


Food justice racial projects: fighting racial neoliberalism from the Bay to the Big Apple

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Food justice scholarship utilizing racial formation theory has largely analyzed race and racism within the conventional food system and the food movement, leaving under-examined the political projects of food justice organizations to realize racial equity. This article recovers the dialectical spirit of racial formation theory, that of oppression and resistance, and interjects a distinct focus on activism in the context of racial neoliberalism to investigate two food justice organizations, ‘Planting Justice’ and ‘East New York Farms!’ These organizations reveal through their work some of the heterogeneity of food and urban agriculture related race-making practices, namely antiracist racial projects that challenge racial and economic inequities. We show how these projects intervene in the system of mass incarceration, reclaim land for cultural reproduction, and build racial and class solidarity. We argue that the food justice movement, which is comprised of many racial projects, contributes to setting in motion emancipatory racial formation processes. In closing, the article reflects on the possible range of food justice racial projects, how these antiracist projects might work to transform race relations, and some of the limitations that food justice activists might encounter resisting racial neoliberalism.

Keywords: food justice; food movement; neoliberalism; race; racial formation

Introduction

Throughout the United States the food movement is navigating the complex terrain of racial and ethnic relations and hierarchies that privilege affluent whites over low-income communities and communities of color (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Guthman 2008b; Reynolds 2015; Slocum 2007).¹ Responding to this state of affairs many food justice organizers have mobilized to directly address ethnoracial inequities in the conventional food system as well as the larger food movement (Bradley and Herrera 2015; Cadieux and Slocum 2015). In turn, some scholars have employed the classic work by Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2014) on racial formation theory to analyze these uneven power relations (Garcia 2012; Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011; Norgaard, Reed, and Van Horn 2011) and primarily emphasize the intersections between food and racialization processes, white supremacy and white privilege (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Kwate 2008; Slocum 2007). Yet, missing from much of the scholarship is theorization of the on-the-ground racial performances by food justice organizations and their production of raced discourses, practices, structures and people. As a result, there is little clarity about how food justice organizations engage in racial formation through antiracist racial projects² and how this connects to strategies aimed at altering symbolic representations of, and material power structures related to, race.

This article enriches our understanding of the food justice movement by connecting the concepts of racial

formation and racial projects to the work of the food justice organizations Planting Justice in Oakland, California and East New York Farms! (ENYF!) in Brooklyn, New York. The organizations reflect some of the breadth of how the food justice movement struggles against neoliberal racial projects through antiracist projects that challenge institutional racism and engage in equitable forms of race-making. We use these examples to emphasize that the concepts of racial formation and racial projects apply to more than just spaces, forces or organizations *producing* food inequities. Recovering the dialectical spirit of racial formation theory, we show how these concepts can help clarify how food justice organizations *resist* these inequities, with food justice understood as a racial project striving for an emancipatory racial formation process.

First, we claim that much of the scholarship on the food movement in the United States overemphasizes the economic dimensions of neoliberalization, which turns neoliberalism into a monolithic entity as opposed to a contingent, uneven and contested social process. Such scholarship tends to efface the reality that neoliberalization includes race-based political projects that facilitate the success of many economic policies through the post-civil rights racialized ideologies of neoconservative and new right politics (Camp 2016; Hohle 2015; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). We therefore contend that racial formation theory is imperative to understanding what critical race scholars refer to as ‘racial neoliberalism’ (Goldberg 2009; see also Roberts and Mahtani 2010) as

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well as how food justice activists navigate this historical context and inject antiracist politics into the food movement. Building on these claims, we then offer the case studies of Planting Justice and ENYF! to show how *food justice racial projects* oppose neoliberal racial projects that have stigmatized and criminalized communities of color. They do so through confronting the political and economic ideologies and institutions undergirding racial neoliberalism while engaging in practices that embrace and empower marginalized ethnic and racial identities. Examples include frames that link food inequities to institutional racism and political and economic marginalization, food jobs that support low-income people of color, programs that challenge internalized oppression and celebrate ethnoracial heritage, and struggles for land justice. We conclude by arguing that it is important to investigate the heterogeneity of food justice projects and how these get shaped by, and at the same time resist, racial neoliberalism. Such analysis can illuminate not merely the strengths of the movement but the barriers activists face in working to contest racial oppression. Doing so can more fully account for how activists set in motion racial formation processes that advance racial *and* economic justice as well as the process of working toward this goal.

The dialectics of racial neoliberalism and food justice

One of the defining features that makes the food justice movement historically significant is that it emphasizes the role of race in its critique of, and solutions to, problems in the food system (Allen 2010; Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011). The movement focuses on *where* food justice emerges, *who* articulates food justice and *why* groups demand justice (Cadieux and Slocum 2015; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). In particular, organizing prioritizes equitable distribution of resources and burdens, the rights of indigenous, low-income communities and communities of color to a stake in decision-making and control of their food systems, and the dignity and economic rights of food chain workers (Bradley and Herrera 2015; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck 2011). Racial equity, then, requires empowerment-based social change that directly confronts cultural, political and economic marginalization.

