“GROW FOOD, NOT PRISONS:” INNOCENCE, ABOLITION, AND PLACE-MAKING IN THE HUDSON VALLEY

by

SARA THOMAS BLACK

(Under the Direction of Jennifer L. Rice)

ABSTRACT

In New York’s Hudson Valley, contemporary development agendas focused on rural tourism and organized around an agrarian and artisanal sense of place have created conditions for rapid gentrification and racialized displacement. This dissertation examines the logics of place and belonging that underly these development agendas, situating them within a history of racial capitalist and settler colonial development. I show how particular forms of “settler moves to innocence” (Tuck and Yang 2012) invoking agrarian and artisanal ideals are used justify and normalize viscerally uneven, tangibly contested geographies of food, land, housing, and incarceration in the region. I draw on Black, feminist, decolonial, and abolitionist theories of politics and place-making, as well as interviews, primary and secondary literatures, and 8 years of practice as a scholar organizer, to explore what motivates moves to “agrarian innocence” and what methods and practices might disable moves to innocence. Reflecting on grassroots organizing at the intersection of food justice and prison abolition, I offer three general methods to inform antidotes for innocence: learning to see “forgotten places” (Gilmore 2008), practicing toward “somatic abolition” (Menakeem 2017), and “reselecting our ancestors” (Gilmore 2022a, Williams 1998).

INDEX WORDS: Hudson Valley, good food movement, gentrification, whiteness, racial capitalism, abolition

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DEDICATION

To Melissa Mae Odum Ridgway, Mary Curtis Black, and Dorothy Price.

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INTRODUCTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

> "Racism not only blinds us from recognizing the significance of our new racial institutions, it also paralyzes those inclined to act."
>
> Clyde Woods (2002)

> "Anti-racist whites invest too much energy worrying about getting it right; […] It's not about that. It's about putting your shoulder to the wheel of history"
>
> Ricardo Levins-Morales (2015)

1.1 ON THE VICTORY BUS

It was - 4° F in January 2016 as I waited in the parking lot of Eastern Correctional Facility. I had been up before the sun, driving across three counties in New York's Hudson Valley and running late to the stops along my route. First, the eggs from Sparrowbush Farm—I let myself into the barn by headlight and came out with two crates. Then, out east to Millerton, NY and Rock Steady Farm, where I backed my car up to the loading pad and attempted to carry what I needed—apples, carrots, onions, cabbage—in only two trips. I had run a version of this route many times, juggling coffee and directions between three or four farms in the rural Hudson Valley before heading South or West to a New York State prison. This time, I was making my way to Kerhonkson, a small town at the foot of the Catskill Mountains, where two prisons built

ninety years apart shared a large campus across the street from a Wal-Mart. Pulling into the parking lot that morning, I was relieved to see that the Victory Bus was running late too.

The Victory Bus was a project at the intersection of prison abolitionist and food justice organizing in New York City and the Hudson Valley. The project offered affordable boxes of organic, local, small farm produce and door to door, community-organized, cooperatively managed prison visit transportation for families and communities impacted by mass incarceration. Co-founded in 2011 by Jalal Sabur, a young Black farmer from Westchester County, and Herman Bell, at the time an incarcerated elder and political prisoner, the Victory Bus emerged from a long tradition of Black radical thought and liberation practice based on mutual aid, cooperative economics, food, land, and agriculture (cf Penniman 2018; White 2018, Grant et al 2012). The package deal of produce and transportation that the Victory Bus provided, albeit at a small scale, was one of the more affordable prison-visit rides available. Certainly, it was the only one run by farmers. Farms, prisons, country roads, and small cities and towns in the Hudson Valley – this dissertation is broadly focused on how sites like these are woven together in the regional history of uneven development, and on the conjuncture emerging from that history.

In the decade since the Victory Bus started running, patterns organizing the distribution of resources for place- and life-making in the Hudson Valley have shifted dramatically on multiple fronts. For example, since that morning seeing my breath in the parking lot of a 122-year-old prison, the town of Kerhonkson has undergone a significant change in relation to shifting flows of people, money, and capacity in that place. The *New York Times* real estate section published a description of the change in 2019:

> "For generations, New Yorkers have flocked to the Hudson Valley to escape the pace of city life, often choosing it over the Hamptons for its affordability, as well as its relative lack of traffic, pretense and SoulCycle studios. But as more city residents buy homes upstate, that distinction is becoming less obvious. […] [T]he once-sleepy hamlet of Kerhonkson, N.Y., where a number of ultramodern million-dollar homes have been built in recent years, has been dubbed 'Kerhampton'" (Satow 2019).

Kerhonkson, "once-sleepy" and unpretentious, is experiencing a dramatic escalation in home values and housing costs as a growing number of wealthy New Yorkers seek a restorative country-life in million-dollar homes. While the Hudson Valley has been molded by hundreds of years of economic development focused on regional tourism and second home ownership, the region has also *always* been decidedly multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and working class (Williams-Myers 1994, 2003). In recent years, however, long-simmering urban and rural gentrification patterns in the Hudson Valley have experienced both dramatic escalations and tangible expansions in space. From the riverfront to the mountain towns, the region is humming with high-end development in a specific aesthetic and discursive register, largely focused on local foods, iconic landscapes, artisanal goods, historic architecture, and escaping "the city," New York City. Towns previously anchored by factories, farms, and prisons are shifting toward boutique hotels, waterfront amenities, revitalized historic districts, craft businesses, and rural tourism as municipal survival strategies.

As more and more people with significant wealth relocate to the area, working class communities and long-term residents face a profound shortage of affordable housing, insufficient frontline community resources, and a segregated and precarious jobs market. These changing

patterns partly affirm the production of a particular "sense of place," a political story about who belongs here and why. Flows of capital and senses of place, carried by moving people, work together to stabilize renewed geographic patterns. The above *Times* piece, for example, notes a new shuttle from Manhattan to Kerhonkson not unlike the Hamptons Jitney, the famous bus service that ferries New Yorkers to the elite beach destination on the east tip of Long Island (Satow 2019). Now, a private bus to Kerhonkson "will ferry weekenders upstate for upward of $50 one way, offering them high-speed Wi-Fi, cappuccinos and locally sourced snacks" (ibid).

This kind of gentrification is not the only context in which the organization of resources for place- and life-making is rapidly changing in the Hudson Valley. In waves following the state killings of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castille, Sandra Bland, and many others, a rush of organizations and individuals racialized as white have clamored to invest their resources in (or at least gesture toward) "racial equity," "racial justice," or "diversity, equity, and inclusion" initiatives (Cyril et al 2021). That pattern accelerated *dramatically* in the wake of the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the summer of 2020. Mass uprisings and other ruptures spurred more and more people and institutions racialized as white to pour their resources across a wide spectrum of strategies for "anti-racism" (ibid). Organizers and frontline communities are riding these waves, often with a keen awareness of their impermanence. Before this shift, for example the Victory Bus team operated on a small budget and struggled to gather resources critical for regular operation. Today, however, grassroots and philanthropic investment has enabled the organization to buy a tractor with critical implements, put up deer fences, run irrigation lines, and grow and distribute nearly 20,000 pounds of organic food on collectively managed land. Yet, there is a careful awareness that this flush of resources may not last very long, and that radical organizing work can often be captured, co-opted, and sanitized in the

interests of the landed and powerful status quo (cf Taiwo 2022, Cyril et al 2021). How the farmer organizers at Sweet Freedom Farm best meet this moment, in furtherance of the mission to "Grow Food, Not Prisons!" is an open question with emergent answers.

These opening vignettes introduce two key themes of this dissertation. First, the two busses on the same roads – the Victory Bus and the Kerhamptons Jitney – travel across broader urban-rural development geographies in the region. This dissertation is *not* a study of each bus. Rather, I'm interested in understanding what logics, forces, and processes produced their entangled transits, and what logics, forces, and processes hide those entanglements within the dominant sense of place. My first theme informs the second, that communities in the region are engaging the emergent conjuncture of crisis and mobilization and organizing to change its shape with no outcome guaranteed. This dissertation is *not* a study of resistance movements. Rather, I am interested in what logics, forces, and processes might destabilize dominant discourses fueling gentrification the Hudson Valley, and how trajectories of resource mobilization can shift in the wake. I am focused on how "those inclined to act" (Woods 2002) can identify pathways forward which evade re-capture by regimes of racial capitalism, that jam the (re)inscription of racialized uneven development, and that arrive somewhere life-sustaining.

1.2 INNOCENT AND ABOLITIONIST DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS

Following the first theme, this dissertation argues that the dominant economic development agendas at work in the Hudson Valley rely on and reproduce a particular and racialized sense of place, cultivated by actors in the Hudson Valley "good food movement." Over the last 20 years, this network of well-resourced, predominately white, culturally, and politically influential non-profits, advocates, farmers, farmworkers, restauranteurs, and landowners have advocated for policies and investments that have transformed the landscape.

Their work uplifted small and medium scale family farms, local and community-based economies, craft products and artisanal labor, rural tourism and high end markets as instruments for reinvigorating a languishing regional economy. I will demonstrate how this development agenda produces and is produced by an **"agrarian and artisanal sense of place,"** a particular political story about the region that normalizes racialized displacement. My research notices that this sense of place is organized around themes of authentic and restorative connection to land, labor, community, and history. The Hudson Valley is marketed as a place where tourists and second homeowners can eat like a farmer, support craft businesses, find creative peers, feel situated within a meaningful historic context, and be healed by encountering nature. An agrarian and artisanal sense of place obscures histories of land, labor, and community that might complicate or contradict the narratives which today primarily nourish economically advantaged people racialized as white.

In the artisanal and agrarian Hudson Valley, we can identify a specific kind of what Eve Tuck and K. W. Yang called "settler moves to innocence," or the discursive tools that naturalize settler claims of belonging in places that were, and continue to be, violently colonized and racially organized. In the Hudson Valley, various advocates for rural economic revitalization utilize themes of authentic or meaningful connections to place in order to advance a development agenda focused on food, agriculture, craft goods, and rural tourism. I consider these strategies as structured in "**agrarian innocence**." Moves to agrarian innocence are used in the Hudson Valley to articulate a sense of place and a desirable future for racial capitalist and settler colonial interests, one where certain forms of conscious production and consumption of certain foods, materials, services, and spaces are seen as credible antidotes for the anxiety and alienation of settlers (see chapter 5). In conflicts around this racialized economy, many people use moves to

agrarian innocence to defend their belonging, by mobilizing narrative strategies, resonant with abstracted, romanticized, and racialized images that imply settler belonging and authentic connection to place (see chapter 6). Artisanal and agrarian place-making, structured in agrarian innocence has normalized Black, Brown, Indigenous and working-class marginalization in and displacement from the Hudson Valley. If racial capitalist and settler colonial logics make places that motivate moves to innocence, what relationships to place might dismantle these logics, and what kinds of logics might make, as McKittrick (2013 p 15) said, "more humanly workable" places (see Chapter 7).

To understand the possibilities for connections to place that aren't predicated on the displacement of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and working class communities, this dissertation builds on the concepts of **abolition** and **abolition geography**. Abolition is a theory and practice of social change rooted specifically and materially in Black freedom struggles against chattel slavery, colonization, plantations, organized abandonment, mass incarceration, food apartheid, environmental racism, and other deadly expressions of racial capitalism (Davis 2005; Davis et al 2022; Kaba 2021; Gilmore 2022a). Abolition focuses not just on ending these expressions, but on uprooting the logics of racialized dehumanization that give those expressions coherence across time and space. To do this—to end, uproot, and produce new modes of organizing our social and material resources toward nourishing life—abolitionist thinkers call for "a million community-driven experiments" (Kaba qtd in Hooks 2020) that teach us how to "change everything" (Gilmore 2022b).

