

Oakland, California's Points of Nutritional Hope

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Abstract

Starting in the early 2000s, a flash flood of money from tech industries in Silicon Valley and San Francisco has overwhelmed many neighborhoods in Oakland. Being geographically centralized between the two hubs, Oakland has become a hot spot to live, invest, and unwind. Because of how fast this tech revolution has shocked the area, communities that were once free to move fluidly throughout the city, are now blocked off by miles of food deserts, upscale shops, and trendy restaurants. Gentrification has affected Oakland's food systems by restricting major communities from having access to quality food outlets by increasing prices, diminishing food diversity, and maintaining colonial practices. However, despite the major pressure that gentrification has exerted on my home town, there are points of Nutritional Hope that provide quality nutrition and a helping hand. Independent initiatives, Alice Waters and her restaurant Chez Panisse, Bottoms Up Community Garden, and lastly Project Open Hand illustrate how through horizontal collaboration, there are still community victories amongst all the chaos. Furthermore, these areas reestablish the once cooperative vibrancy and fluid characteristics that have been destroyed.

Glossary

BART - Bay Area Rapid Transportation train line

The Town - Oakland was coined the town by local rap legend Too \$hort

Bougie - Shortened term of the bourgeoisie or middle / upper class

Vibe - The rhythm of a space, person, event, etc

Bumping - playing loud music

Introduction

I found inspiration for this project in 2017 when I first began handing out quality food to the homeless camps throughout Oakland. I have been working for Jessica Lasky Catering in Oakland for a number of years and after one event in San Francisco, I could not deal with the amount of leftover food that was going to be thrown away. Therefore, some of my co-workers and I decided to box up the food and bring it to a homeless camp the next day. The following morning, I drove to the intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Way and 27th street in downtown Oakland with cases of food in my car. As my co-worker Maria and I started to carry boxes of fruit and sandwiches towards the camp, perfectly on queue, I remember the roar of a shiny, red Porsche as it zoomed past us. We turned the corner and started to hand out food and people began to approach us asking for a bite. I was in shock by the number of people who patiently waited in line for some food, but I was even more shocked when I reached out to hand someone an apple and they asked, "Do you have anything else?" I tried to give out plums, but instead of biting right into the nutritious fruit, many people just handed it off to the next person. I was confused and wanted to understand why simple, quality food was being turned down. Moreover, Maria and I both felt terrible even though we knew that we were doing a good thing for the community. This led me to ask myself, how has gentrification reshaped the food structures within Oakland?

If you dive into what the food on your plate truly encompasseses, you will find a vast network of political, social, and economic decisions. Where did this food come from? How was it made? Am I eating this food because I enjoy a quality meal or am I purely eating to carry on my day? Because of the current systems that American culture is wrapped in, there are many

questions surrounding what we consume. Therefore, it is important to take a step back and evaluate what you are putting on your plate. Yet, this opportunity does not extend to everyone. Individuals who are working around the clock, strapped down with kids, tight on money, homeless, or anything along those lines may not have the freedom to ask these questions about their dietary habits. This ultimately illustrates how food is a marker for one's socio-economic status across the Bay Area.

Gentrification has immensely changed Oakland's unity from its inviting and inclusive foundation that my friends and myself experienced over the past few decades, to a separated and exclusive environment that is physically divided. This disconnect stems from the systematic advantages that wealthy individuals have within the United States. Because of Oakland's geographically located a flash flood of legislation, followed by the affluent, consumed the Town, which can be best visualized through the lens of food culture.

In meeting people both domestically and abroad, their reaction to my claim of Oakland, California as my home is usually the same: a grimace or scowl followed by the question, "Really?" Originally my response to this question was a mellow, but ecstatic, "Yes, really," but now my response is a passive, "Yes." This transition between tones has paralleled the transformation of Oakland, California from a grimy, yet covertly exciting city to a bustling hipster fantasy and a Tech industry playground. My once blissful response stemmed from the hidden beauty of what Oakland was. A mixed pot of races, religions, foods, and activities that created what I believe to be the perfect space to grow up. As a Latino and Jewish male, I was incredibly comfortable knowing that my home was, according to the East Bay Express in 2014, the most diverse city in the United States of America (East Bay Express 2014). With such an

immense variety of food and community, everywhere I went, I felt at ease. I grew up in Montclair, which is one of the more affluent neighborhoods of Oakland and still the environment completely paralleled the “low and slow” vibe of the city. As I attended Montera Middle School and then Oakland Technical High School, I was submerged in the humbling reality of the greater community and food lifestyles. Whether it was basketball games and barbeques in the Acorn District or soccer practice with celebratory tacos in the “Murder Dubs” of East 24 street, for me, there was no divide between the haves and the have nots. This blended the city together into a beautiful landscape of acceptance, collaboration, and humility, which provided me a space to engage with and to appreciate the city as a whole.

However, these mixing grounds of love, community, and sharing have been pushed away into little pockets to make room for the over-consuming and “bougie” activities. Flea markets, sporting events, and festivals that were once intimate, and “native” gatherings grounds are now entangled in webs of gentrification from young, wealthy, and mostly white consumers searching for a good time and a taste of the original Oakland flair. These upscale activities and tastes are rolling through Oakland with complete neglect for what was once an inclusive atmosphere and have skewed the food systems into a one sided affair. This is why I now give an incognito response to the question if I am from Oakland. This is because the original, sly energy that made Oakland the hidden jewel of the Bay Area has been exposed and commodified. A landscape where half the population struggles to find a quality meal and a warm bed while the other half purchases a fifteen dollar piece of rustic, avocado toast. The dichotomy of life throughout my hometown has illustrated that neo-colonial and capitalist grip on society has not ended, but in many ways is stronger than ever. With the ships of San Francisco and Silicon Valley at the

forefront of technological progression, the sail of gentrification has begun to blanket the surrounding areas, as the wealth pours in and the continued displacement of people ensues.

Prior to the injection of wealth over the twenty years, the economic divide was physically recognized by the hills and lowlands. However, since the great transition of Oakland starting around the turn of the century, areas that were once claimed as the “ghetto” have been developed into high demand housing for incoming gentrifiers. “Gentrifier” in this context is the title for incoming wealth derived and trickled down from the tech boom of San Francisco and Silicon Valley. As a result, the haves claimed North and Central Oakland. While the have-nots (who once dominated the entire city) are now limited to spaces within West and East Oakland. Furthermore, these areas are being dragged along in the back pocket of gentrifiers for future, potential development sites.

To give you an understanding of how dramatic the real estate shift has been, a family friend who has lived in the East Bay for over forty five years and who has been a Real Estate agent for twenty plus years, discussed the unparalleled growth of Oakland with me as I helped him organize an open house just off Telegraph Avenue in Oakland's Rockridge district. Charles described how the area that is currently known as Temescal District (Between Telegraph and Broadway Avenue and 51st and 45th Avenue) was once considered a slum, but now is considered one of the most desirable areas in the Bay to live. He told me that a standard two bedroom, one bathroom house would sell for less than two hundred thousand dollars before 2000, but now that same house will easily sell for over one million dollars. This massive, quick shift in housing prices is purely a byproduct of upper-middle-class to upper-class demands.

After the “White Flight” (Richards 2018) of the 1960s - 1970s, where mostly white, well off citizens deserted urban areas in pursuit of suburban homes, there was a complete “erosion of the tax base that provided essential city services” (Reiss Jr. 1985). Therefore, “[A]ll city services, including that of the police, failed to grow to keep pace with the mounting problems associated with urban decay and the new problem populations” (Reiss Jr. 1985). With the deinstitutionalization of mental facilities and halfway houses and then disappearance of businesses, a large population of people were forced to the city streets (Reiss Jr. 1985).

Before I continue with the above passage, I need to first dive into the serious homeless problem that faces Oakland's communities. In the early 2000s, I would ride around as my parents drove me to soccer or basketball games and there would be a few homeless people here and there, but nothing like it is today. Now, as you drive around downtown Oakland, along MLK, or towards the Webster Tube there are humongous encampments of homeless people cooped up underneath overpasses. Hundreds of people living in terrible conditions right near major construction developments displays the dichotomy of what is occurring within Oakland. These establishments of homelessness have led the United Nations to investigate. In an article by the East Bay Express, “United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Leilani Farha inspected Oakland's homeless encampments” and stated to an express reporter that these spaces of disbelief are a repercussion of "systemic cruelty." The institutional oppression is directly linked to the city accelerated processes to construct major housing projects, and social spaces for the incoming gentrifiers. With little regard for low income families, these developments set a standard for the housing market and lifestyles throughout the city.

This standard has become so inflated that current Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf has cracked under the pressure of the raising homelessness percentages. Because the percentage of homeless individuals has increased by roughly twenty five percent from 2015 to 2017 (San Francisco Chronicle 2018), the city in collaboration with three Bay Area nonprofits have instituted a pilot program called “Keep Oakland Housed”. This initiative will provide “city dwellers who make 50 percent or less than the area’s median income” an opportunity to receive assistance (San Francisco Chronicle 2018). The issue of homelessness is so severe that programs like this, along with low income housing developments are beginning to spring up throughout the city. However, the sheer abundance of tent cities that are still occupied has not decreased, but actually grown. This progression is one of the results of the white flight that I discussed above.

Although Oakland was cast aside by suburban sprawl, this movement catalyzed revolutionary activism. Leading up to the new millennium, Oakland, California was classified as one of the most violent cities in the United States of America due to the high rates of illicit drugs, crimes, and political unrest. Yet, Oakland still provided an even playing field for individuals to work together and collaborate, igniting major social movements.