Following in the footsteps of the environmental justice movement that linked racism and civil rights with the environment and brought this to the forefront of the environmental pollution discourse (Bullard 2000; Taylor 2000), food justice brings race and racism to the center of food politics (Alkon 2012; Alkon and Agyeman 2011). Framing inequities in the food system as a form of institutional racism taps into a long history of environmental, economic and social justice organizing and provides a broad-based coalition that can be mobilized to achieve racial justice (Ganz 2009; Heynen 2009; Pulido 1996). For our purposes here, the similarities between these different post-civil rights antiracist projects are significant as far as they reflect the open and processual nature of struggles against

food and environmental inequalities (Allen 2010; Pellow 2000), and represent fronts for resisting racial neoliberalism. Therefore, instead of seeing neoliberalization as strictly an economic process that furthers capital accumulation, we agree that it is also a malleable racial project 'underwritten by the hegemony of colorblindness' (Omi and Winant 2014, 211), the privatization of racism, and at key historical moments, the explicit racism of new right politics. We plot below the importance of these racial and economic connections for understanding the development and practice of food justice projects.

Racial formation and the rise of neoliberal racial projects

In their definitive book, *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant (2014) argue for a dialectical process of race-making that is open, ongoing and contains a variety of racial projects that vary in time and space. They challenge the dichotomy of racial common sense in the United States where race is either illusory or essentialized. Framed as illusory it is an ideological construct that has no material foundation (e.g. 'I do not see black or white, I just see people'). Framed as essential it becomes a fixed, concrete, objective category with universal existence (e.g. 'All blacks are naturally better at sports'). In contrast, Omi and Winant advance the dialectically rich concept of racial formation, where race is an 'unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle' (110). Race has materiality as a part of the social structure, but is historically fluid and contested in the ongoing process of producing racial categories. Therefore, all actors are raced and everyone performs race. What changes historically are the coding practices and material benefits attached to particular racializations. Racial projects, then, organize, make concrete and politically activate these racial formations. This entails the construction of racialized discourses that shape the common sense of individuals and institutions in order to produce particular micro-level interactions as well as larger institutional practices. The symbolic scaffolding is foundational to racial projects because it legitimates the distribution of power, income, wealth and life chances between racialized groups.

Omi and Winant (2014) contend that while one racial project may be hegemonic at a given moment, there is never just one racial project; different racial projects compete to ensure that their narratives and visions of society become common sense. For instance, since the 1960s a civil rights racial project has competed with new right, neoconservative and neoliberal projects. Responding to slavery, Jim Crow and racial segregation, the civil rights racial project claimed that institutional racism operated historically through policies enacted or sanctioned by the state based on the category of race. Civil rights movements pushed for an activist-state to challenge the economic privilege of whites over people of color, with proposals including reparations, affirmative action and the inclusion of

people of color into the New Deal structures of fair housing, employment and education.

Despite this contestation, the neoliberal project predominates due to the reactionary work of earlier new right and neoconservative projects in the 1960s and 1970s (Omi and Winant 2014). These racial projects whipped up racial resentment by using code words and the idea of reverse racism to tap into the class-based anxieties of working class and middle class whites and pit them against people of color. Yet, to avoid some of the most visible racism associated with earlier racist racial projects, the current neoliberal project builds on neoconservative talking points by espousing a colorblind society where people are abstract individuals, not members of racialized social groups. In this way, racial neoliberalism mirrors the uneven and contested economic processes of neoliberalization (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010; Goldberg 2009; Omi and Winant 2014). The discourse of racial neoliberalism suggests that since the state is supposed to treat everyone equally, it cannot act on the category of race because this would favor people of color. Moreover, the state should eschew regulation and let the freedom of the market, individual choice and meritocratic competition shape peoples' social locations. The practice of racial neoliberalism, then, uses the discourse of equal opportunity and personal responsibility to build a white working class and middle class voting bloc that supports a political project to defund the welfare state, enforce austerity on low-income communities, and pursue mass incarceration in order to criminalize the poor (Bonilla-Silva 2013; Feagin 2006; Omi and Winant 2014). Despite the push toward colorblindness, racial neoliberalism has utilized explicitly racist discourse during moments of social and economic crisis in order to reassert the power of the capitalist class over labor, the working class and communities of color (e.g. Rudolph Giuliani in New York City during the 1990s and the 2016 Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump).

Race making, political struggle and the food justice movement

Racial formation theory is beneficial here because it helps to shift the analysis of food politics away from an over-emphasis on neoliberalization as a strictly *economic* process. For much of the past decade the dominant academic discourse frames neoliberalism, corporations and class-based power as the central obstacle or problem (Alkon and Mares 2012; Giménez and Shattuck 2011; Guthman 2008a). Thinking dialectically, this would then require a counter-hegemonic force capable of wresting economic control of, or creating alternatives to, the food system. The implicit bias of much literature on neoliberalization is that one's class or occupational position and consumer status is the locus of action from which to fight most effectively for change. However, economic conditions alone cannot explain urban food inequities, which relate directly to white supremacy, the white backlash against the

Civil Rights and Black Power movements, and the rise of new right and neoconservative policies targeting people of color (Billings and Cabbil 2011; Omi and Winant 2014; Sbicca 2016).³ Similarly, economics alone cannot explain the reliance on immigrant farm workers, a process intimately bound to the racialization of groups born outside the United States (Harrison 2014; Holmes 2013). In brief, racial formation theory offers tools to unpack neoliberalization as a variegated economic and *racial* project in order to explain the heterogeneity of conditions that produce food justice struggles.