1.3 UNSETTLING INNOCENCE IN THE GOOD FOOD MOVEMENT

Following my second theme, this dissertation is also concerned with how communities and individuals invested in an artisanal and agrarian sense of place in the Hudson Valley might

rebel against or defect from logics of racial capitalism and settler colonialism. To explore this, I analyze the motivations and internal narratives of a broad and loosely associated coalition of people and groups – what I call "the good food coalition" – that have cultivated an agrarian and artisanal sense of place and fostered the corresponding development agenda. Recognizing that many actors in this coalition have struggled to situate themselves in meaningful relationship to intersectional anti-racist struggles, I examine contradictions embedded in an agrarian and artisanal sense of place, especially desires for authentic or restorative connections to land, labor, community, and history.

I use this analysis to expand a critique of whiteness in struggles for just, intersectional food and land politics in the United States. I build on the work of organizers, farmers, gardeners, and scholars who have developed the lens of food justice and who have thoroughly diagnosed how whiteness limits struggles for a just and equitable food system. Whiteness is at the root, for example, of the good food movement's neoliberal focus on market-based solutions and consumer behavior, uncritical embrace of gastronomy and fine foods, classist pronouncements to "vote with your fork," and racist castigations of those who, "if only they knew," would certainly make better choices about what to eat (Guthman 2008a, Guthman 2008b, Slocum 2007, Mares and Peña 2011, Minkoff-Zern 2014, Ramirez 2014). Food justice, on the other hand, refers to grassroots practices which confront the interlocked race-, class-, and gender-based injustices that weave throughout the sprawling, multi-sectored food system. Organizers practicing food justice have mobilized a wide variety of strategies and projects: confronting hunger and food apartheid in poor and working class communities of color (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, Povitz 2019), organizing for fair pay and fair treatment of migrant farmworkers (Minkoff-Zern 2014), breaking the whitewashed representation of sustainable farming and small farmers (Bowens 2015, Alkon

2012), building urban and community based food and farming projects (Povitz 2019, Reynolds and Cohen 2016), and more. Within the framework of food justice, organizers can often configure sprawling terrains of political struggle across seemingly disparate sectors of food and land systems, and yet engage in reshaping that terrain through acts as intimate and embodied as turning the soil (Penniman 2018, Jones 2019, Ramirez 2015, Sbicca 2016).

Critical food studies scholars have recently uplifted three key traits of food justice that both define the practice *and* deliver transformative social, political, and ecological impacts. First: food justice is necessarily engaged with struggles over land sovereignty, it destabilizes the primacy of individualist private property ownership, and it requires creative imaginations about land access, land stewardship, and relationships enabling just work on land (Penniman 2018, Williams and Holt-Giménez 2017). Second, food justice uplifts embodied and relational practices of attending to trauma and community care, including practices of growing, sharing, and preparing food, as critical practices for building and wielding political power (Penniman 2018, Jones 2019, Ramirez 2015). Third, food justice is intersectional, and uses food and land as conceptual nodes for tracing and confronting a broad range of forms of exploitation, from mass eviction to mass incarceration (Sbicca 2018, Alkon et al. 2020).

Yet, as food justice has been taken up within good food movement communities (and become tied to both cultural caché and significant funding opportunities), some organizers and scholars have noted that the concept may still be short-changed, diluted, or misrecognized. Cadieux and Slocum (2015) note that certain food projects like gardens and farmers markets in urban communities of color have become synonymous with food justice, "as if it were enough to pair non-white groups with the food movement's familiar spaces of change" (p. 9). Reynolds and Cohen (2016, Reynolds 2015) write about the problems that arise when token markers of

diversity are valued over the work of dismantling oppression and constructing new power relations. Ramirez shows how white-led, white-centered community food projects pursing diversity and inclusion often fail to serve the needs and visions of the future developed by Black food and agricultural communities (2015). Within the good food movement, there is still a "hesitancy to acknowledge, analyze, and address structural violence," that can prevent well-resourced advocacy workers from meaningfully connecting their work to broader anti-racist struggle (Cadieux and Slocum p. 35). Afterall, figuring out "what an anti-racist worm bin looks like" requires not only a practiced analysis, but also many other organizing and facilitation skills, relationships, commitments, ways of knowing, and opportunities to learn new ways (ibid).

Even after the recent mainstreaming of criticisms of whiteness in the good food movement, actors in the Hudson Valley have often struggled or failed to configure their place-based, place-hungry work toward a politics of solidarity with broader racial justice movements. The artisanal and agrarian sense of place created opportunities for moves to agrarian innocence, methods for evading, ignoring, or obscuring both the inherent contradictions embedded in food movement self-narratives, as well as the political potential of alternate formations.

At the same time, in some sectors of the food movement space, there has been a recognizable shift away from the idea that structural racism is an unrelated issue to food and agricultural work in the region, toward explicit organizing modes and interim strategies designed to destabilize white supremacy and to serve the leadership and vision of Black, Brown, Indigenous and working-class food and agricultural communities. In this dynamic context, I am interested in the barriers and opportunities that exist for actors invested in meaningful relationships to land, labor, community, and history in the Hudson Valley to understand their entanglements with struggles for racial justice in the region and beyond.

This dissertation argues that we should understand the production of an agrarian and artisanal sense of place, not as a well-intentioned, reformable rural revitalization strategy, but as a continuation of economic development paradigms organized in the interests of racial capitalists, built on ideologies of innocent settler belonging, and requiring the destruction of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and working-class relationships to place. I join a growing field of scholars attempting to push the boundaries of critical food studies by grappling more deeply with the implications of Black geographies and carceral geographies for both criticizing the dominant ideologies of urban and rural food and land economies and for strategizing toward just alternatives (Reese and Sbicca 2022, McKeithen 2022, Williams and Freshour 2022, Garth and Reese 2020). Abolition geography offers a framework for transformative politics that refuse the destruction of Black, Brown, and Indigenous places and belonging, and which counter the need for settler and white "innocence" in imagining a just food future (cf Tuck and Yang 2012, Gilmore 2022a). Abolition and abolition geography are concepts that might strengthen our ability to effect meaningful transformations of the narrative, financial, and material infrastructure relevant to intersectional struggles for food, land, and racial justice in the Hudson Valley at this time.

1.4 GUIDE TO THE CHAPTERS

In Chapter 2, I introduce my theoretical foundations and provocations. I am situated within studies of how racial capitalism—organized and mobilized by coalitions of self-interested people and institutions—produce landscapes predicated on the destruction of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and working class relationships to place. Racial capitalist development produces and sustains racially uneven landscapes through processes of dehumanization which are inherently unstable and deeply contested. Black and anti-colonial feminist traditions remind us that political

power is experienced, transformed, built, and mobilized intimately. These are the foundations for understanding how abolition and abolition geography can shape strategies for food and land justice in the Hudson Valley.

I have developed these ideas as a scholar-organizer committed to interim politics of resourcefulness, which I describe further in Chapter 3. I am rooted in relational grassroots organizing traditions based in storytelling, direct action, positionality, and everyday relationships capable of enduring conflict and change. I understand grassroots organizing as a method of collective knowledge creation and world building. To inform this work and my scholarly approach in addition to my 8 years of experience in the Hudson Valley, I analyze and learn from interviews, oral histories, media, advocacy reporting, marketing texts and images, secondary literatures, and archival materials. I use genealogical narrative and discourse analyses to identify how relationships to power, place, and identity are built and mobilized in the region over time.

In Chapter 4, I describe how the emergent conjuncture in the Hudson Valley is rooted in 400 years of settler colonial and racial capitalist uneven development. I discuss four loosely chronological contexts: 1) manorial settler colonization, enslavement, and post-Revolutionary War industrialization, 2) rural tourism development in the wake of the Hudson River School art movement, 3) industrial booms and busts in the 20th century, and the economic abandonment leading to Urban Renewal and mass incarceration, and 4) recent revitalization schemes and development financialization strategies transforming urban and rural space. Triangulating agriculture, incarceration, and urban renewal, I illustrate how historically based "senses of place" in the new tourism economy erase deep histories of multi-racial struggle.

In Chapter 5, I trace the origins of an agrarian and artisanal sense of place in the Hudson Valley good food movement. I describe how various cohorts in the good food coalition

naturalized the absence of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and working class people in spaces and practices celebrated for their life-affirming relationships to land and labor. The Hudson Valley that they created was primed for a particular process of rural gentrification. Then, in Chapter 6, I examine racialized discourses of place and belonging in the Hudson Valley cities and towns surrounding conflicts over gentrification and tourism, demonstrating the ongoing denial and destruction of a Black sense of place. I identify moves to agrarian innocence framed around authentic connection to community and history in the discourses surrounding economic development plans based on tourism, even in contexts where agriculture is largely absent.

Lastly, in Chapter 7, I consider what non-innocent place-making might look and feel like in the Hudson Valley. Based on observations of geographies I encountered while organizing with the Freedom Food Alliance (an umbrella organization for the Victory Bus Project and Sweet Freedom Farm), I examine development patterns connecting food and agriculture to Hudson Valley prisons. I describe how the Freedom Food Alliance presents an abolitionist, non-innocent counter agenda to both carceral geographies and the agrarian and artisanal sense of place. Reflecting on efforts toward anti-racism in the Hudson Valley food movement, I articulate relevant lessons from abolitionist practice.

This study interrogates how an agrarian and artisanal sense of place reifies and perpetuates carcerality via racialized displacement and place annihilation. Discourses of agrarian innocence mask the contradictions embedded in places celebrated for their life affirming, humanizing, artisan and agrarian possibilities. The entanglement of innocence with a desire for a meaningful connection to place is a potent combination that can contribute to a future every bit as violently racialized as the present it builds on and the past it recalls. Noticing the practice and power of moves to agrarian innocence is critical for organizers invested in a just regional future.

CHAPTER 2

RACIAL CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND POLITICS OF THE "FORGOTTEN PLACES"

2.1 OVERVIEW

This dissertation argues that an artisanal and agrarian sense of place in the Hudson Valley serves racial capitalist and settler colonial logics by obscuring past and present geographies of BIPOC and working-class life, and by normalizing BIPOC and working-class absence in places celebrated as life-sustaining and life-affirming. In this chapter, I theorize that process as a method of what Katherine McKittrick (2011) called "place annihilation," or the "destruction of a Black sense of place," arguing that mobilizing an agrarian and artisanal sense of place in the Hudson Valley requires the destruction (literally and discursively) of BIPOC and working class relationships to land, labor, community, and history. I utilize the concept of "innocence" as developed by Tuck and Yang (2012) and Gilmore (2022a) to illustrate how discourses which naturalize the belonging of white and well-resourced migrants further both place annihilation and the alienation of marginalized people from power and resources. In contrast, I rely on the concepts of abolition and abolition geography, drawing again on Gilmore (2022a) to consider what a sense of place might look and feel like were it *not* reliant on the dehumanization and displacement of BIPOC and working class people. I situate abolitionist thought within the intellectual traditions of Black and decolonial feminisms and geographic thought traditions, and work with those traditions to describe practices of abolitionist place-making in everyday life.

