

**Eastside Histories: Connecting Urban Food Sovereignty to Environmental Racism and City
Planning in Austin, Texas**



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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Drawing from the disciplines of geography, sustainability studies, and environmental history, this thesis connects economic development and environmental racism to food sovereignty in Austin, Texas. Communities are built at the grocer, the church potluck, the corner ice cream shop, and the dining room table. Food spaces connect and define us in intimate ways. The food sovereignty movement recognizes that each of us has the right to articulate how the systems which connect these spaces function. We have the right to determine how our food is produced, distributed, and consumed not only because our relationship to food is personal and deeply human but because constituent control of food systems actually makes these networks more resilient. When each of us are empowered to control our own food system, ecological and social justice are foregrounded and food functions as a vessel for social fulfillment and support.

Control over how food is produced and consumed in East Austin is under ongoing negotiation. It has been for a long time. I argue that city economic development initiatives, undergirded by logics of racial capitalism, continue to disrupt community food sovereignty and that city planners need to understand this relationship in order to build a more equitable and inclusive city in the future. Andrew M. Busch¹ and Elliot Tretter² argue that during the 20th century policies supporting the growth of Austin's knowledge economy actively disenfranchised and displaced people of color, who lived primarily on the Eastside. Expanded upon later, this thesis draws significantly from the work of scholars like Laura Puldio and Ashante Reese who

¹ Busch, Andrew M. *City in a Garden: Environmental Transformations and Racial Justice in Twentieth-century Austin, Texas*. UNC Press Books, 2017.

² Tretter, E. (2016). *Shadows of a sunbelt city: The environment, racism, and the knowledge economy in Austin*. pp. 13. University of Georgia Press.

have argued that capitalism benefits from the construction and valuation of racial differences and the exploitation of people of color- this dynamic makes capitalism inherently racial. In the context of Austin, development has benefited Austin's highly-educated and primarily white knowledge economy workers while doing little to improve education and economic opportunities or quality of life for people of color living on the Eastside. I expand upon this contextualization of racial capitalism in Austin by arguing that economic development initiatives also encouraged the corporatization of food retail, the displacement of restaurants and grocers owned by Black and Hispanic Eastsiders, and the disproportionate disempowerment of food sovereignty on the Eastside.

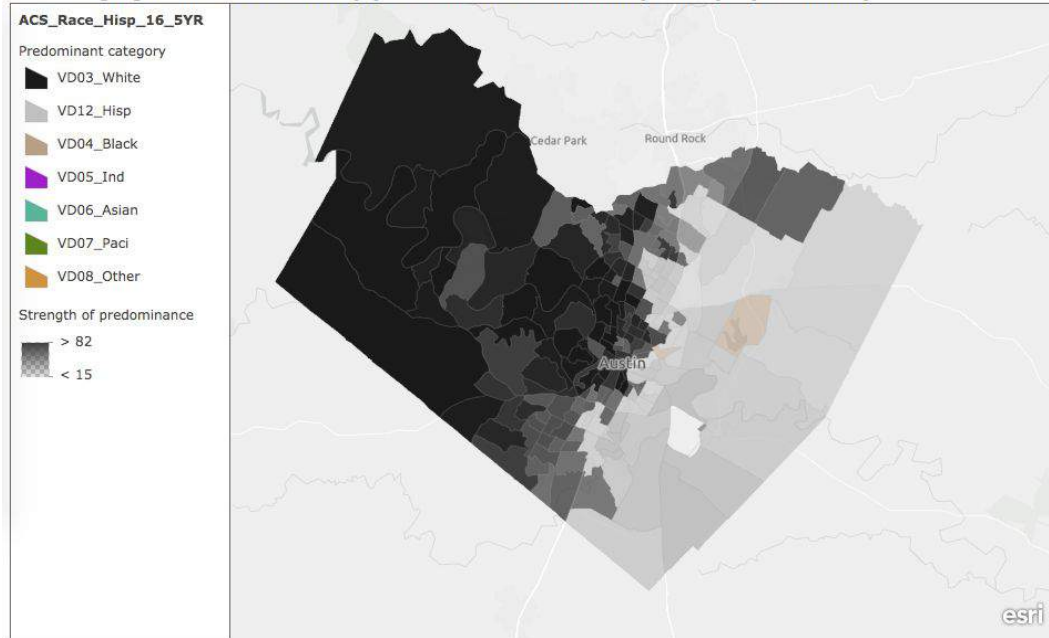
During the last one hundred years the City of Austin has developed from a town of just over 30,000 people³ to a major global city; today Austin is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States.⁴ A recent study also found that Austin is also one of the most racially and economically segregated cities in the U.S.⁵ The maps below display the racial and economic demographics of Austin in 2016. White and middle-to-upper class Austinites typically live west of highway IH-35, while Hispanic and middle-to-lower class Austinites typically live east of IH-35.

³ Austin History Center. *Everything Austin: Population Statistics*. Retrieved from: <https://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/everything-austin-population-statistics>

⁴ Mueller, Elizabeth J. "Struggling Toward Livability in Austin, Texas." *Livable Cities from a Global Perspective*. Routledge, 2018. 61-78.

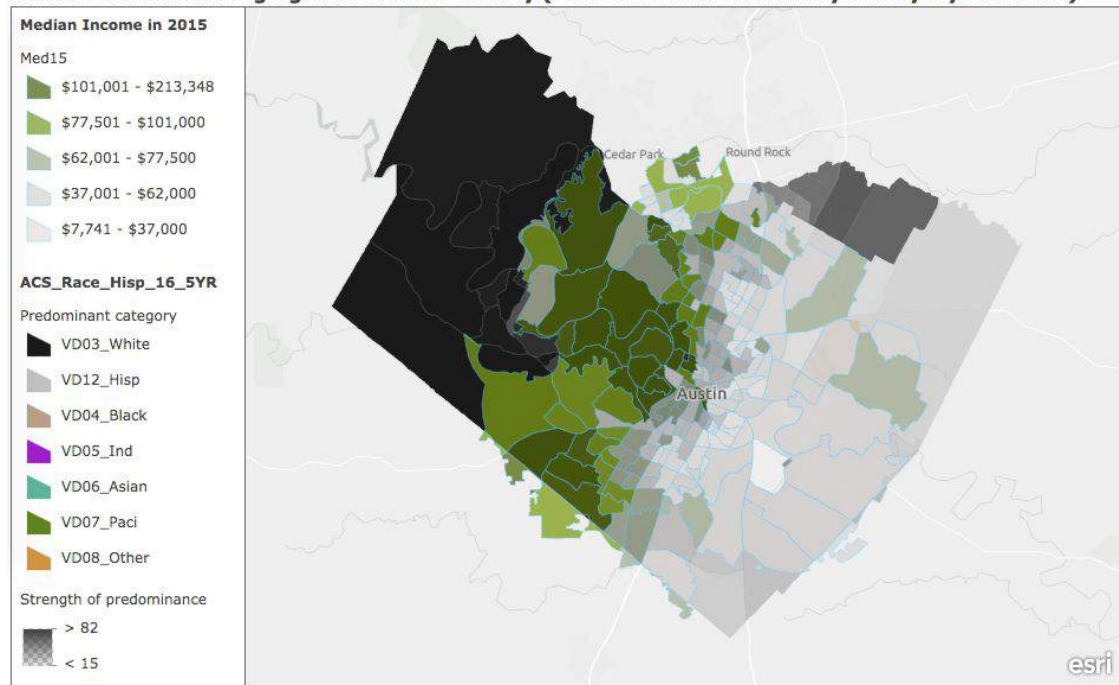
⁵ Florida, R., & Mellander, C. (2015). *Segregated city: The geography of economic segregation in America's metros*. Martin Prosperity Institute.(9)

Racial segregation in Travis County (2016 American Community Survey 5 yr estimate)



Map 1.1 Majority racial composition of West versus East Austin⁶

Economic and racial segregation in Travis County (2016 American Community Survey 5 yr estimate)



Map

1.2 Median income geographically⁷

⁶ Data retrieved from 2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimates

⁷ Data retrieved from 2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimates and 2015 ACS median income estimates

The stark geographic bifurcation between rich and poor, white and Hispanic displayed in Map 1.1 and Map 1.2 suggests that during the last century Austin's phenomenal growth has at best done little to counteract racial inequality entrenched at the beginning of the 20th century, and at worst has further solidified racial disparities. Numerous studies and decades of activism by East Austin environmental justice organizers have uncovered the ways that toxic facilities, such as the Holly Power Plant and the East Austin Tank Farm, were deliberately located in communities of color because the environmental health of these neighborhoods was valued less than in predominantly white communities.⁸ However, few scholars have connected this history of environmental racism, to food access and control in Austin. This gap is noteworthy because the racial devaluation which allowed toxic waste facilities to be located in communities of color also enabled the destabilization of sustainable and supportive food networks which thrived on the Eastside prior to the 1950s. Displacement resulting from city development initiatives beginning in the 1920s, the introduction and later exodus of chain supermarkets, and today gentrification and the closing of long-time restaurants due to increasing property taxes have had a deleterious effect on foodways in communities of color. These trends have been enabled by the devaluation of communities of color and the decentering of their voices from political decision making. Today food insecurity is greater in East Austin neighborhoods and a 2018 study found that "ZIP codes experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity are located primarily in Austin's Eastern

⁸ Busch, Andrew M. *City in a Garden: Environmental Transformations and Racial Justice in Twentieth-century Austin, Texas*. UNC Press Books, 2017. pp. 144-147

Crescent neighborhoods, and African-American and Latino communities are disproportionately affected.”⁹

The purpose of this paper is to interrogate the geographic dimensions of food access and control, or food sovereignty, in Austin. I explore the ways that development initiatives over the last century have supported easy access to grocery stores and control over culturally relevant restaurants in predominantly white neighborhoods, while denying communities of color these same rights. To make this argument, I will draw from the work of the global food sovereignty movement and the Black Food Justice movement. Historically, the global movement for food sovereignty, which can be defined as equitable control over how food is grown, distributed, and consumed, has focused on protecting and empowering smallholder farmers faced with the land enclosures, price instability, and impossible competition imposed on them by neoliberal free-trade agreements.¹⁰ While elucidating adverse impacts of our modern food regime on rural populations, this focus fails to acknowledge interconnected urban inequities. In their most recent report, lead movement organizers La Via Campesina mark an important new direction for the movement's work, emphasizing that “the fight for agrarian reform and food sovereignty is not an exclusively rural issue, but one that concerns the whole of society”.¹¹ Rural and urban foodways are intrinsically linked and a comprehensive food justice movement must unite “an alliance between rural people and the urban working class”.¹² In the United States, the Black Food Justice

⁹ United States, Congress, Office of Sustainability, and Lucia Athens. “2018 State of the Food System Report.” 2018 State of the Food System Report, Office of Sustainability, 2018, pp. 1–24.

¹⁰ Altieri, M. A. (2009). Agroecology, small farms, and food sovereignty. *Monthly review*, 61(3), 102-113.

¹¹ Struggles of La Via Campesina. pp 36 (2017) Retrieved from <https://viacampesina.org/en/struggles-la-via-campesina-agrarian-reform-defense-life-land-territories/>

¹² “ “ pp 8

movement has played a critical role in connecting urban racial injustices enacted through city planning and economic development to the broader movement for food sovereignty.¹³

In 2007, more than 500 representatives from 80 countries met in Sélingué, Mali to refine and assert the goal of food sovereignty at the first global forum on food sovereignty. This thesis will employ the definition of food sovereignty established in Mali and quoted below.

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.”

– Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty, Mali, 2007¹⁴

Contextualizing the ideals of the global food sovereignty movement and the Black Food Justice Movement in Austin, I connect economic development initiatives supported by the City of Austin to Austin’s variegated geography of food sovereignty. Applying the definition of food sovereignty above, I pay particular attention to the ways that development policies can reinforce and reflect some residents “right to define their own food and agricultural systems” more than others.¹⁵ “Defining” a food system in this context means: dictating the ways that food in your community is produced, distributed, and consumed. A community where food is distributed through community-member owned and operated grocery stores, restaurants, food production facilities, and farms has greater food sovereignty than a community where grocery stores and restaurants are operated by chains or folks from outside of the neighborhood. Food sovereignty is an important goal because “it puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and

¹³ Reese Ashanté M. (2019). *Black food geographies: race, self-reliance, and food access in Washington, D.C.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

¹⁴ Nyéléni 2007 Forum for Food Sovereignty. (2007), 9–9. Retrieved from https://nyeleni.org/DOWNLOADS/Nyeleni_EN.pdf

¹⁵ “ “

consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations” and allows the community to support its own needs and express its unique cultural background.¹⁶ When neighborhoods have control over their own food systems, community members experience greater belonging and connection to each other through food. The connective role of food is exhibited by the food histories of communities of color in Austin.

Among other things, food sovereignty exists in relation to economic structures, housing affordability, and public infrastructure. For example, given that food costs money in a capitalist society, affluence enables a greater degree of control over what food you buy. In a city without highly developed public transit, being able to afford a vehicle increases the range of grocery stores and restaurants accessible to a consumer. At the store, affluent customers have the ability to choose more expensive foods which align with their ethical agenda and cultural identity. Lower income residents do not have these same liberties. Access to good public education, affordable housing, and desirable jobs are related to economic status and food insecurity. Property taxes, business loans, and development incentives influence whose restaurants and grocers can survive in neighborhoods. Backyard and community gardens break this link between income and food choices by enabling gardeners to pick exactly what they plant and eat, but even then gardening requires time that many lower income folks who work multiple jobs just don't have.

The ways that economic status enables food sovereignty are important when we remember that Austin is one of the most economically bifurcated cities in the United States.¹⁷ Explaining the historic roots of this inequality, Tretter asserts that “as Austin continued to grow

¹⁶ “ “

¹⁷ Florida, 9

[during the 20th century], its employment structures, systems of education, relations of social intercourse, housing patterns and other factors were organized by both legal and extralegal means to ensure racial inequalities and white dominance.¹⁸ These processes reflect the City's historic "possessive investment in whiteness" as policies ensured economic advantages to Austin's white residents while failing to account for other residents' needs.¹⁹ As Tretter (2016) demonstrates, throughout the 20th century city development initiatives did not center the social and economic needs of East Austinites. During the Progressive Era, 1960s urban renewal projects, and 1990s Smart Growth initiative economic inequalities were exacerbated, I argue that food sovereignty was impacted in parallel multifaceted ways.²⁰

Because economic inequalities are connected to food sovereignty, this thesis will among other things be an economic history. Specifically, I focus on urban planning during the Progressive Era, 1960s urban renewal projects, and neoliberalization from the 1970s onwards. Locally, these periods are defined by city plans typically supported by the Austin Chamber of Commerce, the Austin Board of Realtors, and other continuously influential business coalitions. I will also pay particular attention to the influence of national politics on local planning, for example the election of Ronald Reagan and consequently the growing neoliberalization of politics in Austin.

