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# FORUM

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## ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS ACTIVISM? RESISTING GENTRIFICATION IN OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

*Empreendedorismo como ativismo? Resistindo à gentrificação em Oakland, Califórnia*

*¿Iniciativa empresarial como activismo? Resistencia al aburguesamiento en Oakland, California*

### ABSTRACT

This article investigates the cultural politics of entrepreneurship as a form of opposition to gentrification in Oakland, California. Building on Watkins and Caldwell's (2004) foundational work, I examine the relationship between political projects – resisting gentrification, racial and economic disparities – and the cultural work of signifying a community's continued presence amidst displacement and glorification of newcomers. Based on 30 interviews with employees of food justice non-profit organizations, social enterprises, and government agencies, I argue that activists promote food-based entrepreneurship to create employment and business opportunities for long-term residents that enables them to stay in their hometown. In doing so, the contributions of long-standing communities to Oakland's diverse food cultures are highlighted. However, property values are rising rapidly that even these opportunities cannot ensure that long-term communities remain. For this reason, I conclude by offering examples of direct action and policy advocacy that can supplement these entrepreneurial approaches.

**KEYWORDS** | Entrepreneurship, food justice, cultural politics, activism, gentrification.

### RESUMO

*Este artigo investiga a política cultural de empreendedorismo como uma forma de oposição à gentrificação em Oakland, Califórnia. Com base no trabalho fundamental de Watkins e Caldwell (2004), examino a relação entre projetos políticos – resistindo à gentrificação e disparidades raciais e econômicas – e o que significa, em termos culturais, a presença permanente de uma comunidade em meio ao deslocamento físico e a glorificação dos recém-chegados. Com base em 30 entrevistas com funcionários de organizações sem fins lucrativos de justiça de alimentos, empresas sociais e as agências governamentais relevantes da cidade, defendo que ativistas promovam o empreendedorismo de base alimentar a fim de criar empregos e oportunidades de negócios para residentes de longa data que possam permitir-lhes permanecer na sua cidade natal. Ao fazê-lo, destacam-se as contribuições de comunidades de longa data para as diversas culturas alimentares de Oakland, num momento em que essas comunidades estão sendo desvalorizadas e deslocadas. No entanto, os valores das propriedades estão aumentando tão rapidamente que mesmo essas oportunidades não asseguram que as comunidades de longa data possam permanecer. Por esse motivo, concluo oferecendo exemplos de ação direta e advocacia política que podem complementar essas abordagens empresariais.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** | Empreendedorismo, justiça alimentar, política cultural, ativismo, gentrificação.

### RESUMEN

*Este artículo investiga la política cultural de la iniciativa empresarial como forma de oposición al aburguesamiento en Oakland, California. Basándome en el trabajo fundacional de Watkins y Caldwell (2004), analizo la relación entre proyectos políticos –resistencia al aburguesamiento y las disparidades raciales y económicas– y el trabajo cultural de significar una presencia continuada de comunidad en medio al desplazamiento físico y la glorificación de recién llegados. Con base en 30 entrevistas con empleados de organizaciones sin fines de lucro de justicia alimentaria, iniciativas sociales y agencias gubernamentales relevantes de la ciudad, planteo que los activistas promueven la iniciativa empresarial basada en alimentos para crear oportunidades de empleo y de propiedad empresarial para residentes a largo plazo que pueden permitirles permanecer en su ciudad natal. Al hacerlo, destacan las contribuciones de comunidades duraderas a las diversas culturas gastronómicas de Oakland en un momento en que estas comunidades están siendo desvalorizadas y desplazadas. Sin embargo, los valores de las propiedades están aumentando tan rápidamente que ni siquiera estas oportunidades pueden asegurar que permanezcan comunidades a largo plazo. Por este motivo, concluyo brindando ejemplos de acción directa y apoyo de políticas que pueden complementar estos abordajes emprendedores.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE** | Iniciativa empresarial, justicia alimentaria, política cultural, activismo, aburguesamiento.

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## INTRODUCTION

In a 2006 New York (NY) Times column, food writer Michael Pollan described food activism as a kind of “novel hybrid: a market-as-movement.” In contrast to the many 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century social movements that have pushed back against the exigencies of capitalism (Polanyi, 2001), food activism seeks instead to support an alternative, “green” form by purchasing products from local organic farmers and vendors of cooked and value-added products. Rather than confronting the industrial food system, this offers a kind of revolution through attrition in which activists can attempt to secede from the industrial food system through their consumption choices (Alkon, 2012; Meyers & Sbicca, 2016). Food justice activists, who deploy alternative food systems as a means to create grassroots economic opportunities and address health disparities in low-income communities of color (Alkon & Agyeman, 2010), have also adopted this strategy, calling for support for local food entrepreneurs who are people of color.