In the first effort to use racial formation theory in relation to food justice, Alkon and Agyeman (2011) edited a volume that underscores how the food system is a racial project that produces racialized subjectivities and hierarchies, consolidates white privilege and oppresses communities of color (e.g. Minkoff-Zern et al. 2011; Norgaard, Reed, and Van Horn 2011). The volume also reveals, albeit not through racial formation theory, the dialectical tensions between racist and anti-racist projects in the food system with some examples of how food justice organizations contest institutional racism (McCutcheon 2011; Morales 2011). So, while there are contributions that discuss the ways in which neoliberalization is racialized, say in the unfolding of grocery development patterns (McClintock 2011; see also Anguelovski 2015), scholars need to draw out and explain more of these connections and their explicit forms of race-based contestation.

One of our theoretical interventions is that by referring to food justice projects, we elevate the role of political struggle in the analysis of a racialized food system. Many food justice organizations are combating and/or are enmeshed in neoliberal projects. Scholars therefore need to pay attention to how food justice projects navigate racist projects that rely on the triplicate ideologies of colorblindness, implicit/explicit racism and market-based fundamentalism. As we have argued elsewhere, many food justice activists engage in secessionist food politics that preference creating alternatives to the conventional food system (Myers and Sbicca 2015), a kind of politics that often reinforces neoliberal subjectivities (Alkon and Mares 2012; Guthman 2008a; Mares and Alkon 2011; Pudup 2008). At the same time, the colorblindness inherent to neoliberal projects permeates parts of the food movement, in turn depoliticizing activist interventions (Guthman 2008b). Our call to focus on food justice projects helps to investigate how race becomes a site for *confrontational* politics that *challenge* how the state demeans and dehumanizes people of color (e.g. mass incarceration, mass unemployment, defunded educational systems and gentrification-based redevelopment projects). Therefore, opening up the analysis of food justice to include the intersecting power relations of race and class breaks down false binaries and frees up space to theorize the political contestation of neoliberalization dialectically.

Concentrating on these intersections reinforces that the food justice movement is not monolithic but, in fact, consists of a range of racial projects. Some are more

exclusive, in that they are run by and meant for the political goals and cultural foodways of communities of color. For instance, food justice projects rooted in black nationalism emphasize black self-determination and self-respect through a racial politics of segregation that shuns interracial cooperation (McCutcheon, 2011). Others, such as the former South Central Farm in Los Angeles, enable Latino/as and indigenous diasporic communities from Mexico and Central America to raise culturally relevant plant species, supplement the family food budget and foster community (Mares and Peña 2010). Instead of being maligned as racialized subjects that do not 'succeed' under neoliberal logics of economic competition, these examples show how ethnoracial identities are the site around which to make race in a way that resists racial hierarchies *and* therefore pressures to conform to market ideals of *homo economicus*.

Food justice projects may also work across racial, ethnic and national boundaries, while elevating the significance of racial justice. In a set of 24 commentaries on race and ethnicity in the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems and Community Development* (2015), many authors, both academics and activists, reveal the range of these projects. Some examples that push against the color-blindness of neoliberal projects include campaigns to increase civic participation and strengthen community assets in order to overcome racist histories related to farming and land access (Sweeney et al. 2015). Others focus on transforming everyday practices by using anti-oppression methods that break down racial hierarchies and attend to the intersecting class dimensions of power (Garzo Montalvo 2015). Still others center on moving beyond inclusion to work on anti-colonial and indigenous rights campaigns that focus on recovering land and fostering culturally rooted knowledge systems (Kepkiewicz et al. 2015; Vernon 2015). Each of these initiatives represents part of the polyculture of antiracist projects in the food justice movement. They challenge whitened cultural histories with strategies that move beyond celebrating ethnoracial diversity by highlighting and contesting the pursuit of capital accumulation through racial and ethnic exploitation.

Methods

Our data comes from two different but related projects investigating the racial and class relations of food justice organizations. While Oakland and New York City are on different sides of the country with different histories, they share the attributes of having large working class populations, high levels of racial and ethnic diversity, racialized histories of institutional neglect and mass incarceration, strong left social movements, and very active, creative and successful food justice movements. They are also places with vibrant traditions of racial justice organizing, which inform how Planting Justice and ENYF! engage in their respective food justice projects.

The first author's data on Planting Justice comes from ethnography, in-depth semi-structured interviews and archival sources. In addition to informal observation of the organization as a member of the board for 3 years from 2010–2013, he conducted fieldwork for two and a half months, 20–40 hours a week, as a participant in daily activities such as edible landscape installations, gardening, canvassing and administrative duties. He carried out 35 interviews in total, 25 while doing fieldwork in 2012 and 10 more in 2015. These interviews included staff, board members, community partners and formerly incarcerated people, some of whom completed reentry programs co-sponsored by Planting Justice.⁴ Last, he collected and analyzed archival sources, including internal documents related to organizational operations, journalistic accounts and social media, as well as government and think tank reports to triangulate these other sources.