Major communities grew through the tight bonds of shared ideas, political activism, and community collaboration. This catalyzed the stream of independence that flowed throughout the city and developed an intense ecosystem of creativity and strength. However from the surface, Oakland seemed like a rowdy, undisciplined city full of uncivilized crooks. For example, the Black Panthers, an African American political group, was viewed by the world as a harsh, gun flashing militant group, but at the core of their efforts, they offered way more than military coats and berets. They provided daily breakfast, tutoring programs, and day care facilities for

thousands of kids across the city of Oakland. Yet these movements did not satisfy a capitalist agenda even though there was a strong sense of togetherness and a small forming industrial economy. Oakland was seen as a place with huge economic potential because of its close proximity to one of the economic centers of the country and the low property values in Oakland. As a result, “civil” institutions, large corporations, and crude companies recognized the potential of the area. For example, the internet radio company Pandora, a multi-billion dollar company, situated itself in downtown Oakland in 2000.

As San Francisco and Silicon Valley became two of the most economically driven cities in the world, elites decided to return to the area because of the attractive distance to work, the rich heritage of Oakland, but most importantly the totally depressed property values. Thus, highlighting the power of money in a system completely dependent on it. Then as a neighborhoods' economic value grew, the high demand for new and quality restaurants, bars, social areas, schools, and grocery outlets followed suit. This transforms the area into a model of monetary mobility, which will be visualized later on through the food culture of the city.

Once an area is regarded as a “hip” space, the area past a financial tipping point. Sadly, the craziest part of this swing is that the upswing hasn't stopped. This metaphorical and literal wrecking ball has and is going to continue to squeeze communities that cannot afford to keep up with the pace of rising housing costs and living expenses.

As giant cranes litter the sky, and the constant noise of construction disrupts gentrifiers' lunch of a twenty five dollar bowl of ramen, the have-nots are continuously being pushed out and into neighborhoods that are mainly supplied by liquor stores and fast food. This binary is exactly why Oakland has such a powerful social presence. The forms of diversity are not just racial, but

also social and economic. To best illustrate the complex social laboratory of Oakland, California, I will look at the greater political, social, and economic factors that are enmeshed in the vibrant and potent food systems of the town. Although Oakland has evolved into its own powerful, economic presence, the values in which created the city I grew up in have been altered and systemized into the fantasies of the wealthy.

Background

As Oakland's population began to reach 400,000 people around 2010, Oakland passed its economic tipping point for a vast majority of citizens due to the constant injection of plans, resources, and desires from Silicon Valley and San Francisco elite. In order to fully comprehend the scope of gentrification within Oakland, we must go back and compare the wealth and demographics of Oakland's population between the years of 1980 and 2010. According to the Bay Area Census in 1980 the median household income of all Oakland residents was 13,780 dollars and roughly about 47 percent of the Oakland residents were African American. In 2000, the median household income was 40,055 dollars with a 35.7 percent African American population. Ten years later, in 2010, the median household income was about 49,721 dollars with a 28 percent African American. Despite inflation, there is still a ridiculously large upward trajectory of annual income within the city of Oakland and a major transition of ethnic demographics. Over this thirty year span in which the greater Bay Area has exploded into the leading technological mecca of the world, many different people have soared in attempting to claim a piece of the treasure for themselves. As more and more wealth began to reside within commutable distance from these massive economic centers, long term residents started to be forced out from the quick eruption of disposable income. For example, African American

populations plummeted by 50,000 people between the years of 1980 and 2010 (Bay Area Census). Areas that were once dominated by African Americans have and are continuing to be scavenged and turned into a stereotypical white middle-class space with a twist of color and flair. Now these places are outside of the price range of many families, but also just blatantly outside of the true character of Oakland.

Before I continue, I would like to make it known that gentrification isn't catalysed by hipsters or techies, but is ignited by the systems that are directly beneficial for individuals who have wealth. It is very hard to detach race from these issues because the United States is historically a country built for white men, but for the purposes of this paper, I would like to make it known that race is not one of my primary topics. It correlates with the issues that are present throughout the bay, and also the country, but for this paper, I would like to specifically discuss food and its place throughout the city.

As the agenda of the rich and middle class began to overshadow the agenda of ethnic groups, the need for leisurely activities grew dramatically. "When one interest group holds too much power, it succeeds in getting policies that help itself in the short term rather than help society as a whole over the long term (Stiglitz 2015). Thus, serious political action by then Mayor of Oakland Jerry Brown was taken in order to facilitate the development of Oakland's social world. Through recognizing that San Francisco could only house elites and Silicon Valley was on the brink of a financial boom, Mayor Brown listened to the minority population of rich and middle class voters and decided to continue the trend of capitalist growth through his "10K" plan. In his pursuit to bring 10,000 new residents to the minimally-developed downtown area of Oakland by 2001, Brown provided major tax cuts, a sleek approval process, and pushed aside

city officials to revolutionize Oakland's dirty downtown (Elinson 2010). Soon after the 10K plans initiation, the canvas of a colonial artist began to be painted as massive construction projects contaminated the air with the noises of saws and grinders. In an interview with the New York Times, Mayor Brown stated, "We needed housing and not just for people that are hanging on or people who live on subsidies, but people who have disposable income that can go to the art galleries and restaurants" (Elinson 2010). Here Brown directly marginalizes major communities throughout the city. Instead of recognizing that communities with disposable income thrash communities without the economic surplus, he directly issues lopsided ventures for the prosperous. Ideally, restaurants and art galleries are open to everyone that can afford leisurely activities, but not everyone within Oakland can attend. By acknowledging that there are needs to house people "hanging on," but acting for the benefit of the haves illustrate the complete disregard for over half of the cities population. As Major, Mr. Brown blatantly deployed his desire for the city to satisfy a more middle-class taste.

On the other hand, I recognize that the city of Oakland does have numerous governmental organizations in order to provide unprivileged residences with aid. However, the publicity for said programs are difficult to access along with the disbelief in the system to provide support. According to the a 2006 Oakland Mayor's Office of Sustainability report, in 2000, "20 percent of Oakland's population had incomes at or below the Federal poverty level." Yet with such low levels of income, there are minimal individuals who apply or are even knowledgeable about food programs. "As a result, low-income peoples in need of food lost over \$54 million dollars in unclaimed federal benefits in 2003" (Mayor's Office of Sustainability 2006). The Office of Sustainability even accepts that "One of the biggest reasons people do not

participate in the program is simply that people feel embarrassed using food stamps”(Mayor’s Office of Sustainability 2006). However, food stamps can be issued in the form of a Credit Card, masking the true purpose of the programs.

I believe that the lack of individuals who apply for governmental aid is because individuals that are living in these types of conditions believe that the system is fully against them. In high school, I remember being in my Government Class and having fiery debates about the welfare systems within Oakland. With tears rolling down her face, one of my classmates shared that her family applied for food stamps, but after six months, they heard nothing. The barriers dividing the people who need help with quality aid further cast shadows on marginalized communities. This is where I find governmental officials, like Jerry Brown falling into historical roles of colonial administrations. If Jerry Brown was really a man for the people, those same tax cuts and sleek approval processes would also be available for eliminating the gap between city organizations and the people who really need the support. Another option for Mr. Brown’s agenda could have provided tax cuts for low income housing or more efficient transportation to supply better food access. Mr. Brown’s top down agenda that conformed to a middle class or upper class lifestyle left huge areas vulnerable for gentrifiers to mold the landscape into their trendy, boutique paradise.

Throughout Oakland the major food outlets are clumped together within a few blocks of each other in central and northern Oakland. For example, there is a large Sprouts Farmers Market located on Broadway Avenue which is approximately five walking blocks from the massive Whole Foods Market on Bay Place. Five blocks! Furthermore, these two stores sell a huge percentage of the same items. The over abundance and access for certain areas depicts the

systematic precision of city planning for the prosperity of a certain demographic. Along with the grand supermarkets, there are numerous farmers markets, small Mom and Pop shops, and restaurants galore that fill up the finite areas. However, in east and west Oakland, which takes up the vast majority of Oakland's territory, the majority of food access points are fast food chains, corner stores, and gas stations.

A few restaurants litter the east and west parts of town, but the vast majority of these food channels are non-nutritious, high in fats and sugars, and cheap. The terrible division “between the flatlands and hills is striking and adheres to the boundaries delimited decades ago by the aforementioned freeway construction, redlining, and zoning. Along with the flatlands being home to the highest concentration of people living below the poverty line and host the lowest percentage of home ownership and the lowest levels of education attainment” (McClintock 2008). While Nathan McClintock (2008) documents how Oakland is physically divided by public works, it is very important to understand that Oakland public works rest on the “10K” project. This project divided the city into controlling spaces where education, health, transportation, and food levels can all be contingent on where one lives. Despite the fact that Jerry Brown’s 10K plan fell way short by only producing half the number of residents he intended to because of the housing crash of 2008 (BondGraham 2009), the foundational work that Mr. Brown put in place has led to the complete re-ignition of his plan in the past ten years. Because of Mr. Brown’s initial build up, the stage was set for a resurgence of wealth and growth.

On the following page is a map that I illustrated to document the food landscape of Oakland. To create this visual aid I first charted the locations of super markets, farmers markets, local NGOs, and liquor stores using Google Maps. Then I hit the streets to verify that these

points were legitimate. At first glance, you can see a heavy concentration of all the different food outlets located in Central and North Oakland. Then when you expand your view East and West, the points begin to dwindle and only liquor stores remain. This exactly represents the idea of food deserts. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (2011), a food desert is “defined as parts of the country vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas.” That definition exactly portrays these vast areas of Oakland that are limited to corner stores for nutrition.