In the past several years, gentrification has presented a significant challenge to the food justice movement. The farmers markets and health food stores that activists have created in communities of color have been appropriated by urban boosters seeking to draw wealthy whites to these neighborhoods. For example, Movoto’s list of “35 reasons you need to move to Oakland” includes urban farms as number 19 (Nelson, n. d.):

Was that... a farm you just walked past? Yep. Oakland is a hotspot for urban farming, with entire communities coming together to plant and raise crops. It’s not just great for community building, but it helps kids (and adults) learn the importance of nature, healthy food, and working together.

Despite the fact that gentrification brings in new residents who are often supportive of local food projects, Oakland’s food justice activists understand it as threatening the displacement of their community, and seek to push back against it. The strategies through which they do so are predominantly entrepreneurial.

Watson and Caldwell define the cultural politics of food as an approach that requires researchers to “concentrate specifically on food as a window on the political... Food practices are implicated in a complex field of relationships, expectations, and choices that are contested, negotiated, and often unequal” (2004, p. 1). In this article, I apply this perspective to investigate the ways that food justice activists, social entrepreneurs and city officials frame entrepreneurship as a form of opposition to gentrification in Oakland, California. Those I spoke with view employment and

business opportunities in the food sector as a way for long-term residents to be able to maintain residence in Oakland, as well as to receive recognition for their community’s role in shaping the city’s diverse food culture. However, development and speculation have so inflated both residential and retail property values that these opportunities cannot guarantee long-term communities’ abilities to stay in their hometown, and so entrepreneurial forms of opposition must be supplemented with direct action and policy advocacy. Through this analysis, I emphasize the inextricability of political projects, such as resistance to gentrification, from my respondents’ symbolic work trumpeting the presence and contributions of a community threatened with displacement to both the city’s culture writ large and to its foodways. Displacement, then, becomes not only expulsion from the city but also erasure, and resistance to gentrification becomes not only about staying but also being seen.

## Food movements and entrepreneurship

Though there are earlier antecedents, particularly among indigenous peoples and those farmers and gardeners who could not afford chemical inputs, Warren Belasco (1993) traces the contemporary movement to reform and transform the food system to the growth of the counterculture in the 1960s. Young, countercultural types went “back to the land” in search of a more organic lifestyle, forming communes and homesteads. Many of these were short lived, but those that remain today have become successful businesses (Meyers, 2005). Early adherents hoped that as the movement grew, these alternative food systems would replace the dominant, industrial model (Alkon, 2012; Meyers & Sbicca, 2016). However, the relationship between big and small food has become far more complex.

Food is big business. Total retail and food service sales in the US topped 5 trillion dollars in 2015 (Statista, 2015). The organic foods industry grew at 11 percent in 2015, far outstripping the food industry’s overall rate of 3 percent (McNeil, 2016). In the food industry as a whole, and the organic subsector, large “legacy” brands dominate. Natural food stores were the primary distributor of organics in the 1990s, but by 2008, nearly half of this food was purchased in chain supermarkets like Wal-Mart and Safeway (Dimitri & Oberholtzer, 2009). Scholars call this process conventionalization; large brands have entered the organic market and employed the same practices they do in conventional agriculture and industrial food processing (Buck, Getz & Guthman 1997). This has led to the rise of organic brands like Muir Glenn tomato sauce (General Mills) and Odwalla smoothies (Coca-Cola) that are household names.

But these are also promising times for small food entrepreneurs. The food movement has created a growing distrust of large brands, and a trend towards small, local, and artisanal foods. A recent NY Times article profiled several food entrepreneurs that have been backed by venture capitalists and Silicon Valley-style “accelerators” eager to finance and support independent food businesses (Strom, 2015). This investment, along with the maturation of the millennials and health concerns of baby boomers, has caused large brands to increasingly lose market share to smaller ones (Jefferies, 2012). Some large brands have responded by acquiring their smaller competitors. Indeed, both Muir Glen and Odwalla started out as independent, small-scale entrepreneurial ventures before being purchased by food retail giants (Trotter, 2016). Food movement supporters are sometimes aware of and decry these “sell-outs,” while continuing to advocate for locally-owned brands. But many more are either unaware of this consolidation or else cheer the growth of ethical businesses.