The second author's data on ENYF! emerged from ethnography, in-depth semi-structured interviews and archival materials. From May to November in 2011 and 2012, he spent 24–40 hours a week as a volunteer at ENYF! and a community gardener at Hands and Heart Garden in East New York, which is affiliated with ENYF!. He assisted ENYF! staff, youth and community gardeners in food production, participated in monthly meetings for the organization as well as the garden, served as a facilitator for garden meetings, and attended monthly skill-based workshops and town hall meetings. Alongside of field notes, he conducted 10 interviews, lasting between one to four hours, with staff and community gardeners, and conducted follow-up visits to both ENYF! and Hands and Heart Garden several times a year in 2013, 2014 and 2016. He also collected archival materials including internal documents, reports from civil society organizations, and newspapers.

These cases help us to examine our two main analytical concepts: food justice racial projects and racial neoliberalism. Having two cases enriches our theoretical intervention and helps illustrate the variability of anti-racist food justice projects. It also provides a more well-rounded understanding of the dialectical struggle between racial neoliberalism and food justice, and how two organizations in distinct social conditions at similar points in time create unique responses to race-based inequities. We now turn to a discussion and analysis of food justice interventions into the racial neoliberalism of mass incarceration (Planting Justice) and urban land access (ENYF!).

Overcoming incarceration: Planting Justice's prisoner reentry work and the reimagination of food justice in Oakland

Oakland is majority people of color, and blacks and Latino/as fare worse than their white counterparts in nearly every category of social and economic well-being (Schell 2013). Of most significance for this case study is how neoliberal projects have relied on ideological and material constructions of race that produce disproportionately high

arrest and imprisonment rates for blacks and Latino/as (e.g. framing black male youth as prone to violence and readymade criminals) (Alexander 2012; BondGraham and Winston 2015). These negative framings are central to a neoliberal project that has disinvested in Oakland's black and Latino/a communities while simultaneously expanding the system of mass incarceration under the banner of a colorblind quest for law and order, which on the streets means local law enforcement harass, intimidate and criminalize residents (Rhomborg 2004; Rios 2011).⁵ Speaking to this complicated terrain, longtime Oakland resident, professor and political activist, Angela Davis (2012) reasons:

[T]he process of criminalization imputes responsibility to the individuals who are its casualties, thus reproducing the very conditions that produce racist patterns in incarceration and its seemingly infinite capacity to expand. The misreading of these racist patterns replicates and reinforces the privatization that is at the core of neoliberalism, whereby social activity is individualized and the enormous profits generated by the punishment industry are legitimized (171).

One of the key objectives, then, of Planting Justice's antiracist project is to challenge the colorblind language that obfuscates the carceral state and engage in a kind of race-making that historicizes racist outcomes and rehumanizes racialized subjects. Like much of Oakland's food justice movement, Planting Justice draws on the antiracist projects of the Black Power and environmental justice movements to resist the trifecta of neoconservative, new right and neoliberal projects (Alkon 2012; Sbicca 2012). Central to this work is utilizing what one of their organizers refers to as 'counter-narratives of history [to] intervene upon the systemic and structural violence dominating human relations' in order to 'produce spaces for resistance' (Zandi 2009). For example, two organizers with Planting Justice wrote an article linking violence in the food system due to slavery and colonialism with the 'displacement from ancestral lands and foodways, resulting in hunger and malnutrition on one hand, and disease and overconsumption on the other' (Garzo Montalvo and Zandi 2011). As we develop more below, this kind of analysis dovetails with the belief that mass incarceration is a contemporary instantiation of violence waged by the state to regulate communities of color, only this time as part of a neoliberal project that relies on criminalization and racialization to 'solve' the problem of poverty (Sbicca 2016; Wacquant 2009). Public statements by the organization and its staff show that they operationalize intervening in mass incarceration by 'work[ing] to address the structural inequalities inherent within the production, distribution, and consumption of industrial foods' by 'grow[ing] food, grow[ing] jobs, [and] grow[ing] community' (Planting Justice, n.d). This also entails reclaiming 'the spaces of the garden, the farm, the kitchen, and ultimately, the body and the land' (Garzo Montalvo and Zandi 2011). In brief, these practices resist colorblind politics by

framing racism as structural, yet acknowledging how racism is embedded *and* contested in everyday cultural practices.

Before starting Planting Justice, the two cofounders participated in social justice movements, such as the anti-war movement, which sensitized them to the connections between violence, capitalism and the racialization of the 'other' that normalized the war on terror. Yet, they wanted to take some of the broader lessons from these movements, such as how to mobilize people to demand change, and apply them to their local context to meet immediate community needs. A fortuitous connection in 2009 with the Insight Garden Program at San Quentin State Prison funneled the cofounders' nonviolent and antiracist commitments into supporting formerly incarcerated people, mainly black men, reenter their communities. Seeing the violence of racial and class inequalities in Oakland, as well as the power of food to mobilize for change, they devised an antiracist food justice project that leverages the tools of urban agriculture. The Insight Garden Program helps men inside prison address some of the historical trauma of incarceration through healing circles and horticultural therapy. Once they leave, Planting Justice furthers this process with employment in urban agriculture, youth education and community organizing. Yet, unlike research that suggests food justice inspired urban agriculture mainly embodies the economic unevenness and contradictions of neoliberalization (McClintock 2014), we show how race-making practices are deeply entangled in this process.