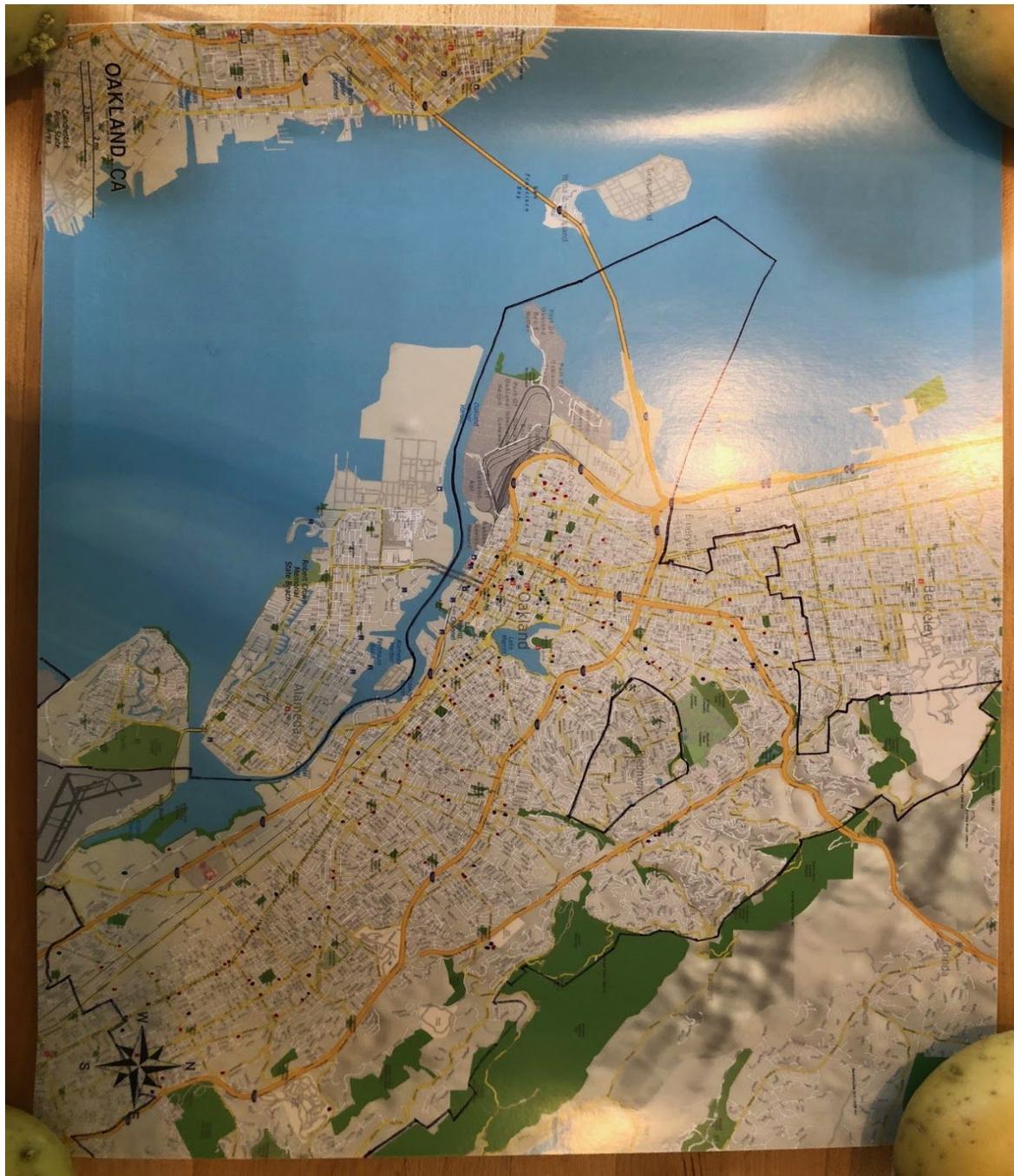


Figure 1: The black line is Oakland's borders while each dot corresponds to a different food outlet. Purple-Supermarkets / Green-Oakland's Food NGOs / Blue-Farmers Markets / Red-Liquor Stores.

A Quick Note

Throughout my time exploring the social laboratory of Oakland, some of my experiences have strengthened the love I currently feel for my home and make me feel very nostalgic about my upbringing. On the other hand, however, some of my experiences have developed into a severe dislike for the changes brought about overtime. Before this project and at the start of my undergraduate work as an Anthropology major at the University of California, Santa Cruz, I attempted to reduce and detach my personal agendas and motives from my work in Oakland. This made me feel disgusted at what Oakland has become. I would return home and get stuck in line at all of my favorite restaurants and venues, or I would be caught in a crowd at my favorite view point. Places that were once small pockets are now buzzing like an urban jungle. However, as I have continued my studies, I have learned that detaching myself and engaging with traditional anthropological practices of objectivity is not the way I want to incite change or acquire knowledge. My poetic memories of rowdy cookouts at Lake Merritt or listening to Mac Dre on the block made me recognize that “I could no longer behave or write as if it were possible to remain unconcerned, untouched, uninvolved, untransformed by what I was experiencing and writing” (Frederique Apffel-Marglin 2011). Therefore I argue that the only real way to continue the historically active, socially innovative, and powerfully connected community of Oakland is by expressing my biases from the past and how my present experiences have impacted my life. Now, I would like my rhythmic narratives of my youth about the epic tales of Oakland before its huge changes to become a catalyst for inciting community awareness and involvement. The following pages are my personal observations, thoughts, and experiences throughout my life in an attempt to reveal what I believe to be the conscious disregard of long standing communities

for the benefit of the middle to upper middle classes. In order to help maintain the areas in which the production of vibrancy is formed, instead of tearing literally these pockets down brick by brick, I believe that my true opinions must be shared.

As Ruth Benedict states, “No man ever looks at the world with pristine eyes” and thus I am following suit via Cultural Anthropology. I believe that the beauty in the work that follows is truly centered at the deep, passionate, love I have for The Town. Every little piece of who I am derives from my attachment to Oakland and its glorious vibrancy (which is/has become commodified, but I will discuss that later). Therefore, my experiences, interpretations of readings, and interviews that encompass this work are more of a reflective take on how they have affected my life and my thoughts about the city as a whole.

In Clifford Geertz's “Thick Description”, Geertz dissects the notions of culture development and the space for writing an ethnography. As a result, he perceives anthropology as a field of meaning instead of one that draws cultural conclusions which helps establish a structure for participant observation and collaboration. Throughout his article Geertz spins culture into a “web of significance” (Geertz 1973) by highlighting the connection between groups and their surrounding environment. Therefore, I have followed his direction and attempt to illustrate how people are a product of Oakland and Oakland is a product of its people.

Moreover, I want people to recognize that through these experiences I have found peace in the changing of times. This peace has been found by utilizing Lila Abu-Lughod's method of examination of the particular, which is found in her work “Writing Against Culture”. During my time with numerous organizations throughout Oakland, I have come to recognize that, “the effects of extra local and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically,

produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives” (Abu-Lughod 2008). By looking at Oakland with this anthropological lense, the daily events that transpired helped me negotiate between the value of capital and community. Because the large scale, systematic practices of capitalism are in constant transaction with the local community and its day to day actions, I have thus seen, heard, smelled, and tasted that hope is still on the horizon.

What is Nutritional Food?

First, I wish to distinguish the difference between high and low quality food. One difference that I would like to depict is the labeling of organic. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, there are different qualifications to be labeled ‘organic’. For example, “Organic meat, regulations require that animals are raised in living conditions accommodating their natural behaviors (like the ability to graze on pasture), fed 100% organic feed and forage, and not administered antibiotics or hormones. (McEvoy 2012)” For organic produce the story changes a bit. Organic produce needs to be grown in at least 70% organic soil. The remaining non-organic practices are produced without using prohibited practices (genetic engineering, for example), but can include substances that would not otherwise be allowed in 100% organic products like fertilizers and pesticides (McEvoy 2012). The reason why organic foods are a better nutritional diet is because they lack major poisonous chemicals that are extremely harmful to humans both through consumption and also the pollution of the planet by promoting healthier soils from the lack of industrial fertilizers that destroy the land and water. Those chemicals that are used by large scale industrial farms leach into the ground, into water sources and into the air.¹ Another characteristic that contextualizes quality food is by the nutrition level. Bright and

¹ If you would like to read more about this a good place to start would be Jay Shankar Singh’s book, “Agro-Environmental Sustainability”.

colorful foods like salmon, kale, and garlic, house a multitude of vitamins and minerals that contribute directly to one's overall well being and long term health. While on the other hand, fried and processed foods explicitly remove or replace the nutritious content with high levels of salt, fat, and sugar. So instead of benefiting the body, they increase risk of long term health issues. Ultimately, there are multiple levels of food quality, which parallels the multiple avenues of life that food contextualizes.