Since the early 2000s, a group of activists working under the banner of food justice have increasingly problematized the food movement’s elitism, arguing that the attention the movement focuses on predominantly white farmers, chefs, and food artisans, at best ignores, and at worst appropriates communities of colors’ long-standing food traditions. Food justice activists recognize that people of color have long been discriminated against within food and agriculture. For example, the USDA’s historic policy of denying loans to Black and Latino farmers has been the subject of several lawsuits (Gilbert et al., 2002; Minkoff-Zern & Sloat, 2016). In addition, immigration and labor policies have prevented people of color from land and farm ownership, limiting both participation in agriculture and the acquisition of wealth (Minkoff-Zern et al., 2011).

Food entrepreneurs of color are less likely to be able to draw on family resources to start their businesses, and are less likely to receive traditional loans and equity investments (Fairlie & Robb, 2008). Moreover, white farmers and food entrepreneurs tend to benefit from disproportionate publicity within the food movement’s rhetoric and writing, even when there are people of color doing similar work (Cohen & Reynolds, 2016). Recognizing these disparities, food justice activists seek to create support for farmers and entrepreneurs of color, while addressing food insecurity and diet-related health disparities in their communities (Alkon & Agyeman, 2010). Linking marginalized farmers and food entrepreneurs to food insecure communities is depicted as a win-win—a source of profits for the former and food for the latter (Alkon & Guthman, 2017). It also draws on communities of colors’ long-standing traditions of food entrepreneurship; they have often turned to small-scale, culturally-rooted food provisioning due to

barriers in the traditional labor market (Ray, 2016; Forson, 2006; Abarca, 2006). However, food justice activists have struggled to draw in significant numbers of low-income customers. Despite intentions to the contrary, their customers tend to be middle-class, white, and often relatively new to the neighborhood.

This is in part because the food justice movement has laid some of its deepest roots in cities and neighborhoods that are rapidly gentrifying. (Alkon & Cadji, 2015). Gentrification is a process through which working-class urban neighborhoods become inhabited by wealthier residents, displacing long-term inhabitants and changing the nature of cities (Slater, 2006; Lees et al., 2007; Quastel, 2009). Though it is commonly talked about in terms of the consumer preferences of new residents, gentrification is fundamentally a structural process. Through gentrification, capital expands through the reproduction of urban space, as guided by city and regional policy (Smith, 2008; Hackworth & Smith, 2001). It is also a racialized process, predicated on the previous divestment from the urban core that characterized segregation and redlining (Shaw, 2007; Lees et al., 2007). Displacement and violence are two of its core features; low-income communities of color are increasingly subject to police scrutiny at the behest of new residents (Ospina, 2015; Shaw, 2015), and are pushed out of their homes, at best resettling in less expensive areas and at worst becoming homeless (Slater, 2006; Applied Survey Research, 2015).

And yet, urban developers appeal to consumer preferences, to promote gentrifying neighborhoods. Food, particularly organic and ethnic cuisine, has long been on the list of amenities that drew early waves of artists and other cultural creatives to low-income communities (Zukin, 1995). Cafes are often the first businesses that new residents open in their new neighborhoods, creating gathering spaces for early gentrifiers (Sullivan & Shaw, 2011). Food is also important to the later stages of gentrification as counterculture is joined and sometimes displaced by large-scale development (Lees et al., 2007). In today’s food-focused popular culture, thriving restaurants and urban farms are essential element of cities’ efforts to brand themselves as hip, creative, green, and attractive (Burnett, 2014; Hyde, 2014). Investors search for this sort of food retail as a signal that a neighborhood is ripe for redevelopment. According to Stan Humphries, chief economist for the online real estate marketplace Zillow, “The entry of a coffee shop into a location provides a signaling function to other types of investors [...] that this neighborhood has now arrived and is open for business in a way that it was not before” (quoted in Kohli, 2015). Understanding this, a group of Harlem real estate agents have banded together to open ground floor coffee shops and eateries so that they can raise the prices of residential units above

(Clarke, 2014). Similarly, the fruits of food justice activists' labor, including farmer's markets, community gardens, and healthy food retail, are at times among the amenities that realtors and other urban boosters reference as selling points (Alkon & Cadji, 2012).