Businesses, including restaurants and grocers, on the Eastside during the first half of the 20th century were largely excluded from public support, and were left to contend with unpaved

¹⁸ Tretter, E. (2016). *Shadows of a sunbelt city: The environment, racism, and the knowledge economy in Austin*. pp. 13. University of Georgia Press.

¹⁹ Lipsitz, G. (2006). *The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics*. Temple University Press.

²⁰ See Tretter

roads and poor access to public utilities.²¹ Tretter notes that “all aspects of the social reform agenda of Southern Progressivism operated within a framework of white supremacy and anti-black racism”.²² When the City Plan of 1928 segregated city services for African Americans to East of East Avenue, it bifurcated the city and laid the groundwork for decades of unequal investment in sidewalks, roadways, water infrastructure, and education. As Tretter says, “instead of improving the situations of non-white people, the overwhelming results of Progressive reform in the South was implemented to improve the situation for ‘whites,’ largely at the expense of non-whites, and to solidify white domination over non-whites by legal means”.²³

The apathy of city planners towards the Eastside during the first half of the 20th century also meant that Eastsiders were unhindered in their efforts to build self-sufficient economies and social networks. Restaurants and grocers were key nexi for community cohesion and support during the Jim Crow Era. However, by the 1950s these communities could no longer rely on being left alone by development initiatives. East Austin land which bordered downtown had become too valuable to “just sit there”. Inspired to “revitalize” central Austin in the 1960s, urban renewal projects seized “dilapidated” lands in order to increase their economic utility. At this time University of Texas developers began buying up land on the Eastside, displacing residents and giving them scarce options for resettling.²⁴ The construction of highway IH-35 further entrenched the physical divide between East and West Austin, and the location of the Holly Power Plant and East Austin Tank Farm directly inside Hispanic neighborhoods ensured that West Austinites would have access to a healthy environment while those living near these

²¹ Busch, 57

²² Tretter, E. M., Sounny, M. A., & Student, S. P. (2012). Austin restricted: Progressivism, zoning, private racial covenants, and the making of a segregated city. *Geography*, 7

²³ “

²⁴ Busch, 141

industrial facilities on the Eastside were exposed to toxic drinking water and polluted air.²⁵ In the 1990s, the City's Smart Growth initiative again encouraged the "development" of East Austin, precipitating gentrification and the further displacement of residents of color. Restaurants which have served as community anchors for years, today are losing customers and are fighting an uphill battle against rising property taxes. In their place, restaurants catered towards the tastes of affluent newcomers are gaining footing in the neighborhoods. Rather than counteracting racial inequalities, City development initiatives have in many ways made them worse: IH-35 was built to accommodate "caucasians only" suburbs, the Holly Power Plant was built to fuel Austin's growing knowledge economy; these projects supported economic growth outside of East Austin while simultaneously displacing Eastsiders.²⁶ Urban renewal and smart growth policies could have empowered Eastside voices and facilitated economic equality, including in food sectors, yet they did not.

Economic developments less directly related to city initiatives also disenfranchised residents of color. During the early 1900s Black and Hispanic communities in Austin maintained their own grocers, restaurants, and backyard farms and largely controlled their own food ways. The rapid growth of the supermarket industry during the 1950s and 1960s supermarkets would spell the end of many Hispanic and Black owned grocers on the Eastside and by the late 1970s supermarkets dominated food retail there. Neoliberal policies during the 1970s and 1980s encouraged market consolidation and price-wars between chains. Within this hyper-competitive environment chain-supermarkets in Austin chose affluent West Austin neighborhoods over East Austin leaving fewer and older supermarkets in the city versus the suburbs.²⁷ In fact, by the

²⁵ " "

²⁶ Busch, 144

²⁷ Eisenhauer E. (2001). In poor health: Supermarket redlining and urban nutrition. *GeoJournal*, 53(2), pp. 125-133.

1990s there were only two supermarkets on the Eastside and food insecurity was a major concern.²⁸ Today scholars refer to this trend as “supermarket redlining”, or the process by which predominantly Black and Hispanic urban centers were abandoned by supermarkets due to the perception that these neighborhoods are “dangerous investments” and “unprofitable”.²⁹ While the “demands of markets and corporations” certainly play a large role in dictating food systems in predominantly white neighborhoods, I would argue that affluent white consumers have greater food sovereignty than their minority counterparts due to this economic and political history.

In his 2017 book *The Color of Law*, Richard Rothstein makes the compelling case for reparations for federally supported residential segregation.³⁰ I would like to make a similar case to Rothstein, that there is a need for state policies which address historically rooted racial inequality in power, except that I would like to make this case about food systems. Rothstein argues that during the 20th century the United States government (at multiple scales) codified racist bank loan practices, “caucasian only” exclusive suburbs, and infrastructure which further entrenched segregation in housing.³¹ Many white American’s today have inherited wealth derived from the gains their grandparents and parents made from the appreciating value of homes purchased cheaply in the 1950s and 1960s, a process from which Hispanic and Black Americans were deliberately excluded.³² I contend that City policies which pandered to the growth of Austin’s knowledge economy also excluded Hispanic and Black Americans thus enabling unequal food sovereignty in Austin. Because the City played an active role in perpetuating

²⁸ Wyatt, Tommy (1995 May 19) Newspaper column: Rappin’. *The Villager*. (1)

²⁹ Eisenhauer, 125

³⁰ Rothstein, R. (2018). *The Color of Law: a forgotten history of how our government segregated America*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company.

³¹ “ “

³² “ “

inequality, the city should do this history justice and fight for equitable food sovereignty in the future.

The purpose of this thesis is firstly to advocate for grassroots-led and government-supported policies to rectify historic racial inequalities in Austin. Specifically, I advocate for empowering Eastside food sovereignty through policies which protect established restaurants and grocery stores, including affordable housing initiatives and tax breaks for long-time business owners. To achieve this, political structures must be designed in order to amplify Hispanic and Black business owners' voices in decision making. I also advocate for government support for emerging Black and Hispanic foodways which exist inside and outside of the market. For example, grant programs could support Black and Hispanic operated community gardens and food-related gatherings. In order to support this argument, I will provide the historical background for understanding how the City of Austin, in collaboration with business coalitions and affluent homeowners associations, have led development projects, past and present, which disempower Black and Hispanic food sovereignty. Understanding this history will demonstrate why supporting diverse foodways is so important to fostering inclusive city development moving forward.

My analysis in no way intends to posit that city policies have entirely determined food sovereignty; subversion and acts of resistance ranging from the personal to powerful collective demonstrations are recurring currents in this history. Ordinary lives are lived within this history, and it would be impossible for me to understand or do justice to the complex ways that Eastsiders have navigated and pushed back against systemic oppression. However, I hope at least to advocate for the value of these stories and for the right of all people to find comfort,

community, and resilience through food. The fact remains that city policies play a decisive role in encouraging certain visions for Austin's future and systematic measures are a necessary part of building an equitable city.

My second purpose is to bear homage to the ways that food has functioned in stories of resistance and resilience in Clarksville, a historically Black Austin neighborhood, and East Austin, a historically Black and Hispanic neighborhood. I hope that by interjecting stories told by individuals about the role of food in their cultural identity, community cohesion, acts of resistance, feelings of belonging and place, I can make an emotional plea for the preservation and cultivation of diverse foodways in Austin. Throughout this history, communities of color have repeatedly resisted marginalization and built thriving communities on the Eastside regardless of state-neglect. These stories should inspire contemporary food sovereignty movements in Austin.

The centrality of food and food spaces in fostering social connections and support systems between family members, neighbors, and friends cannot be overstated. Food spaces are vital sites for building community connection, cohesion, and support. When residents who are not white are denied their right to define and access foodways in Austin, they are shut out of *their right to feel at home in this city*. Building an equitable and welcoming city *for everyone* makes it imperative that we interrogate the historic dynamics between race, food, and power in Austin and consider political actions which both repair past damage and make space for new communities to grow.

Background

I write this thesis with the hope that its research can influence Austin's new Land Development Code and other contemporary development initiatives which should seek to redress inequity in Austin. This code is being written in the context of rapid gentrification on the Eastside. First set in motion by the City's Smart Growth initiative, gentrification in East Austin began significantly in the 1990s.³³ Facing pressure from the Austin Chamber of Commerce to promote infill density, and directed by environmental groups like Save Our Springs to steer that growth East and away from the Edwards Aquifer, Austin's City Council designated much of East Austin a "desired development zone" as a part of their Smart Growth initiative.³⁴ In part as a result of these building incentives, since the 1990s East Austin has been targeted by retail and housing developers and for many long time residents and business owners is no longer affordable.³⁵ Significantly, most of the folks being pushed out are Black or Hispanic, while many who move in are white. In 1990 the white share of central East Austin was around 8 percent, by 2000 it had risen to 11 percent and by 2010 it was 30 percent.³⁶ Simultaneously, the African American share of central East Austin dropped from about 34 percent in 1990 to 19 percent in 2010.³⁷

Smart Growth is a perfect example of what Tretter (2016) and Busch (2017) call Austin's "possessive investment in whiteness". "Investing in whiteness" in this context means representing and enacting the priorities of white business elite. Building luxury condos and hipster eateries on the Eastside facilitates capital accumulation for business elites on Austin's Board of Realtors and Chamber of Commerce while allowing West Austin neighborhoods and

³³ Tretter, 30

³⁴ Tretter, 104

³⁵ Tretter, 30

³⁶ Tretter, 110

³⁷ “ “

green spaces to remain unchallenged by new growth. The term racial capitalism expresses that capitalism benefits from the construction and exploitation of racial differences, clearly real estate capitalists in this context are able to accumulate greater capital because the communities of color that they buy out and build over have less value, or profit-making potential, than their white counterparts. Smart Growth reflected the interests of white economic elites while ignoring the ways that communities of color would be negatively impacted. This racial dichotomy in whose interests motivate development has occurred again and again in Austin's history, and I argue explains in part Austin's unequal food sovereignty landscape. Gentrification is pushing longtime restaurant and grocery store owners out of Eastside neighborhoods and is only the most recent example of Austin's long history of "investing in whiteness". Understanding the ways that racial capitalism and specifically "investing in whiteness" has impacted food sovereignty across time, provides necessary context for centering equity in the contemporary context of gentrification.

Outline

In order to provide some historic context for the relationships between racial capitalism and food sovereignty, I will first explore the impact of city planning on the Eastside's foodscape beginning in the early 20th century. My first section argues that during the Jim Crow Era (late 1800s to 1950s) Black and Hispanic communities in Austin responded to segregated city services by building separate thriving support systems which centered around backyard gardens, small grocers, and restaurants. Food was a vital component of community resistance and resilience. Austin's 1928 City Plan redlined city services for Black folks to the Eastside and also displaced Hispanic communities living downtown in "Little Mexico", yet communities nevertheless

formed around Juneteenth barbecue cookouts, homemade back-kitchen tamales, and live jazz and soul food on east 11th street.

In the second part of my historic overview, I will argue that from the 1970s onwards, neoliberalism has further entrenched racial inequality in Austin's foodscape.

The deregulation of food production and retail in the late 1970s led to market consolidation in the hands of a few major corporations.³⁸ In debt from these price wars, supermarkets abandoned inner cities for more profitable white suburbs.³⁹ Meanwhile, neoliberal policies have cut funding for social services and exacerbated income inequality, a process which consequently widens the food access gap nationally.⁴⁰ Since the 1990s, the increasing cost of living on the Eastside has pushed many restaurants out.

In the final part of this thesis, I explore productive takeaways from this food history of Austin. I center the activism of the Black Food Justice and global food sovereignty movements and use these frameworks to suggest equity-based food policies moving forward.

Methodology

To write this thesis I consulted a number of primary and secondary source documents. For a general overview of Austin's political history, demographic changes, and economic development I relied heavily on Andrew M. Busch's work *City in a Garden* and Samuel Tretter's book *Shadows of a Sunbelt City*. Ashanté M. Reese's book *Black Food Geographies* helped me to understand some of the relationships which can exist between food sovereignty, racism, and city policies; her research provided me with a jumping off point for conducting my own research at the Austin History Center archives. I referenced archival documents at the Austin History

³⁸ See Eisenhaur

³⁹ “ “

⁴⁰ Harvey, 17

Center for information on Black and Hispanic settlement in Austin during the early 1900s, records of Black-owned restaurants and grocers, and development appraisal documents about East Austin. Using searchable digital archives of the Austin American Statesman, I conducted research on the geography of supermarket development in Austin during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Since the 1960s *The Villager* newspaper has been an important voice in East Austin's Black community: I looked at front page headlines, restaurant and grocery advertisements, and opinion pieces from *The Villager* to better understand food culture on the Eastside during the 1980s and 1990s. Digitally archived oral testimonies by longtime Clarksville and East Austin residents provided me with insightful stories about food access and control historically. For insight into the experiences of Black and Hispanic food entrepreneurs and community members during the 21st century I consulted video interviews of restaurant owners, Yelp comment sections, and various newspaper interviews.

Theory

Several of the terms and frameworks I will use in this thesis are worth defining clearly; for reference below are descriptions of my choice to prioritize food sovereignty and analysis of the function of racial capitalism in this history.

Why discuss food sovereignty instead of food security?

While significant scholarship has focused on the structural dynamics of “food deserts”, or areas with poor access to healthy food, these studies are limited in their ability to consider socio-political processes influencing food security. It is important to recognize the direct connections between food and the politics of racial capitalism as it is well known that communities of color are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity.⁴¹ On the national level,

⁴¹ Reese, 5

historically Black cities such as Oakland and Detroit have higher food insecurity rates than their white counterparts.⁴² In racially segregated cities like Chicago, New York, and Austin, Black and Hispanic neighborhoods experience the highest barriers to food access.⁴³ These patterns are not coincidental, they reflect continued legacies of residential redlining, disinvestment in communities of color, urban flight, and gentrification.

Ashanté Reese criticizes the term “food desert” for its color-blind consideration of structural patterns, lack of consistent parameters and empirical results, and its racialized connotation of lack which excludes the myriad ways that “food insecure populations” resist and subvert structural constraints. She asserts that, “African Americans and other people of color are often reduced to bodies that need to be regulated and changed”, and that while well intentioned, studies on “food deserts” often further entrench the idea that “black people need fixing” in public discourse and “reinforces the belief that these communities have little or no investment in creating their own place-making strategies toward food self-sufficiency”.⁴⁴ Considering the vital role that food occupies in cultural identity, community cohesion, place-making, and self-sufficiency, it is noteworthy that “food desert” maps reduce the role of food in our lives to merely access or inaccess.