With almost every aspect of life being somehow linked to diet, I have focused my efforts on the following issues: housing, nutrition, care, transportation, and pollution. All of these matters overlap within the activities and ventures of an individual's day, along with being linked to the greater system. Housing is significant to the greater food system because it perfectly coincides with the fight for food. Depending on where you live, the level of nutritional access changes dramatically. This leads to the factor of nutrition. If you are hungry, you may go search for whatever can immediately curb that hunger, instead of long term nutritional gain. This leads to the constant reliance on cheap fast food chains or liquor stores in order to immediately stop the rumbling in one's stomach. The next issue is care which is critical for understanding family bonds, living conditions, and nutritional availability. Therefore, care is the metaphorical glue that holds the livelihood of groups together. Next, transportation is key because it allows for the maneuverability to different pockets of the city for food and other supplies. Lastly, the areas that are most food insecure are usually the areas that have the highest levels of pollution. With BART running above ground and the highways ripping through the lowlands, these areas are constantly at the mercy of smog and other pollutants. Furthermore, these areas have suffered from over a hundred years of industrial practices that have polluted the soil with toxins like lead. Much like a

whirlpool, all of these matters continue to grip and suck in struggling communities, thrashing them around and around, until there is no chance of getting out. Yet, there are life rafts in the water, attempting to pull marginalized communities out of the downward cycle.

Over the past thirty years the Food Justice movement has worked hard to combat many of these issues through rallies, food drives, zero-waste initiatives, and numerous other productions. Despite being such a relevant social issue, I have found that Food Justice has such a broad platform, but lacks a concrete definition. In Julie Guthman's "Weighing in: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism", a multitude of industrial practices are discussed and picked apart. I enjoy her definition of Food Justice, which looks at fighting against the "problem of lack of access to alternative foods" (Guthman 2011). Furthermore, Guthman defines alternative foods as "a shorthand to describe institutions and practices that bring small scale farmers, artisan food producers, and restaurant chefs together with consumers for the market exchange of what is characterized as fresh, local, seasonal, organic, and craft produced food" (Guthman 2011). Here we see that Food Justice is about upgrading access points for underprivileged communities because of a lack of resources. For the Food Justice movement, having a broad definition works in their favor because an umbrella term allows for a wide range of applications when it comes to food insecurity, which has worked tremendously well. In order to take Food Justice to the next level, I want to distinguish spaces that directly energize a community through horizontal collaboration.

Thus the main concept that has emerged from my research is Nutritional Hope. Nutritional Hope is the embodiment of decolonization in areas through small, local, and quality food movements, which provide marginalized groups the ability to see the sunrise on the

horizon. Nutritional Hope is seen in markers that directly connect high levels of food insecurity with quality nutrition and a helping hand. These spaces bridge the gap between the devastating industrial food systems and the localized commitment to improving the health of the community. They illustrate that amongst all the rapid, financial chaos, there are organizations that still recognize and combat hierarchal food structures. This concept will be highlighted through field research on the amazing work of independent non-profit initiatives, community gardens, and NGO groceries.

Independent Initiatives of Nutritional Hope

Here I expand on my introductory paragraph on my experiences handing out food. In order to see both sides of the socio-economic lifestyles throughout Oakland, I have worked with Jessica Lasky Catering (JLC) company to produce high profile events throughout the city of Oakland. I have worked in catering for over four years now, and have done everything from small, intimate parties overlooking the entirety of the Bay Area to massive, over-the-top weddings in beautiful Napa Valley Vineyards. Despite the large spectrum that catering events can fall in, one thing's for certain: the people who have the means are expressing incredibly gluttonous dietary and social habits. Instead of these individuals wanting to cherish their wedding days through deep, meaningful relationships, hundreds and hundreds of people arrive in party buses and flow into the dining room while meeting each other for the first time. I truly appreciate that everyone is entitled to celebrate in their own way, but I feel like “we have lost the safety net of a web of extended relations and human community and find ourselves increasing on our own, competing with others...for the social space and rewards that make us feel like we really belong, really exist, really matter”. (Frederique Apffel-Marglin 2011). The safety net of

our family and friends has been stretched and mangled as these individuals face a sea of unknown faces; wanting to spend huge amounts of money on illustrating a lavish and abundant lifestyle. The humble connections that once influenced my youth seamlessly fall through the cracks when it comes to the wealthy. Rather than building up a deep, meaningful, “web” of social relationships, certain communities are building up walls to further isolate themselves and their possessions, only allowing access to their lives via invitation.

Within this community, the vast majority of people who can afford to have a catered party are the “gentrifiers.” White, wealthy, and “just moved to the area” are three of the many qualities of people that have infiltrated Oakland’s borders and have asked for the expertise from JLC. These markers are now social hierarchies within Oakland, and even the greater Bay Area or country as a whole. Instead of establishing tight, horizontal connections to these spaces, they are furthering the restructuring of the original communities. By verticalizing our social ties, the only links that remain are between people and their socio-economic position. This organization of communities has now included the vibrancy of Oakland. By utilizing capitalism leverage, incoming gentrifiers have taken apart what Oakland once was, yet still believe that they are maintaining the charisma of Oakland. But in reality they are merchandising and commodifying the essence of Oakland. Ultimately, the social value of being apart of living in Oakland has become a new form of being politically correct and having social integrity.

For example, over this past summer I helped put together an intimate dinner party for about fifteen individuals. As I arrived at the customers humongous house located on Skyline Blvd, I was led past the Mercedes in the driveway and into the front room. Before we began setting up for the party, I asked the host how long they had owned their house and perfectly on

cue the wife said, “Oh for about 3 years now. My husband works in Silicon Valley.” As the host began to give us a tour of their house, multiple pianos, six bathrooms, 4 living rooms, and all with a television set up, portrayed the “lavish” lifestyle of the haves within Oakland². The icing on top of the cake was when the tour entered the kitchen and a wall of glass stood between me and a view of the Golden Gate Bridge. After talking to the host in front of the view for about five minutes, I went back to our van to unload the supplies for the event. As I tried to make my way back to the kitchen, I got lost.

For the record, here I am not trying to shame individuals for being wealthy and wanting a view of the Bay, but I just want to make it known that from what I have seen, the new wave of people are incredibly flashy and over the top. This aspect is the exact opposite of the discrete atmosphere in which I grew up. Furthermore, for the truly wealthy, these individuals are literally placing themselves geographically on top of Oakland, which highlights the verticality of wealth in the United States.

As we began to set up the buffet for the party, I was in utter disbelief by the sheer amount of food that the clients asked for. Fish, beef, chicken, salads, potatoes, and charcuterie platters made up the dinner, but that's not all. A huge spread of brownies, tarts, cupcakes, and another charcuterie board rounded off the night. As the platters are left barely touched, and the guest started to leave, I sat back literally in shock by what was wasted³.

² On a quick side note, the amount of space that individuals who are well off occupy is remarkable. Every stereotypical aspect of American lives is encompassed in the idea of bigger is better. When in reality this is tremendously problematic because of the insane amount of resources that are consumed in the process. A good place to continue this point of research is to watch the documentary *Minimalism*.

³Food waste is a huge issue, especially within the United States, therefore I will direct you to the experts such as Kevin D. Hall and his work “The Progressive Increase of Food Waste in America and Its Environmental Impact.”

After the party ended, there was enough food left over for multiple families to eat. Even after filling up the clients' fridge and portioning leftovers to all the staff, there was still so much food left. So, my co-workers and I decided to take the initiative to repurpose the leftover food for the benefit of the community. Therefore, a few of the staff members and I took control and assembled sandwiches, bundles of fruit, and goodie bags to hand out to the homeless population throughout Oakland.

After almost every event that I worked for Jessica Lasky Catering, the amount of food that is left over can feed a lot of people. This is the first space of Nutritional Hope because there are a lot of individuals who recognize how severe the changing of times has impacted communities, and want to take a stand. On a side note, the leftover food is not the caterers fault. They do tremendous work in separating waste into proper sections, buying all compostable utensils and dishware, along with working with a local biodiesel gas station to repurpose all of their unwanted oils. Even after multiple plans to reduce waste, it is truly impossible to gauge how much or little the clients will eat, so the amount really varies from event to event. Therefore the amount of food that can be repurposed varies.

Over this past summer, I worked for Jessica Lasky Catering at a large wedding in Carmel that continued for over three days! This event consisted of a Friday lunch and rehearsal dinner, Saturday breakfast, lunch and then wedding dinner, and finally Sunday breakfast and lunch. Everything from prehistoric looking Atlantic Cod, to the mountains of french fries, and pounds of crispy bacon were prepared and consumed on this ridiculous property that had three pools, multiple barns, two industrial kitchens, and probably way more that I didn't even see. In my opinion a party of this magnitude is very wasteful, but also not very romantic. I understand that

JLC perpetuates this type of culture, and by working for the company I am also at fault, but through this recognition, I have stepped up my efforts to counteract this gluttonous behavior.

Throughout the event it seemed there was a huge amount of food that was going to be thrown away, so one of my co-worker, Maria, and I began assembling packages of food to distribute once we arrived back in Oakland. I remember distinctly forming a Fordian style assembly line. One person puts slices of fruit, the next some meat, and lastly so vegetables. After only an hour of working this system we had amassed over one hundred to go containers.

That following Monday after the grueling hours of the event were over, I left my house to head down to the kitchen to pick up the sandwich boxes. As I was packing out, I was met by the head chef who had prepared bags of extra fresh fruit and pastries for us to hand out. After loading up my car and eating a croissant or two, I headed down to meet my co-worker, Maria, at Lake Merritt.

With Maria now in my passenger seat, we discussed where the best place to hand out food would be. "Well there is the huge tent city on MLK and 24th ST," Maria said. I rebutted, "There's a massive one on MLK and Alcatraz." After some back and forth, we decided to go with Maria's original spot of MLK and 24th ST, but before we left the lake, I was struck by the dark reality of our situation. The terrible fact that we had to debate about which encampment to drop food off highlights the horrific conditions of Oakland's communities. Furthermore, these areas that we discussed are attached to key, thriving points of gentrification. Merely a few blocks from the bustling downtown areas of Oakland or Berkeley, the horrible, yet terribly amazing binary of this social laboratory can be seen in such a small space.