Gentrification brings both opportunities and challenges to food justice organizations. While food justice activists improve the neighborhoods in which they work, they create spaces palatable to new residents already interested in local and organic food. These new residents support food justice entrepreneurs by purchasing food, volunteering, and donating funds. Indeed, for many of the food justice organizations I spoke with in Oakland, the customer support of these new residents is crucial to the organizations' fundraising goals, as well as their ability to garner profits for small farmers and food entrepreneurs. These benefits, however, are tenuous. The displacement of long-term residents from the neighborhoods where food justice projects operate makes it impossible for activists to pursue their missions. Ironically, as food justice activists improve food access in historically marginalized neighborhoods, the food insecure communities they seek to serve are forced out. Broadly motivated by an analysis emphasizing the need for racial, economic, and environmental justice, food justice activists have recognized that gentrification brings violence to their communities (Crouch, 2012; Markham, 2014; Massey, 2017), and are working to counter it in a variety of ways. They argue that because food is so deeply embedded in gentrification, it provides an important lens through which to develop resistance against displacement. Their primary strategy is grassroots economic development by providing jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities to long-term community members. In doing so, they increase both the resources and visibility of these groups. However, such opportunities are not entirely able to counter displacement pressures. For this reason, I also describe policy approaches that can complement entrepreneurial strategies.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper is part of a larger project analyzing the relationship between food and gentrification in Oakland, CA. It began when Alkon advised Josh Cadji's MA thesis, which sought to understand the racial politics that underscored the perception of farmers' markets and alternative food spaces as white. While he was conducting participant observation, the non-profit food justice organization, with which he worked saw a real estate company highlight their farmers market and community garden in a video designed to lure new residents to their rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. This prompted his organization to become

embroiled in critical debates about the role of food activism and sustainable food systems in promoting gentrification, which became the topic of his thesis.

Recognizing that other food justice organizations experienced similar dynamics, I then conducted 30 interviews with a variety of Oaklanders dedicated to food justice, including employees of non-profit organizations, restaurateurs, and social entrepreneurs. Interviews generally lasted 1-2 hours and were recorded using an iPhone app, and then transcribed. I used a snowball sample, beginning with community-based non-profits doing work similar to the one Josh worked with. My access was eased by Josh's reputation as a dedicated activist, as well as by contacts from previous research. Following that, I widened my scope to include for-profit social enterprises and food businesses that were either mentioned by the non-profits as like-minded or who explicitly described their work as dedicated to food justice and/or community empowerment. I stopped when I reached "saturation," meaning that the collection of new data failed to yield additional insights (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). I chose the examples described below from among my 30 interviews as those that most clearly illuminated the cultural politics of entrepreneurship. However, support for entrepreneurs as a form of resistance to gentrification came up in nearly all interviews.

I coded the data by hand using Microsoft Word, reading and re-reading transcripts in order to search for emergent patterns in a way that ensured that our data gave rise to our analysis (ibid). Support for entrepreneurship was a common theme, as it was the primary way that both non-profit and for-profit organizations sought to channel their opposition to gentrification. Within that category, I coded for kinds of support, including jobs, ownership, and race representation. These became the primary nodes around which this analysis coalesced.

## RESULTS

In 2008, Oakland-based social justice activist Van Jones published *The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems*. This widely-acclaimed NY Times bestselling book argued for a "green new deal" that would create thousands of jobs in alternative energy and resource conservation. Because these jobs could not be outsourced, Jones argued that they could help marginalized communities to "lift themselves out of poverty," ensuring that "the approaching green wave lifts *all* boats." Jones' vision of a green-collar economy quickly rose and fell from popular discourse. Jones himself was hired by the Obama administration



as a “green jobs advisor,” but resigned amidst demonization by the political right for what can only be seen as minor and irrelevant infractions. But his concept of green jobs has taken hold among the sustainable food sector in his hometown of Oakland.

## Non-profit settings

One of the largest non-profits working for a just and sustainable food system in Oakland is Planting Justice. Providing employment is a part of the organization’s mission, along with democratizing access to affordable food and ensuring environmental sustainability. Planting Justice runs several social-enterprise businesses that raise money for the organization, including a landscaping company and a commercial nursery. According to co-founder Gavin Raiders, living wage employment is a central part of transforming food systems, as well as broader systems of inequality:

[Our goal is to create] business plans that work, that generate enough revenue to create living wage jobs that aren’t grant-dependent. When we looked around at the food justice movement at Oakland and other places, a lot of the work is being done by volunteers [and] by college-educated people who get hired from across the country [...] You might only have two people at an organization that are from the community making a wage.

In order to transform systems, we need business models that are scalable and replicable. It’s a multi-decade project, but we intend to help Planting Justice form in dozens of cities in the US in the course of our lifetime, and hopefully have thousands of people who are making living wages, who otherwise might be incarcerated or out on the street or struggling or dead due to the violence that exists in our system.

If we’re going to change the food system or economic system or help people stay in their homes or help people stay in Oakland or any other city where they’re born and raised and want to continue living, we have to have those economic models that work.

Planting Justice employs 35 people. Roughly 2/3 are people of color, and 60% are formerly incarcerated. Gavin credits this meaningful, living wage employment with transforming lives. “We’ve been hiring folks out of prison since 2010,” he said proudly, “and not a single person has been re-incarcerated on a new offense in that entire time.”