Because food is cultural, it is important to note that “food desert” maps tend to support acultural city and nonprofit interventions. Typical policy responses to food desert studies include creating city incentive programs for selling produce at corner stores, targeted educational programs about “good food” in schools, and improving sidewalk and public transit access to

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⁴³ Reese, 5

⁴⁴ Reese, 16-17

grocery stores.⁴⁵ Between 2015 and 2018, targeted city Office of Sustainability campaigns have increased the number of farmers markets in Austin from 18 to 30, the number of community gardens by 15 percent, and the number of households employing curbside composting from 14,000 to 19,000.⁴⁶ These are important strides, yet food insecurity continues to impact 15% of Travis County residents, which is higher than the national average, 11.1%⁴⁷.

Naya Jones and Julie Guthman, among others, have criticized the popularity of the “food-as-nutrition” food policy lens in discourse about food rights. “Food-as-nutrition”, Jones states, prioritizes parameters of “healthy” food access above other roles that food plays in our lives, and omits dimensions of wellness and health that extend beyond vegetable intake. “Good”, “healthy” food cannot be seen as universal or apolitical because the “goodness” of food is relational to the consumer, and many “objective” measurements of health are socially constructed and racially biased. The most common measurement of obesity in the United States is the Body Mass Index which represents the subject's height to weight ratio. Parameters for what ratios constitute “obesity” according to the BMI are highly controversial and continuing to shift every few years, critics argue that they shift to reflect the interests of influential pharmaceutical boards.⁴⁸ Guthman argues that the BMI is a poor indicator of health and discriminates against diverse body shapes, yet it is nevertheless used as “proof” of the need for anti-obesity programs and research in communities of color”.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ See Austin food policy initiatives discussed in “State of the Food System”, 2018

⁴⁶ United States, Congress, Office of Sustainability, and Lucia Athens. (2018). “2018 State of the Food System Report.”. Office of Sustainability. (pp. 1–24)

⁴⁷ “ “

⁴⁸ Jones, N. L. (2016). *Eating while young and Black: food, foodways, and gentrification in Austin, Texas* (pp. 55) (Doctoral dissertation).

⁴⁹ Guthman, J. (2011). *Weighing in: Obesity, food justice, and the limits of capitalism* (Vol. 32). Univ of California Press. (pp. 28)

“Food desert” maps highlight the geographic distribution of food inaccess, but as Guthman, Reese, and Jones point out, by reducing food insecure neighborhoods into problem demographics, food desert maps inspire generalized interventions without listening to and empowering the resilience strategies already being employed. While “food desert” maps have played an influential role in illuminating food inaccess geographies in Austin, this paper takes a more comprehensive look at our city’s food system by focusing on the multi-scaled political dynamics which have influenced race and “*food sovereignty*” not just security in Austin.

Food deserts assess one aspect of the food system, *access* to “healthy” food. Food sovereignty advocates for equity in *control* of all dynamics of our food systems. Food sovereignty has become mobilized in diverse contexts in order to demand that all people have the right not only to access food but to *decide on what terms* their food is produced, distributed, and consumed. Food sovereignty recognizes that food plays a vital role in cultural identity, community, and self-sufficiency and therefore that control of food is at the center of political justice.

What is racial capitalism?

Many scholars have argued that capitalist economies require the creation of inequality in order to grow. The term racial capitalism positions capitalists as creators and manipulators of differentiated landscapes of racial value. Categories of difference such as race are used, subconsciously and consciously, to justify the exploitation of devalued people, landscapes, ecologies in order to extract greater profit.⁵⁰ Low elaborates, “racial capitalism captures the sense that actually existing capitalism exploits through culturally and socially constructed differences

⁵⁰ See Pulido, Harvey, Reese

such as race, gender, region and nationality and is lived through those uneven formations”.⁵¹ By valuing and devaluing groups of people based off of their racial category, as enslaved blacks were dehumanized during slavery and as Black and Hispanic bodies continue to be dehumanized in many contexts today, capitalist entrepreneurs can justify underpaying Black and Hispanic labor and shouldering environmental burdens onto communities of color. When racial capitalism is allowed to become a central logic of governance, as in Flint, Michigan, profit becomes more important than the lives and well beings of devalued populations. In the case of Flint, saving money by switching the city to a contaminated water source was justifiable because the people whose health was on the line were Black.

Drawing from the work of numerous scholars, later I will argue that the development of Austin’s food system today has been informed by racial capitalism.. Federal, state, and local level policies in Austin have historically prioritized economic development which is accessible to white folks while failing to acknowledge the impact of this development on communities of color. In particular I will focus on the impact economic development on East Austin’s food sovereignty. Because capitalism profits from inequality, it is important that public sector initiatives intervene in economic development in order to ensure that social justice is centered.

⁵¹ Lowe, Lisa. 2015. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. (pp. 149-150)

SECTION I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Part I: Investing In Whiteness, Roots Of Resiliency (1910-1970)

Introduction

Running through the food histories of communities of color in Austin, Texas are two recurring trends. Firstly, the iterative devaluation of Black and Hispanic neighborhoods and foodways by influential business elite and City of Austin political leaders. Secondly, the tenacity of Black and Hispanic communities in fostering alternative foodways and social structures which support vibrant communities in spite of and in resistance to disenfranchisement in white-dominated civic society. I demonstrate these recurring trends during the Jim Crow Era by sharing stories of resilience through community foodways from the Progressive Era through the 1950s. The folks whose lives existed within these stories navigated a landscape of differentiated value, a segregated city sliced in two by a City Plan (1928) which restricted city services for Black folks to East of East Avenue.

In the early days, consultants had to make a case for the value of a city plan in the first place. Koch & Fowler, the engineers behind Austin's 1928 City Plan, pleaded that "the building of a modern, efficient city is more than a mere accident... the best advantages are available only when a good city plan has been adopted, and a program provided which will suggest certain re-adjustments and the co-ordination of the future improvements".⁵² "Re-adjustments" in this context included paving roads, building playgrounds, and most notably herding Black and Hispanic Austinites into one part of the city, so as to purify and increase the business

⁵² Austin City Plan 1928, 1

profitability of the rest of the city. Koch & Fowler suggested “solving” the “race segregation problem” by designating all city facilities and services for Black Austinites to a “negro district”.

⁵³ By doing this, Koch & Fowler argued, the city could bypass the technical illegality of segregation and “draw the negro population to this area”.⁵⁴ By making it harder for Black folks to live throughout the city the City Plan of 1928 “invested in whiteness” and disrupted pre-existing community foodways.

The desire to support white-owned businesses, by clearing out for development parts of the city populated by people of color, motivated the City Plan and this connection makes this the first example of racial capitalism impacting food sovereignty in communities of color.⁵⁵ Prior to the City Plan, freedmen's settlements were scattered throughout Austin and Mexican-American's in “Little Mexico” sold homemade candies and tamales at Our Lady Guadalupe Park downtown.

⁵⁶ The stories I share from before the city plan evoke the deeply personal ways that food bound communities together and acted as a vehicle for support during hard times. These businesses and foodways were temporarily dismantled when the city designated Little Mexico as a commercial district, and moved public facilities for African Americans to the Eastside.

This devaluation of East Austin by city officials and developers presented challenges to food sovereignty between 1910 and 1960, yet what is most remarkable about this period is the extent to which communities *used food to fight back*. Writing about the “black spatial imaginary” in New Orleans, George Lipsitz argues that “relegated to neighborhoods where zoning, policing, and investment practices make it impossible for them to control the exchange value of their

⁵³ “ “

⁵⁴ Austin City Plan 1928, page 57

⁵⁵ Busch, 64

⁵⁶ Busch, 49

property, and unable to move away from other members of their group because of discrimination, ghetto and barrio residents turn segregation into congregation.”.⁵⁷ From the earliest years of African-American and Hispanic settlement in the area that is now constituted as Austin, folks have responded to discrimination in the city at large by forming tight knit, socially and economically resilient communities. In the early days, Black-run churches, schools, restaurants, and small grocers cohesed community members within a shared system of social support and self-sufficiency in spite of segregation. Economically, Black Austinites formed what Bobby Wilson defines as a “Black economy” whereby African Americans robbed of equitable access to public resources and assets form their own self sufficient “nation within a nation”.⁵⁸ Within “Black economies” neighbors could rely on one another for “for bartered services and goods; by mobilizing collectively for better city services; by establishing businesses geared to a local ethnic clientele; and by using the commonalities of race and class as a basis for building pan-neighborhood alliances with residents of similar neighborhoods to increase the responsibility, power, and accountability of local government”.⁵⁹ Food played a prominent role in East Austin’s “Black economy”. For example, the “Victory Grill” was a regular stop on the “Chitlin Circuit” and was frequented by prominent Black artists like Louis Armstrong. Residents could find community at small grocers which proved to be vital sites for neighborhood conversation, community cohesion, and social support.

By the 1920s, Black owned insurance companies, grocers, restaurants, dance halls, and doctors offices lined sixth street providing Black Austinites with access to services that white

⁵⁷ Lipsitz, 11

⁵⁸ Wilson, B. M. (2012). Capital's need to sell and black economic development. *Urban Geography*, 33(7), 966.

⁵⁹ Lipsitz, 14

society denied them.⁶⁰ While Black and Hispanic food economies thrived in urban centers across the United States during the first half of the 20th century, by the 1950s and 1960s urban renewal, displacement, suburbanization, complicated residents' ability to control their own foodways.

Clarksville: Foodways in Freedman's settlements

First home to nomadic Tonkawa, Comanche, and Lipan Apache Native Americans, by the mid-1800s much of the land that is now the western part of Austin was occupied by Elisha Pease, governor of the newly forged American state of Texas.⁶¹ After 1865, Pease sold parts of his land to former slaves and in 1871 Charles Clarke purchased two acres for his family and the families of other freed slaves to build their homes upon.⁶² In 1874, Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church was founded and services were held first at the house of Clarksville resident Peter Tucker, and later in a church constructed by residents.⁶³ Today Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church continues to hold congregations and community events.⁶⁴

Although freed African Americans throughout Austin fought to make a living, building their homes from repurposed building materials from sheds and stables in areas unsuitable to white settlers, Mears echoes Wilson's theory of the "Black economy" by noting that they "also developed highly active, strong social structures, grounded in church, school, and self-help organizations".⁶⁵ Whether forced by segregation or out of personal choice to fend for themselves,

⁶⁰ Busch, 48

⁶¹ Kearn, B. C. (n.d.). Austin History Center: Brief History of Austin. Retrieved from <http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/brief-history-austin>

⁶² The Origins of Clarksville. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.clarksvillecdc.org/origins-of-clarksville>

⁶³ Community Corporation, C. (2016). Walking Tour: Clarksville. Retrieved from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/565ded29e4b085b1596246b9/t/571a98b4356fb0bb3458eb17/1461360838249/Clarksville_WalkingTour-sm.pdf

⁶⁴ “ “

⁶⁵ Mears, M. M. (2002). African American settlement patterns in Austin, Texas, 1865--1928.

African Americans in urban areas worked together to provide for their own needs and those of their children.”.⁶⁶ This was certainly true of Clarksville, where roots of resilience reveal themselves in stories of a community that supported itself from the beginning. Food played a particularly supportive role in Clarksville as early oral histories note the prevalence of trading, bartering, and sharing food routinely and during celebration. Available evidence indicates that for some giving and receiving food also signified belonging.

For the decades leading up to the 1940s and 1950s, African Americans living in Clarksville and Austin’s numerous other freedman’s communities controlled their own food production. Particularly for those with access to land, exchanging food was a vital part of both survival and community formation. Notably, Clarksville residents were excluded from municipal water and sewage services at this time, and captured rainwater in water cisterns instead.⁶⁷ In these circumstances, having access to land and control over the production of their own food was integral to the community’s ability to thrive and grow despite ongoing racial disenfranchisement and Black-targeted violence by white society at large. For many years small homes were built on large plots of land so that residents could grow backyard gardens and raise goats, pigs, and chickens on their properties.⁶⁸ Residents shot rabbits and squirrels from their front porches, fished in the Colorado River, and many people kept a cow around for milk.⁶⁹ While evidence suggests that hunger was prevalent, for those lucky enough to acquire land- memories from this time are laden with stories of delicious family meals. Lou Anna Shaw Hayes, born near Austin in 1914, remembers having bacon, biscuits, cereal, or oatmeal for breakfast as a little girl in the

⁶⁶ Mears, 7

⁶⁷ Busch, 48

⁶⁸ “The Origins of Clarksville”

⁶⁹ “ “

1920s.⁷⁰ When asked “who paid for the meat?” Hayes replied, “one thing about it, we raised all that and we didn’t have to buy it. We was on the farm and my dad, if he killed a shoat [calf], somebody else would kill a hog and things like that”.⁷¹ In this way, backyard farms allowed families to put food on the table, even when income was short. Families processed their produce to last. In Clarksville it was common to can fruits and vegetables, keeping beans, corn, black-eyed peas, and cabbage cool by burying them in large wooden chests underground.⁷² Pork and beef were processed into sausages and chitterlings and hams were stored in smokehouses shared by multiple different families.⁷³ Evidence suggests that cooperation and sharing played a significant role in community self-sufficiency.

Beyond the function that subsistence farming served for survival, food also served a social function and was a vital component of community bonding, support, and belonging. Reese states that “anthropological research in predominantly Black communities has noted the importance of trading and bartering not only as strategies to meet individual needs but also as important forms of social and cultural capital through which community cohesion was built”.⁷⁴ Lou Anna Shaw Hayes’ story about her father giving a neighbor beef in exchange for pork bears testament to the ways that trading food in Clarksville connected community members to a broader system of support. Through conversations with older residents in the neighborhood, Jennifer Sharpe in *Clarksville: Whose Community?* finds that goods and services in Clarksville were “extended as a sign of friendship. One resident, who raised chickens, refused to sell her

⁷⁰ Hayes, Lou Anna Shaw (2003). *Oral history: interviewed by Karen Riles on 10/02/2003*. Retrieved from Austin History Center archives Item #2524.

⁷¹ “ “

⁷² Mears, pp. 96

⁷³ “ “

⁷⁴ Reese, 27

eggs to a new neighbor whom she disliked”.⁷⁵ Exchanging food allowed Clarksville residents to care for one another and it also indicated who did or didn’t belong as a part of the tight knit community.

Food was also an important part of holiday celebrations in early Clarksville. Lou Anna Shaw Hayes fondly remembers celebrating Juneteenth (which commemorates the abolition of slavery) as a little girl. She said that, “one family would do one thing, and another one would do another”- the men bringing freshly killed meat to barbecue and “the women would always take vegetables and all the sweet things with us” to the bank of Onion Creek.⁷⁶ Hayes remembers that someone had a “graffiphone” which they would wind up to play records on. At the end of the day, Hayes says, “they would fix something- we called it glace- Snow Cones now they call it, but we had a shaver there that we would shave the ice... and they had some syrup that they would pour over our glace and we would eat it with a spoon”. Clearly food factored prominently in Haye’s memories of childhood nostalgia, community belonging, and celebration.