As we approached the area and hopped out of my car and carried one of the cases over to a corner dominated by tents and trash, the smell of urine and smog was in the air. While the noise of buses and cars zoomed past us, I looked down at my feet and the wrappers of miniature bags of Cheetos, Kit-Kat Bars, and Honey Buns covered the curb. When we began handing out sandwiches, a cop pulled over about twenty five feet in front of us, got out of his car, and began to interrogate one of the people. I couldn't overhear what their conversation was about, but as we got closer and closer the cop warned us to be careful, but allowed us to hand the women he was addressing a sandwich and carry on. A sandwich here and a plum there as hands were reaching out to get a piece of what we were distributing. However, as we shared with the campsite what items we had, some people denied food. Some people asked what we had and said to us, "That's it. Do you not have anything else?"

I was shocked, but continued to walk the lines of tents asking if people wanted some food. Looking at the conditions that these people were living in, yet still being in the position to deny fresh food made me think of my interview with Ms. T in October of 2019. Ms. T has been one of my close friends for a very long time as we grew up together in Oakland. As we discussed the lopsided events that have changed Oakland throughout our lives she shared with me that some of her neighbors near her childhood home in West Oakland "ended up on the streets" and that her Mom ran into them as she crossed "the tent city that grew near their house" (Ms. T 10/15/2019). Some people, like Ms. T's neighbors, that once lived a nice quality of life could not keep up with the quick swing of economic prosperity and then ended up on the streets. Maybe these were some of the people who once lived a higher standard of life and could not deal with taking charity? I was just utterly confused. The organic, healthy food from an upscale catering

company was shrugged off for fear of crippling one's pride? Desire for something else? As I juggled with this idea, Maria and I continued to convince people that we were handing out good food.

After we handed out over a hundred sandwiches, fruit bundles, and other goodies, we walked back to the car and after sitting down, I saw tears coming from Maria's eyes. I asked what was wrong, and she said to me, "I honestly hate handing out food because who wants to receive charity, but these people are clearly caught up in the mess of reality and need help." I slowly began to drive away as I was trying to decompress from the intense string of emotions that I was wrapped up in. I was just in shock that we had to convince people that organic fruit and sandwiches were good for you. I was in shock over my own morality. I do not want to disrespect another person because I believe they need help and I am here to help. I do not want to perpetuate the timeline of colonial "civility" to a mostly ethnic population. I did not want to be the light-skinned savior of a mostly black and latian group of people. All I wanted to do was help, but I was left with the feeling that I did more harm than good. Why did I feel like I was hurting these individuals when my initial intention was to assist them?

Finally, I dropped Maria off at her car and I was left by myself to think. After a few days of decompression I realized that individual efforts like Maria's and mine are incredibly important to the overall well being of homeless groups. This is where I discovered the first point of Nutritional Hope. By having boots on the ground and connecting with people head on you begin to understand the reality of the social situation. By handing out healthy food or other items provides a space to engage with others face to face, which initiates conversation between

different groups of people. Furthermore, this humbling perspective highlights how one individual's efforts can have a huge impact on the community.

For the work that JLC and myself have done within the community over the past few years, we were awarded a certificate from Daily Bread, a local NGO that works with educating and supporting the East Bay through sustainability and inclusiveness. Because my coworkers and I cannot always facilitate Nutritional Hope, occasionally we deliver food to Daily Bread. They act as an intermediary between local businesses with excess food and local, free kitchens and shelters that provide goods to populations in need. Initially JLC reached out to Daily Bread, but once they saw the abundance, diversity, and attention that we gave to our leftover foods they wanted to work directly with us.



Ultimately, JLC and the staff work incredibly hard to find a balance between promoting their business and assisting the community, which is a fair negotiation between capital ideals and social awareness.

First Friday

In order to explain the powerful impact that Nutritional Hope can have, I am first going to dive into a space that perpetuates hierarchical food structures. As I grew up, food has always been a very important aspect of my family's life. When I was little we would go venture to every corner of Oakland in search of great, hole in the wall grub spots. As we would wait in line at the hidden taco stand or Indian food cart, my parents would spark up conversations with the people nearby and share undercover food destinations or community events that were a must go. As Oakland began to really change, the hidden stands and carts that were once publicly shared by word of mouth, sprung up on Tripadvisor or Yelp, as developers built up neighborhoods and the new residents soared in. This resulted in many small grub stops to shut down because of expensive rents or lack of production. For the ones who could acclimate to the high demand, their prices increased and the food changed. A perfect representation of this rapid change is Oakland's First Friday.

The First Friday Event takes place every first Friday of the month on Oakland's Telegraph Avenue between 18th and 27th Street, a huge area of Oakland's Downtown. Before First Friday changed into the 'hip' thing to do, the festival only took up about 5 blocks. When my friends and I were younger, our parents would drop us off or we would BART down to the event and check out the scene. Weed smoke filled the air and the grimy, yet delicious taco stands served out carnitas and guacamole for three dollars. There was space to walk around or circle up with your friends and enjoy Too \$hort bumping on loudspeakers. As we would walk the blocks back and forth we would see friends, acquaintances, and ex-partners. We seemed to know every face and every spot. However, this narrative changed dramatically.

On the First Friday in September 2018, two of my buddies and I decided to take a trip down memory lane and check out the festivities. As we hopped in my car and drove downtown, our jaws dropped at what we saw. Tens of thousands of people crammed onto the streets far as we could see. As we drove around the area for over forty five minutes to find parking, yes forty five minutes, we finally got out and walked over to where our favorite taco stand used to be. We tried to walk through the crowd, but there was no point because there was no space to roam. After we gave up on walking around we made our way to one of the food stands. We looked at the menu and everything was over fifteen dollars. I remember looking at a Taco stand and two tacos, without chips or anything, was ten dollars. I was in disbelief. Our nostalgic stories of First Friday had been invaded and will never be the same. Therefore we decided to call it quits and eat food back at my house. As we made our way very slowly back to the car, I randomly spotted a friend who I hadn't seen in ten years. He had moved to the Blackhawk, Ca on the other side of the Caldecott tunnel when I was around ten years old. He was with his dad and we stopped to chat about how crazy First Friday was. While laughing about old times, they told us that, "We have been waiting in this line for over an hour to get food." As we all caught up, I felt a weird combination of hope and sorrow.

Looking around there was a mixture of every race, religion, and ethnicity, but the whole atmosphere has completely shifted. Yes, First Friday is a city wide, open invitation event, but that has been the only constant. The essence of First Friday as a low-key, passionate, and undiscovered charisma, which once metaphorically captured the whole energy of Oakland has been ripped to shreds and put back together with money and a false sense of community. People come from far and wide to be a part of the Friday Friday Events because they want an original

taste of Oakland's vibrant and socially, enthusiastic community. Yet this vibrancy is now found only in small places of Nutritional Hope.

The Master at Work

Another place that employs these ideals is Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California under the owner and Head Chef Alice Waters. The bill at the end of your meal endorses a very expensive taste only accessible by a certain level of privilege. However, I will discuss this space because of its collision of hierarchical structures with immensely ethical practices.

One of the most exciting and also insightful experiences I had over the summer of 2018, and really throughout my whole life, was my *stage* at Chez Panisse. Chez Panisse is a Berkeley landmark that has fed some of the most brilliant, influential minds. Before my experiences of working at Chez Panisse, I want to document the steps I had to take in order to participate at the legendary facility. After writing several emails to the offices at Chez Panisse, I was finally able to secure a phone interview with the Master of Sustainability, Alice Waters, which I will discuss at points throughout this section. Then at the end of my interview, she offered an opportunity to come learn and work in her legendary kitchen, so of course I said yes.

In my eyes, Water's most important achievement is literally starting the Farm-to-Fork California Cuisine movements back in the 80's. By working directly with producers throughout the Bay Area and completely cutting out large scale, industrial farming from the habits of the restaurant, Waters triggered an avalanche of strategies to promote the well being of the food system and ultimately the whole world. For example, the menu at Chez Panisse is constantly changing because the chefs only cook foods that naturally grow during certain seasons. For example, summer can be engulfed by organic heirloom tomatoes and sweet peaches. Fall might

be dominated by colorful squashes and pumpkin seeds, while winter is consumed by acids and bloody, red beets. Lastly, spring is enmeshed in a tangle of wild arugula and colorful chard.

By being tethered to her magnificent restaurant of Chez Panisse, Waters has also initiated major changes to the educational systems within Berkeley through her organization: The Edible Schoolyard Project. This initiative earned her the National Humanities Medal from President Barack Obama for her dedication to the holistic agenda of food and health through her sustainable blueprint for success (CBS SF Bay Area 2015). By bringing a massive garden to King Middle School, along with chefs to teach culinary classes to children, Alice Waters is the epitome of turning the food system on its head. By teaching children how fun it can be to grow your own food and cook delicious meals, Ms. Water's recognizes the importance of rebuilding the system from the bottom up. By educating young individuals about the importance of a healthy diet and expanding one's taste pallet, these kids will blossom into food conscious adults, coloring their neighborhoods with the bright foods of life⁴.

Alice Waters is a legend in the food community. She is on my Mt. Rushmore of icons because of her work that has and will continue to push the boundaries of eco-friendly practices, sustainable living, and seasonal dishes. In my short conversation with her, my mind was blown by her soothing voice as she expressed the endless possibilities of how society can break down the current food systems and replace them with more ethical practices.