Planting Justice staff also help one another find support services, such as housing. While Deep East Oakland, where most of Planting Justice’s employees are from, has not yet been subject to the same housing pressures as other parts of the city, these formerly incarcerated, predominantly Black and Latinx workers face high levels of housing discrimination. Planting Justice provides letters of employment and references, and is also beginning the permitting process so that their recently purchased nursery can also be zoned for housing. Despite these strategies, several employees are homeless, living out of their cars or crashing with friends and family.

Even as they demonstrate strong support for some of Oakland’s most marginalized residents, Planting Justice’s business model depends on a wealthier clientele. Their edible landscaping company “Transform Your Yard,” has built approximately 400 gardens across Oakland. While 25% of these gardens have been for low-income people at reduced rates, and the organization refuses to work with realtors and speculators, the majority of their gardens are for full-paying clients whose investments in their properties are rewarded with increased property values.

In order to facilitate positive relationships between clients and employees, Planting Justice screens the former to make sure they are a good match for the organization’s values.

We turn down clients who don’t share our values. We interview people [who want to hire us]. Anybody who’s working for property owners [knows] there’s all kind of nasty power and privilege stuff at play which does not feel good [...] We don’t want to put ourselves or any of our staff in those positions, especially when there’s other trauma and stuff at play in these situations.

This screening process demonstrates the cultural work involved in promoting entrepreneurship—in this case, green jobs—as a response to gentrification. Planting Justice must act as a kind of translator between their formerly incarcerated workforce and their relatively wealthy client base. They put forward a narrative about who their workers are that emphasizes their good intentions, while acknowledging the systemic barriers they face. For their part,

clients are educated about these obstacles and are screened in order to ensure successful relationship building.

Another food justice non-profit that views the creation of jobs for long-term Oakland residents as essential to its mission is Mandela Marketplace. For Mandela, the goal is not just living wage jobs, but the ownership of community food assets. Mandela Marketplace is a non-profit food hub whose centerpiece is the for-profit, worker-owned Mandela Food Coop. Mandela Marketplace's Director of Social Entrepreneurship, Mariela Cedeño, describes how this relationship enables community ownership of food businesses:

If you look around the Bay Area, it's mostly white people who either have a network with resources or have their own personal finances that are able to start this kind of business [...] The reason we established ourselves as a non-profit to support and incubate Mandela Foods was because worker-owners from West Oakland didn't have the credit or the networks or the access to the kind of financing they would need to build out something that was going to cost \$750,000, whereas a non-profit has the kind of skills necessary to network through grants or to provide guarantees to help them get that financing.

Notably, all the worker-owners of Mandela Foods Co-op are African-American, while the non-profit staff is racially diverse. The worker-owners share the organization's profits while the non-profit can fundraise to cover any losses. Thus, the non-profit serves as a kind of angel investor in the coop. The coop broke even for the first time in 2012, one year ahead of their business plan, and earned profits for the first time in 2014. Decision-making power for the grocery lies primarily with the worker-owners, each of whom have a vote on workplace policies. The non-profit collectively has one vote as well, which allows them input but not control.

Customers at the co-op, however, are predominantly white, and even the customers of color are often new to the neighborhood. Mariela explains how essential the support of new residents is to the co-op's profits:

[The co-op's] end goal is to make healthy food accessible to community residents and by that, change the health indicators and dynamics of this community. And so, making sure that the healthy produce and the bulk goods like beans

and grains are affordable is important to them. But they're also going to want to cater to the people who can make it profitable. So, they're also going to sell a fancy cheese or free-range chicken or a ten-dollar bottle of honey.

Long accustomed to seeing businesses in their area owned by non-Blacks, these neighbors are particularly excited to learn that those working at the store also own it. Worker-owner James Burke, who grew up in West Oakland, described how impressed long-term residents are when they realize this. "They say, 'Oh yeah, you all own this store?' And they'll tell their kids, 'Oh they own this store.'" Another worker-owner, Adrianna Fike, expands on the reasons that Black ownership matters:

It matters for reasons of representation, it matters for reasons of community development that the developers look like us, that we are developing our own. It matters in terms of self-determination; expressing it, demonstrating it, teaching it. It matters for the legacy of all the grocers; Black grocers that have come before in Black communities. It matters for legacies going forward, it matters for just communities of color around the world, for people trying to transform food systems or participating in their own sovereignty, in owning themselves. It matters when the Black people are trying to do that and they have examples of Black people who are doing it already. You can't just tell me that it's a white thing because we're here!

