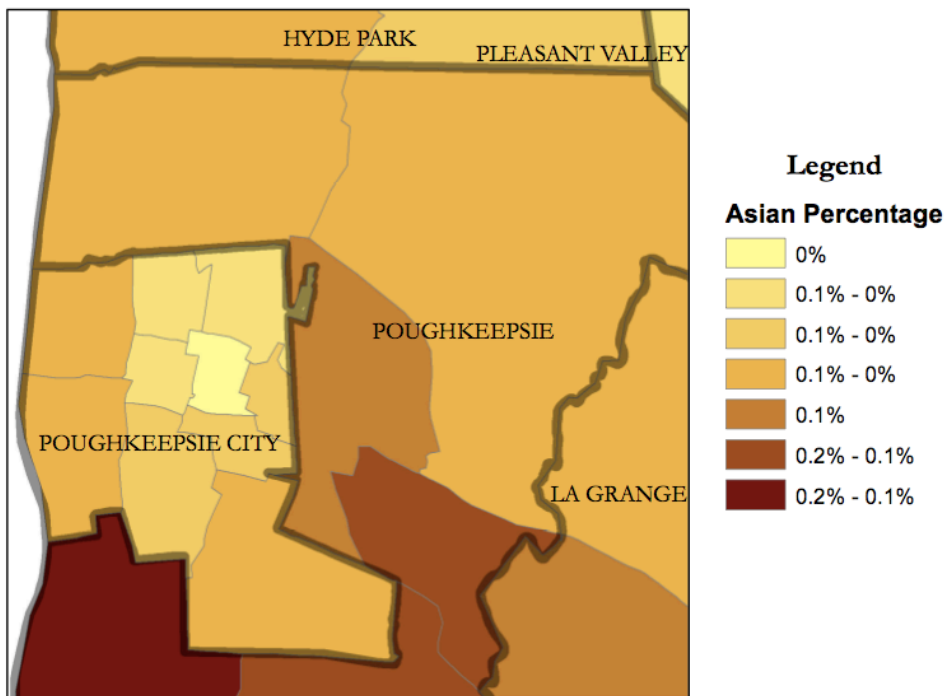


Figure 4 – Percentage of Asian Americans per Census Tract, 2000

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