To go back, the word *stage* derives from the french term *stagiaire* meaning trainee, in which a cook or chef works in another chef's kitchen for free to learn new cooking skills,

⁴ This topic has been discussed, written about, and re-written numerous times, so for more information you can refer to the Edible Schoolyard Project website: <https://edibleschoolyard.org/berkeley>.

techniques, and recipes. As I first arrived at the back entrance to Chez Panisse at 6:30 in the morning and I was lent a chef's coat and apron, my heart began to beat faster and faster as I nervously entered the kitchen. I saw my anxious face in the reflective copper refrigerator doors as I walked to my station. In my interview, Ms. Waters stated multiple times how, "important the restaurant is because it is the model for sustainable practices," and I did not want to stain Ms. Water's crowning achievement. I pride myself on being a foodie and staring at the Mount Everest of sustainable food culture made me so nervous. I felt as if my whole reputation was on the line and that if I tarnished Chez Panisse, then I would be shunned from the Farm-to-fork community as a whole. As I went to the produce cabinet and retrieved ten massive cloves of garlic to peel, in my anxious state, I somehow realized the atmosphere was very calm. Dim lights and the smell of the blackened, wood burning ovens reminded me of nights out camping, which calmed my nerves. The dim lights highlighted the mellow vibrancy of the kitchen. Then as the cooks entered the space carrying containers of wild mushrooms, multi colored tomatoes, and massive, purple fava beans, I was in disbelief. With so much going on, the peaceful atmosphere stayed the same. Suddenly in the middle of cleaning garlic, I was called over to one of the large dining room tables for the morning chef's meeting to discuss the day's menu.

With everyone sitting around the table shucking humungous containers of the purple fava beans, we talked and laughed about the days dishes and the random assortment of products that found themselves needing to be prepared. Whether it was multiple goat carcasses or boxes of fresh rosemary, the executive Chef Nathan delegated tasks to the sous chefs who would continue the process all the way down to the last man on the totem pole: me. Despite the clear hierarchy within the kitchen, I was amazed by how humble and modest the team was. Everyone was

shucking the beans and having a good time discussing the day's tasks and sharing how drunk they got the night before. Nathan even took the time to introduce me and also ask if I had any questions. This made me instantly feel like a part of the team, so I asked him, "How often does the menu change?" In response he said in the happiest tone, "Every second of every day. It all depends on what comes in and how the team wants to prepare it." This incredibly inclusive and flexible element vibrates throughout the whole building, connecting to everyone and everything that enters the doors. When you are a customer sitting down, you feel as if you are at your grandma's house enjoying a bottle of wine and olives, catching up on lost time. Or and bear with me now, even if you are a piece of food, you would recognize that you will be treated with the utmost respect and curiosity from the moment you enter the kitchen. No plastic, only creative hands, and lastly effective waste procedures to encapsulate the highest quality of care.

As I carried the shells of the purple fava beans out to the waste center in the back of the kitchen a multitude of huge containers for recycling, compost, and oils separated by-products and prepared them to be taken to the best treatment facilities possible. The best part about it was that there were only two medium sized containers for landfill waste. Almost everything that enters the massive wooden doors are carried in reusable or recyclable containers from the stacks of large produce containers to the recyclable boxes, and then they are all perfectly tetris'd into the back patio. The outside refrigerator for dairy products is dominated by glass bottles of Strauss Milk and parchment paper wrapper butter blocks. Every facet of production within Chez Panisse is strategically fashioned in order to minimize the restaurant's environmental footprint. The very fact that a huge upscale restaurant that feeds hundreds of people a day can operate with such ease illustrates the dramatic possibility for larger corporations to mimic the Chez's agenda.

As my time continued at Chez Panisse I started to learn the backgrounds of my peers. Some of the participants within the kitchen had worked for over a year as an intern before finally getting a paid job. Some people were deep into their *stage*, one, two, maybe even six months into their practice. Others were like me, only participating for a short time to gain insight and experience. As the salty smells of mushroom sauce began to flow through the air and you could hear the crackle of deglazing pans, I began to realize something very important. The very fact that Chez Panisse accepts so many different types of people for however long of a time frame is the true beauty of its platform. In my interview with Alice Waters, one of the biggest takeaways from the experience for me was that she is the exact definition of a teacher. On multiple occasions she preached that, “the most important part of overturning the system is through education (8/12/18).” All she wants to do is spread her message and help people understand the beauty in being nutritionally correct, not just dietary, but also environmentally. This is exactly what the internship programs at Chez Panisse or the classrooms at the Edible Schoolyard do. The very fact that so many people are willing to devote so much time, for free, illuminates how valuable and beneficial the lessons you learn from Ms. Waters are. Even in my short amount of time there, the chefs wanted me to learn how to butcher a goat, to pull fresh mozzarella, and to cook duck confit. They want nothing more to share their practice with the world. Furthermore, this opportunity to participate in the process of who, what, where, when, why, and how the food was being produced made me immediately want to pass along the information I had learned.

Another lesson that Alice shared in our dialogue, and also something that I observed was how Chez Panisse bridges the gap between where food is produced and how it is eaten. This is incredibly different from a huge majority of food systems throughout the world, and in this case,

specifically Oakland. Waters wants to reconnect how people see and eat food because it has been lost because of the zoom of life. Alice shared with me one of her biggest anxieties by stating that, “Not only have we lost the ability to cook, but our culture has lost the ability to be together (8/12/18).” This cultural void that Waters talked about really struck me because something as easy as sitting down with your loved ones and sharing a meal is being stripped away. Even when I go out to eat with some of my friends and you look around, everyone's on their cell phone. The value that was once esteemed in our immediate relationships is crumbling.

Historically, sharing food was incredibly important for human development as a social species because it signified a sense of community and togetherness; however, we are losing something so key to our growth; a sense of real compassion and belonging. These are the exact trends that Waters and her work at Chez Panisse, but also King Middle school and the Edible Schoolyard Project do so well. They attempt to change the current trajectory of division by reconnecting people with their food. Whether it be the close relationships between the farms that provide the daily produce and proteins for the restaurant, or the close knit, non-hierarchical prep meetings where everyone is on the same page illustrate the mendable chains of food structures that are currently broken and divided. I cannot put an exact number on the amount of people that have walked through the doors of Chez Panisse to cook or just sit down for a meal, but everyone that walks into those beautiful wooden doors recognizes Water's determination to share that message.

Despite the hefty bill that comes at the end of an absolutely amazing meal at Chez Panisse, the lessons you learn from your time there truly encompass nutritional hope. I recognize that the majority of people can not afford to participate in a meal at Chez, but the lessons that all

the individuals who *stage* or grow through the classroom at King Middle School lay the foundation to overturn the food systems through collaboration and care. It emphasizes precisely how the greater political, social, and economic food systems should be operated, but it also raises the giant question; how do we cut the cost of local, quality foods, for people who cannot afford them?

As my time came to close at the mecca of food structures, I felt very grateful to have participated in preparing some of the food. After walking down the side walkway past the kitchen doors for my last time, I was baffled by the events that had taken place. I was in disbelief by how fast the time went and by how much I had directly and indirectly learned in such a short amount of time. I have worked in professional kitchens before, and some days could not be longer, but during my time at Chez, time slipped away. Whether I was being taught how to make a simple mushroom sauce or roll pasta, I recognized how truly valuable the establishment of Chez Panisse has and will continue to be for the greater food community. Everywhere, Chefs that cooked at Chez are popping up restaurants attempting in order to promote the well being of the whole food production chain. Along with contributing to the overall growth of sustainability. However, none of them will ever be as good as Alice Water's masterpiece.

Bottoms Up Garden

Bottoms Up Community Garden on Peralta Street in West Oakland is a non-profit organization to help bring nutritional food to the struggling community that surrounds the area. Starting in 2014, from the surface, the Garden has made an incredible impact on the surrounding community. Annual community events like Oakhella that started in 2016, where people visit the garden, listen to good music, and eat fresh food or even just regular work days where volunteers

can come, get educated on gardening, and animal husbandry has flowered beautifully in the area. As I first ventured to Bottoms Up, I met Mike one of the founders and leading volunteers. I was impressed with the location being in the middle of West Oakland's Food Desert and then Mike illustrated the need for long time Oaklanders to participate, so I rolled up my sleeves and got to work. Picking radishes, collecting eggs, and sweeping up made up a basic work day, but the cream of the crop were the stories that Mike shared with me. According to Mike, the Garden that was once dominated by local volunteers, but now since the neighborhood is "quickly becoming white" (Mike 12/12/2019) it has now become an outsider's mecca. But he continued to say that this is a different breed of Outsider. Instead of fully contributing to the commodification of Oakland's vibrancy, these individuals are helping lift up struggling communities. They are directly impacting the local neighborhood and balancing their original migrancy and exploitation of Oakland. Sadly however, when you look around the area of the garden, you begin to see the intense grip gentrification has on the surrounding community. Yet, the garden acts as a beacon to continue the fight against the system.

Through the commitment of Bottoms Up Garden's leaders, they have been able to overcome immense hurdles which have resulted in the need to question the greater political, social, and economic initiatives of the city. In one of my interviews with Mike, we discussed the pros and cons of developing a space of hope for the area along with the tremendous obstacles that he has had to overcome in order to put the garden into full effect. The first major obstacle was the immense soil pollution in the surrounding area. This toxic landscape reflects longtime disregard for certain neighborhoods through the East Bay. Due to Oakland's industrial past, which includes General Motors or any number of the large smelting companies that occupied the

area, there are major levels of contaminants in the soil (Walker 2001; McClintock 2012). Mike began to describe to me the high levels of iron and other heavy metals that they discovered in the area when Bottoms Up was first being created. Because no produce can be grown in such contaminated dirt, the Bottoms Up team had to spend a few thousand dollars removing over a foot of soil, laying down wood chips, and then placing around six plus inches of dirt on top to just begin the process of planting. All of which was only possible through private donations and volunteer work. This contaminated picture is the reality throughout all the lowlands of Oakland. Even if one wants to establish a community or even personal garden for better nutrition, the upfront investment in soil and planter boxes can destroy the whole project.