Mandela may feature "fancy cheese or free-range chicken" to please new, more affluent neighborhood residents, but they also proclaim their identity as a Black-owned business dedicated to supporting producers of color.

Gentrification has long been on the minds of Mandela's employees, both at the co-op and the non-profit. One important strategy through which they push back against this force is by providing an opportunity for community ownership of a business that admittedly benefits from the influx of new residents. Again, Mariela explains:

We've talked a lot about gentrification, and what that means in West Oakland. We're a cooperative, but we're working in a capitalist system. What this enables us to do is to make sure that community

residents who have been part of the history of West Oakland can own the economy so that they can stay in it and profit from the people who are coming in who have higher levels of income.

[Gentrification] is a dynamic that we don't want to happen to them. We want them to be a part of it. And I think they're an exemplary model of what local community members [can do] to build their quality of life through increasing income and also healthier food access, but also make money off of the fact that people do want to move to the community. You know, Burke grew up here, (*pointing to James Burke, one of the worker-owners*) and Mandela Marketplace is going to become profitable and he's going to get a share of those profits and be able to afford to stay in West Oakland. That's part of making a national model about how to fight these dynamics and work within the system even if it's flawed.

For non-profit organizations like Planting Justice and Mandela Marketplace, both of whom benefit from the influx of new residents to Oakland, employment and community ownership are ways to enable long-term residents to respond to the threat of displacement. At the same time, they raise the profile of people of color who participate in community food systems, disrupting the narrative that local and organic food is the province of affluent whites. As gentrification changes the racial demographics of Oakland, the presence of these long-term residents signifies that Black communities remain in Oakland and contribute to their communities in positive ways.

## For-profit settings

There are also a growing number of social enterprise restaurants and food businesses that strive to create green jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities for long-term community members. Perhaps the most prominent of these is Red Bay Coffee. Founded by Keba Konte, an artist, activist, and a co-owner of successful cafés in Berkeley and San Francisco, Red Bay roasts “single origin, fair trade, direct trade, organic, and sustainable coffees [and] envisions a world in which coffee is a vehicle for inclusion, social and economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, innovation, and environmental sustainability.” Keba founded Red Bay in 2014, and it quickly became one of the East Bay's most visible brands,

available at many local cafes and farmer's markets, and selling wholesale to large retailers, such as Whole Foods and tech companies, such as Twitter and Salesforce.

Red Bay also runs a café in Oakland's uptown neighborhood, an epicenter of gentrification. Housed in a recycled shipping container and decorated with reclaimed wood, art and succulents, it maintains an aesthetic that has become synonymous with the influx of white hipsters. Keba thoughtfully acknowledges the role that high-end food businesses like his have played in changing neighborhoods. “One of the things I struggled with was: If I opened up a coffee shop in central Oakland, would it be a magnet for gentrification? Would I be making the problem worse?”

An African-American man, Keba argues that his presence as a business owner works to diversify the predominantly white, male world of specialty coffee. But Red Bay's social justice ethic goes beyond the identities of its founder and farmers. Keba's goal is to “populate the coffee shop with young Black and Brown people who are struggling to stay in the city—half of whom would be formerly incarcerated.” Red Bay's business model provides livable wages. Entry-level workers earn wages, tips, and a share of profits, for a total of about \$20 per hour, though it remains to be seen whether this is enough to keep employees in Oakland. “It's a risky proposition and we're still sorting through the intricacies of the challenge,” he expounds. “But I feel like it could catch on. Oakland could potentially be a model for resisting the displacement effect of gentrification.”

The Town Kitchen is another for-profit food business that aims to ensure that the city's new can benefit long-term community members. On their website, the Town Kitchen describes itself as a “community-driven food business [that] delivers locally-sourced lunch [and provides] fair-wage jobs and college classes to low-income youth.” They source from food artisans who are women, people of color, and largely based in Oakland. Their delivery clients include an array of corporate and tech businesses, social impact companies, and large events, including the 2016 Super Bowl. As one promotional article put it “poor youth get a good wage and culinary training, and Bay Area tech companies get their fancy lunches. Everyone wins.” Cofounder, Sabrina Mutukisna, has a background in non-profit youth development and works to ensure that the young people employed by The Town Kitchen get the support they need, including help with college and financial aid applications, housing, and other needs. She estimated that 80% of her employees are either enrolled in college or taking college-prep classes in high school, and several have left to attend universities.