Little Mexico: Roots of resilience

By the early 1920s there were at least fourteen freedman communities settled throughout Austin. Although Clarksville remains exceptional for the resilience of its cultural institutions in the present day, other settlements were located in contemporary Wheatsville, Pleasant Hill, Red River, and Barton Springs neighborhoods.⁷⁷ In 1900, whites and African Americans made up 98 percent of Travis County’s population although a small Mexican-American population had

⁷⁵ Sharpe, Jennifer. (1982). *Clarksville: Whose Community?* Bread and Roses Publishing. pp. 3

⁷⁶ Hayes oral history

⁷⁷ Busch, 47

settled “Little Mexico” in downtown Austin.⁷⁸ Between 1910 and 1920 two significant factors drove increased Mexican immigration into Austin.⁷⁹ Firstly, the destabilizing impact of the Mexican Revolution drove thousands of people out of Mexico and into Texas.⁸⁰ Secondly, the introduction of railroads in Central Texas facilitated the development of industries and large scale farms which actively recruited migrant employees.⁸¹

Busch writes that with railroads, “access to distant markets caused economies of scale to become more pronounced, and larger farms quickly undersold smaller family farms” in Travis County.⁸² He remarks that, “this process forced former white landowners or their children into cities and towns and created more demand for low-skilled agricultural workers, positions that whites were increasingly unwilling to take”.⁸³ One such farm was the Walker Properties Association Farm, which began recruiting labor from Mexico in the early 1910s to produce cucumbers, onions, spinach, and chiles. Produce grown on Walker Properties’ Farm was also processed by the hundreds of Mexican-Americans employed at the Walker Chili Factory downtown from the 1920s through the 1950s.⁸⁴ The Walker Chili Factory, later renamed the AusTex Chili Factory was located at the center of Little Mexico, producing canned tamales, chili con carne, and Red Devil chili powder which were shipped nationally.⁸⁵

Like Clarksville and Austin’s numerous freedmen's settlements, Little Mexico was neglected by the city because of racial discrimination. Homes, businesses, and churches were

⁷⁸ Busch, 49

⁷⁹ “ “

⁸⁰ “ “

⁸¹ “ “

⁸² Busch, 50

⁸³ “ “

⁸⁴ History Center, A. (n.d.). Austin History Quiz Answer 14. Retrieved from <http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/austin-history-quiz-answer-14>

⁸⁵ Valenzuela, B. (2016). *Mexican-American Settlement Survey Travis, County*. Valenzuela Preservation Studio.

located on land highly prone to flooding from the Colorado River and residents were disconnected from municipal services such as water.⁸⁶ Despite this, Mexican-Americans formed a vibrant community in Little Mexico. At the heart of social life in Little Mexico was “Our Lady of Guadalupe Park”- today Republic Square Park in downtown Austin. Guadalupe Park was the site of frequent cultural events such as Cinco de Mayo and Diez y Seis de Septiembre and also hosted street vendors selling homemade candy, tamales, and pan dulces which were enjoyed by families after Sunday mass.⁸⁷ While the Walker Chili Factory and other white owned facilities played a powerful role in food production in the 1910s and 1920s, many Mexican-Americans also produced and sold candies and tamales out of their homes. As raising livestock was common in Clarksville, so too did families in Little Mexico find creative ways to control the production of their food and use food to express their cultural identity. As in Clarksville, food sovereignty enabled food to function as both a vehicle of cultural expression and belonging and as a tool for resilience in spite of state neglect.

Progressivism: Vilifying And Regulating Black And Hispanic Foodways

Contradicting nostalgic oral histories about the vibrant foodways found in Clarksville and Little Mexico, records and surveys written by white City and University of Texas officials from the Progressive Era codified Black and Hispanic food practices as “dirty” in order to justify the regulation and disempowerment of these strategies. In 1913, University of Texas sociologist William B. Hamilton issued a report containing suggestions for how Austin could sanitize its industries and optimize urban planning. Hamilton expressed disdain for the “sloppy methods”

⁸⁶ Busch, 57

⁸⁷ Bruno, A. (2020, March 24). Our Austin Story. Retrieved from <https://tribeza.com/our-austin-story/>

employed by Black workers at slaughterhouses in Austin, ruling that candy and tamale production out of Hispanic households was a health hazard for whites.⁸⁸

Busch notes that collecting food scraps from refuse heaps in the back of restaurants, houses, and hotels was a cheap way for minority communities such as Clarksville to feed their chickens, pigs, and goats. While today composting and feeding backyard chickens food scraps is extolled by proponents of ecologically-conscious food, Hamilton used the following racist and classist language to describe similar practices: “just as the chickens follow the farmer’s plow to pick up fresh earthworms, so do Mexicans, negroes, and poor whites follow the city wagons to the dumps to pick out rags, boxes, and decaying food” arguing that this practice “has undoubtedly caused much disease among a class which is very hard to reach”.⁸⁹ Hamilton’s language compares “Mexicans, negroes, and poor whites” to chickens eating worms, and blames their survival tactics for spreading disease in the city. He proceeded to recommend that the city ban the practice of picking through refuse heaps.

Not included in Hamilton's report is acknowledgement that the poverty of many Black and Hispanic residents and the necessity of finding cheap alternative foodways, was owed to their neglect by the state. During the early 1900s, Black freedmen's towns were interspersed throughout the city of Austin, and the city was as integrated as it ever has been. Yet all aspects of life- housing quality, access to public infrastructure such as paved roads and water lines, and proximity to toxic waste sites remained intensely racially bifurcated.⁹⁰ Observing the power dynamics of unregulated trash disposal in the early 1900s, Busch notes that municipal and

⁸⁸ Busch, 59

⁸⁹ Hamilton (1913). “A Social Survey of Austin” (12). Retrieved from: <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/27578>

⁹⁰ Busch, 48

private garbage haulers would literally dump trash into minority neighborhoods.⁹¹ Yet minorities were simultaneously “demonized for their substandard living conditions and their lack of cleanliness even though most of the refuse that wound up in their communities was not theirs”.⁹² These environmental injustices reflect the violent disenfranchisement of people of color from civic culture during the Progressive Era, and the ways that racially-linked language about “cleanliness” was used to vilify the food practices of communities of color and expunge the state from responsibility for alleviating poverty.

Codifying Segregation: the 1928 City Plan

When Progressive Era officials like William B. Hamilton derided Clarksville and other communities of color for being “dirty”, they laid the groundwork for a racist logic which continues to influence policy making in Austin. This logic posits that in order to “clean up”, “modernize”, or “develop” a part of Austin, communities of color must be cleared out. Prior to the 1920s, Busch notes that communities of color scattered throughout Austin “presented little threat to the engrained social order” or capitalist development of the city.⁹³ A booster publication in 1891 described the “color line” in Austin as “mutually conceded, but without friction or race antagonism”.⁹⁴ While this rhetoric sugar coats race-relations, as Busch states the racial divide remained “a social rather than a spatial demarcation, a matter of practice, occupation, and custom rather than geography”.⁹⁵ Austin’s 1928 City Plan changed this.

⁹¹ Busch, 58

⁹² “ “

⁹³ Busch, 50

⁹⁴ Busch, 50

⁹⁵ Busch, 76

By the mid-1920s Mexican immigration into Austin was increasing. Racial tensions across the country were hardening as white soldiers returning from World War I met spiked unemployment, and simultaneously found that urban geographies “had changed to accomodate much larger African American populations”.⁹⁶ Meanwhile many African-American veterans returned emboldened to claim their due right to social and economic equality in the country they had fought for.⁹⁷ 1919 was dubbed the “Red Summer” as race riots erupted in thirty-eight US cities including Longview, Port Arthur, and Texarkana Texas. Following World War I the Klu Klux Klan became more active in Austin.⁹⁸ Anti-Bolshevik hysteria sharpened many white’s feeling that their place in society was threatened by anyone who did not look like them, African-American and Mexican-American compatriots included.⁹⁹

In some ways then, it is no surprise that by 1928 the location of communities of color throughout Austin began to be imagined by white civic leadership as an impediment to “progress” and “growth” in Austin. Undergirded by logics of racial capitalism and motivated by the desire to accumulate capital by clearing central Austin for white economic growth and to “protect” white residential areas, the Austin City Plan of 1928 institutionalized segregation in Austin by stipulating that public services for “negroes” only be provided in redlined “negro districts”. The plan also zoned Little Mexico as a commercial district.¹⁰⁰ This undermined the wellbeing and health of communities of color in order to support an exclusive vision for Austin’s economic growth. It's worth noting that since at least 1897, Hispanics have been considered legally “white” in Texas, and that technically Hispanic folks could use whites-only public

⁹⁶ Busch, 67

⁹⁷ “

⁹⁸ “”

⁹⁹ “

¹⁰⁰ “1928 City Plan”, Plate no 11

facilities during the Jim Crow Era.¹⁰¹ Yet, according to Tretter “as the 20th century wore on and their numbers grew... underlying prejudices and bigotry emerged with force against migrants from Mexico and helped to create a kind of de facto standard for spatial and social segregation.”

¹⁰² When in 1928 the City relocated public services for African Americans to East Austin, it is fair to assume that many Hispanic Austinites also experienced prejudice and exclusion.

The City Plan of 1928 disrupted deeply rooted community ties to social support systems and foodways tied to places like Our Lady of Guadalupe Park. In 1928, the City of Austin prioritized its vision for Austin as an “ideal” residential city and a “cultural and education center” for white people’s culture and education, above the right of nonwhite Austinites to access public services. By displacing Little Mexico and threatening most residents of freedmen's settlements access to land, the City Plan of 1928 began Austin’s long and repeated history of disempowering the communities of color and threatening their right to control their own foodways.

Thriving foodways in spite of segregation: the Chitlin Circuit

According to Busch, “most accounts of African American and Latino life in Austin from the 1930s through the 1950s portray a generally positive period marked by high levels of community cohesion and a relatively vigorous economic life defined by small businesses and networks of familial and neighborhood support”.¹⁰³ When following the 1928 City Plan African-American Austinites were refused access to public services such as schools and utilities west of Highway I-35 and all freedmen's settlements but Clarksville were replaced by white

¹⁰¹ Tretter, “Austin Restricted”, 8

¹⁰² “ “

¹⁰³ Busch, 136

development and forced to move east- these communities responded by building their own social spaces, and cooking their own food in their own restaurants on their own streets.

By the 1940s, one such street was east 11th street. In 1941 most African Americans in Austin lived between east First Street and east 19th Street, although large numbers of Black Austinites held out (with no municipal water) in Clarksville as well as in an area on the west side of South Congress Avenue.¹⁰⁴ One source counted 52 small businesses east of East Avenue on 12th street¹⁰⁵. East 11th street during the 1940s and 1950s was a hot spot for Black music, culture, and food.¹⁰⁶

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Victory Grill in Austin, ca. 1945

Victory Grill in Austin, ca. 1945. An important stop on the "Chitlin' Circuit" for notable blues players, Victory Grill opened in 1945 as a gathering place for African-American soldiers returning home from World War II—hence the name. Tary Owens Collection, Texas Music Museum.

¹⁰⁴ Mears "Settlement Survey"

¹⁰⁵ Busch, 136

¹⁰⁶ Victory Grill. (2013, May 29). Retrieved from <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/xdv02>

¹⁰⁷ Terry Owens Collection (1945) Photograph: "Victory Grill in Austin, ca. 1945" *Handbook of Texas Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/xdv02>.

Classic food and drink establishments like the Victory Grill, Charlie's Playhouse, and the Deluxe Hotel hosted famous Black musicians touring the Chitlin Circuit, a collection of venues throughout the south hosting Black artists during the era of segregation. During the 1940s and 1950s famous Black blues and jazz artists like James Brown, Ike and Tina Turner, Etta James, Billie Holiday, Chuck Berry all came through the Black-owned Victory Grill on east 11th street.¹⁰⁸ Dr. Charles Urdy remembers those days fondly, saying: "I went to all those places all the time. That's where I met Louis Armstrong – at the Lawson's Ice Cream Parlor. He was staying at the Deluxe Hotel." reminiscing that "it was our world, and most of it was between 11th and 12th street".¹⁰⁹ While African Americans were barred from entering white establishments west of IH-35, anyone of age on east 11th street could grab a cold beer or burger and enjoy live blues and jazz six nights a week.



Holding out against gentrification, the Victory Grill is 'still standing' today (photographs by author Sarah Holdeman in 2020)



¹⁰⁸ Milam, William (n.d.) "Victory Grill" *Handbook of Texas Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/xdv02>.

¹⁰⁹ Bingamon, B. (2019, October 18). The Long Story of East 11th and 12th Streets Takes a Turn. *The Austin Chronicle*. Retrieved from <https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2019-10-18/the-long-story-of-east-11th-and-12th-streets-takes-a-turn/>

Restaurants and bars like the Victory Grill brought the community together in celebration of Black expression and solidarity during the 1940s and 1950s. Another anchor for community on the Eastside during the early 20th century was the Green and White Store. From the 1920s through the 1960s small grocers were numerous in East Austin. Founded in the 1940s, the Green and White Grocery started off as a general store, selling household goods and hardware with a small grocery in the back.¹¹⁰ In time their meat market and homemade tamales and tortillas became more popular than electric supplies, and the store was best known for their seasonal specialties like Christmas tamales. Like most other grocers at the time, the Green and White Grocery was a family affair. Offspring grew up running through the aisles of the store- and when they came of age took over the business. John Cazaderes Jr., maternal grandson of founder Noverta Lopez, remembers that “everybody in the family did the cooking”, especially in September through December “because, you know, when the weather got cooler, that was tamale weather.”¹¹¹

But the Green and White Grocery was more than just a business, it was one of those stores that everybody in the neighborhood went to. If you were new in town, you went to the Green and White Store to buy your tortillas and talk to the locals. You could find what you needed there and not at other stores, as one early attender recalled the Green and White store was “very critical for people that just recently immigrated to Austin, and that find themselves in the difficult position of trying to find the medicines that they used in Mexico, and not being sure where to find them”.¹¹² Greater merchandise than tortillas were exchanged at the Green and

¹¹⁰ Williams, M. (n.d.). Talking Shop. *Tribeza*. Retrieved from <https://tribeza.com/east-austin-green-white-grocery-evolution/>

¹¹¹ “ “

¹¹² East Austin Stories (2009 Sep 14). “The History of the Green and White Store”. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKsKnojiVWho&t=6s>

White Store, like the Victory Grill the Green and White Store was a sanctuary for social exchange. It was a space for belonging, as one as one customer reminisced- “in my early years it was the comfort of food, the comfort of things that reminded me of home, and things that I ate at home”.¹¹³

Other scholars have made the case for grocers as public spaces, for example Ashanté Reese who says,

“It is at the grocer’s that the neighborhood awareness is sharpened much more so than on the sidewalk or on the stairs. Why? ...because one is seen by others in the midst of choosing what will become a meal. One thus reveals something about oneself, about one’s secret; this creates permanent availability for speech that, starting from the example of a comment on the quality of various products, takes off from the foundation on which it began rolling in order to rise up into a more general discourse on neighborhood events . . . The grocer is where the neighborhood speaks”.¹¹⁴

If the grocer is where the neighborhood speaks, the early days of the Green and White Grocery speak to a community that provided support to those who needed it.¹¹⁵ John Jr.’s sister recalls her father lending community members food when money was stretched thin at the end of the month. She says, “people would come and sign their receipt and put their name on there. And my dad trusted them. They needed food, they needed medication, candles, anything, my dad knew them and it was just a spoken thing and it was as simple as writing it on a cash register receipt”.