From the initial founding of Planting Justice, organizers have committed to practices that support working cooperatively across social boundaries in order to carry out their programs in a way that challenges mass incarceration at the point of reentry and fosters economic and racial equity. With a racially and economically diverse staff of 37 people, programs that consist of and work with many formerly incarcerated black men,⁶ and awareness of the internal differences in privilege and opportunity among staff doing this work, Planting Justice engages in anti-oppression practices, such as their quarterly all-staff Workplace Justice Series. In 2015, the series focused on racism, police violence and the abolition of the prison industrial complex, which organizers used to deepen a collective commitment to antiracist practices that disassociate stereotypical connections between black phenotype and formerly incarcerated performativity (Planting Justice 2015a; 2015b). For example, empowerment strategies with formerly incarcerated black men who build edible landscapes and make kale smoothies in majority people of color high-schools challenge racial expectations with positive portrayals that aim to disrupt the violence committed upon black bodies in the criminal justice system and the food system. Planting Justice, therefore, resists racial neoliberalism by embedding food justice within race-making processes that contest existing ideological framings with concrete material practices. There is, as Gabriel, a Latino former staff and board member asserts, 'radical imagination work' that goes into this food justice project that

‘creates an opportunity to practice on a daily basis different ways of being, different ways of knowing, and thinking’.

Beyond transforming the symbolic framing of formerly incarcerated black men, Planting Justice also sees job creation as a key race-making practice to defy the discursive foundations that justify their economic marginalization. Given the historical position of blacks as a reserve army of labor, Planting Justice creates living wage food jobs that start at \$17.50 an hour with comprehensive health, vision and dental insurance. As the staff is quick to articulate, instead of creating economic opportunity for former ‘convicts’, ‘felons’ or ‘inmates’, they employ the term ‘formerly incarcerated people’ or ‘prisoners’ to historicize and politicize how the state exerts power over people. The term denotes a system of mass ‘incarceration’ (e.g. policing practices, courts, prisons) that targets disproportionately low-income communities of color and thereby locates crime in contingent power relations rather than human nature. As an empowering response, depending on the skills and desires of staff, formerly incarcerated people build edible landscapes for homeowners and grassroots organizations, farm a five-acre orchard and two-acre nursery, canvass the public for financial support and policy reform, and educate people on culinary arts and food justice.⁷ Good food jobs, then, become an important empowerment tool to develop one’s voice as an advocate for criminalized people of color. Bilal Coleman, a resilient black man who spent 20 years in prison, shared his reentry process in an autobiographical YouTube series called ‘The Freedom Chronicles.’ On his 200th day of freedom, he expressed gratitude for his position as a full-time staff member of the Education Team working with criminalized youth of color in Oakland: ‘I had no clue, or no idea that I would be working with youth. Or would even have the voice that I do have to make to where the youth would actually listen and take to my story and compare that within the things that they are going through in their lives’ (Planting Justice 2016). Such expressions speak to the ripple effects that good food jobs have as a race-making practice that rehumanizes formerly incarcerated people and creates the opportunity to model antiracist resistance to mass incarceration.

Living wage food jobs are also central to combating the extremely high 65% recidivism rate in California, which exists because of the multitude of socioeconomic barriers facing formerly incarcerated people (Petersilia 2008). A significant barrier is the inability to find gainful employment that pays enough to cover rent, food and utilities in an already racially stratified economy, which often pushes people to engage in practices that lead to their incarceration in the first place. For Planting Justice, living wage food jobs are a pillar of their food justice project:

In an economy that systematically devalues, under-employs and underpays formerly incarcerated people, our \$17.50/hour starting wage is a political statement that the

labor of former prisoners is valuable and that their success and well-being is a worthy investment (Dean 2016).

A testament to the organization’s effectiveness is that none of the 21 formerly incarcerated staff has recidivated. Speaking to the value of these food jobs, a middle-aged black reentry hire named David shared in an interview, ‘When you get somebody employment...it gives a person that one little kick-start that they really, really, really need...When I got out, I had a lot of problems, but a job was able to get rid of a lot of ‘em, so for that I will always be grateful.’

Planting Justice is not just modeling living wage reentry strategies though; they are fighting for their expansion.⁸ One of their strategies for this is the canvassing program, which since 2012 has reached over 51,000 people. This intervenes in neoliberal racial formation processes by fostering public attention to the problem of mass incarceration that then compels the state to take notice and change how they deal with the reentry process. In 2015, the cover of the yearly East Bay Express Sustainable Living issue featured two formerly incarcerated men and a former Mandela High School student working at Planting Justice’s farm in El Sobrante. This visibility coincided with public funding by the state of California for a two-year collaborative reentry project led by Planting Justice that links together food and restorative justice (Sbicca 2016). Also by publically advocating alongside a host of economic, racial and restorative justice organizations, Planting Justice has been part of successful grassroots campaigns to shift county resources more toward prisoner reentry and less to incarceration.

In all, Planting Justice as a food justice project navigates and contests the racial neoliberalism of mass incarceration. They do so with discursive and interpersonal interventions into the violence and oppression driving the criminalization and economic marginalization of people of color. At the same time, the organization’s programs empower individuals and build public support for racial justice in the criminal justice system and economic justice for formerly incarcerated people.