The point of this theoretical engagement is to consider how communities might engage the current and specific conjuncture in the Hudson Valley. Specifically, I am interested in how some members of the good food coalition who are motivated by a meaningful connection to place and oriented toward racial justice may need a different way to understand their own positions within an expanded, non-innocent politics of place. I interweave scholarly and non-academic conversations to show how abolitionist analyses of political life under racial capitalism and settler colonialism can make defecting from regimes of displacement, dispossession, and dehumanization more possible for white people desiring a meaningful connection to stolen land. I am taking up three research questions to explore these themes:

Question 1: How have agrarian narratives about the Hudson Valley (re)produced racialized geographies of inclusion and exclusion?

Question 2: How do food movement actors contribute to the normalization of racial capitalist and settler colonial logics in the Hudson Valley?

Question 3: Where might food movement organizers locate the sites and practices of struggle with and potential transformation of the racialized landscape of the Hudson Valley?

2.2 GEOGRAPHIES OF SETTLER AND RACIAL CAPITALISM

Racially uneven patterns of development in the Hudson Valley are sedimentations of settler and racial capitalist logics, which underly values like private property and productivity, individualism and free markets, manifest destiny and *tabla raza*, and other justifications for unequal shares of land and power, structured in racial hierarchy. These worldviews underwrite vast human suffering by justifying the past and present, quiet or overt dispossession and displacement of people considered subhuman, uncivilized, heathen, or criminal from the

resources necessary for life-making. In the Hudson Valley, dynamic coalitions of actors who share an investment settler colonial and racial capitalist logics and outcomes organize social and material relationships across the landscape, producing patterns of racialized uneven development. Gramsci called coalitions like these "blocs," power formations that cohere around shared ideologies, conditions, stories, experiences, and other socio-material coagulants (2012, Woods 1998). These coalitions mobilize resources, broadly defined, to reshape the landscapes around them in service of their interests. Often, actors within these coalitions do not recognize their own investment in these logic systems because both the ideologies and the sedimented impacts of racial and settler capitalism are naturalized and stabilized within a hegemonic order (hooks and mesa-bains 2006).

Always, however, this order is internally unstable. It relies on contradictions that can be exposed, and on the coherence of coalitions that are unfixed and mutable. As Clyde Woods, Katherine McKittrick, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and other scholars of Black Geographic thought have argued, these multivalent power formations, though naturalized and normalized by many, are unstable, vulnerable, and subject to limits and frictions. They can be disrupted, recontoured, supplanted, evaded, or ignored all together by counter formations, other coalitions, organized around different interests. The struggle between power formations, across abstract and intimate terrains, produces the dynamic landscapes that we inhabit and shapes our understanding of where we belong within them. In other words, as Gilmore summarized Marx, "by mixing our labor with the earth, we change the external world and thereby change our own nature" (2022a p. 22) In this first section, I describe how the production of race and racialized discourses of place and belonging are methods for securing the stability of racial capitalist and settler colonial hegemony across space.

Racialization and racialized uneven development are necessary for capitalism's economic function. Capitalism's extraction of surplus value requires the construction and maintenance of hierarchies of difference out of socionature –land, soil, raw materials, and forms of life, including human life (Smith 2008). Race and racism are social tools use to form, stabilize, and normalize the exploitation of differences among people and places (Robinson 2000, Gilmore 2022a, Hall 1980). Gilmore, working with Robinson (2000), expands:

> "Capitalism, never not racial, including in rural England, or anywhere in Europe for that matter, where, as Cedric Robinson teaches us, hierarchies among people whose descendants might all have become white depended for their structure on group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death, exploited by elites, as part of all equally exploitable nature-as-other, to justify inequality at the end of the day, and the next morning as well" (2022a p. 471)

Whiteness, Gilmore notes, is a recent category in a longer history of organized "**dehumanization**," or "the ideological displacements central to any group's ability to annihilate another in the name of territory, wealth, ethnicity" (2007 p 243). Dehumanization in this context refers to the assertion that certain human others cannot or should not be included in within European, masculinist constructs of rational Man (Wynter 2003, Lugones 1994, 2010). Some groups of people (white European men and their co-conspirators) are considered rational, free, productive, and self-possessed "humans" with a clear place of belonging in both history and territory. Other groups of people – noble savages, teeming masses, irrational or corrupted women, irredeemable criminals, simple-minded slaves – are "equally exploitable" to "nature-as other," such that the exploitation of their labor and life forces is as normal as the exploitation of soils, rivers, forests, and oceans (Gilmore 2007 p. 243). Racialized social worlds are

characterized by contradiction and struggle because structurally dehumanized people always assert their capacity for self-determination (McKittrick 2006, Woods 2017, DuBois 2017). As a result, colonial and capitalist powers have had to continually organize and enforce social life to maintain the coherence of these "ideological displacements" (Gilmore 2007 p. 243).

As agents of racial capitalism and settler colonialism organize the landscape – displacing and destroying community ecologies – they must create narratives of place that stabilize deeply uneven, contradictory, and contested systems. McKittrick (2006, 2011), for example, describes this process within the landscape delusion organizing plantation slavery in the colonized Americas. The plantation, McKittrick (2011) says, is an enactment of an uneven colonial-racial economy which depends simultaneously on fixing Black bodies into place *and* on the annihilation of a Black "sense of place." To stabilize the plantation's economic strategy – forcing masses of captive people, including highly skilled agrarians, to work in slave labor camps at the productive centers of a new global economy – settlers and their logic systems developed ideological, legal, and social structures that imagined and enforced Black placelessness. "In the Americas," McKittrick explains "free labour under bondage thus marked black working bodies as those 'without'— without legible-Eurocentric history narratives, without land or home, without ownership of self—as this system forcibly secured black peoples to the geographic mechanics of the plantation economy" (ibid p. 948).

Maintaining place annihilation requires the construction of robust plantation ideologies that normalize Black unfreedom and stabilize working-class white cooperation with the plantation coalition (Woods 2017). Free and enfranchised Black people did not just pose a political or physical threat to planters and the plantation system. They undermined the fundamental ontological and ideological fictions that maintained and justified slavery. As

W.E.B. DuBois (2017) argued, the common characterization that Black people were stagnant and corruptible unless yoked by benevolent slaver was a direct result of the psychological and ideological chaos of white slave owners and others aligned with the plantation coalition. This coalition structured and legitimized a whole knowledge system, backed by pseudoscience, religion, ethics, and philosophy, to argue that Black workers were out of place in territories of freedom, and comfortable in their natural spaces of servitude (DuBois 2017, Woods 2017).

The practice of place annihilation is at the bedrock of patterns of organized abandonment and uneven development throughout the 20th century that have created overlapping geographies of mass criminalization, mass incarceration, food apartheid, environmental racism, slum clearance, eviction, and forced migration for racialized and working class communities in urban and rural places across the Americas (McKittrick 2011). Increasingly, scholars and organizers focused on these conditions are describing geographies of racial and settler capitalism as "carceral" (cf Bonds 2018, Bledsoe and Wright 2018, Williams and Freshour 2022), not specifically because of their direct relationships with systems of mass incarceration. Rather, prisons are just one feature of carceral geographies, formations for accomplishing the displacement and confinement of human life, and the annihilation of self-sovereign relationships to land, labor, community, and history, that racial capitalism and settler colonialism require. Prison building and mass incarceration are sprawling strategies for stabilizing neo-liberal economic regimes in crisis (Gilmore 2007, Camp 2016).

The ongoing annihilation of indigenous peoples' places also requires intricate ideological displacements. Whereas racial capitalism required the structural normalization of Black, Brown, and working-class *presence* in such vastly incoherent regimes of human suffering as plantations, settler colonialism required that indigenous communities disappear, become *absent* through the

multiple genocides of war, forced relocation, forced assimilation, and discursive banishment into a finished past (Tuck and Yang 2012). "Settler moves to innocence" is a concept that Tuck and Yang (2012) use to describe the discursive practices that normalize settler belonging and settler futurity in the wake of tangible genocide – practices which often involve powerful, spiritual, or morally romantic relationships to land and nature. Settler moves to innocence are "positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (ibid, p 10). Innocence is a kind of "evasion" which seeks to "rescue settler futurity" by reconciling settler guilt and complicity, rather than removing cooperation from the settler logics organizing resources and social life (ibid p 3). Moves to innocence narrate settler belonging as they justify and motivate the exclusion of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and working class people from power over resources for place- and life-making.

Objectification and the normalization of suffering, placelessness, and powerlessness are persistent practices and modes of relating across difference which result in the uneven distributions of resources, even in contexts with "liberatory" aims. Critical scholarship, for example, is often guilty of reproducing dehumanization. Clyde Woods criticized scholarship focused on racialized inequality in 2002, arguing that the failure to engage activism and social movements against racial capitalism meant that those "studies provide a priori support for the conclusion that impoverished ethnic communities are passive and disorganized [and] incapable of developing solutions to the problems faced by them" (p 66). Scholars, he says, are "forc[ing] their subjects to view their own corpse" (ibid). Likewise, Ashanté Reese (2020) reflects on how, in the context of critical food studies, "social scientists have often rendered those who bear the heaviest weight of inequities as agentless," (p. 30) causing them to ignore active and historied

strategies for Black place- and life- making with food and land "in favor of replicating models in which Black people are almost solely seen as the recipients of education and aid" (ibid p. 31, Jones 2019).

Dehumanizing racial capitalist worldviews also comprise the foundation of what organizers, educators, and activists have often termed "white supremacy culture" in professional and social worlds (Penniman 2018, SONG 2015, Slocum 2007, Reynolds and Cohen 2016). Tema Okun (2021) described elements of this culture – with features like perfectionism, conflict avoidance, valuing quantity over quality, the worship of the written word, binary "either/or" thinking, and the idea that good strategy and progress is always marked by growth and scalability – as practices which marginalize racialized and working-class people from power within powerful institutions. In non-profit-dominated social movement spaces, including the alternative food movements but also increasingly a broad movement of advocacy sectors mobilizing "diversity, equity, and inclusion," white supremacy cultural norms still enforce the uneven distribution of resources and continue to have tangible consequences regarding which communities and strategies receive funding, attention, respect, and room to grow in accordance with their own visions.

These sometimes subtle dehumanizations are damaging to meaningful multi-racial and cross-class solidarities, which might have the potential to transform the violent systems the underwrite our lives. They can also prevent people racialized as white from recognizing the ways that white supremacy culture and other forms of racial capitalist logic dehumanize and damage *everyone*, albeit in very different ways (Crass 2013, Lugones 1994). For example, Southerners on New Ground, a multi-racial, multi-generational organization for queer liberation in the U.S. South, has described certain habits within their white anti-racist membership that have this

effect. These include workaholism and martyrdom, white-on-white call out culture and anxious anti-racist credentialing, leading with hesitancy and fear, a self-obsessed concern over one's own goodness, and a discomfort with Black people that leads to over-accommodation and conflict avoidance as much as it can lead to disdain, harm, and structural disempowerment (SONG 2015 p. 7). "Within ourselves, inside SONG, in coalitions, campaigns and other formations," the collective writers explain, "we have seen some of the ways that white privilege, white superiority, white pathology and neurosis have caused harm and damaged our ability to build trust, confidence and long-term comradeship with communities of color" (ibid p. 4). Ricardo Levins-Morales also wrote briefly about the impacts of white neurosis for the white anti-racist organizing network Showing Up for Racial Justice in 2015. He warned about the anxiety that white folks can feel about their "anti-racism grade point average," which distracts from tasks at hand: "putting your shoulder to the wheel of history" and "undermining the structural supports of a system of control that grinds us under." Anxiety, shame, fear, perfectionism, a drive to work oneself to the bone, and to castigate and marginalize others who are doing it wrong: these habits are symptomatic of broadly dehumanizing intellectual and emotional approaches to the problems at hand. As Black and decolonial feminists like hooks, Sandoval, and Lugones argue, they stem from attachment to a Western and masculinist ontologies of "purity" which cannot handle contradiction, multiplicity, and the unknown (Lugones 1994). There are, borrowing again from McKittrick, (2013 p. 15) "more humanly workable" ways to engage in struggle.