¹¹⁶ These testimonies speak to the Green and White Grocers centrality as a space of support. In contrast to HEB and Walmart Supermarkets in Austin today, the Green and White Grocery and other small grocers during this time were controlled by and for their community. About a small

¹¹³ “ “

¹¹⁴ Reese, 98

¹¹⁵ “The History of the Green and White Store”. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKsKnojVWho&t=6s>

¹¹⁶ “ “

grocery mart in Deanwood, Washington D.C. Reese states that the “Community Market operated within a moral economy tinged by racial solidarity, pride, and collectivism”.¹¹⁷ Similarly, the Cazaderes family were community members themselves and this allowed them to supply the medicinal herbs, tamales, and cuts of meat that their community asked for. They also developed trusting relationships with their customers which allowed them to give and receive mutual aid and support.

Urban renewal, suburbanization, and supermarkets in the 1950s and 60s

In the years following World War II, the dynamics of food sovereignty on the Eastside were transformed by three interrelated social and economic shifts: urban renewal, suburbanization, and the proliferation of supermarkets.

Established communities on the Eastside did not benefit from, and were often displaced, by urban renewal and suburbanization efforts. In spite of the displacement caused by the Austin City Plan of 1928, during the 1930s and 1940s communities of color had built alternative systems of support and cultural solidarity, with food at the heart of it all. Urban renewal disrupted these systems by displacing entire neighborhood blocks to, for example, expand the University of Texas.¹¹⁸ Urban renewal also introduced toxic industries into the Eastside.¹¹⁹ No longer apathetic towards the Eastside, the City decided to fix up “dilapidated areas” if only to make them more useful for the University of Texas and expanding whites-only suburbs.¹²⁰ Austin’s 1958 City Plan, which laid the rhetorical groundwork for later renewal projects, was intended to draw in

¹¹⁷ Reese, 104

¹¹⁸ Busch 134

¹¹⁹ “ “

¹²⁰ Busch, 140

ideal citizens with social and economic capital.¹²¹ It emphasized that “people and businesses would make locational decisions based on the ‘attractiveness of the community’ and suggested that in order to make the city attractive to knowledge economy labor, areas of “disrepair” with “obsolete” structures be removed and replaced.¹²² Because of historic neglect by the City, many more of the “obsolete” structures which urban renewal sought to replace were found in East Austin. In 1966, almost 1,000 acres in East Austin were scheduled for clearance or “rehabilitation”.¹²³ According to Busch, “in 1967 entire neighborhoods were claimed by the University of Texas using eminent domain legislation and over the coming years, were evacuated, demolished, and replaced by different structures for different people”.¹²⁴ Unlike white residents who could easily move to the suburbs, displaced people were banned from “whites only” suburban developments and faced discrimination when attempting to acquire home ownership loans.¹²⁵

The Austin Chamber of Commerce, the Austin Board of Realtors, and the University of Texas Board of Regents had some say in the direction of urban renewal and the construction of highway IH-35, the Holly Power Plant, and expansion of University of Texas facilities into East Austin reflected the interests of wealthy constituents who wanted to “renew” Austin without altering their own West Austin neighborhoods. Just as folks in Little Mexico and Clarksville were dispossessed in 1928 so that downtown land’s capital utility could be maximized, in the 1950s and 1960s the construction of highway IH-35, the Holly Power Plant, and expanded University of Texas facilities into East Austin rearranged devalued communities of color in order

¹²¹ Busch, 142

¹²² “ “

¹²³ Busch, 148

¹²⁴ Busch, 134

¹²⁵ Tretter, 126

to accumulate capital for Austin's white knowledge economy. The highway connected downtown to whites-only suburbs and the expanded University of Texas campus supported students with the social and economic capital to get a higher education. As Busch argues, "urban renewal brought an overtly economic aspect to segregation; its policies encouraged politicians, university officials, developers, financiers, and contractors to profit from redeveloping large portions of minority areas to create jobs for white workers".¹²⁶

Policies favoring the knowledge economy at the expense of other sectors further exacerbated the wealth gap between whites and people of color, as Busch argues "the benefits of growth did not accrue evenly: in fact, decentralization, infrastructural and environmental improvements, and reliance on knowledge labor had deleterious effects on minorities, who were not allowed to participate in the growth."¹²⁷ Urban renewal projects in the 1950s and 1960s perpetuated and exaggerated the wealth gap in Austin, providing more power, more roads, more university sports facilities for educated whites while simultaneously pushing People of Color out of their homes and introducing toxic industries into their neighborhoods. These processes entrenched unequal food sovereignty to the extent that wealth and ability to access and control food intake are connected in a capitalist economy.

To accommodate the population boom spurred on by the growth of Austin's knowledge economy, during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s Austin's physical size grew exponentially; between 1960 and 1970 the physical area of Austin grew by roughly 70 percent; simultaneously the overall density of the city declined by 17 percent.¹²⁸ These trends paralleled nationwide patterns in the decentralization and suburbanization of American cities; during this time there

¹²⁶ Busch, 140

¹²⁷ Busch, 132

¹²⁸ Busch, 129

was “a dramatic increase in automobile ownership and usage” and “the number of automobiles owned in Travis County doubled between 1960 and 1972”.¹²⁹ Highways IH-35 was built in order to link downtown to growing white suburbs north of Austin. The construction of IH-35 along the historic redline border between East Austin and the rest of Austin physically entrenched the

Shopping Chore Easier In Northeast Austin Now

The poor overworked cars of Northeast Austin—and their poor overworked drivers—can take life a little easier, now that Cameron Village is open.

Shopping chores previously have consumed so much time for residents of the booming residential area that one young matron is known to have complained, with weary humor: “I spend almost as many hours on the road as my husband, and he’s a traveling salesman.”

Cameron Village meets a real need. With its opening, that new but large and growing part of Austin to the far northeast now has its own shopping facilities — and very complete ones.

Here, under one roof and accessible from both the newly paved Cameron Road and from Interregional Highway, are a grocery store (Hydew’s Supermarket); an appliance store (G. M. Bettis, Incorporated); a photo supply store (Studiman Photo Service); a ladies’ ready-to-wear store (the Fashion Shop).

In front of the center provides room for 250 cars. A graded area behind the village has space for 200 more. In addition, there is a 51-car space behind the center for owners and employees of the stores.

The canopy extension beyond the sidewalk directly in front of the arcade will prove a real boon in bad weather. The shopper can drive right up to the platform, load his car there and eliminate the necessity for carrying heavy packages through the rain.

With the exception of Studiman’s, which will open soon, all the stores in the center will be ready for business during the opening.

East 51st Street is the throughway that gives quick access to Cameron Village to all residents of Northeast Austin, including those who live west of the Interregional Highway and Airport Boulevard.

spatial divide between races and “destroyed already scarce housing in minority communities and often disrupted neighborhood life”.

¹³⁰ Urban sprawl both necessitated automobile ownership and perpetuated it, as retail developers catered towards car owning customers by building bigger but more spread out stores.

*A new Rylanders meets the need of “that new but large growing part of Austin to the northeast” (suburbs)*¹³¹

¹²⁹ “ “

¹³⁰ Lipsitz, 374

¹³¹ Image: Rylander’s fun spot to shop. (1965, Feb 18). *The Austin Statesman (1921-1973)* Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1521804966?accountid=7451>

Large corporate supermarkets were among the retailers who capitalized off of car culture. size, and variety of products out of business. In the decade Supermarkets proliferated during the 1950s in Austin and put many smaller grocers who could not compete with their marketing influence, following 1950, supermarkets' national share of the retail food market doubled from 35% to 70%.¹³² Supermarkets took control over food distribution out of community hands as “advances in technology and scale allowed stores to grow bigger, and market integration (both horizontal and vertical) gave retailers (whose parent corporations are now often larger than their wholesale suppliers) increasing control over both wholesale and retail prices”.¹³³ While in the 1930s an average sized grocery store was between 6,000 and 8,000 square feet, by the 1960s supermarkets averaged as large as 60,000 to 80,000 square feet.¹³⁴ With these expansions, supermarkets offered customers a wide variety of produce and home goods in one place, a convenience small grocers could not compete with.

Supermarkets' rise to supremacy in East Austin was incremental. While many locally owned independent grocers endured in Eastside neighborhoods well into the 1970s, for independent grocers catering to a community consumer base, supermarkets provided a very real threat to business because of their ability to offer a greater variety in products and reach a broader base of consumers.¹³⁵ Reese notes that “because capitalism requires an abundance of consumption to continue to reproduce itself, Blackowned businesses in segregated neighborhoods cannot compete with larger chains that have further reach within and beyond Black communities”.¹³⁶ Eventually the introduction of chain supermarkets into East Austin

¹³² Eisenhaur, 127

¹³³ Eisenhaur, 127

¹³⁴ Reese, 34

¹³⁵ Fontaine, Rev. J. (1971). *The Black Registry of Austin's Businesses*.

¹³⁶ Reese, 105

would take customers away from community run grocers, only for these supermarkets to disinvest and pull out of the community during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s because of the perceived “risky investment” of locating in an area populated predominantly by people of color. By 1995 many people in East Austin, in particular those who did not own cars, lacked access to affordable, culturally appropriate, and healthy food as there were only two grocery stores in the entirety of East Austin. Both of these supermarkets were corporate owned.¹³⁷

Unlike family owned grocers, these supermarkets entered and exited neighborhoods based on profitability. After tempting the Eastside market with a few early openings like the Super Food Land¹³⁸ on Montopolis Drive in 1955 and A&P¹³⁹ on Hargrave street in 1969, supermarkets largely abandoned the Eastside following affluent customers out into racially exclusive suburbs.¹⁴⁰ Across the country, including Austin, the location of new and improved supermarkets followed affluent whites out into the suburbs. While what would become the first HEB Supermarket was built downtown on West Sixth street in 1938, by the late 1960s, as affluent whites were moving outwards, there were an abundance of articles in the Austin American Statesman announcing chain supermarket openings in far north and far south Austin

¹³⁷ Wyatt “Rappin”

¹³⁸ Supermarket reopening set today. (1955, Mar 31). *The Austin Statesman* (1921-1973) Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1559640734?accountid=7451>

¹³⁹ New A&P supermarket slated opening today. (1969, May 04). *The Austin Statesman* (1921-1973) Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1515076058?accountid=7451>

¹⁴⁰ Most suburbs around Austin had deeds prohibiting African American residents (Tretter, 126).

suburbs (see Rylanders¹⁴¹, Handy Andy (Anderson Mill)¹⁴², Handy Andy (Rutland)¹⁴³ HEB¹⁴⁴, Kroger¹⁴⁵, Safeway¹⁴⁶, Hyden's¹⁴⁷).

Eisenhaur calls the strategic abandonment of inner city neighborhoods by food retail “supermarket redlining”, a term which denotes the systematic ways in which the abandonment of Black and Hispanic neighborhoods by food retail is reflected geographically.¹⁴⁸ Evidence suggests that what few supermarkets remained in East Austin after the 1970s did not receive the same expansions, upgrades, and capital investment that their suburban counterparts did.¹⁴⁹ The detrimental imprint of these early locational decisions compounded by neoliberal supermarket consolidation (detailed in Section 1 Part 2) are still reflected in the paucity of supermarkets found in East Austin.

Racial redlining, urban renewal, suburbanization, and the development of corporate supermarkets are trends in cities across the United States during the first half of the twentieth

¹⁴¹ “ “ Rylander's fun spot to shop

¹⁴² In austin area: Handy andy opens 6th store. (1974, Nov 22). *The Austin American Statesman (1973-1987)* Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1504056687?accountid=7451>

¹⁴³ “ “

¹⁴⁴ Capital plaza's HEB store their largest. (1960, Nov 16). *The Austin Statesman (1921-1973)* Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1527931371?accountid=7451>

¹⁴⁵ Kroger company opening new austin family discount centers. (1970, Mar 16). *The Austin Statesman (1921-1973)* Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1514774803?accountid=7451>

¹⁴⁶ Two new food stores to open. (1973, Feb 16). *The Austin Statesman (1921-1973)* Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1504085219?accountid=7451>

¹⁴⁷ Shopping chore easier in northeast austin now. (1958, Jul 14). *The Austin Statesman (1921-1973)* Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1528098135?accountid=7451>

¹⁴⁸ Eisenhauer, 125-133

¹⁴⁹ HEB's new store to be ultra modern. (1957, Jun 26). *The Austin Statesman (1921-1973)* Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1613490926?accountid=7451>

century. Today there is a disproportionate paucity of food retail in communities of color, and many of the diverse cultural foodways which supported and sustained people inside and outside of the capitalist marketplace have been eroded away. While these trends may strike some as “inevitable” and the correlation between race and control of food sovereignty “coincidental”, the food history of Austin during this time indicates that political factors favoring white economic growth created this reality. Eisenhower eloquently argues that supermarkets emerged, proliferated, and came to dominate food retail because of the confluence of political factors beneficial to their development. She states,

“The growth of a retail industry with the political and economic power to dominate food retailing (as well as food production and distribution) was highly dependent on the increased mobility of the upper- and middle-classes, the willingness of the government to relinquish a number of regulatory controls, and the development of technology which vastly improved both communication and information management for those who could afford it. In the process of becoming the dominant form of food retailer, supermarkets have become normative, and indeed, gained a sheen of inevitability. Thus, in the popular mind (and in the minds of too many researchers) supermarkets are understood to be a given”.¹⁵⁰

The growth of the supermarket as the dominant form of food retail in Austin was precipitated by government funded highway projects and investment incentives, demand from developing suburbs for new food retail, by the increasingly globalized nature of America’s post-war food trade, and by the development of technologies which enabled the transportation and storage of transnationally produced foods.¹⁵¹ Consumerism at Austin’s burgeoning supermarkets was heavily promoted by the widely circulated *Austin American Statesman* which frequently published articles promoting buzz about the new technologies progressive modernity of new supermarkets. Supermarkets’ supremacy was

¹⁵⁰ Eisenhower, 129

¹⁵¹ Eisenhower, 127 also see Ageyman

not the inevitable result of modernity and evolution working themselves forward, it was enabled and supported by the confluence of multifaceted political and cultural factors promoting consumerism, suburbanization, and ‘modernity’.