Although, neither founder was raised in Oakland, the city provides not only the company's mission, but an important aspect of its branding, as "the town" has long been a nickname for Oakland, distinguishing it from "the city" of San Francisco. This speaks to the trendiness of Oakland's sustainable food scene, as well as the founders' goal of raising the visibility of people of color in Oakland. Sabrina describes the name of her company as a direct response to gentrification:

Oakland's at a place where gentrification is really a big subject. Talking about things like food anthropology and food gentrification [...] These big questions of how do we preserve our culture and what is Oakland culture and how do we see that through our food and how do we see that through our young people and making sure that young people can stay in Oakland, can buy a house in Oakland, can start businesses in Oakland. What are we doing to create that?

The Town Kitchen and Red Bay Coffee are at the forefront of an effort by Oakland's food-based social entrepreneurs to ensure that some of the benefits of the city's dynamic, sustainable food scene accrue to long-term community members, highlighting their contributions to the city's culture, while providing living-wage green jobs. The trend toward employing youth of color with limited employment prospects is a recent phenomenon, and those making use of this approach hope it can help long-term residents withstand the housing pressures wrought by gentrification.

Newer business owners like Keba at Red Bay and Sabrina at the Town Kitchen hope that their employees will be able to stay in the city. But Sabrina reports that for at least some of the youth she works with, it is already too late. Their families have been displaced, and they commute to The Town from suburbs as far as an hour away. That speaks to the quality of their job, but also the inability of even good, green jobs to combat gentrification as real estate pressures continue to intensify.

## DISCUSSION

Despite much popular support, creating green food jobs is a limited approach to pushing back against displacement. It can help long-term communities see themselves reflected in Oakland's thriving food scene, but there is no guarantee that even these wages can withstand the city's housing market. Given

that middle-income communities are also facing displacement pressures, it seems unlikely that long-term residents can be supported in navigating the current landscape. If displacement is to be avoided, the landscape itself must be shifted. Several city policies have recently been initiated to begin this work.

Oakland is no stranger to activism opposing gentrification. One prominent recent campaign involved a one-acre, city-owned lot in the East Lake neighborhood. When the city council attempted to sell this lot to be developed as a luxury apartment tower, protests erupted, shutting down city council meetings. Due to community opposition, the developer agreed to build affordable units on site. Another important recent campaign resulted in the passage of measure JJ in 2016, which expands the city's affordable housing and rent control measures and limits rent increases. As individual community members, many food justice activists and entrepreneurs participated in these struggles, but the organizations themselves were largely absent.

However, organizations have been involved in crafting policies to integrate health equity and affordable housing into the building permitting process. Two prominent organizations, the Oakland Food Policy Council and the Hope Collaborative have been working with the city's Departments of Planning and Public Health to craft Healthy Development guidelines for the City of Oakland.

The Hope Collaborative's Executive Director, Sabrina Wu, describes the overall intent of these guidelines and her organization's motivation for participating in their development:

It's supposed to be an upstream public health tool that would identify potentially negative health impacts of proposed developments before they're approved. We found ourselves always on the other side of the fight. The city has already approved the project, why didn't the community have a say? Now we're going to fight against it, we're going to have a lawsuit. Guess what, it's too late because you didn't show up at the public meetings that they never told us about.

This is something that happens time and time again. What we are hearing from our members is we actually need something earlier on in the approval process. We're not going to count on the city to always let us know when public comment is, when is the time we engage? They just don't do that well. There needs to be some kind of check in place. They're not oriented in thinking

about “How will this development proposal that I’m getting at the permit desk impact the health of this community?” That’s not how they’re trained. They actually need a tool that will walk them [through this process]. It looks at impact on housing, transportation, food, space, arts, and culture. It’s very broad and comprehensive.

The Healthy Development guidelines take a comprehensive approach, including recommendations on environmental health, economic opportunity, community culture and safety, healthy food, transportation, housing, and recreation. With regard to food, the guidelines advocate that the city requires or incentivizes developers to support an edible parks program, to increase neighborhood access to healthy food through the farmers markets, produce stands, or grocery stores; and to dedicate space for permanent and visible gardens. The guidelines also advocate for enhanced access to affordable housing, particularly for vulnerable populations. Strategies include a Jobs/Housing Impact Fee, support for maintenance of existing affordable housing, the institution of preferences in city-assisted, affordable housing projects for people who already live or work in Oakland, those who have been displaced, and homeless and very low-income families, and an inclusionary zoning policy for development projects that support long-term, affordable ownership opportunities for local residents. It also includes support for some of the entrepreneurship programs described above, such as living wage jobs and the incubation of locally owned businesses.