There are other potential options such as City Slicker Farms, an NGO that provides the tools and man power to establish a garden in or around your home, but these organizations do not have the mass capabilities to feed the whole city. They work incredibly hard to “provide flatlands residents with fresh produce either via community supported agriculture, sliding scale farm stands, or farmers markets. Agri-food education is central to the work of these organizations; many work with school gardens and nurseries, and provide backyard gardening mentoring and cooking classes” (McClintock 2008). Furthermore they illustrate the “interconnectivity of the uneven distribution of resources in Oakland” (McClintock 2008). One of my informants, Ms. T, discussed the work that City Slickers Farms did in her Father’s backyard in West Oakland. After removing “a foot of topsoil” (Ms. T 10/15/2019) they were finally able to build garden boxes and Now her father has fresh tomatoes and other beautiful produce.

Continuing with Bottom Up Garden, the second and biggest hurdle that they have had to overcome is being accepted into the neighboring community. Mike explained to me that the first

year or so of Bottoms Up Gardens was enmeshed with major resistance. Mike shared with me that the first few months of the garden, the garden experienced vandalism and violence against the members. Mike shared with me that as he would come in the morning to begin the day and some of the local community members would yell at him, "get out of here white boy." I understand the community resistance to the garden especially during the middle of Oakland's big financial flip, but the garden was established to help maintain ethnic communities. Rather than being developed to align with a middle class agenda. This hostility, I believe derives from the immediate impact that gentrification has had on the neighborhood. Going from being able to call Oakland your home to having the fear that next month you are not going to be able to afford rent because someone, especially someone of another race, is making an offer on a neighboring house that is skyhigh. That will definitely entice aggression or at the very least anxiety.

Mike found peace about a year into the Garden's establishment when one of the garden's pigs escaped his pen. Mike shared with me that his massive one hundred plus pound pig broke through his pen and began to run around the neighborhood. As he frantically searched the area, the pig became a nuisance and the cops got involved. Here is where Mike's story became incredibly powerful. The cops came up to him and were threatening him with fines and payments that would ruin the garden, so he lied to the police, and said that the pig wasn't his. After Mike said the pig wasn't his, the police interrogated some of the garden's neighbors to see if Mike was telling the truth. One by one the neighbors who had blasted Mike for the color of his skin and for infiltrating the area, backed Mike up and said to the police that they never saw a pig. With the cops gone and Mike finally capturing his pig, he thanked the neighborhood with the promise of a big barbecue. At the expense of the pig, Mike and the garden was finally accepted into the

community. The powerful reciprocation of a meal linked the neighborhood and the garden together.

This inauguration of Bottoms Up Garden into the community parallels Clifford Geertz's classic essay, *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight*. As Geertz and his wife arrive on the Indonesian Island of Bali, instead of being warmly welcomed, they are ignored and disregarded. After a week of being ignored, they heard word that in order to raise money for a local school, the community is having a large Cockfight in the town square, which is an illegal activity under the Republic of Indonesia. Geertz highlights that the idea to raise money through these means is viewed by the government as "backward, unprogressive, and generally unbecoming of an ambitious nation"(Geertz 2005), but to the townsfolk it is an opportunity to positively, wreak havoc. As the bloody event was underway and hundreds of people, including the Geertzs, crowded the battle grounds, sirens rang and armed policemen surrounded the area. As the crowd began to scatter, Geertz and his wife followed a man into a courtyard to evade the police. However, the police stopped their search to interrogate the only white people in the area. As they began harshly questioning Geertz and his wife, a Indonesian man jumps out and develops an elaborate story as to the reason they are together. Completely shocked by the scene that is playing out in front of him, Geertz confirms the man's story and the police carry on without punishment. The next morning with the dust settled, Geertz proclaims that, "the village was a completely different world" (Geertz 2005) as they laughed and drank together for the rest of the trip.

Much like Geertz, Mike "demonstrated solidarity"(Geertz 2005) with the surrounding neighborhood because of the mutual resistance against authority figures. Furthermore, because

community members stood their ground, mutual respect was born. This is a true representation of the original flavor of Oakland that expresses why Bottoms Up Garden is a point of Nutritional Hope. Instead of snitching on Mike for his pig running wild, the community found a common enemy; the police. Which is a bigger problem to many people and an exact symbol of the system that is breaking down and abusing ethnic groups. Furthermore, for backing him up, Mike unhesitatingly reciprocated with a feast to the neighborhood, shining light on his goal to help care for unprivileged groups. In my time at Bottoms Up, the locals treated Mike like one of them. The sounds of smack talk, jokes, and laughter with Mike filled the air as he handed out bags of produce, and I felt the true character of Oakland being expressed within the Garden.

Another major hurdle that they need to still overcome, is how dramatically their practices go against the grain of not just Oakland's food systems, but the greater industrial food powers throughout the world. Much like Geertz analysis that Cockfights are "unprogressive", community gardens defy the contemporary notions of food production. Instead of large scale, industrial farms, the idea of small, local food outlets are considered "backwards" because they cannot produce on a massive scale like the mega-powers with their cheap, fast, and instantly filling products like Coco Puffs or McDonalds. However, spaces like Bottoms Up are necessary because food activism is all about questioning the norms of society and big industry, especially ones that are running the planet into the ground.

Bottoms Up Garden attempts to go against the contemporary capitalist norms by providing FREE, quality food to the public; however, according to Mike, "people are seriously paranoid" about fresh food. Instead of needing to hop in a car or bus to venture out to get food, at least once a week Bottoms Up puts out fresh produce for the neighborhood to take. Yet, the food

is usually left there overnight and saved by the following days' volunteers. I would argue here that the few takers are a product of multiple factors. The brainwashing commercials that industrial companies pump into television sets, the lack of interest and time, but also the simple aspect of not having the space or knowledge to cook non-mainstream foods. For example, radishes are a staple at Bottoms Up Garden because of their quick growth rate and even for a trained cook, it may take a minute or two to figure out your cooking process. These issues are a huge problem in our contemporary time because they contribute towards the continuously growing disconnect that we have with our food.

Bottoms Up is on the frontlines of Nutritional Hope as Mike and the community are battling their immediate surroundings. As the massive industrial corporations inhibit the efforts of Bottoms Up garden from growing and making a massive impact on seriously marginalized communities. However, organizations like Bottoms Up Garden are important because they are a direct link between combating the neo-colonial beast and promoting the ethnic communities of Oakland. The whole reason for the name Bottoms Up is to establish an equal playing field by rebuilding the food systems through horizontal participation and care. While they lack the size and production capabilities to truly overturn the system, nonetheless, I believe that these efforts contribute towards the space of moral development and nutritional hope.

Below are photos of the Bottoms Up Community Garden's Chicken and Goose coop, planting zones among the ruins, and rows of fresh produce and herbs. The first picture below illustrates the chicken coop and its water supply. The interesting thing about this setup is that the water for the fowl is runoff from the planter boxes that are directly growing out of the tube. This is an excellent way to reduce water usage along with repurposing brown water. The next image

is the second portion of Bottoms Up Garden that utilized an abandoned lot around the corner. Here you can see a lush garden in the center of urban ruins. Large, green kale and wild flowers juxtapose a rust and graffiti covered house that was deserted long ago. Far back to the left you can see a potentially beautiful home that was vandalized standing next to the controversial above-ground Bart tracks. I believe this photo perfectly depicts a nutritional oasis surrounded by an urban desert. The third photo is a 180 degree turn from the second picture. Because the original plot can only produce so much food, this space is completely overgrown. Chard, arugula, and numerous herbs highlight the potential of such a small space and its ability to feed. Urban farms and gardens are a major stepping stone to a better, healthier, and more inclusive food system.



Figure 2 : Chicken and Goose Coop



Figure 3: Flourishing among the ruins



Figure 4: The multitude of crop at Bottoms Up Garden

Lastly, the efforts by Bottoms Up Community Garden critically tie to Ashanté M. Reese's "Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington, D.C." and her dissection of food structures throughout black communities. Reese illustrates the dramatic relationships between power and race which make food access, "expand beyond where people shop or what they eat" (Reese 2019). Therefore, Reese depicts how a food system can harmonize communities, create divided spaces of care, or also everything in between. As a result, the analysis and critics of the food systems must be done on a case to case basis because individuals walk a tight line between sides. This perfectly coincides with Bottom Ups story throughout West Oakland because at first their efforts were depicted as a perpetuation of colonial action and then their work brought together a vibrant community. As a result, Bottoms Up Garden is a prime example of the need for "engaged anthropology" (Reese 2019) because of the amazing ethnographic lense into the daily lives affected by a transformative food system

Project Open Hand

Another organization that begins to break down the vast pressures of gentrification is Project Open Hand (POH). Project Open Hand was first founded in 1985 by Ruth Brinker, "a San Francisco grandmother and retired food-service worker" (Project Open Hand). Through their locations in San Francisco and Oakland, the mission of Project Open Hand "is to improve health outcomes and quality of life by providing nutritious meals to the sick and vulnerable, caring for and educating our community" (Project Open Hand). Located on San Pablo Avenue and about 19th street, Project Open Hand is a median between the West Oakland deserts and the central Oakland mecca for "bougie" consumers. Through their trained dietitians and organic products,

Project Open Hand is perhaps the most well rounded and positive space of nutritional hope I have ever seen.