Corporate supermarkets challenge food sovereignty by putting local grocers out of business, sourcing goods from global markets, and giving power over food options, variety, and prices to corporate heads. In other words, chain supermarkets reorient power over food production, distribution, and consumption away from local neighborhoods and to corporate owners motivated not by community needs, but by global markets. While the seeds of corporate consolidation and local disempowerment were sown in piecemeal ways by the 1960s, neoliberal policies in the late 1970s fed unregulated racial capitalism in ways that exacerbated already existing racial divides between who had access to, representation within, and control over their foodways in Austin and who did not. My next section explores Austin’s food history from the late 1970s to the present, interrogating the impacts and legacies of neoliberal ideologies on food sovereignty for communities of color in East Austin.

Part II: Neoliberalism and Gentrification (1970s-Present)

Introduction

During the 1970s and 1980s neoliberalization would shape control over food production, distribution, and consumption in ways that disempowered growers, retail owners, and chefs on the Eastside. Scholars widely point to the late 1970s and early 1980s as a turning point for America’s socio-economic landscape at the national scale

due to the adoption of neoliberal social and economic policies under President Ronald Reagan and Chair of the Federal Reserve Paul Volker (Harvey, Guthman, Giroux, McClintock). By the early 1970s, politicians across the political spectrum were brainstorming responses to the break down of Keynesian policies, stagflation, and soaring unemployment; Harvey notes that neoliberal policies were not the *only* proposed “solution” to the economic breakdown.¹⁵² When Reagan was elected in 1980, he (among other global leaders such as Margaret Thatcher) popularized the political logic “that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms” and that these freedoms are best “liberated” by cuts in social welfare programs, the adoption of free trade policies, and the prioritization of capitalist interests.

¹⁵³ Neoliberalization entails the dual process of rolling back government-funded social safety nets and oversight, “and the ‘rolling out’ of new social and economic relationships that further fuel capitalist accumulation.”¹⁵⁴ Examples of roll-out neoliberalization in the food system have included privatizing hunger relief, deregulating corporate control of supermarkets, and shifting blame for food insecurity from the state to the individual.¹⁵⁵

Politicians enacting neoliberalization have tended to frame the government's involvement in protecting private property and “the quality and integrity of money” by military, police, and legal force to be justified while the government's involvement in protecting non-economic rights such as food access, healthcare, and workers’ rights have been

¹⁵² Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, USA. 10

¹⁵³ Harvey (2007), 2

¹⁵⁴ McClintock, Nathan. "Radical, reformist, and garden-variety neoliberal: coming to terms with urban agriculture's contradictions." *Local Environment* 19.2 (2014): 147-171.

¹⁵⁵ McClintock, 147-171

framed as “arbitrary” and “invasive”.¹⁵⁶ The incohesiveness of this purported protection of “freedom” becomes even more obvious when race is considered; many scholars have criticized neoliberal policies for protecting the economic interests of upper-class white males, while invisibilizing and devaluing the lives of people of color.¹⁵⁷ Critiquing the uneven development, widening wealth gap, racial devaluation, and environmental degradation caused by neoliberal policies has become common parlance in academic writing.¹⁵⁸

What changed in the 1970s and where is neoliberalism present in the history of Austin’s food systems? As Section I posits, historically white capitalist interests have driven Austin’s development and people of color have been excluded from the benefits of growth. In response, communities of color built independent support networks on the Eastside. Independent grocers served as community hubs for connection to shared cultural identities through food and reciprocal support was exchanged between customers and neighborhood grocers who were willing to spot the check when times were tough. Locally owned restaurants provided a safe space for artists of color to perform, community activists to mobilize, and for people to celebrate life together. Beginning in the 1970s, external corporate interests enabled by multiscalar neoliberal policies began to play a more aggressive role in East Austin’s foodscape. Neoliberal policies at the national level created a hyper-competitive grocery store market characterized by consolidation, globalization, and the disempowerment of local people in controlling their food system.

¹⁵⁶ Harvey (2009), 2

¹⁵⁷ Giroux, Henry A. "Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, class, and the biopolitics of disposability." *College Literature* (2006): 176

¹⁵⁸ See Harvey, McClintock, Giroux, Guthman, Pulido

Inequalities in food sovereignty have been further exacerbated at the local level by gentrification on the Eastside. While since the 1990s the Austin area's growth rate has nearly doubled, for most census tracts since the 1980s Austin's African American population has been declining.¹⁵⁹ As white migration propelled by growth in the knowledge economy drives up property values on the Eastside, longtime residents are continuing to be pushed into suburbs like Pflugerville and Round Rock; today it has become harder for long standing restaurant owners on the Eastside to stay in business.

Neoliberalism: Supermarket Consolidation and Urban Disinvestment

Neoliberal corporate consolidation and free market competition during the 1970s and 1980s created a difficult economic environment for local grocers on the Eastside. In 1971, Brown's Grocery and Market, Devaugh Grocery and Market, Shaw's Food Store, Sunrise Grocery, and Thomas Matt Grocery registered in "The Black Registry of Austin's Businesses".¹⁶⁰ Evidence suggests that of these five independent grocers, only Devaugh's grocery store was still in business by 1979.¹⁶¹ In 1992, zero Black-owned grocery stores were registered in the "Black Registry".¹⁶²

A primary driver of grocery and supermarket closures in urban centers across the United States during this time were "price-wars" or corporate face-offs where two or more retail chains competed for control over the same market by fighting to cut prices. The retraction of the state from market regulation is a central tenet of neoliberalization.

¹⁵⁹ Tretter, 102

¹⁶⁰ Fontaine, "The Black Registry"

¹⁶¹ The Rouse Company. (1979). *The American City Corporation- Market Analysis to determine the economic development potential for the east and south Austin Study Areas*: 70

¹⁶² *Black Registry 91'-92'* (1992) Retrieved at Austin History Center, Call #: A 338.70964

Neoliberal logic posits that the “invisible hand” of unregulated markets clears out “inefficient” businesses who cannot compete and therefore unregulated markets encourage efficiency and productivity. As Buck phrases it, “the neoliberal food regime is thus predicated primarily on the expansion of global markets, facilitated by rapid and increasingly volatile global flows of capital and by the reorientation of state functions toward accelerating rates of production and of capital accumulation”.¹⁶³ Adhering to these logics the Federal Trade Commission deliberately did not to regulate aggressive price-wars between supermarkets, and “by the 1980s, the Federal Trade Commission

Superstore May Challenge Retailers

Guidry, Frederick H

The Austin American Statesman (1973-1987); Mar 25, 1974;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Austin American Statesman
pg. 24

Superstore May Challenge Retailers

By FREDERICK H. GUIDRY
(c) 74 Christian Science
Monitor News Service

The superstore, looming on the marketplace man's horizon, appears to present more of a challenge to food and other retailers than to shoppers.

As envisioned by many university researchers, the superstore is mostly a logical extension of the supermarket, with its emphasis on food but enhanced by a wider variety of non-food items.

The concept seems to be made to order for consumers seeking the convenience of one-stop shopping. It is presumed to be an advance over the present shopping center, which requires moving the car, in some cases, and negotiating with several checkout counters in any case.

If this marks a modest change in habit for the shopper, it portends a major shakeup for supermarket owners and their suppliers, despite the fact that the superstore is filled as only mildly revolutionary, and on a quantum jump such as the supermarket achieved over the corner grocery store. The superstore will come gradually onto the scene and be firmly established by the 1980s, according to projections by

Walter J. Salmon, Robert D. Buzzell, and Stanton G. Gort. Salmon and Buzzell are at the faculty of the Harvard Business School, Cambridge, and Gort is at Indiana University's School of Business. Their research was financed by Marketing Science, willing and able to drive their

Institute and Family Circle magazine. Their findings showed that competition is a big factor in the trend toward superstores. Operating profit has been dropping for supermarkets, as has average return on net worth, despite dramatic growth in sales.

As a result, many supermarkets have been turning to higher-margin nonfood sales.

Superstores will carry this diversification a significant step further. They will offer not only food, laundry and household maintenance products, but also some apparel, lawn and garden, hobby and craft, stationery and sewing items, and even dry cleaning and shoe repair.

all under one roof. It is assumed that such stores will be operated by existing food-store chains, rather than new retailing interests.

The technique for inclusion will be "routine buying needs," according to the authors. Supermarkets supply these needs in several limited lanes. Superstores will cater to desires that are rapidly becoming routine for some income groups.

The theory is that consumers want their shopping to be more efficient. Salmon and Buzzell are at the same time that retailers on the faculty of the Harvard Business School have been and will increase sales volume. Their research was financed by Marketing Science, willing and able to drive their

own automobiles in the shopping area.

If rapid transit really comes into its own, the authors say, the whole superstore concept might have to be rethought.

The trend toward larger, glasier, and more diversified supermarkets is already visible, the authors note. There are food emporiums in Minneapolis, Tulsa and other places, featuring wall-to-wall carpeting and a selection of

grocery items.

There are side-by-side food and drug stores, sometimes with the wall broken down between them. And there is the rare example of the French "hypermarché" with some 250,000 square feet of selling space in Montreal.

Actually the superstore that is expected to become most common in the United States is not that large. The authors foresee something like 30,000 to

35,000 square feet as adequate and not so overwhelming for the customer. The current average for new supermarkets is about 18,000 square feet.

The superstore will likely be open longer hours than most supermarkets are now, but the authors see disadvantages in 24-hour operation. These include the difficulty of cleaning up the store and replenishing stocks, the

increased likelihood of pilferage when fewer people are around.

Also, they note that higher-income customers are less likely to be shopping in the wee hours — and these customers are the mainstay of the superstore.

Growth of the superstore is expected to impact heavily on existing supermarkets. The authors foresee a need to close nearly half of them in

*A 1974 article in the Austin American Statesman describes how consolidated “superstores” are taking over food retail.*¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Buck, pp. 54

¹⁶⁴ Guidry, F. H. (1974, Mar 25). Superstore may challenge retailers. *The Austin American Statesman* (1973-1987) Retrieved from

(FTC) had taken the position that there was often no clear distinction between legitimate competition and predatory pricing practices”.¹⁶⁵

Proponents of neoliberalism argue that when the government allows aggressive market competition, economic growth is maximized and this growth increases the wellbeing of general society.¹⁶⁶ Yet in practice, unregulated market competition resulted in corporate consolidation in food retail as only large companies could afford to use leveraged buy-outs (LBOs) to stay afloat during price wars.¹⁶⁷ Between 1982 and 1987 centralization cost Texans more than 500 grocery stores.¹⁶⁸ “Inefficient” small retailers like Shaw’s Foodstore and Thomas Matt Grocery were pushed out of business. While consolidated supermarkets may have won the “price war” fight, in the long term they accrued massive debt from LBOs and began closing stores in neighborhoods that executives considered to be “less profitable”. According to Eisenhauer, “between 1978 and 1984, Safeway closed more than 600 stores in inner city neighborhoods. Many of those stores were the primary or only source of reasonably priced (and minimally processed) meat and produce in their neighborhoods”.¹⁶⁹

The term “supermarket redlining” describes this pattern of supermarket disinvestment from communities of color in particular during the 1980s and 1990s.

<https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1503948808?accountid=7451>

¹⁶⁵ Eisenhauer, pp. 154

¹⁶⁶ Harvey, 20

¹⁶⁷ Eisenhauer, 128

¹⁶⁸ Sustainable Food Center. (1995). *Access Denied An Analysis of Problems Facing East Austin Residents in Their Attempts To Obtain Affordable, Nutritious Food*. Retrieved from <https://static.spacecrafted.com/d97a6716dafc419ba047f82b03db0dd7/r/f238dea4f25941f7be8bcf1861a38c3e/1/31f82d56f07244438033bd7325f25306.pdf>

¹⁶⁹ Eisenhauer, 128

Industry representatives excused their aversion to inner-city communities of color by essentially saying, as Eisenhower phrases it, that “it makes no sense to serve distressed areas when profits in the serene [and white] suburbs come so easily”.¹⁷⁰ Assessing the profitability of East Austin’s retail market in 1979, The American City Corporation’s “Market Analysis to Determine the Economic Development Potential for the East and South Austin Study Areas” report concluded that due to the high percentage of East Austinites on public assistance and the lower income of residents relative to the rest of the city, “there is no market in the study area for the development of regional retail facilities or commercial office space”.¹⁷¹ The firm declared that “the decline in total personal income in real dollars seems to suggest that there will be no new support for additional retail facilities in the near future” on the Eastside.¹⁷² In other words, they encouraged retail supermarkets to avoid East Austin because “the people there are too poor to be profitable customers”.

Consequently, between 1985 and 1995 a Foodland supermarket, a Safeway, Sheffer Grocery and a variety of other food stores closed in East Austin leaving only two grocery stores remaining on the Eastside.¹⁷³ Between 1994 and 1995 three supermarkets closed in Austin in low-income neighborhoods, meanwhile HEB opened a new Central Market health supermarket in North Austin and Albertsons began plans to open a new store in West Lake Hills, two affluent and predominantly white neighborhoods.¹⁷⁴ An Austin Sustainable Food Center study found that while Travis county’s number of retail

¹⁷⁰ “ “

¹⁷¹ The Rouse Company, *The American City Corporation* pp. 70

¹⁷² “ “

¹⁷³ Sustainable Food Center, *Access Denied*

¹⁷⁴ “ “

stores increased by 25 to 50 percent between 1985 and 1995, the number of East Austin retailers had not grown.¹⁷⁵



Built in 1922 by Henry G and Fannie Tuke, today the Comal Food Store has fallen into disrepair.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ “ “

¹⁷⁶ (2020) *Photographs of East Austin Comal Food Store* by author (Sarah Holdeman)



When in May of 1995, *Villager* columnist Tommy Wyatt wrote in his popular daily column “Rappin’ that the “Eastside needs supermarkets”, Wyatt was responding to the impact of three decades of supermarket redlining in East Austin. Supported by local policies which favored Austin’s growing population of white knowledge economy workers and accelerated by neoliberal federal policies which failed to regulate competition, during the second half of the twentieth century food retail became increasingly dominated by profit-driven corporate actors. Rather than facilitating economic growth for everyone, neoliberal policies widened the socio-economic and racial gap in access to and control over food in Austin.

¹⁷⁷ Wyatt, Tommy (1995 May 19). “Rappin” *The Villager*.