Countering disinvestment through urban agriculture: East New York Farms!’ pursuit of food justice, culinary justice and land justice

East New York is located in the easternmost section of North-Central Brooklyn. Home to almost 183,000 people in 2010, the community is 51% black, 39% Latino/a and 2% white with a large number of Caribbean residents and a smaller number of South Americans, West Africans, Indians and Bangladeshi (NYCDCP 2012). It is also a low-income community struggling with poverty, unemployment and crime due to a history of redlining,⁹ urban renewal, planned shrinkage and mass incarceration imposed by neoliberal, neoconservative and new right projects (Thabit 2005). One of these moments was in the 1970s and 1980s when City Hall actively sought to

displace East New Yorkers by withdrawing municipal services from the community and bulldozing entire blocks of homes into rubble (Thabit 2005). Residents did not stand pat though; they organized together and turned these vacant lots into community gardens. The guerilla gardening was so extensive that East New York had the most community gardens of any community in New York City, over 65 gardens in all. These gardens became hubs of food production and an important resource for access to fresh produce in a community flush with fast food restaurants and bodegas and only a few grocery stores full of expired, moldy and spoiled foods (Thabit 2005).

Yet, for all this sweat equity to revitalize their community, a neoliberal City Hall headed by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani continued to try and displace East New Yorkers in the 1990s, this time through mass incarceration and attempts to sell off city-owned lots to the highest bidder (Thabit 2005). Once again, residents fought back and their organizing gave birth to the food justice organization ENYF!, which emerged in 1998 after a three year participatory planning project.¹⁰ Its community driven mission was to link assets (gardeners, gardens and youth) with needs (fresh produce, land tenure and food jobs) in order to build a community gardening and farming network in East New York that could combat a legacy of disinvestment. Today, ENYF! operates a farmers market and farm stand, a youth program, several urban farms, and works with over 30 food-producing community gardens.¹¹ They root their food politics in a community organizing strategy to build interracial class-based alliances that challenge the destabilizing effects of racial segregation through various practices, including embeddedness within an interracial community center, celebration of ethnoracial identities at their farmers' market, and cultural resistance through struggles for land access.

What grounds ENYF! as an antiracist food justice project is that it is run out of United Community Centers (UCC), a community center with a long history of social justice organizing.¹² UCC emerged in East New York during the 1950s to provide programs, activities and services to white and Jewish youth living in newly created public housing. By the 1960s, UCC had been kicked out of public housing for its politics and set up shop in a stand-alone community center, where it still resides. During this time, UCC continued to focus on youth programs, specifically its interracial summer camp, but also organized block associations, fought for integrated public education, and waged campaigns against the Vietnam War and planned shrinkage. This interracial politics rejects the divide and conquer strategies of new right and neoconservative projects, framing integration as 'the recognition of the richness of difference; of the right of different people, with different histories and experience, to influence and change one another during the common struggle to end oppression and war, racism and exploitation (Eisenberg 1999, 258).'

ENYF! has maintained UCC's interracial class conscious politics. In the eyes of David Vigil, ENYF! Project Director:

We see gardens as a great forum for bringing people together from a lot of different backgrounds. The gardens and the markets have been a great tool for working across difference in a way you don't see very often in New York City. We're seeing...people working together, sharing food traditions, exchanging knowledge and seeds and labor (Pantuso 2014).

In particular, UCC's memory of how neoliberals, neoconservatives and the new right used divide and conquer strategies from the 1950s through today to pit the working class along racial lines has been passed on to ENYF! and shaped how they utilize food. Sarita Daftary-Steel, former ENYF! Project Director, emphasizes how these links are made visible in their youth internship program:

We believe it's important for youth to understand that urban agriculture in East New York rose out of a painful history of racial discrimination, disinvestment, and urban decline. With this historical background they can better understand the significance of gardens as a source of pride, and the systemic forces that created segregated, impoverished neighborhoods like East New York (Daftary-Steel 2015).

David Vigil expands on Sarita's points:

The goal is that they learn more about themselves, their community, and the world at large through a lens of food and food justice. We look at East New York and ask, why are there so many vacant lots? Why are there all these diet-related diseases? Why are these waves of immigration coming from the global south? We can use food as a great medium to discuss those things (Pantuso 2014).

One of the places to do such work is through tours of their youth farm, where visitors learn how ENYF! emerged out of a history of institutional racism and is working toward racial equity in the food system. Consequently, at ENYF!, food is the bridge to bring together different people around the shared goal of building community and a just food system, which means linking institutional racism to class inequities and building class-based power as a pathway to exercising ethnoracial identities and meanings.

This racial project is seen at the ENYF! farmers market, where local food is merged with interracial empowerment and culinary justice through celebrating black and Caribbean foodways. ENYF! both specializes in these groups' staples – bitter melon, hot peppers, collard greens, bush beans, long beans, malabar spinach, okra and callaloo – and emphasizes their cultural importance to the community through festivals where people learn about the histories of these plants, how to grow and prepare them, and sample and buy them. Most importantly, these festivals locate black and Caribbean culinary traditions within their African, Asian and Latin intercultural roots, showcasing the common bonds that can be forged across difference and through food. ENYF! reaffirms this belief

through potlucks and anti-oppression workshops. In the former activity, people bring a cultural dish that is personally meaningful and share this food and its story with others. In the latter, people engage in interactive skits to address internalized and interpersonal oppression, discrimination and ageism, amongst other inequities. The purpose of both is to tell stories, share knowledge and build relations by working together across and through difference in order to confront racial neoliberalism at the cultural level through new race-making practices.