If and when they are adopted, the Healthy Development guidelines will be an important tool to create development that meets the needs of current Oakland residents while minimizing displacement. But its creators recognize that it will be controversial and that elected officials have favored recruiting tech firms and upscale housing developments. For now, they are beginning by emphasizing the guidelines that do not require new laws. Some of these are more superficial, such as requiring trash receptacles on development sites. Others alert the Planning Department to existing city and state housing laws that were not previously on their radar, an omission that some developers used to their advantage. At the same time, the Planning Department is pursuing additional guidelines, beginning with those that are less controversial to build support toward those whose adoption may be more complicated. If and when they are adopted, the Healthy Development guidelines are the kinds of policies that can help prevent displacement of low and middle-income Oakland residents, even as wealthier residents increasingly share the city, and businesses—food and otherwise—cater to newcomers’ needs.

## CONCLUSION

Since its re-emergence in the 1960s, food activism has evolved from its anti-capitalist roots to promoting the production and consumption of local and organic commodities. Advocates for food justice, while systemically highlighting the ways that both industrial and alternative food systems reproduce racial inequalities, also pursue their goals through support for entrepreneurs. They promote food entrepreneurs of color by featuring their products at farmer’s markets and health food stores, and by providing green jobs in marginalized communities. When faced with the challenges brought by gentrification, food justice activists continue to highlight entrepreneurship. They argue that creating living-wage green jobs and ownership opportunities for communities threatened by displacement garners material benefits for these groups, enabling them to stay in the city, while highlighting their visibility and contributions to their cities’ food cultures. This brings the cultural work of representation together with the material objective of improving the distribution of resources.

However, these entrepreneurial strategies reinforce neoliberal notions of business development and market-based solutions to social problems such as racism and environmental injustice. Neoliberalism is a political and economic philosophy that asserts that human well-being can best be achieved if the so-called “free” market is allowed to function free of intervention from the state (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Prominent social scientists have argued that current modes of food activism may explicitly oppose this philosophy, but have nevertheless tended to embrace neoliberal forms of governance, including reliance on markets to pursue change (Allen, Fitzsimmons, Goodman, & Warner, 2003; Allen, 2008; Brown & Getz, 2008; Guthman, 2008b; Harrison, 2008). Food justice advocates call attention to decades of institutionally racist development patterns (McClintock, 2011). But rather than demanding government investment in these areas, they argue that communities can create grassroots development through local food systems. This approach suggests that everyday people can work together to solve social problems. While this certainly can be empowering, the lack of a role for government policy helps to relieve the state of its responsibility to provide environmental protection and a social safety net, a responsibility that is particularly important in light of the state’s role in pursuing and permitting the destruction of communities and environments in the first place.

In addition to their overt political work, social movements such as food justice help shape a sense of proper selfhood and citizenship. Many food activists unreflexively espouse

and perpetuate ideas compatible with neoliberal notions of good citizenship through their emphasis on self-responsibility, individualism, and entrepreneurialism (Bondi & Laurie, 2005; Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999; Lerner & Craig, 2005). Support for local food entrepreneurs not only upholds individual responsibility for one's own economic fortunes, but also concedes decreasing political support for entitlement programs often derided as handouts (Allen, 1999). Moreover, they neglect that small businesses are competitive and often fail, making them a poor substitute for direct assistance.

While non-profit food justice organizations seek to shore up entrepreneurial venues through fundraising, the provision of technical assistance, incubation, and other support; they are nonetheless unable to ensure that the entrepreneurs they work with are able to withstand displacement. To be sure, these social entrepreneurial strategies and ventures are relatively recent and cannot yet be studied systematically, but the homelessness of several Planting Justice employees and the displacement of some of The Town Kitchen's workforce speaks to the challenge of keeping long-term, low-income residents in Oakland, even with jobs that pay \$20 per hour. A recent study by the non-profit Policy Link (2016) found that the number of Oakland units affordable to both minimum wage workers and entry-level teachers are the same: zero.

Of course, living-wage job and entrepreneurial opportunities are important for communities who have withstood decades of segregation, redlining, urban renewal, and general disinvestment, even if they cannot withstand the current speculative real-estate boom. However, food justice activists seeking to fight gentrification would do well to add additional strategies to their lexicon. At its root, gentrification is a political-economic process through which developers and other boosters increase their profits with the help of city policy. And while city policy is often used to lure developers, it can also be deployed to make demands of them. The Healthy Development guidelines described above are a clear and comprehensive example of this, and some food activists have been involved in the process of shaping them. Food justice activists would do well to promote these guidelines among their supporters, including both the long-term community members they seek to support and the newer, wealthier residents who can act as politically powerful allies. In this way, food justice activists can use their entrepreneurial approaches not only to buy and sell food and to signify the remaining presence of long-term communities, but also to build power toward affecting broader policy changes.

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