As a volunteer working with Project Open Hand, I immediately felt the quality of their impact as soon as the door opened. As a non-profit grocery store, clients come in and fill out a grocery list of set quantities of products available for the day. As they would hand me their list, I would scramble around filling up a grocery cart full of quality grains, fruits, vegetables, and basically anything you could find at a small grocery outlet. I would look down at the list of items and mumble to myself the orders, “Two bags of rice, one bundle of bok choy, another bundle of kale, and lastly 3 packs of frozen chicken.” Then, I would load up their reusable bags and send them on their way. In a short three hour shift, I repeated this routine about thirty to forty times. By the end of the day I knew where every item was located.

As the customers stacked up, some would just get their groceries and go, but others would go to the fully trained dietitian to build a quality diet for their particular needs. This is huge for communities in need because it begins the process of nutritional education. Also, this is a key to Nutritional Hope. By finding faith and guidance in Oakland through one's own consumption choices. For example, some of the questions that I heard over the counter were, “What foods help promote a healthier lifestyle?” After the nutritionist helped schedule a proper diet for an individual, they can get all the food they need in the shop. This level of access that POH provides, not just food but support, directly links care to the food systems. This highlights how POH closes the circle when it comes to food systems through their ability to cover all points of need and provide clients with a horizontal approach to a quality food system.

Near the end of one of my shifts an older African American Woman entered Project Open Hand wearing dark, circular glasses. As she approached the identification station, she removed her glasses. As I looked up, I saw my reflection in the soft, grey ocean of her eyes. I was instantly swept away by the intense, yet unidentifiable pain the woman was in as she handed me her identification card. After confirming her membership with the organization, she asked me in a very mellow voice, "Can you help me fill out the card, I have cataracts and can't really see." I got up from my seat and went around the counter with a pencil in hand. "Ma'am would you like chicken or fish?" I asked. In response, she happily stated, "You know what, I trust you baby, so just get me whatever you would get." I was taken back, because there is a pretty wide range of products available and she may have some dietary restrictions, but something about her soothing voice made me get this woman the very best POH could offer. As I happily filled up the cart and snuck her a couple of extra items, I was revitalized by the level of confidence this woman had in a complete stranger. I felt that I had achieved exactly what I was looking for during my time at Project Open Hand. I was injected with the original vibrancy that I so longed for and that I hadn't felt since my youth. The level of faith that this woman had not just in myself, but in Project Open Hand to almost blindly take care of her is that communal element that the contemporary forms of Oakland lack. I knew that this is the link that would define Nutritional Hope. It was the exact meeting point between compromised health and a social support system wanting to lend a hand. Thus, Nutritional Hope provides a trusting link between food and compassion through the use of horizontal collaboration.

With the cart filled up, grocery bags packed, and the security guard helping the woman get to her ride, I wondered if everyone has a type of experience like this during their time at

Project Open Hand. Considering the number of people who use this space for food, there are many opportunities to replenish hope in the surrounding neighborhood and beyond. It rejuvenates my belief that there are pockets of trust that light the candle of hope in the ever darkening space of the hierarchical food system.

Project Open Hand clearly signifies the need for non-capitalist food structures because of just the sheer numbers of people who require their free services. The immense volume of people who cannot escape from the big, quick swing of wealth accumulation within Oakland illustrates how important the points of nutritional hope and their access to nutritional foods are for the community. Furthermore, Project Open Hand opens up a space to question why there are not more initiatives that provide a service like this for the community.

With many Oakland residents living at the margins, there are minimal operations that assist the needy as much as Project Open Hand. One of their most positive endeavors is their meals on wheels for people who can not visit the distribution outlet. Utilizing cargo vans, Project Open Hand delivers meals to individuals who are critically disabled. This demographic of people deserve the highest level of access, but also care. However they don't receive it from the system unless they can afford it. But Project Open Hand provides a free, nutritious diet that can be equivalent to taking medicine, according to some of the food worlds brightest minds. Scholars like Michael Pollan and his work *The Omnivore's Dilemma* or Melanie Dupuis's *Dangerous Digestion*, depict how a healthy diet of organic, locally sourced, and nutritious food doesn't just help your body, but also the bodies of the world. These authors have helped catalysed the medicinal properties of nutritious foods and its importance for overall global health. The practices of organizations like Project Open Hand that provide high quality care for their patients

by “supplying over twenty five hundred meals along with distributing healthy grocery options to over two hundred people a day” (Project Open Hand), depicts a system that benefits all those critically involved.

In my short time working with Project Open Hand, I have only become more critically aware of the food system for not adopting the practices that make Project Open Hand an incredible organization. Instead of working from the top down, like the majority of large corporations, Project Open Hand works from the Bottom Up (pun intended) in order to lift everyone up together. Because Project Open Hand works directly with possibly the most marginalized communities, they stand as a beacon of hope. By repairing the relationship between suffering and a good quality of life, Project Open Hand directly combats the systems that are further separating Oakland.

Stiglitz

Because Technological Capitalism in San Francisco and Silicon Valley changed the entire landscape of Oakland, I believe that this is a prime example to help understand wealth inequality around the world. In Joseph E. Stiglitz book *The Great Inequality*, Stiglitz describes how serious the divide is between rich and poor, illustrates its impacts, and then discusses solutions to this major issue. First Stiglitz states that, “the top 1 percent of the world now own nearly half the world’s wealth- and are on track to own as much of the rest of the 99 percent combined by 2016” (Stiglitz 2015). This top percent is only about eighty people, while the bottom ninety-nine make up about seven billion four hundred and twenty five million people. Because the Bay Area is the Technological capital of the world, this separation of wealth is

drastically visualized. Everything from the richest estates to the poorest tents can be quickly seen in the social laboratory of Oakland.

After highlighting the stark distribution of wealth, Stiglitz then argues that the most impactful aspect of inequality on society is the “erosion of our sense of identity” (Stiglitz 2015: 93). Due to the lack of economic opportunity, communities around the world, much like ethnic groups in Oakland, are being forced into detrimental decisions. The environment, health, education, and overall freedom are all under pressure as the lack of resources becomes truly present. This constriction is ultimately displayed through the lopsided food systems throughout my hometown. Because of the lack of quality food options for major spaces in Oakland, there is a loss of community flavor, togetherness, and individual identity.

Lastly, Stiglitz depicts how government bodies can help eliminate the immense inequality throughout the world. The first point the Stiglitz makes is to “eradicate extreme poverty and hunger” (Stiglitz 2015). Here, he specifically highlights regions throughout Africa that need the most global assistance, but what I find the most fascinating is that in one of the richest countries in the world, there is still the struggle of food insecurity. According to Feeding America, a domestic NGO that works to provide food to insecure populations, argues that there are still over thirty-seven million Americans that are food insecure. Being centrally located between two of the most financially, influential space in the world, the idea of being food insecure should not even be a question. With so much money being accumulated in such a small area, the exploitative nature and greed of capitalism is more alive than ever. By looking at a space so culturally dynamic like Oakland, government bodies should help talk about such issues and be

able to “Enhance growth by increasing inclusiveness. A country’s most valuable resource is its people. So it is essential to ensure that *everyone* can live up to their potential...”(Stiglitz 2015).

Conclusion

In the case of Oakland, the once mysterious, dangerous, and deliciously weird style that flowed throughout the city has been diluted as more and more people try to capture that essence. Because of the uneven playing field that capitalism employs, people who have wealth are able to do as they please and Oaklanders have been the victim of this structure. Because Oakland has been molded and transformed into a middle class dynamic, the city has taken a new, commodified shape. However, I have discovered points where these formations have yet to grip. While these spaces of Nutritional Hope are still alive, everyone must contribute to maintain the small remaining bits of Oakland’s true, vibrant character. Furthermore, for people who have spent their lives in Oakland, we have an obligation to continue the legacy of Oakland’s historical roots. Individuals like Elaine Brown, a once Black Panther Leader, have started to promote community gardens, low-income housing, and has collaborated with the governmental board to bring better education and food access to ethnic communities. Instead of abandoning my home, this is the type of impact that I would like to have with this paper.

In conclusion, this research has opened my eyes and has taught me that Oakland, California is a highly dynamic space that is overwhelmingly composed of different races, religions, genders, and every other imaginable category of people. Because the city is now a bustling hipsters dream due to the structural advantages that wealthy individuals have, we must look at the pockets where capitalist pursuits haven’t yet reached the core. By looking at these dualities, we can begin to break down the capitalist agendas to truly visualize its destructive

forces. If we can begin to recognize the reality of gentrification within the borders of Oakland, there is still time to make the right adjustments in order to save the original vibrancy. Through this resurrection, the future of Oakland can become the cutting edge of inclusiveness and nutritional consciousness. In these spaces of nutritional hope, the answers lie, but it is up to everyone to help make this possible. By visualizing the unbalanced impact that capital has and by recognizing the organizations that help counteract these structural pressures, major cities around the world can begin to assist and promote equality.

With everything going on in the world, it is very easy to become pessimistic. However, this project has opened my eyes to the continued strength of horizontal participation. Whether that is through Jessica Lasky Catering, Chez Panisse, Bottom's Up Garden, or Project Open Hand, I firmly believe that compassion is still alive. It may be covered up, but Nutritional Hope is a strong tether to human kindness and connectivity.

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