A directly related aspect of ENYF!' food justice project is their struggle for the community's right to land. East New York has a large immigrant population, many of whom grew up on farms, come from farming families that are only a generation or two removed from the land, or have identities rooted in food cultivation. Many want to grow their own food, but they have faced significant obstacles in obtaining access to and control over land because City Hall devalues their cultural claims to the land in favor of growth oriented economic redevelopment. Access to even a small plot of land is valuable as it enables residents to rebuild the feeling of home, the belonging to a community, and the ties that bind, all of which are prerequisites to an engaged civic life and the formation of political power. For Janelle Nicol, former ENYF! Market Manager, who is Jamaican and Dominican, working with ENYF! was invaluable:

[It] keeps me close to my own roots, because of the food that we grow and the conversations that come out based on the food...I was in Florida for a while and came back to Brooklyn completely Americanized. No salt and no peppa. I came back to East New York and started rediscovering things, reconnecting...It's also important for the people in the community that lived in Jamaica and felt the same way, bland, since they didn't have anywhere to connect, and then they come here and it feels like they're home.

ENYF! was born, in part, to help residents legitimate their claims to land, as well as remove vacant lots from the market and place them into land trusts. By working with the Greenthumb program of the NYC Parks Department it has been extremely successful in realizing these aspirations (Daftary-Steel and Gervais 2014). More importantly though, at its roots, ENYF!' land acquisition efforts enable residents to resist a forced assimilation into whiteness, the American diet and the corporate commodity foods of the conventional food system, which residents refer to as 'second hand foods' that 'look nice but don't taste good' and 'are designed to get you sick and have you buy pills'. This struggle is important since the neoliberal project of the middle- and upper-class in New York City has long sought to deny immigrants access to land and criminalize their food production practices under the claim that they are impediments to development, threats to the propertied class and need to be integrated into Anglophone culture (McNuer 2014; Rosenzweig and Blackmar 1998). ENYF!' land justice struggles resist these practices by securing for

residents a space where they can reaffirm ties to the land, grow their own food and reproduce cultural difference. Additionally, in contesting the displacement politics of racial neoliberalism, community gardening in East New York has become a thorn in the side of a growth-oriented City Hall. Not only has such mobilization asserted that communities of color have a right to the city, but it has also raised larger questions about community-led development, affordable housing and gentrification in East New York. This is important since Mayor Bill De Blasio has made the community ground zero in his 'affordable housing' initiative through the rezoning of the Broadway Junction transit hub where the Long Island Railroad and A, C, J, Z and L subway lines intersect. ENYF! has been part of community efforts contesting this rezoning process as undemocratic and potentially harmful to the community's low-income residents, a political power that emerged, in part, through food-based community organizing. Central for ENYF! to this organizing is an attempt to shift the dominant discourse of City Hall away from telling low-income communities they have to choose between affordable housing and community gardens toward forcing City Hall to construct a development model that works for these communities by bringing together affordable housing and urban agriculture, a solution that would address race-based and class-based inequities.

In all, ENYF! is more than just a local food organization and sees food as more than a single-issue campaign, leveraging it into an antiracist project. The history of racial neoliberalism and contentious social justice organizing links together the youth program, the farmers market and the community gardens into a distinct food justice project. This sociohistorical location has infused ENYF! with the pursuit of food justice, culinary justice and land justice in order to oppose segregation, assimilation to whiteness and racial hierarchies, as well as the denial of voice in and control over the development of their community.

Conclusion: the power and potential of food justice racial projects

Throughout this article, we have highlighted the dialectical process of racial formation. Neoliberal projects *and* food justice projects are both race-making forces in the food system. This intervention is important given that the scholarly focus has tended to look at how food activism reproduces neoliberalism and colorblind racial projects without an appreciation of antiracist projects that resist both colorblindness as well as overt systemic racism. Consequently, we presented the cases of Planting Justice and ENYF! to demonstrate how organizations advance food justice racial projects that resist racial neoliberalism. These organizations link urban agriculture to strategies that address the traumas of incarceration and migration, reclaim food production and fight for land access in order to create community across racial boundaries, and build class-conscious racial solidarity through anti-oppression trainings and

celebrations of distinct cultural foodways. Through these projects food justice activists reshape racial identities, meanings and structures that both subvert and challenge racist practices that legitimate and reproduce economic inequities.