If we want to interrupt this seemingly endless, naturalized, and normalized rehearsal of racial capitalist and settler colonial relationships across difference, Gilmore says "we ought to prioritize coming to grips with dehumanization" (2007 p. 247). Abolition is an organizing concept for that task. Abolition is the insistence that it is possible to organize social-material

worlds outside of the white supremacist and settler colonial logics which often present themselves as the inevitable and natural order of things (Gilmore 2022a). Black and decolonial feminist theories are crucial for understanding abolitionist organizing (Carruthers 2019, Davis et al. 2022). These theories, among their many gifts, offer ways of recognizing political terrains within relationships, bodies, everyday efforts, and intimate scales, and they carry a critique of political work that neglects these terrains. In this way, they are theories of change – they recommend strategies designed to get us somewhere different. In the following sections, I will summarize abolitionist perspectives on place, power, and practices for change, rooted in Black and decolonial feminist critique, that enable more humanly workable approaches to life in the wake of racial and settler capitalism.

2.3 ABOLITION GEOGRAPHIES

Geographers tracing abolitionist thought often begin with an historical analysis of enslaved and free Black people's work to enact worlds rooted in their humanity. One of the most important records of this is W.E.B DuBois's *Black Reconstruction* (2017 [1935]), an analysis of free people's efforts to rebuild American democracy in the wake of the Civil War. Emancipation and the end of the American Civil War, DuBois demonstrated, was made possible because many enslaved people recognized changing conditions and escalated long traditions of resistance, fugitivity, and self-sovereignty. They stopped working, self-emancipated, and organized for the freedom of their peers. In the wake of the end of the war, they negotiated for the means to make their lives on the land. Some were promised those means through General Sherman's Special Field Order 15, which organized a swath of land 30 miles wide from the coastline inward, and extending from Charleston, South Carolina to the St. John's River in Florida, for freed people's resettlement (Heynen 2021, Heynen and Ybarra 2021). Elsewhere, Black people developed

robust experiments for organizing their resources in their collective interests, creating churches, schools, political organizations, and collective economies. Black land sovereignty through property ownership would not only undermine plantation ideologies; it could also support the formation of the kinds of relationships conducive to collective freedom through collective governance and cooperative stewardship (DuBois 2017).

When the false promises of federal protection and land access collapsed, they foreclosed possibilities for what DuBois called an "abolition democracy," or the full inclusion of freed people in democratic citizenship as property owners, and thereby as architects of their own self-determining communities. Instead, plantation coalitions collaborated to create new carceral geographies, literally built on the enforcement of Black placeless-ness. It soon became illegal to be Black and out of place, to say nothing of the extralegal methods of enforcing white supremacy through spatial terrorism. To abolish plantation slavery would require the destruction of the logics which made dehumanization and displacement a coherent strategy for organizing resources for social life. Actual abolition would also necessarily emerge from the strategies for life that oppressed people sought out and cultivated, and the configurations of relationships, processes, and materials they produced. Abolition geographies are those relationships, processes, and materials – transformations in space and in the arrangement of political terrains emergent from life in the wake of dehumanization. An abolitionist perspective understands that racialized people are not condemned to a static fate within predetermined, patterned relations of abuse, but are producers of thought and strategies for life which reject the epistemological conditions justifying their objectification (Robinson 2000, Gilmore 2022a, Woods 2002, Woods 2017, Kaba 2021).

As a strategic framework, abolition examines existing relationships of power and configurations of resources and seeks to transform violent structures without reproducing violence. In a resource recently compiled by abolitionist organizations Interrupting Criminalization, Project Nia, and Critical Resistance, organizers offered six guiding questions to help community groups orient toward abolition and away from "reformist reforms" that maintain dehumanizing carceral logics at their core (Interrupting Criminalization et al 2022 p. 11). To paraphrase their framework here, abolition means interrogating whether a strategy preserves existing power relations; whether it legitimizes, expands, or benefits the carceral system, its beneficiaries, and sustainers. If the demand is to transform power relations, abolition requires a refusal to operationalize distinctions between "deserving" and "undeserving" people. Abolition requires principled methods for building new power relations, oriented by the leadership of the most marginalized and most impacted by the system in question.

In the context of food and agriculture, abolition enables us to recognize how strategies and practices of community care are explicit acts of intellectual labor and world-making, of enacting spaces that reject the epistemological conditions for food apartheid, labor exploitation, and other forms of racial capitalist violence (McKittrick 2006, Ramirez 2015, Woods 2017). These practices might look like singing the Blues (Woods 2017), remembering traditions and passing them on, sharing meals and sacred space (Penniman 2018), smiling, feeling, breathing, or just being in a place, whether it is designed for you or not (Jones 2019). Many food justice communities already do tend to be invested in slow, relational organizing through growing and sharing food, providing for everyday needs, and connecting to the land (Ramirez 2015, White 2019, McCutcheon 2019, Smith 2019). But abolitionist thought illuminates how these practices have grounding in the spatial histories of racial, settler capitalism and the alternative geographies

that have been created in resistance. When we know this history, it becomes difficult to ignore the value of projects which fall outside of normalized expectations for radical politics under white supremacy culture (for example, the expectation of scalability and growth). It becomes difficult to continually marginalize political subjects who do not comply with white supremacy culture's Eurocentric expectations of revolutionary agents and contexts (i.e. that they work themselves to the bone, that they stage protests in city streets, that they organize strategic narratives in binary, either/or modes). It becomes necessary to understand the relationships and practices that support just and cooperative governance of resources, especially of land. For groups of people to organize their resources across difference, without reconstructing group-differentiated hierarchies, they need robust practices for communication, strategizing, conflict engagement, harm repair, and weathering changes over time.

Abolitionist traditions, especially more recent struggles against mass criminalization and incarceration of racialized and working-class people, have cultivated many strategies for engaging conflict and pursuing repair without reproducing harm. One critique imbedded in this practice is a critique of innocence. Gilmore (2022a) has described the shortcomings of arguments against prisons which rely on the figures of the innocent – or relatively more innocent – people that they affect: children, parents, women, trans and non-binary people, the elderly, the non-violent. "Innocence evades a problem abolition is compelled to confront: how to diminish and remedy harm as against finding better forms of punishment," Gilmore writes (2022a p. 488). Abolitionist thought may be useful for fostering the abandonment of moves to innocence, including the sorts of frenetic anti-racist worry, credentialing, martyrdom, and other modes of dealing with guilt and shame that SONG and Tuck and Yang describe.

One antidote for a compulsion toward innocence is incommensurability, a strategic tolerance for irreconcilable differences and unknowable futures. As Tuck and Yang argue:

> "An ethic of incommensurability, which guides moves that unsettle innocence, stands in contrast to aims of reconciliation, which motivate settler moves to innocence. […] Reconciliation is concerned with questions of what will decolonization look like? What will happen after abolition? […] Incommensurability acknowledges that these questions need not, and perhaps cannot, be answered in order for decolonization to exist as a framework" (2012 p 35).

Incommensurability, in this case, refers the divergent claims to land and place among Indigenous, Black, and settler peoples in under settler colonization (Tuck and Yang 2012). Incommensurability names that non-metaphorical decolonization will require real negotiations of power, space, and land in which settler futures are not guaranteed or centered. Incommensurability is a way of not being attached to the imaginative certainty of settler futurity, a way of not being paralyzed by incomprehensible, unknowable differences and changes that are undoubtedly ahead. Tuck and Yang offer it as an ethic for interim solidarities across difference, for strategies of "settler harm reduction," and other experiments toward the reorganizations of human power relations (p 21).

Another concept that enriches contemporary scholarship on abolition is adrienne maree brown's use of "emergence," a synthesis of theories of change and traditions of movement building with roots in Black and decolonial feminist theory (brown 2017). Emergence is a way to think about the unfolding present, the constancy of change, and the relationships between very small and very large processes. Emergence imagines that the processes necessary for radical,

large scale transformations are indelibly, and usefully, linked to our immediate and intimate relationships - in our bodies and our abilities to collaborate directly with other human beings. brown writes that emergence enables:

> "strategies for organizers building movements for justice and liberation that leverage relatively simple interactions to create complex patterns, systems, and transformations—including adaptation, interdependence and decentralization, fractal awareness [the patterning relationships between large and small scales], resilience and transformative justice, nonlinear and iterative change, creating more possibilities." (brown 2017)

Incommensurability and emergence are abolitionist counter logics that anticipate change, difference, and conflict, but insist on approaching these with a grounded, practiced refusal of dehumanization. I hear incommensurable and emergent abolitionist thought in Gilmore's theory of change articulated in *Golden Gulag*:

> "If we take to heart the fact that we make places, things, and selves, but not under conditions of our own choosing, then it is easier to take the risk of conceiving change as something both short of and longer than a single cataclysmic evening. Indeed, the chronicles of revolutions all show how persistent small changes, and altogether unexpected consolidations, added up to enough weight, over time and space, to cause a break with the older order. […] With persistence, practices and theories circulate, enabling people to see problems and their solutions differently- which then creates the possibility of further, sometimes innovative, action" (2007 p. 242)

Here, small but persistent shifts in the ways we make ourselves and our places can disrupt normalized structures of violence, enabling us "to see problems and their solutions differently" (ibid). Together, I think of these concepts as theories of change for pursuing collective liberation through grassroots relational organizing.

2.3.1 Political possibilities in "Forgotten Places"

Drawing on Gilmore, brown, Tuck and Yang, I am interested in the relationship between how we make places, see problems, and conceive of change. Political subjectivities – how we see ourselves, our places, and our relationships to and within struggles over power – are, in the Hudson Valley, shaped by centuries of material and ideological sedimentation and emergence in the region. One of the most impactful material and ideological structures shaping the region and its subjects is the notion of the urban and rural divide. It is impossible to understand displacement, dispossession, and racialization in the settler Hudson Valley without understanding the region's relationships to New York City, and the interplay between rural extraction zones and urban aggregation centers that facilitated the construction of settler colonial New York. These relationships are as much material as they are social, anchored as much by the flows of the Hudson River, the development of the canal systems, rail lines, and interstates as they are by editorializations in *The New York Times* and the aesthetic cycles of marketing geared towards residents of "The City."

Laura Barraclough (2011) calls this dynamic "rural urbanism," or the dialectical relationship between rural land and urban policy, and between discursive representations of each. Writing about the San Ferando Valley's relationship to Los Angeles, she argues that whiteness and white supremacy are reproduced through the cultural, ideological, and political economic relationships inscribed in places we recognize as rural and agrarian. Rural urbanism is a process

that can produce hegemonic consent to uphold an unequal social order across the urban-rural through cultural notions of the moral order of rural life and of those deemed the rightful stewards of that life. The Hudson Valley can also be understood in terms of a dialectical relationship between the valley and the city, where an agrarian moral order affirms the innocence of settlers, organizes a white racial territory, and obscures racially uneven economic development patterns.