Responses from the Eastside: Food and Resiliency Strategies

Ashanté Reese and many others have criticized the social sciences for making statements about the impact of state policies “on” communities of color.¹⁷⁸ Reese argues that this kind of analysis has the potential to portray people as passive victims and code communities of color as “lacking” “problem populations” who “need to be fixed”. Instead, Reese contends that scholars have an obligation to recognize the humanity of the people they write about, and consider the multifarious ways that people subvert, resist, and defy structural racism. Although supermarkets in their intrusion and their exodus from East Austin radically impacted food sovereignty for Eastsiders, it’s important to remember that people *lived regardless* and cultivated meaningful foodways *in spite of* marginalization by the state. A look into popular Eastside newspaper *The Villager* reveals that church fish fries and Juneteenth barbeque cookouts brought the community together regularly. Into the 1990s, all sorts of Black-owned barbecue and soul food restaurants advertised in the paper. Fowler’s Barb-BQ advertised daily special \$1.99 rib plates, Arvy and Mae Crayton of “Arvy’s bar-bq” cooked up “special homemade chili”, the Southern Dinnett (soul food) said they could “cater your party any Sunday”.¹⁷⁹ Other spots included Club la Tanya (“Chittlings Served Daily” cooked by Connie), Ben’s Long Branch “real Elgin Hot Sausage”, Terry’s Seafood Restaurant and Fresh Seafood Market (serving Fresh Louisiana Oysters), and Sam’s Bar-B-Que (they “specialize in good eating”).¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Reese, 5

¹⁷⁹ (1980 April 24). *Newspaper ad page*. *The Villager*.

¹⁸⁰ “ “

In response to the challenges to food access and control caused by supermarket redlining and neoliberal reductions in social welfare funding, Eastsiders ran food pantries out of neighborhood churches and community centers; churches still play a vital role in providing food assistance to the Eastside today. In 1995, over twenty churches and community centers were offering food assistance programs on the Eastside.¹⁸¹ In 1994, the Austin Baptist Community Center alone served 1,800 families.¹⁸² Forced by neoliberal policies to fill in for the state, these private institutions subsidized food access by collecting donations from inside and outside of the community.

First the Grocers then the Restaurants: Stories about Gentrification (1990s-Present)

“I kinda feel robbed of my, ya know, my culture, where I came from. It’s kinda like I’m forced to live a different life, and what I’ve lived is kinda like a secluded life. Kinda do it for yourself type of life, to where it was once a big family. Ya know? And it was just like a lotta love...I had my whole family with me when I was here [East Austin]. I had my mom, my brothers, we were all happy. Once we left here it was like a curse. And we moved into a new and better house, but it's like we left everything behind us that was instilled in us and that was being a family, being one.”

-Nicole Thomas, a Black resident whose family was priced out of East Austin¹⁸³

“Gentrification”¹⁸⁴

[jen-truh-fī-**key**-shuh n]

noun

1. *the buying and renovation of houses and stores in deteriorated urban neighborhoods by upper- or middle-income families or individuals, raising property values but often displacing low-income families and small businesses.*
2. *the process of conforming to an upper- or middle-class lifestyle, or of making a product, activity, etc., appealing to those with more affluent tastes: the gentrification of fashion.”*

¹⁸¹ Sustainable Food Center, *Access Denied*

¹⁸² “ “

¹⁸³ East Austin Stories (2009 Sep 18). *In the Shadow of Downtown*. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5xML_LnIpU

¹⁸⁴ Gentrification. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/gentrification>

*“You seen what they did to the Fran’s on Congress,
now they wanna do the same thing to Montopolis.
Make it all spotless; take out the Tom Gro, [TomGro Grocery]
raise up the taxes, build up the condos.”¹⁸⁵*

-Lench, “What Happened to Austin?”

Gentrification occurs when developers and city planners target “undeveloped” or devalued neighborhoods to be “developed” in order to maximize their economic utility for a city. What “development” means in this context is building offices, apartment complexes, supermarkets, and restaurants which cater to affluent incomers to the detriment of existing communities of color in inner-city neighborhoods.

What has provoked gentrification? Certainly Austin’s incredible population boom since the 1990s has increased our need for housing- but the specific concentration of new housing on the Eastside has much to do with city development initiatives in the 1990s. In 1997, the Austin City Council passed three bonds intended to protect the Edwards Aquifer by limiting development in West Austin, which the aquifer is under, while promoting infill density in desired development zones such as the eastern part of central Austin.¹⁸⁶ As environmentalist Bill Bunch phrased it, they wanted to “preserve this [pointing to West Austin] water and unbelievable biodiversity that still exists... Build here [pointing to East Austin] this was Blackland prairie mostly, it has already been denuded of its biodiversity by the plow and is suitable for building”.

¹⁸⁷ Bunch’s interpretation of Austin’s geography exhibits a clear lack of the regard for the integrity of East Austin’s existing neighborhoods, as he appears to prioritize animal biodiversity

¹⁸⁵ Avila, Vox. (2016, Jan 27). *What happened to Austin?*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1m03-DlHu0&list=RDW1m03-DlHu0&start_radio=1&t=0

¹⁸⁶ Tretter, 104

¹⁸⁷ Bunch, William. 2008, Sep 4. Personal Interview with executive director of Save Our Springs. (referenced by Tretter, 103)

over diverse human lives in Austin. Yet this mentality was influential, mainly (as Tretter argues) because environmentalists like Bunch joined forces with influential business coalitions who wanted to develop the area.¹⁸⁸ These Smart Growth initiatives henceforth encouraged developers to “fix-up” the Eastside.¹⁸⁹ As a result, since the 1990s East Austin has experienced an exodus of communities of color as long time residents are priced out of their neighborhood and wealthier (typically) white folks move in. Between 1990 and 2000 the white share of central East Austin rose from 8 percent to 11 percent.¹⁹⁰ By 2010 it was 30 percent.¹⁹¹ Simultaneously, the African American share of central East Austin dropped from roughly 34 percent in 1990 to 19 percent in 2010.¹⁹² Austin’s Hispanic population has to a lesser extent also declined, from 57 percent in 1990 to 52 percent in 2020.¹⁹³ Many people on the Eastside cannot keep up with the disproportionately high property value increases occurring on their side of the highway. Between 1992 and 2002, home prices in Austin increased by 71 percent on average.¹⁹⁴ In the East Cesar Chavez neighborhood in East Austin, between 1998 and 2004 land values increased by 400 percent on average and property taxes increased by 123 percent.¹⁹⁵

Today as city planners propose Austin’s new Land Development Code, questions about whose responsibility it is to absorb density are back on the discussion table. As previous sections detail, East Austin has historically been excluded from the benefits of Austin’s development. Because of this history and in order to foster equity in Austin’s

¹⁸⁸ Tretter 103

¹⁸⁹ Tretter, 110

¹⁹⁰ “ “

¹⁹¹ “ “

¹⁹² “ “

¹⁹³ Tretter, 110

¹⁹⁴ Busch, 241

¹⁹⁵ Busch, 241

future, I argue that East Austin is owed protections from the impacts of Austin's growth today. Increased affordable housing, property tax breaks, and grant programs would help longtime residents and restaurants stick around, as would dispersing higher density housing in areas which are less vulnerable to gentrification.

Consider the emotional experience of being displaced from your home. Gentrification constitutes an attack on residents' sense of place, belonging, and family. Where you are from, the streets you biked around as a kid, the restaurants you went to after soccer practice or for Mom's special birthday dinner- these places are destroyed and transfigured into a landscape catered towards affluent incomers. As Goodling articulates, gentrification "is also an indirect process that includes the loss of place, cultural resources, and community".¹⁹⁶



Mural By Mando Tanner mourning the loss of Eastside restaurants such as El Azteca, Rabbits, and Don Darios¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Goodling, Erin, Jamaal Green, and Nathan McClintock. "Uneven development of the sustainable city: Shifting capital in Portland, Oregon." *Urban Geography* 36.4 (2015): 516.

¹⁹⁷ Tanner, Mando "This is Austin- The History of Gentrification" Mural at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center.

Appealing directly to the emotions provoked by the process of gentrification, in the section that follows I will use the stories of two Eastside restaurants, El Azteca and Gene's Po Boys, to provide a small window into the pressures that gentrification places on Eastside. Gentrification is waging a war on the ability of East Austinites to maintain food related social exchanges which are rooted in place. "Developing" the Eastside has resulted in the displacement of restaurants which had previously served as vital hubs for building community and cultural solidarity. As Hispanic and Black owned restaurants are pushed out, white-owned restaurants take their place. For many who remain on the Eastside, things just don't feel "the same anymore".

As Jones writes, "one effect of East Austin's (re)making is the construction of food places with particular "tastes" in terms of food, values, and price, which do not necessarily meet the needs or desires of long established residents".¹⁹⁸ Not only are many residents priced-out, those who stick around don't feel like their values are represented in the neighborhood, and may feel that their histories are being erased and replaced. Restaurants and grocers serve as anchors for a community connection and political mobilization and their loss isn't just about food- it's about community cohesion, residents' sense of place and belonging, and it's about who has a voice in constituting the Eastside's history and identity.

El Azteca: Property taxes and displaced customers

¹⁹⁸ Jones, 4

Jorge de Jesus Duron Guerra and his family opened La Azteca at 3 p.m. on May 10th 1963 in a building on East 7th street which in previous periods was home to Alba's Cafe, Rosita's Tamales, and Ruby's Dancing Place.¹⁹⁹ A war vet adept at communications and electronics, Guerra had returned from Korea unable to find opportunity in Austin's segregated knowledge economy. "Opening El Azteca was a matter of survival" according to Guerra.²⁰⁰ Employing skills he'd honed working at his uncle's restaurant, Guerra used food entrepreneurship to gain standing in the Eastside community and make a living. For over 50 years La Azteca cooked up barbacoa de cabeza, chalupas, homemade tamales, menudo, carbrito



al horno, and steak a la Mexicana.²⁰¹ For many Eastsiders, the food and decor at La Azteca felt like home- as Yelp reviewer Delia S. wrote in 2016 "the food isn't fancy and it might not be the best Mexican food I've ever had, but it's honest, cheap and has a nostalgia factor for me. The pink and green walls, the heavily religious decor, the framed family photos...it may as well be my abuela's house".²⁰² Like the Green and White Store described previously, La Azteca was a space of comfort and belonging. It was also a political space.

¹⁹⁹ Barnes, M. (n.d.). The Story behind Austin's El Azteca. *The Austin American Statesman*. Retrieved from <http://specials.mystatesman.com/el-azteca-austin/>

²⁰⁰ “ “

²⁰¹ El Azteca: Menu. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://elaztecaustin.com/menu.html>

²⁰² S., D. (2016, August 16). El Azteca Restaurant. Retrieved from <https://www.yelp.com/biz/el-azteca-restaurant-austin>

For years El Azteca was frequented by political organizers and candidates wanting to engage with Mexican-American constituents on the Eastside. El Azteca provided a place for community members to connect with each other and mobilize collective concerns in the neighborhood into political change.²⁰³

Owning the restaurant gave Jorge Guerra standing in the community which he used to support political organizing. In an interview for the Austin American Statesman, Former city Council Member Mike Martinez said “it wasn’t just the great Mexican food that Mr. Guerra served that made the place so special. It was Mr. Guerra himself. His civic engagement and political participation in his community was always a part of El Azteca. He challenged me on numerous occasions to think about things from a different perspective”.²⁰⁴ Guerra’s family organized alongside other neighborhood business-owning families such as the Limóns and the Estradas to lobby the city and the state for better health services²⁰⁵ on the Eastside, paved streets, and flood mitigation infrastructure.²⁰⁶ Restaurants owned by invested community members have played a vital role in helping Eastside neighborhoods organize in diverse contexts.²⁰⁷ When these institutions leave, there is one less public space for longtime residents to establish community aspirations and civic discussion.

²⁰³ Barnes, “The story behind”

²⁰⁴ Barnes, “The story behind”

²⁰⁵ Chris Whitcraft, S. W. (1969, Feb 17). HOC must make funds fit needs: Priorities purpose for meeting. *The Austin Statesman (1921-1973)* Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1515068836?accountid=7451>

²⁰⁶ “Leut. Gov. Bill Hobby meets “Mexican American supporters” at El Azteca”. (1972, May 31). *The Austin Statesman (1921-1973)* Retrieved from <https://atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.atxlibrary.idm.oclc.org/docview/1514044179?accountid=7451>

²⁰⁷ East Austin Stories. (2009, Sep 23) “Juan and Only”. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7I6Q1xvKh4>

In 2009 the City of Austin began construction on the “East Seventh Street Improvement Project” which was intended to upgrade pavement, sidewalks, water lines, and landscaping along east seventh street.²⁰⁸ While local leaders like Guerra had been organizing for better infrastructure in their neighborhoods for years, the Eastside only began receiving substantial attention from the City after it was targeted as a “desirable development zone” beginning in the 1990s. Construction on east seventh proved detrimental to El Azteca, as it blocked off the restaurant from the street and prevented customers from parking nearby. According to Guerra, street work cut sales in half by 2012 when construction was completed.²⁰⁹ Meanwhile, property taxes in the area had been increasing at the same time that Guerra’s wife Ninfa got sick and the family started accruing health care bills. By September of 2016, the Guerra family could no longer afford to keep El Azteca afloat. After 53 years El Azteca closed.²¹⁰ El Azteca went out of business because it lost customers and could not keep up with rising property taxes. The same story applies to Nueva Leon, Gene’s, Alcomar Mexican, Tom Gro Grocery, Rabbits, or Don Darios. Where was the City when these small businesses needed its support?

²⁰⁸ Mejia, E. (2016, May 2). Tex-Mex restaurant El Azteca struggles with commercialization in East Austin. *The Daily Texan*. Retrieved from <https://thedailytexan.com/2016/05/02/tex-mex-restaurant-el-azteca-struggles-with-commercialization-in-east-austin>

²⁰⁹ Barnes, “The story behind”

²¹⁰ “ “

Gene's/ Hillside: Rebranding And Erasing Black Food History



*Above: left- Gene²¹¹ and right- Gene's Po Boys²¹² restaurant.
Below left²¹³ and right²¹⁴ Gene's building remade into Hillside Farmacy*

Say you are new to the Eastside: if you were to visit 1209 east eleventh street on a Sunday morning, you would find that you have arrived at Hillside Farmacy, a self-proclaimed eatery specializing in “farm-to-table” bites. You would also find that it’s your lucky day, you arrived during brunch and your waitress is handing you a menu. Interested in something light? A \$5 brulée grapefruit, \$9 Kale Caesar, or \$9 housemade granola and yogurt await you. A variety

²¹¹ Eastside Stories (2009, Sep. 16). *Gene's Too Hot to Trot*. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwi7LrIx8Wg>

²¹² Eastside Stories, *Genes Too Hot to Trot*

²¹³ Image retrieved from: https://www.yelp.com/biz_photos/hillside-farmacy-austin?start=690

²¹⁴ Image retrieved from: <https://goop.com/place/texas/austin/central-east-austin-restaurants/hillside-farmacy/>

of homemade fountain sodas and cocktail drinks are offered including the Country Doctor (\$8)- a blend of apples cinnamon whiskey and ginger, and La Diable (\$10)- mezcal, ginger syrup, and cassis berry liqueur. On the walls around you are prescription bottles and decor which bear homage to the Hillside's idyllic history, including a picture of Doc Young, Austin's first licensed Black pharmacist who ran a soda fountain and drugstore out of Hillside from the 1920s through the 1970s. A Youtube search for "Hillside Pharmacy" will bring up a video by Austin's African American Cultural Heritage District.²¹⁵ In this video the narrator will tell you about how Hillside Pharmacy is proud to carry on Doc Young's legacy by restoring his old soda fountain to make \$10 cocktails; they'll mention that after the drugstore closed in the 1970s it housed "Gene's Po Boys" and in the same breath that Gene's "then closed and gave way to its new incarnation" Hillside Pharmacy.