In the spirit of theorizing the particular dialectical relations between competing racial projects, our cases, although illustrative of the initial successes of the urban food justice movement, also raise questions about temporal, spatial and scalar limits. Planting Justice unites racial and economic justice with living wage food jobs for formerly incarcerated people and provides an alternative model for organizing economic production compared to low-wage neoliberalism. Yet, these practices alone cannot transform the larger structures producing racialized job and housing markets for formerly incarcerated people. Recognizing this barrier is why Planting Justice has built alliances with other organizations in order to push the state to end racial profiling practices, fund rehabilitation instead of incarceration and eliminate the policies that stigmatize formerly incarcerated people and undermine their economic chances. The same scalar limits have pushed ENYF! toward alliance building with other food justice, urban agriculture and economic justice organizations in order to secure the right to land as well as contest and transform redevelopment projects and priorities in low-income communities. It is only through such mobilization that ENYF! has a voice in what happens to city-owned vacant lots, can halt or slow down local gentrification, and has successfully saved existing community gardens from destruction. Therefore, while food justice projects may operate successfully at an organizational level, it appears that larger mobilizations are necessary to expand these wins in the long-term and shift municipal, state and federal policies around pressing economic and racial justice issues.

Moreover, given the food movement's tendency toward local activism and secessionist politics, as well as its reliance on philanthropic funding, there appear to be internal as well as external limits to a vibrant confrontational politics. These limits become more salient as nonprofit funding from public and private channels has become harder to obtain since the Great Recession.¹³ In light of conditions in the political environment indicating the resilience of forces committed to racial and economic stratification, this offers a moment for critical reflection. Racially reactionary forces such as the Tea Party and Donald Trump's presidential campaign underscore the continuing power of new right politics. Additionally, there is the blunt fact that urban neoliberalization is premised on gentrification and mass incarceration. Yet, in keeping with a dialectical analysis of oppression and resistance, burgeoning social justice movements are contesting these central strategies of racial neoliberalism. The Black Lives Matter movement confronts mass incarceration and police abuse and brutality, the Right to the City movement works to stop gentrification and segregation, and the Fight for \$15

movement challenges poverty level wages. Recognizing this resistance and theorizing its potential, as well as limits, is likely generative of meaningful insights because the food justice movement increasingly finds itself at the dialectical intersection of these competing racial projects.¹⁴

While this article is an initial foray into documenting and theorizing food justice projects, there is a need to expand the analysis and investigate the capacity of other food justice projects to build counter hegemonic forms of power that transform race relations and institutional priorities. Answering this question requires that scholars continue to theorize and identify how the food system, along with intersecting social systems, are racial projects because this helps to isolate the drivers of racial stratification. As we have argued, neoliberalization *targets* race, but there are clear class implications in how white economic elites have utilized neoconservatism and new right politics to further their political projects. For instance, politicians racialize the rhetoric of personal responsibility to legitimate the dismantling of social supports for and subsequent criminalization of low-income communities of color. Politicians have also justified the displacement and gentrification of low-income communities of color in the name of redevelopment and economic growth. Equally as important is the need to determine how and to what degree food justice projects work to bend the arc of racial formation processes toward racial equity and liberation. In the contemporary moment, to do so requires greater attention to how food justice projects challenge or reproduce the kind of racial neoliberal processes we have endeavored to articulate. Tracing these and other contexts within which the dialectic of oppression and resistance plays itself out offers an analytically robust, yet malleable foundation to evaluate the emancipatory capacity of food justice racial projects.

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Notes

1. Our ethnoracial terminologies are limited to the US context and align with how scholars use them in food justice and critical race literatures.
2. When referring to specific racial projects after their first use (e.g. antiracist racial project), we drop the 'racial' from subsequent uses in order to simplify reading.

3. Examples include redlining, urban renewal, benign neglect, planned shrinkage, white flight, segregation and mass incarceration.
4. All names have been changed unless quote comes from a public source.
5. The dialectical process of political struggle in Oakland between racist and antiracist projects from World War II to the present follows the broader pattern identified in our discussion of racial formation theory (Self 2003).
6. As of August 2016, 21 of the staff were formerly incarcerated, most of whom are black. For more details on the staff see, <http://www.plantingjustice.org/about-us/staff/> and http://www.eastbaytimes.com/breaking-news/ci_30206784/urban-farm-planet-justice-adds-east-oakland-site. Roughly 30% of the staff is white and roughly 30% has a college degree. The rest of the staff is black and Latino/a, and most of the staff have only a high-school diploma or some college.
7. For details on programming, see 'Programs' (Transform Your Yard, Food Justice Education, Grassroots Canvass, 5 Acre Farm) at <http://www.plantingjustice.org/>.
8. For some public reporting on this see Bolsinger (2014) and Burke (2015).
9. Redlining was a discriminatory practice used between the 1930s and late 1960s by white lenders who refused to give loans or insurance to people of color by deeming where they lived poor and therefore a financial risk.
10. For ENYF! history see Daftary-Steel and Gervais (2014).
11. ENYF! privileges hiring from the community, promotes from within and has been made up of staff who live in Eastern Brooklyn and identify as white, Indian, Latina/o, African American, Caribbean and black. Based on its birth from a community-based planning project and organizational practices that privilege community voice and decision-making power in the organization, it continues to respond to what the community wants ENYF! to be.
12. For UCC's history, see Eisenberg (1999).
13. Although the Great Recession is generally understood to have lasted in the United States between 2008 and mid-2009, the effects lingered until 2015, with many places, particularly low-income people and people of color in those places, experiencing the recession years longer than the 'official' end announced by economists and the United States government.
14. A similar point was made by Pellow (2016) who recognized in his suggestions for a critical environmental justice studies the significance of intersections between environmental justice movements and the Black Lives Matter movement. There are clear parallels with how we have discussed food justice projects in this article.

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