In contrast, Gilmore's (2008) idea of "forgotten places" provides an imagination of political subjectivity forged in places beyond the framework of rural-urbanism. Forgotten places are "places that have experienced the abandonment characteristic of contemporary capitalist and neoliberal state reorganization" (p. 31). She applies this concept to geographies of mass incarceration in the United States, arguing that we think of "the kinds of places where prisoners come from and where prisons are built as a single - though spatially discontinuous region." This region is neither urban nor rural, but something in between and outside of those categories. Gilmore uses a Malay word, "desakota," shared by economic geographer Terry McGee, which means "town-country," naming "ambiguous places in the dominant typology of settlement and sector" (Gilmore 2008 p 34-35). Desakota indicates a:

> "strange combination of sudden settlement changes—urban depopulation along with the establishment of megaprisons on formerly agricultural lands—and the regular circulation of people throughout the entire region without any necessary relation to the formal economy, to the distinct and overlapping political jurisdictions, to the prisons, or even to each other: visitors, prisoners, workers."

Breaking down binaried ontologies of rural-urbanism can help us understand the mix of logics, processes, settlements, and abandonments that structure carceral landscapes, as well as the practices by which people who live in the "town-country" or the "rural-and-urban forgotten" can

navigate the contours of abandonment, make life there, forge political community, and reshape the world. Her argument echoes Clyde Woods (1998). "Once we lift the veil off the restructuring process," he wrote, "we can more clearly see the specifically regional practices of ethnic supremacy" (pg ##). A regional scaled study, Woods emphasized, was necessary "because official urban and metropolitan boundaries do not begin to encompass the dimensions of power, the weight of history, or the presence of contending ontologies" (pg ##). Understanding the Hudson Valley as a "forgotten place" is crucial for understanding the possibilities for intersectional organizing in the present conjuncture.

2.4 "OUR WORK IS OUR GAIN:" TOWARD COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

This dissertation is, at its root, about whiteness and the intellectual, emotional, embodied, and personal barriers that white people leading or participating in the Hudson Valley's economic "revival" may face while recognizing the racialized impacts of their work and while figuring out how to operate within multi-racial coalitions across abolitionist geographies. Some might be concerned that focusing on white people in movements to dismantle racist structures has the side effect of reifying whiteness as a stable and fixed identity, instead of as social technology for extracting and concentrating wealth and resources. Others might argue that the list-ification of white supremacist tropes and patterns lends itself to a neoliberal and hyper individualistic theory of power and change, where well-meaning (and less well-meaning) white people can "invest too much energy worrying about getting it right" without devoting enough energy to "undermining the structural supports of a system of control that grinds us under" (Levins-Morales 2015). Critics of frameworks for accomplishing "diversity, equity, and inclusion" in institutional and organizational settings often call out too much "talking the talk" of representation and inclusion with token gestures of diversity, and not enough "walking the walk" of shifting investments of

time and resources toward the leadership and visions of working-class, colonized, and marginalized people (Cyril et al 2021, Ramirez 2015). What can those more meaningful shifts look like, how should we organize toward them, and what are the strategic and discursive dead ends worth avoiding?

A close examination of whiteness is essential for exploring what it means to come to grips with dehumanization. The framework "**collective liberation**" is a relevant and viable offering, a concept that has emerged from decades of anarchist, feminist and anti-racist organizing and intellectual traditions, as well as global grassroots movements against colonialism and imperialism in the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st Century (hooks 1994b, Crass 2013). The term was coined by Black feminist scholar bell hooks in the essay "Love as the Practice of Freedom" (1994), where hooks begins with a common observation provoking Black and U.S. Third World Feminist inquiry: even the most visionary and radical of men in the Black liberation struggle tolerated or embraced sexism, and the feminist white women who dedicated their lives to ending patriarchy were too often unable to effectively grapple with, or even acknowledge, how white supremacy underlies structures of domination, both personal and planetary. What is necessary to address this disconnect, hooks argues, is radical love. "Without an ethic of love shaping the direction of our political vision and our radical aspirations," she writes, "we are often seduced, in one way or the other, into continued allegiance to systems of domination—imperialism, sexism, racism, classism" (hooks 1994b p. 289).

Love, in hooks work and in many other Black and anti-colonial feminisms, is a kind of "oppositional consciousness" (Sandoval 1991), a way of being present to relationships among people, and among people and the other creatures and materials of this earth, in such a way that certain patterns of domination and dehumanization are not as seductive. Love, hooks argues, is a

willingness to be invested in the humanity and spirit of others, in the context of our intimate relationships, our abstracted, sprawling, and interdependent social and ecological relationships, and our relationships to ourselves. Although love is a tricky political framework to operationalize in public, hooks argues that it is an essential tool for coming to grips dehumanization:

> "In progressive political circles to speak of love is to guarantee that one will be dismissed or considered naive. But outside those circles there are many people who openly acknowledge that they are consumed by feelings of self-hatred, who feel worthless, who want a way out. Often they are too trapped by paralyzing despair to be able to engage effectively in any movement for social change. However, if the leaders of such movements refuse to address the anguish and pain of their lives, they will never be motivated to consider personal and political recovery. Any political movement that can effectively address these needs of the spirit in the context of liberation struggle will succeed" (1994 p 294)

Southerners on New Ground's white members similarly wrote, "Our work is our gain. As we transform our world and relinquish privilege, we gain integrity, peace, humanity, and collective liberation" (SONG 2015)

Ultimately, drawing on the theoretical and scholar-activist interventions describe here, this dissertation interrogates the relationship between methods for "transforming the world" and the craving for "integrity, peace, and humanity." There are ample political and practical cul-de-sacs that prioritize the latter without adequately grappling with the former. Learning to see and avoid those dead ends, I ultimately argue, is a form of knowledge that can be made and continually practiced through embodied and place-based relational organizing, informed by incommensurable and emergent abolitionist thought.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGIES

3.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This dissertation utilizes three inter-related qualitative methodologies: scholar organizing, interviewing, and the analysis of secondary sources and archival media. Together, these methods for creating and using knowledge to address the following research questions:

Question 1: How have agrarian narratives about the Hudson Valley (re)produced racialized geographies of inclusion and exclusion?

Question 2: How do food movement actors contribute to the normalization of racial capitalist and settler colonial logics in the Hudson Valley?

Question 3: Where might food movement organizers locate the sites and practices of struggle with and potential transformation of the racialized landscape of the Hudson Valley?

Foundationally, I approach this project in the spirit of what Derickson and MacKinnon (2015) called an "interim politics of resourcefulness." This is an approach to engaged scholar activism rooted in feminist and post-colonial theories of knowledge production which understand all knowledge as partial, situated, relationally produced, and therefore informed by the sedimentations of social and material histories with geographic contexts (Anzaldua 1987, Harding 1991, Haraway 1988, Rose 1997, Woods 1998, Derickson and MacKinnon 2015). Simultaneously, I also approach this project as an organizer, someone invested in developing collective grassroots capacity to win tangible victories in the struggles against racialized displacement in the Hudson Valley. In the first section of this chapter, I will outline my approach

to knowledge production via a discussion of an interim politics of resourcefulness mapped alongside articulations of relational grassroots community organizing.

Necessarily, parts of this project are also autoethnographic. I am someone who has found a home in the Hudson Valley, in part because of a desire for a "restorative" relationship to my own labor, to my body, and to the land. As I work to understand the racialization of this landscape and the politics that are possible here, I reflect on my own experiences as a white food, farm, and non-profit worker. My experiences shape the outputs of this project, and my inclusion of them helps me to be clear about the contours and limits of my own standpoint. While I do not consider this project a formal ethnography of any given community, I certainly attribute many of the ideas presented in this project to 9 years of living and working in this place, not unlike the anthropological method of "deep hanging out" (Rosaldo 1994, Geertz 1998). Deep hanging out describes how an immersion in social and informal life, as opposed to structured or boundaried field work via participant observation and interviewing, is often the most generative way to develop understanding of communities in context. Deep hanging out echoes in practices of relational organizing: both value long term relationships anchored in experiences that perhaps have nothing to do with research or with struggle, and yet are profoundly central to research and struggle. Both make way for informal conversations and gossip about funders, landlords, local billionaires, customers, peers, cops, aldermen, distant figures, and small-town neighbors. Gossip has been an (often unquotable) well-spring of information that informs the orientation of this work. Which pieces of gossip enter my ears are, of course, shaped by the body I carry, the conscious and unconscious ways I take up space, and the ways I am perceived as a white-bodied queer cis-woman from the deep South.

Table 3.1 *Schematic breakdown of research questions and their respective objectives in relation to the methods in describe in this section.*

Research Question	Objectives	Methods	Analysis
Question 1: How have agrarian narratives about the Hudson Valley (re)produced racialized geographies of inclusion and exclusion?	**1a:** Identify key narratives characterizing shifts in settlement and economic development patterns in the Hudson Valley in the 20th century to the present. **1b:** Determine how settlement and development patterns (for example, in agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and incarceration), and their attendant narratives, have contributed to racialization in the Hudson Valley.	Archival and secondary source research via Hudson Community Library of Voice and Sound, HCDPA archive, Kingston Historical Society, and print and digital media archives, and historical literature. Resourceful scholar-organizing with Hudson Anti Displacement Project team	Narrative Analysis Discourse Analysis
Question 2: What's the relationship between food movements and settler futurity in the Hudson Valley?	**2a:** Determine food movement actors' relationships to problems with racism, classism, and coloniality in food movements in the Hudson Valley. **2b:** Identity frameworks that actors use to narrate colonial histories and their implications in the Hudson Valley.	Semi structured interviews with non-profit workers, organizers, and farmers. Secondary source document research Resourceful scholar organizing	Narrative Analysis Discourse analysis
Question 3: Where do food movement organizers locate - conceptually and literally - the sites and practices of struggle with and potential transformation of the racialized landscape of the Hudson Valley?	**3a:** Determine how organizers use places and place-based identities in their political narratives. **3b:** Determine key intellectual histories with which organizers situate themselves and understand their organizing frameworks.	Semi structured interviews with non-profit workers, organizers, and farmers. Resourceful scholar organizing with SJLA, ReGen, National Young Farmers Coalition, Rolling Grocer, Soul Fire Farm, Sweet Freedom Farm and the Victory Bus Project.	Narrative Analysis Discourse Analysis

Following my section on resourcefulness and relational organizing, I will detail my research methods, categorizing them as scholar-organizing, interviewing, and analysis of secondary and archival source material. Table 3.1 provides a schematic breakdown of my

research questions with related objectives and methods for data collection and analysis. At the root, this project is about the stories that people tell themselves and each other about land in the Hudson Valley: what's happened here, what should happen here next, and who gets to decide. **Question 1** looks for the stories that constructed the present-day racialized geographies of the Hudson Valley. **Question 2** looks for the stories that reckon (or do not reckon) with these histories, for stories that narrate (or do not narrate) the implications of these histories. **Question 3** asks where do stories about confronting racial and settler capitalism in the Hudson Valley take place, and why? My organizing collaborators, other interviewees, and archival sources account for these questions differently; there are many choices that individuals and institutions can make when they narrate the Hudson Valley.

3.2 RELATIONAL ORGANIZING AND POLITICS OF RESOURCEFULNESS

Relational organizing is a concept of political work that is rooted in the infrastructure of person-to-person relationships, as opposed to disembodied narratives, discourses, power dynamics, or blocs (Carruthers 2019, Collins 2002). An orientation towards relational organizing means recognizing the fabric of person-to-person relationships built at "the pace of trust" as a critical terrain for reorganizing power relations at many scales, and for sustaining the social conditions that bring about change (brown 2017). Relationships and stories are not abstract magic bullets, however. Grounding theories of change in more intimate scales raises thorny questions of how to recognize and navigate differences, how to create conditions for collective struggle, how to deal with disagreements, dramas, harm, and failure. It involves many practices for creating spaces, holding dialogue, engaging conflict, offering accountability, making decisions, and understanding what sorts of practices are necessary for what sorts of conditions.