If you were new to the Eastside and visited 1209 east 11th on a Sunday morning, what would not be evident to you would be the whole history of the place. Opened for business in 2012, Hillside Pharmacy is one of many restaurants on the Eastside today who have commodified East Austin's history in order to market their food as "authentic" to the customers who can afford their food. Not included in Hillside Pharmacy's marketing is acknowledgement of their own role as white gentrifiers driving up neighborhood property values in a historically Black neighborhood and displacing the previous Black-owned business at 1209 east eleventh- Gene's New Orleans Style Food. Gene Tumbs was still running "Gene's" just three years prior to Hillside Pharmacy's opening in 2012.²¹⁶ One of the only soul food restaurants left on the Eastside,

²¹⁵ Austin's African American Cultural Heritage District. (2014, June 3) "Hillside Drugstore". Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4_c1nxqfDA

²¹⁶ Seale, S. (2012, March 5). Opening day at Hillside Pharmacy: Humming with activity, looking understatedly gorgeous. *Austin Culture Map*. Retrieved from <https://austin.culturemap.com/news/restaurants-bars/03-05-12-hillside-pharmacy-is-open-for-business/>

in an interview published on Youtube in 2009 customers raved about the Thursday (“Pork Chop Day”) Special.²¹⁷ Another customer said “if you want to get some soul food this is like the spot in Austin. I don’t know very many other places you can go, except Gene’s”.²¹⁸ During an era when increasing numbers of Black folks were being priced out of their own neighborhood, Gene’s held out as a beacon for soul food lovers. Gene was a laid back guy with aviator wire frames, a ballcap, and a perpetual grin- at the time of the video he was avidly planning the future and talked about his plans for expanding the business. Gene shows the camera a stage he’s building in the back patio so they can host music nights on Fridays and Saturdays- “it’s like a dream come true. You know?”.²¹⁹

The totality of Gene’s dream was never realized. Three years after Gene’s interview was published, Hillside Farmacy was opening their doors for business. Curiously, Gene’s story is misrepresented in the historic narrative Hillside’s current owners fabricate, according to them Gene’s “gave way” to necessary and inevitable renovations by Hillside.²²⁰ On their website Hillside Farmacy is honored to have received a Preservation Austin Award for their “loving” restoration; this time Gene’s story isn’t mentioned at all.²²¹ As expensive restaurants like Hillside move into East Austin, they rewrite the tastes and the identities of Eastside culture. As previous sections elaborate, restaurants and groceries have long been sites of resilience and resistance on the Eastside. Critically, Hillside Farmacy’s rewriting of the Eastside’s history into something idyllic and long gone challenges the continuing right of Black Eastsiders to define and design their own food spaces and alienates those who remember Gene’s and remain.

²¹⁷ East Austin Stories, *Genes Too Hot to Trot*

²¹⁸ “ “

²¹⁹ “ “

²²⁰ Austin's African American Cultural Heritage District. (2014, June 3) “Hillside Drugstore”.

²²¹ Retrieved from: <http://hillsidefarmacy.com/>

Ben's Long Branch
THE LUCKY HOT SAUSAGE B-BQ
TUESDAY SPECIAL
Chicken, Ribs, 3 Chicken, Potatoes,
Salad, Beans, Pickles, Onions and
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CLOSING WEDNESDAY
NIG TOLL BANDLE NIG PHANNON NIG LUMMEL NIG

Everyone has a fried chicken recipe.
Only the Colonel has
the Blue Ribbon
Original Recipe!
Where do you go when you want fried
chicken that doesn't taste like any other
fried chicken? To Kentucky Fried Chicken.
For the Colonel's Original Recipe chicken.
Because the Original Recipe does it right.
Original Recipe chicken is made differently.
It's actually pressure-fried. So it's tender and
juicy. And it gets its unique flavor from the
Colonel's secret blend of eleven herbs and
spices.
But although Original Recipe chicken is
highly recommended by us, remember
that you can also get our Crispy chicken.
All this delicious food chicken awaits
for you at the Colonel's. The Original
Recipe or the Extra Crispy chicken.
Kentucky Fried Chicken
It's nice to feel so good about a meal.

Ads in "The Villager": while chains like KFC and McDonalds had gained popularity, back in the 1980s and 1990s there were still lots of local spots to find soul food on the Eastside. Today they're pretty hard to find.²²²

SECTION II. APPLICATIONS: ADDRESSING GENTRIFICATION WITH A FOOD SOVEREIGNTY LENS

Introduction

I began this thesis with two aims. The first aim was to advocate for government-supported initiatives which address racial inequalities in Austin and prioritize food sovereignty for all Austinites moving forward. The second aim was to honor the roles that food has played in resistance and resilience in communities of color. The history I have provided supports both of these aims. By highlighting the ways that systems of power motivated by racial capitalism have disenfranchised communities of color from the benefits of development in the past, I aim to argue for city initiatives which empower Black and Hispanic voices in particular today. By highlighting the centrality of food in stories of resistance, solidarity, and community support, I aim to argue that protecting community-led and supported foodways is a crucial goal.

In the final section of my historical overview, I argue that gentrification is a continuation of previous processes of racial capitalism and dispossession. Urban renewal in the 1960s and SMART growth in the 1990s excluded the voices of communities of color and actively resulted in displacement on the Eastside; today Austin can and should center equity and address food sovereignty in the Land Development Code rewrite currently being discussed in 2020, as well as our upcoming Climate Action Plan. There are many intersection points between gentrification and food sovereignty and even more relevant political tools to address these points, but a comprehensive overview is beyond the scope of this project. Rather than take on all of these intersections comprehensively in the sections below, I apply my call for remedying past

inequities in food sovereignty to three significant points of intersection. Firstly: maximizing affordable housing in Austin would relieve financial burdens for many low-income residents allowing them to exercise a greater degree of control over what foods they choose to buy. These measures would also combat displacement thus allowing neighborhood community foodways (including backyard gardens, local restaurants, and church pantries) to remain intact and flourish.

Secondly, supporting Hispanic and Black-owned restaurants, grocers, and community gardens through rent controls, grant programs, and technical assistance would ensure that Black and Hispanic residents continue to see their culture and values reflected in the landscape around them and can continue building community solidarity through these spaces. Finally, empowering new growth for up and coming community-led food sovereignty initiatives would provide the people who know their community best with the resources to enact necessary changes. Listed below are suggested policies which apply to these three points of intersection: further research on direct actions related to these goals is necessary and the purpose of the short overview below is to provide a jumping off point for more extensive investigations at a later date.

Part I: Affordable housing

In their 2016 study of barriers to food security in Austin, Patel and Lentz found that food insecure “residents are keen to consume healthy food, but are unable to afford it given competing financial pressures, such as rent”.²²³ Therefore, Patel and Lentz argue that affordable housing initiatives play a vital role in supporting food access in Austin.

²²³ Lentz, Erin, and Raj Patel. July 2016, Office of Sustainability City of Austin. (10) Retrieved from: http://rajpatel.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Food-For-All_FINAL_070616.pdf.

Connecting community feedback with case studies from Portland, Washington D.C., and Denver, Way, Mueller, and Wegmann's 2018 report *Uprooted* presents a series of concrete actions the city could take in order to mitigate displacement and ensure affordable housing.²²⁴ Included in their list of recommendations are, "capital costs for new construction or preservation of housing, ongoing spending on local rent vouchers, assistance to existing homeowners, [and] direct funding to support the staff and operations of nonprofit housing organizations".²²⁵

Other specific policies would include passing a city ordinance which provides first tenants and then the city with the opportunity to purchase government-assisted affordable housing rental properties and mobile homes when owners attempt to convert rents to the market rate or place the property on the market.²²⁶ Purchases might be supported by non-profit third parties, a city sponsored Affordable Housing Strike Fund or by other means. Way et. al point to Denver and Washington D.C.'s passage of similar ordinances as blueprints; in Washington D.C. low-income tenants have created limited equity cooperatives in order to buy their units which has allowed housing to remain affordable for households making less than 50% of the median area income.²²⁷ Passing a tenants first right ordinance would help prevent affordable multi-family housing from being redeveloped into higher-end commercial properties or housing. Other policies currently being talked about include providing financial support for tenants to organize and negotiate with property owners- protected by a "tenant right to work" ordinance.²²⁸ Future

²²⁴ Way, K. Heather; Mueller, Elizabeth; Wegmann, Jake. (2018) *The Uprooted Project*. University of Texas at Austin Entrepreneurship and Community Development Clinic (School of Law) and the Community and Regional Planning Program (School of Architecture).(2) Retrieved from:<https://sites.utexas.edu/gentrificationproject/files/2019/09/UTGentrification-FullReport.pdf>

²²⁵ Way et. al, 93

²²⁶ Way et a., 65

²²⁷ " " also see:

<https://sites.utexas.edu/gentrificationproject/8-tools-for-combating-displacement-in-texas/city-and-tenant-right-to-purchase-preservation-program/>

²²⁸ Wat et al, 97

researchers should collaborate with community organizers to identify affordable housing areas which are vulnerable to gentrification and compile resources related to food access and housing affordability; the suggestions above provide a crucial starting point for policy makers to build an Austin which is liveable for people of all income brackets.

Part II: Support for Hispanic and Black-owned restaurants, grocers, and community gardens

Food sovereignty is about more than just access, it's about control. Supporting Hispanic and Black-owned food institutions on the Eastside will help ensure that diverse community values, interests, and needs are reflected in Austin's foodscape. From Juneteenth cookouts in Clarksville to homemade tamales and candies sold in Little Mexico- food has always played a vital role in cultural expression and solidarity in Austin. As shared spaces and points of contact, restaurants and grocers are where the community "talks to itself". When established businesses can't keep up with rising property taxes and are replaced by restaurants catering towards affluent incomers, longtime residents feel alienated and disconnected from their own neighborhood.

In 2018 the Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission recommended that the City Council "fund the Economic Growth Business Incubator (EGBI) project for \$180,000 for ongoing efforts in Latino-owned small business development services."²²⁹ They also recommended the funding of a Strategic Planning and Capacity Building Grant specifically for Latinx and minority-owned businesses. Addressing the inequality between the

²²⁹ City of Austin Office of the City Auditor (2018, Jan) City Efforts to Address Displacement and Gentrification. Retrieved from: https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Auditor/Audit_Reports/2_Displacement_and_Gentrification_AS17103_January_2018.pdf

debt capital access rates of white business owners versus Black and Hispanic business owners, the commission advocates for the funding of a low interest lending fund for Hispanic Small Businesses and Worker Owned Cooperatives. This fund would be managed by a Latinx economic development corporation owned and managed by Latinx community members.²³⁰ Each of these initiatives could be used to help support the continued growth of minority-owned restaurants and grocers on the Eastside.

Participating in a community garden requires time many people working long hours do not have; additionally allotted plot sizes may not be large enough to meet a families nutritional needs.²³¹ Yet in other contexts community gardens can be mobilized as educational and leadership opportunities for kids, rekindle residents' connection to the land, and can help communities produce food which reflects their aspirations and needs. By waiving City of Austin site Development Exemption Fees and Travis County Recording Fees, the city could make permitting new community gardens more accessible. Austin's Sustainable Agriculture and Community Garden Program has been mobilized to help Austinites use city-owned land to start community gardens. Providing the funds to waive permitting and licensing fees and increase technical assistance for this program would also increase the accessibility of building new community gardens.

Part III: Empowering community-led food sovereignty initiatives

²³⁰ Hispanic/Latino Quuality of Life Task Force (2014) Ciudad de Austin Hispano-Latino Iniciativa para la Ciladad de Vida. (60). Retrieved from:https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/City_Manager/HispanicReport-ver_6-0901_13.pdf

²³¹ Patel et al, 22

In 2013 there were 5,660 registered nonprofits in the Austin metro area.²³² Many of these organizations work directly to fight food insecurity in Austin including but not limited to, the Central Texas Food Bank, the Sustainable Food Center, Keep Austin Fed, Meals on Wheels, Caritas of Austin, and Urban Roots. Broad systematic changes in education quality, affordable housing, environmental health, public infrastructure etc. are beyond the reach of these organizations and it is imperative that public measures be taken to ensure racial equity in those areas. With that in mind, private organizations can still play a significant role in pushing forward the goals of food sovereignty especially if these organizations are led by those whose work impacts most. To reiterate, the goals of food sovereignty are to protect and enable “the right of all peoples to “define their own agricultural systems”, thus placing “the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems rather than the demands of markets and corporations”.²³³ In other words centering the “aspirations and needs” of those experiencing a lack of access and control in defining their food systems is completely imperative in food work. Guthman, Jones and others have criticized the “missionary impulse” of some food non-profits who seek to “teach good food” to “uneducated” communities. I echo this criticism and point to the history detailed in previous sections as proof that Hispanic and Black communities on the Eastside have a long history of resilience through food to draw from already; nonprofits from other communities with access to funding and networking resources should empower and fund existing activists and organizers on the Eastside and abstain from imposing expert knowledge onto communities.

²³² Cullinane, Mollie (2013 May 7). “Central Texas Nonprofit Facts”. Cullinane Law Group. Retrieved from: <https://cullinanelaw.com/central-texas-nonprofit-facts/>

²³³ Nyeleni, 9

CONCLUSION

Reflecting back on the history compiled in previous sections, it is evident that building sovereign food systems- be they church food banks, backyard gardens, free cook-outs, or small businesses- has been a vital component of resistance to marginalization on the Eastside. Food sovereignty is not or cannot be determined exclusively by market mechanisms or state policies- wells of agency exist outside of those realms. Yet, it is undeniable that the small grocers put out of business by supermarkets in the 1960s and 1970s, the car-less folks struggling to get to one of two grocery stores on the Eastside in the 1990s, and the restaurant owners who can't afford skyrocketing taxes today would be right to blame city development initiatives for their woes. As I argue, East Austin has been excluded from the benefits of, and at times has been actively harmed by Austin's development over the last 100 years. The right of Hispanic and Black communities on the Eastside to control how their food is produced, distributed, and consumed has not been considered or prioritized by city planners historically- and I argue that it should be.

As gentrification threatens the solvency of many Eastside restaurants and groceries today, and food insecurity continues to impact the Eastern Crescent (where most Hispanic and Black folks in Austin live) more than the rest of the city (which is predominantly white), it is crucial that zoning through our upcoming land development code and city council ordinances in other circumstances mitigate displacement on the Eastside and center Hispanic and Black voices in political decision making. These measures are necessary in order to rectify past inequalities in Austin's development and ensure that all Austinites have the right to define their own food system.

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