Relational organizing in the United States is rooted in part in the Black feminist tradition (Carruthers 2019). A core tenant of Black feminist thought is that knowledge production comes from long lineages of relationships and embodied experiences that have only rarely and recently percolated into formal, academic settings (Collins 2000). "Contemporary Black feminism," the Combahee River Collective affirms, "is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters" (Combahee 2014 p. 272). The legacy of experiences among Black women and Black queers is the wellspring of black feminist notions of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), interdependence (brown 2017), and relational movement building practices (Carruthers 2019).

Relational organizing is not the end-all-be-all for social change, but it is an essential ingredient for any social change capable of creating intersectional, abolitionist justice for several reasons. For one, relational organizing values meeting people's basic needs as a precondition for their ability to take part in a growing a movement. For another, the emphasis on consistent, longterm, in-person relationships means that relational organizing can evade social barriers that cause other movement building tactics and strategies to fail. Relational organizing also values individual identity, self-narrative, and self-interest. The point is not to to create stories that subsume individuals into a falsely coherent and unified collective political force, in the way LaClau (2005) describes the construction of populism. Rather, relational organizing asks that we observe ourselves and our many identities without needing fixity, that we listen to others generously, that we iterate among each other to name shared values and needs, and that we respond to the present conditions accordingly. It is not a theory of change for all time. It is a method for orienting oneself together with others, to identify and respond to the needs of this time.

Storytelling and taking action together are the two central practices for building relationships and creating shared understandings in relational organizing. This orientation aligns with feminist, Black, and anti-colonial epistemologies of knowledge production invested in bodies, everyday and mundane experiences, partial or biased perspectives, and webs of relationships among people and places. For example, at a relational organizing training I attended while pursuing this research, I was prompted to consider the question "who are my people?" and "what motivates me to be here" – not to create a stable sense of self, but to practice noticing the strands that connect our self-narratives and self-interests into the mesh of other people's narratives and interests, our collective narratives and interests, and what is asked of "us" at this time. While not commensurate, there are clear similarities between those questions and Audra Simpson's "topic that simply matters to the Mohawk of Kahnawake – the question of who are we, and who shall we be for the future" (2007 p 68). The iterative, embodied, relational, contingent approaches to relational organizing ground my assertion that organizing can be a feminist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial method of knowledge production.

3.3 METHOD 1 – RESOURCEFUL SCHOLAR ORGANIZING

I consider myself a scholar activist, or perhaps more specifically a **scholar-organizer**. There are many interrelated frameworks for this kind of scholarly practice: engaged scholarship (Gilmore 2008), resourceful scholar activism (Derickson and Routledge 2015), service research (Trauger and Fluri 2012), situated solidarity and co-authorship (Nagar 2014) to name a few. But Derickson and MacKinnon's (2015) "interim politics for resourcefulness" best represents my approach. In response to scholarly efforts to create a theory of climate justice, they point to the uneven distribution not only of climate changes causes and impacts, but also of the authority,

capacity, and power to produce just theories of climate change, under the sedimented regimes of colonial capitalism. They write:

> "We are proposing an approach that does not seek to produce a theory of climate justice but rather a politics that seeks to produce the conditions in which just theories of climate justice can emerge. As such, resourcefulness is a political and epistemological posture aimed at remediating the conditions that produced and reproduced the uneven capacity to engender alternative futures. It is an interim politics in that it prioritizes the act of cultivating the conditions in the immediate term that are conducive to full participation in knowledge production and vision practices, over and above working toward the realization of predetermined, philosophically deduced conceptions of climate, environmental, and social justice" (2015 p 306)

As a scholar organizer, my project has a political stance, invested in producing the conditions in which just theories and practices of racial justice in the Hudson Valley can emerge. I also embrace the aspect of "interim politics," meaning that I am interested in understanding, as Southerners on New Ground (2015 p 2) once wrote, the politics necessary "for this time, not for all time."

I approach this project as a resourceful scholar organizer. Pursuing each of my research questions has required sustained forms of engaged research rooted in relational organizing and relationships developed because of organizing. This research was inspired principally by my organizing work with the Victory Bus Project and their umbrella network, the Freedom Food Alliance. In 2015 and 2016, I supported the Victory Bus Project as a core organizational coordinator, responsible for sourcing and aggregating the produce shares each week and meeting

with Victory Bus riders onsite for prison visitation each weekend. Our project did not have the funds or the capacity to receive deliveries or to store our produce in a central location, so I would arrange to pick up each week's produce before dawn on Saturday mornings. The experience of transiting between three or four different farms, barns, and borrowed cold storage spaces, before arriving at a prison parking lot at 8:00am was an early source of information about racialized patterns of uneven development and accompanying aesthetic coding, visible on a landscape scale in the region. Managing my own logistics, planning routes, and supporting other collaborators meant that I spent hours on Google Maps, studying prison campuses and the surrounding towns from above. Driving the routes themselves brought more details into focus, and sometimes shifts in plans or traffic afforded me time to look around. I repeated these transits across the region routinely for over a year. In the process, I worked with other organizers to establish a shared understanding about the purposes of our project and to look for ways it could be improved (such as creating a logistics map, cleaning out a walk-in cooler, scheduling regular check ins, getting to know each other better, bringing on new volunteers). The continual process of reflecting on our work and attempting to hone our practices and our storytelling about the work is an example of knowledge production via relational organizing.

As a doctoral student, I have maintained ongoing organizing and service relationships with the Freedom Food Alliance, the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC), the Social Justice Leadership Academy (SJLA), ReGen Community Garden (image 3.1), Rolling Grocer, the Hudson Anti-Displacement Learning Network (ADLN), and other organizations (see Table 3.2 for descriptions). I have offered a variety of resources – physical labor, use of my car, logistical planning, note taking and strategic thinking, grant writing, project management, money, time, and space as a volunteer with all of these organizations. I have also acted as a paid

contractor or employee with the Freedom Food Alliance and the Hudson Anti-Displacement Learning Network. Access to opportunities to learn and observe through experiential engagement either came from relationships developed as an organizer or drew on relationships and forms of knowledge developed while organizing in the Hudson Valley.

Table 3.2 List of organizations with which the author has had sustained and embedded experience as a researcher, collaborator, or staff person.

Collaborators	**Description**	**Relationship**	**Location**
Freedom Food Alliance (Victory Bus Project / Sweet Freedom Farm)	BIPOC- and abolitionist-led farm collective	Current staff person	Germantown, NY
Hudson Community Development and Planning Agency	Municipal urban renewal agency	Current staff person	Hudson, NY
Hudson Anti-Displacement Learning Network	Municipal group researching strategies to counteract racialized displacement and gentrification in the city of Hudson	Former research consultant, grant manager	Hudson, NY
Social Justice Leadership Academy	BIPOC youth-led social justice organizing training program	Volunteer (ongoing) technical production	Hudson, NY
ReGen Community Garden	Youth-led intersectional food justice and gardening education program	Volunteer (ongoing) construction and labor	Hudson, NY
Rolling Grocer 19	Sliding scale community grocery store	Volunteer (8 mons)	Hudson, NY
National Young Farmers Coalition	Predominately white network of young and beginning farmers	Former staff person, organizing and production	Hudson Valley Region

Image 3.1 "Grow Food, Not Prisons" Garden bed, the same dimensions as a prison cell, at the ReGen Community Garden

Image 3.2 Dirt floor, open air storage for the Hudson Community Development and Planning Agency's records of urban renewal development and community relocation.

Sometimes, I was asked to help with specific projects. SJLA, for example, asked me to co-organize the material execution of a "banner-drop" off the Rip Van Winkle Bridge over the Hudson River, during a march celebrating Juneteenth in 2020. Working with organizers to translate their vision into a material reality was an opportunity to engage careful negotiations of the politics of race and place in Hudson and Catskill, NY. In another context, a Hudson, NY alderwoman asked me for help with writing a grant application for funds to combat Hudson's racialized displacement crisis. She needed help demonstrating that long term residents of color were indeed being displaced by processes of gentrification. In this case, I synthesized 20 years' worth of City-commissioned demographic and market reports and housing needs analyses, as well as American Community Surveys data to make the case. Later, in a second round of applications, I supported a team of two long-term Hudson residents in listening to over 70 oral histories archived at the local library.

When the City was awarded $1,000,000 to fund 6 anti-displacement strategies, I was hired as a temporary project manager tasked with initializing the programs. When the part-time administrator of the city agency administering the grant resigned her position, I was asked to step up and administer the dwindling Hudson Community Development and Planning Agency (HCDPA), the long-dormant urban renewal agency for the city. In this role, I gained access to an imperiled archive (image 3.2) of urban renewal records in the City of Hudson and learned, among many other things relevant to my arguments in chapters 4, 5 and 6, about the role of urban renewal in the historic preservation that made contemporary cycles of gentrification more possible in Hudson. Resourcefulness in this case, unfurled an unexpected universe of opportunities to observe connections between historical rural and urban aesthetic paradigms that shaped land values and land use patterns in racialized ways for decades to come.

3.4 METHOD 2 – INTERVIEWING

Pursuing research Questions 2 and 3 prompts me to study how farmers, small farm advocates, and food justice organizers understand themselves in relation to the narratives and landscapes that surround them. One method that allows for that kind of interrogation is semi-structured interviews. I define semi-structured interviews as interviews that all cover a set of core topics and questions yet allow for the flexibility of new topics to emerge relative to the interviewees experience or expertise (Dunn 2000). I root my interview practice in the theory and practice of oral history, which informs a sense of "shared authority" between participants in an interview encounter (Frisch 1990). I have received over 50 hours of training in the ethical act of conducting interviews and working with interviews as resources for writing and research via the Oral History Summer School based in Hudson, NY.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 people who were or are organizers, farmers, educators, or advocates engaged in agriculture in the Hudson Valley. Of these interviewees, eleven identified as white and three as Black, four as men, seven as women, and three as queer or non-binary. Interviewees were identified initially through my personal and professional networks developed while working and organizing in the region. Three were former colleagues and former supervisors; others became colleagues after the interview. Interviews typically began with a brief discussion of my project before describing my interview protocol. I clarified my ethical commitment to the interviewer's privacy and right to control over how their words, ideas, and identities would be represented in this work. Interviewees could choose whether they would be recorded, transcribed, and quoted, referred to by name or via a pseudonym, or provided with anonymity. Interviewees could also choose the setting and context of the interview – in person, over the phone, while walking, while working. Following the

project description and privacy protocols, interviewees were prompted to ask any questions and invited to jump straight to any points that might have sparked interest during my initial description. Most often, however, the interviewee looked to me to choose a starting point, in which case I began with: "Tell me a little bit about how you came to be doing your work in this place?"

Interview transcriptions were analyzed using narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is a methodological approach that "takes as its object of analysis the story itself" (Reissman 2002 p 1). I examined the structure of the stories that collaborators told about the Hudson Valley and their work within it – the reasons they felt compelled to be here, the way they framed their challenges, the desires and motivations that prompted them to continue working. Narrative analysis prompts me to consider "how [a story] is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity" (Reissman 2002 p 697). As Reissman says, "Analysis in narrative studies opens up the forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers. We ask, why was the story told that way?" (ibid). Narrative analysis allows me to critically examine the way interviewees tell stories about food, land, and belonging in a changing Hudson Valley.

3.5 METHOD 3 – SECONDARY AND ARCHIVAL SOURCE MATERIAL ANALYSIS

To support a historical account of the development of racialized organizing logics of the Hudson Valley, especially pursuant to questions 1 and 2, I reviewed scholarly historical literature; secondary source material like fictional literature and creative non-fictional texts and videos produced about the Hudson Valley; news and arts media, including archival media accessed through digital archives, related to Hudson Valley land use and economic changes; and

reports produced by regional and about Hudson Valley agriculture and agricultural heritage, agritourism, young and beginning farmers, and regional conservation strategies.

Historical literature review focused on the colonization of the Hudson Valley, the wars fought to displace Lenape, Mohawk, and Mohican peoples, the impact of these genocidal wars on the patterns and politics of settlement in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the role of trans-Atlantic slavery in establishing New York (Benjamin 2014, Brooke 2010, Williams-Myers 1994, (Stessin-Cohn and Hurlburt-Biagini 2016)). I also focused on the origins of colonial land tenure in New York, including the notorious landlord and tenant struggles related to the Dutch patroonships and British manorial regimes present until the mid 19th century (Fox 1918, Kim 1978, Bruegel 2002, Humphrey 2004, Ellis 2010). I used texts that produce narratives about the Livingstons, Rensselaers, Schuylers, Ten Broeks, Rockefellers, Roosevelts, and other members of the Hudson Valley aristocratic societies in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, to understand the cultural and material impact of these land use regimes on the racialization of the Hudson Valley (Brandt 1986, Piwonka 1986).

Historical literature review also focused on the economic transitions of the Hudson Valley from early colonial resource extract and stymied agrarian settlement, through the role of the Hudson River in early industrial transitions, the collapse of various industries in the wake of innovations in transportation and shipping, industrial production, and globalization (Hall 1994, Fone 2005, Lewis 2009. I reviewed histories and archival materials related to the regional emergence of the tourism economy, and the eventual mobilization of urban renewal. Additional literatures focused specifically on the history of the Hudson Valley as a slave society, as well as a place for dynamic multi-ethnic communities and vibrant Black life (DeLisser 1894, O'Brien 1981, Williams-Myers 1994, Williams-Myers 2003, Stott 2007, Armstead 2012). This helps me

situate certain nostalgias present in contemporary narratives defining the Hudson Valley as an attractive place for investment and life making, spurring ongoing racialized displacement. Print and digital media focused on news, real estate, arts and culture were also valuable sources for mainstream discourses about the relationships between the economic pasts of the Hudson Valley and their contemporary impacts on market pressures, tourist consumer desire, and other broad narratives influencing the flow of people and resources in this place.

Question 2 also prompted me to gather and review over 50 reports and resources published by Hudson Valley organizations concerned with land use and agriculture, including the Farmscape Ecology Program at the Hawthorne Valley Farm Institute, the Open Space Institute, Scenic Hudson, Grow NYC, Glynwood, the Stone Barns Center, the National Young Farmers Coalition and the Greenhorns. Within these texts, I searched for discourses about contemporary visions for land use in the region. The texts demonstrated shifting attitudes about small farmers as bastions of national security and stewards of a national and cultural heritage, as collaborators and caretakers of sensitive ecologies in a changing climate, or as political agents invested in challenging the long histories of racialized theft and displacement woven into American agricultural histories.

3.6 ANALYZING THE DATA

After gathering advocacy reports, news and editorial media, interview transcripts, and other digital or digitized documents, I used the qualitative analysis software Atlas T.I. to review these materials, identify themes within discourses about the region, and note shifts in these discourses over time and among communities. After multiple iterative reviews, I began coding the texts, identifying thematic engagements with: the urban-rural divide; landscapes and scenery; class and relationships to wealth; economic decline and its causes; invocations of regional

history; invocations of regional future; race and racialization; white or European ethnicity. I used these emergent themes to notice and begin to critique dominant articulations of a regional identity and a regional "sense of place."

In further iterative review and coding focused on the construction of a regional "sense of place," I began utilizing four broad, messy, and deeply interconnected thematic nodes to group elements of textual discourses and subjective narratives. These elements are land, labor, community, and history, which I came to understand as general components of an individual or collective "sense of place." "Land" interlinked invocations of iconic landscapes, landscape conservation strategies, restorative connections to nature, land access, land values, land leases, soil types, and working the land. "Labor" noted the fetishization of artisanal labor, wages and disparities in the value of certain kinds of labor, emotional and embodied experiences of labor, labor exploitation, entrepreneurial (self-directed) labor, or sites evoking historic labors like mill buildings and brick yards. "Community" relates local food systems, local economies, community-oriented businesses, creative community, diverse communities, community accountability efforts, resilient communities, or being in service to the community. "History" connects historic preservation, old-world craft traditions, calls for looking to history to shape the future, history as an economic asset, settler histories, Black and indigenous histories, and the tangibility of history in the landscape. These themes are usefully unruly and unresolved, allowing me to notice how certain coalitions of actors with shared interests and shared vision invoke a sense of place to assert their agendas.

Taken together, these methods – organizing, interviewing, and studying source materials – allows me to consider how people make places under the conditions that they inherit (Gilmore 2022b), how they imagine reshaping those places and conditions, with whom, and to what end.

CHAPTER 4

DEEP PORTS, DEEP POCKETS:

SITUATING THE HISTORIED HUDSON VALLEY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter situates the racialized displacement currently taking place in the Hudson Valley as an emergent chapter in a longer trajectory of regional urban and rural development, organized in the interest of racial capitalist and settler colonial relationships to land and power. Drawing on a review of primary and secondary literatures, I describe four arcs in this trajectory which are useful for understanding the contradictions shaping current conjuncture. I start with a summary of European settlement patterns and the early geographies of resource extraction, enslavement, and manorial land tenure along the Hudson River. Then, I discuss the emergence and impact of the first regional urban-rural tourism economy during the Gilded Age, when enduring discourses of an idealized Hudson Valley were solidified in dominant imaginations. Next, I describe how patterns of development and abandonment in the city of Hudson resulted in a unique urban renewal plan, in which municipal leaders spent millions preserving and defining the historic main street while destroying the homes of hundreds of Black and working class community members. All these histories underly the recent turn in economic revival, which relies on state funded or incentivized adaptive reuse, historic preservation, and marketing an agrarian and artisanal sense of place for cities, villages, and businesses. Each context illustrates how dominant discourses shaping regional and local community identities cohere with racial

capitalist development strategies to produce racialized spaces and to mobilize displacement. Each conjuncture helps us understand the emergence of the present landscape, and to denaturalize the moves to agrarian innocence that will be discussed in the subsequent two chapters.

4.2 PATROONSHIPS, SLAVE SHIPS AND PRISONS IN THE EARLY HUDSON VALLEY

Europeans began colonizing this region in 1609, when Henry Hudson sailed the Dutch ship, *Haeve Maen* or "Half Moon", into the brackish delta of the Mahicanituck. "Mahicanituck" is a Lenni-Lenape name commonly translated as the great waters in constant motion, or the river that runs both ways. The river is a long and deep tidal estuary, changing directions with the tides over 150 miles inland. With many navigable bays and tributaries, including the westerly Mohawk River north of present-day Albany, the Mahicanituck provided colonizing Dutch and English forces with arterial access to the territories at the heart of the trans-Atlantic trade in furs, pelts, and hides, some of the most lucrative socio-ecological landscapes in early colonial North America (Williams Myers 2003). The Dutch called Mahicanituck the *Noortrivier* or "North River, and the British renamed it the Hudson River around 1740.

To take advantage of the fur trade and to organize the settlement of the territory, the Dutch crown began assigning vast land patents (Image 4.1) to a handful of elite families, establishing the feudalistic "patroonship" system. For decades, however, colonial New Netherlands struggled to gain populations of farming families. Marginal soils, poor protections, and lucrative opportunities in the fur trade certainly dissuaded migrant European workers from settling and clearing land in the region, but the primary source of discouragement was the specific aristocratic structure that migrant Europeans found to be a very bad deal. Access to land in New Netherlands and early New York meant entering lifelong and intergenerational tenancy;

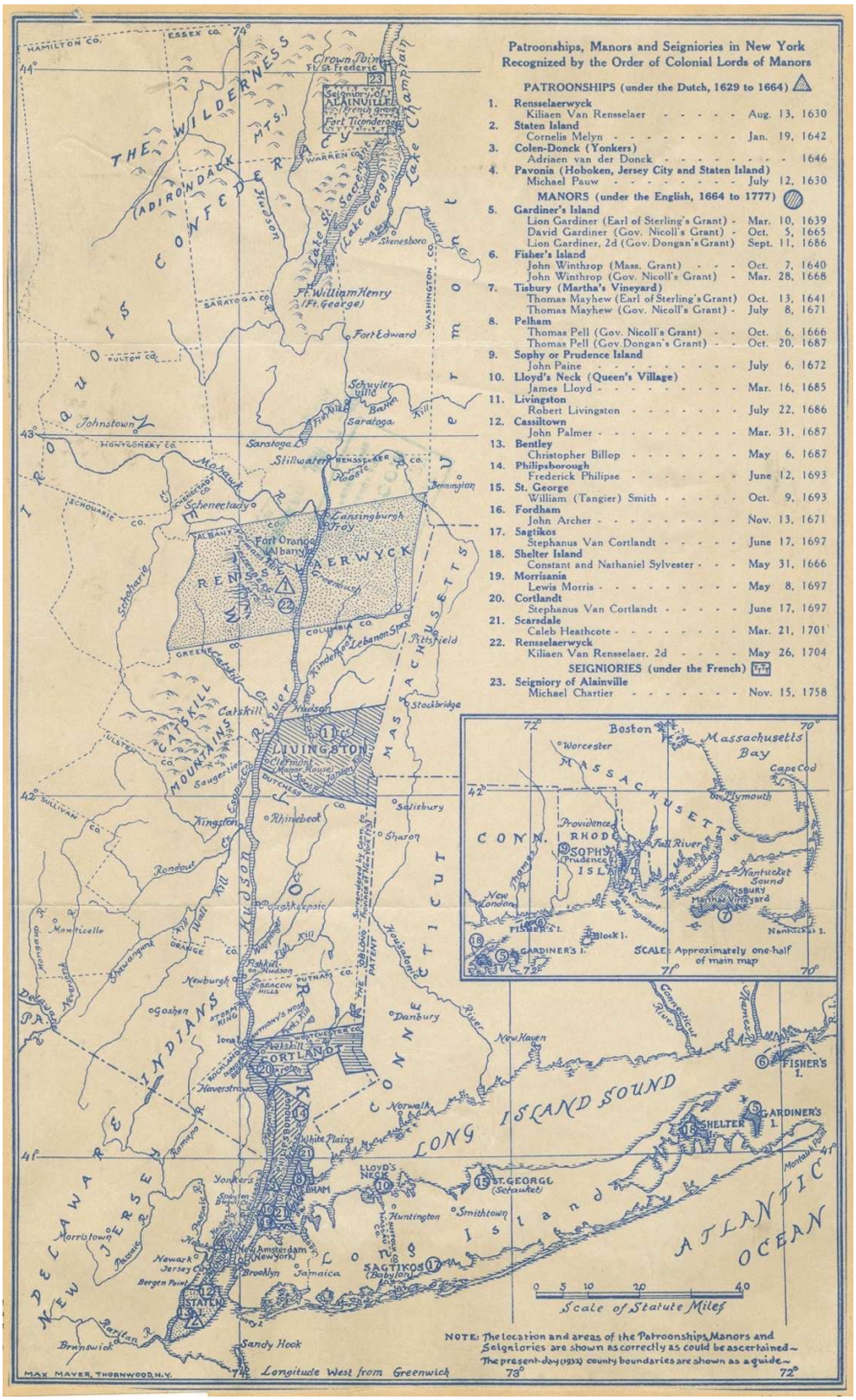

Image 4.1 "Patroonships, manors and seigniories in New York recognized by the Order of Colonial Lords of Manors," published in 1932.

obeying prohibitions on harvesting furs, pelts, and hides; paying annual rents in cash, kind, and physical labor; and submitting the secular and non-secular authority of a newly fashioned aristocracy, from 1629 until after an armed tenant rebellion in the 1840s (Fox 1918, Kim 1978). In the early colonial period, better deals for displaced Europeans seeking land were available to the east in New England colonies and to the south on Long Island (Ellis 2010). The lack of settling tenants threatened the solvency of the colonial enterprise, the Dutch and later the English claims to the territory, and the legitimacy of a new aristocracy's control over vast swaths of land (Fox 1918). Navigating a free labor shortage, many aristocrats and corporations opted to organize their wealth around shipping and trade financialization (Williams-Meyers 2003).

Profits from control over the fur trades and other New World commodities, as well as the trade, financialization, and securitization of enslaved African people, sustained decades of colonial extraction in New Netherlands and New York (Williams-Myers 2003). To supply labor for the other necessary industries—lumber milling, ironworks, ship building, dock work, and grain agriculture—and to supply aristocrats with domestic service and food production, the colonial ruling class imported thousands of enslaved Africans. New York State had the highest concentration of enslaved people of any colony north of Maryland, and African people were central to nearly every aspect of industrial and agricultural life on the Hudson River (ibid). Enslaved Black people regularly resisted the colonial capitalist order in a variety of ways, including self-emancipation, establishing free fugitive communities, organizing uprisings, destroying property, returning violence, and collaborating with the Indigenous and European enemies of New York's ruling class.

To combat these threats, the ruling class configured a web of laws to constrain Black mobility, including limitations of gatherings and provisions for the prevention and recapture of

fugitives. For example, one 1705 law established that, for an unaccompanied Black person, traveling further than 40 miles north of Albany (and toward French and Haudenosaunee enemies) was punishable by death. A 1775 law stated that slavers could not permit the enslaved to leave their dwellings after dark. That same year, two enslaved Black men organized a rebellion around Kingston, and anticipated that 600 neighboring indigenous people would join them if the early stages were successful – but the plot was squashed before it began. In 1794, a series of arsons sparked by enslaved African people stirred Albany, and even after the principal subjects were captured and jailed, fires continued to break out. In 1799, the Gradual Emancipation Act was passed, promising freedom to the children of enslaved mothers after those children turned 26. Sojourner Truth was one young person awaiting freedom in 1827, when her enslaver sold one of her children to another family. Unable to wait any longer, she emancipated herself and her youngest son, fleeing to a Quaker safehouse in Dutchess County (ibid).

Fugitive acts like Truth's and many others (Stessin-Cohn and Hurlburt-Biagini 2016) forged early Black place in the Hudson Valley, as did the skilled sailors smiths, millers, and farmers who made lives and created community and culture in the region (Williams-Myers 1994, 2003). Emancipation, however, did not protect Black communities along the Hudson River from the seismic shifts wrought by industrial capitalism in Europe and in New York. In the early 19th century, waves of displaced migrants from Ireland, Germany, England, Scotland, began arriving along the Hudson River, displacing free Black laborers from work on rail ways, at docks, in brickyards, and in households. A new racial configuration was maintained through state and mob violence that forced many Black families and workers onto marginal lands or into more precarious employment (ibid).

Likewise, labor precarity for working-class communities also drove a struggle over incarcerated labor. At turn of the 19th century, when a multi-racial, heterogenous underclass emerged in industrializing New York, the state and aristocracy championed development of a new "humanitarian" prison to replace overcrowded debtors' prisons, workhouses, jails, and the financially troubled and riotous Newgate Prison in lower Manhattan (Lewis 1965). The state legislature authorized the construction of a new prison called Auburn near the Finger Lakes in 1816, followed closely by prison on the Hudson River in 1825, called Sing Sing. Auburn and Sing Sing were organized to be self-sufficient ventures, maintaining solvency through a carceral labor leasing system. While Sing Sing's workers made a number of products (barrels, shoes, silks, tools, and more), the principal industry was stone cutting. Workers mined and processed state owned marble and blue stone for churches, treasuries, universities, city halls, and fine residences across the state (ibid). In other leasing arrangements, entrepreneurs could deliver raw materials to Sing Sing and pay a flat rate for a processing contract, before selling the goods on the open market. Into the 1830s, as white artisans and trades workers found their social position more and more precarious, coalitions of craftsmen began protesting this state subsidized labor competition, organizing to stop worker training at prisons and to prevent formerly incarcerated people from working alongside them. In 1830, for example, police had to intervene when a mob of stone cutters demanded work stoppage at a job site Sing Sing stone. The trade union pressure prompted state laws in 1835 and 1842 that increasingly curtailed the carceral labor system by prohibiting training in mechanical trades (ibid).

As this section demonstrates, enduring features in the Hudson Valley landscape were forged in a crucible of racialized and colonial class struggle. Yet, in public imagination, this history is almost entirely eclipsed and supplanted by the impacts of a cohort of largely

aristocratic Romantic painters, poets, and novelists, who narrated the Hudson Valley not as a colonial and industrial extraction zone, but as a place to encounter the sublime.

4.3 PAINTINGS AND PASSENGERS: TOURISM IN AN IDEALIZED LANDSCAPE

Buoyed by the accumulating fortunes of New York industrialists as well as the old aristocracy, the Hudson River School formed circa 1825, widely considered the first definitively American fine arts movement (image 4.2). The landscape imaginaries developed by the Hudson River School demonstrated a European and masculine gaze on sublime and unpopulated wilderness. These artists are credited with defining a burgeoning settler American identity entangled with divine nature, underlying the political ideologies of manifest destiny and of landscape conservation in the 19th century (Howat 1972, O'Brien 1981).

Image 4.2 Frederic Church's "View of the Hudson River Valley from Olana" (1867)

As New York City turned into a bustling metropole and industrialization expanded across the region, members of the developing upper and middle classes began to have the means and the infrastructure to experience the now iconic American vistas of the Hudson Valley. In the middle of the 19th century, the Hudson Valley developed a persistent economy of visitors compelled by the landscape, the history, and the remnants of certain pre-industrial ways of life. "However widely travelers have differed about other things in America," said Gilded Age artist and travel writer Robert De Lisser in 1894, "all seem to agree in their love for the Hudson. The pens of all tourists dwell on its scenery, and their affections linger about it like magic lights which seem to have this river in their peculiar charge." In his travelogue volume *Picturesque Catskills*, De Lisser depicts the waterfalls and romantic vistas alongside the farmers, trappers, old mills, and stone churches, indicating that tourists and would-be tourists held nostalgia for relationships of life- and place-making that predated the industrial expansion and social crises following the American Civil War.

As DeLisser described, travelers to the Catskills seeking Hudson Valley views could arrive by steam ship to river port cities like Rondout in Ulster County or Catskill in Greene County, before catching a train and a horse or carriage into the mountain houses of the high escarpment. There they would find not only iconic promontories with sweeping valley vistas (image 4.3) or plunging waterfalls in the interior forest, but also humble yeomen in their fields (image 4.4), blacksmiths in their village shop, and a chatter of languages from Europe in tidy and decent villages (DeLisser 1894). DeLisser photographed hay-makers, iron-workers, old churches, barns, and mills. The Hudson Valley, by 1894, held a historical record of development, evidence of belonging to a meaningful history on settled land.

Image 4.3 Tourists viewing Kaaterskill Clove, from Delisser (1894) *Picturesque Catskills*

Image 4.4 Farmers making hay in Tannersville, from Delisser (1894) *Picturesque Catskills*

At the root of this regional sense of place were powerful landholders with world historic fortunes invested in preserving and protecting the experience of the Hudson Valley, through the creation of parks, conservation trusts, and development regulatory frameworks (O'Brien 1981). The Catskills, De Lisser said, were remarkably free of the "nuisance" of "advertising signs on rocks, trees and barns, along the highways and railroads […], so different from the situation in Massachusetts or Connecticut where no laws are in force to protect people" from having their vistas "much marred." In this region, the artists and financiers who helped put these landscapes on the map also contributed to the American ethic of wilderness conservation and landscape protection, but this ethic of conservation has also always been textured by the aesthetic discourses celebrating both yeoman and aristocratic ways of rural life.

Into the 20th Century, boosters of the Hudson Valley tourism economy continued to highlight the regions mix of agrarian and aristocratic history, inscribed in the landscape through old stone structures and sweeping estates. *Holiday* magazine did a cover feature on the "lordly aristocrat of rivers," the Hudson: "American history speaks from the banks of this river. Old Stone houses, small-chambered, low-ceilinged, narrow-windowed, remember the days of the Dutch colony […] when Swedes, Irish, Germans, French, English and Dutch brawled in the taverns" (Carmer 1949 p 36). By the early 19th Century, the magazine recounts, "the period of our national inferiority complex" compelled the wealthy to build both castles *and* fake ruins along the river, to give "a sense of antiquity" (ibid p. 41). The feature includes a spread of estates, including ones belonging to author Washington Irving and to President Martin Van Buren, mirroring another spread of "rugged rivermen," mostly elders, who "dwell in forgotten pockets of time" (image 4.5) (ibid 1949 p. 34). The mix of highbrow architecture, mythological European antiquity, New England frontier simplicities, and working class patina is an enduring

MRS. HOWARD VAN GUILDER buttons up one of her twins outside their shack in Guilder Hollow, a backwoods settlement near Granville.

RUFUS VAN GUILDER, like most residents of the Hollow, is descended from early Dutch settlers who fled from patroons. Some 20 families remain, much intermarried.

KATHERINE VAN GUILDER, née Winchell, belongs to one of the few outside families ever admitted into the Van Guilder clan.

The Hudson Valley has bred rugged rivermen—and some who dwell in forgotten pockets of time

CAPT. HUGH QUIGLEY, retired after three decades as a Hudson skipper, still "works the river" as a caulker in a boatyard at Rondout Creek, near Kingston.

"YANKEE JOHN" GALUSHA recalls when the upper Hudson was rough "a man's first name wasn't Fight." Now 90, he specializes in folk ballads

CORNELIUS HASBROUCK, late patriarch of Eagle's Nest, west of Kingston, led a mountain people of Dutch-Negro-Indian stock, firm believers in witchcraft.

CAPT. WILLIAM RUTLEDGE, 72, works as night watchman in the yards a Rondout Creek. He drove mules beside the Erie Canal when he was 1

Image 4.5 Rugged rivermen featured in *Holiday* magazine (Carmer 1949 p. 34)

theme of the region's appeal for tourists, and of the ideologically dominate sense of place. Composing an incomplete historical landscape that sanitizes and simplifies the political lives of urban and rural, multi-racial working classes in the region naturalizes the sanitization and simplification of those groups in the present.

4.4 INVESTING IN HISTORY: URBAN RENEWAL AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

This pattern of incomplete placemaking is true in the countryside *and* in the dense urban centers that were built on the Hudson during the period of industrialization, westward expansion, and river- and canal-based shipping in advance of and alongside the development of rail roads. During this time the Hudson Valley was an essential but changing corridor of trade. Rondout (now part of Kingston) was a working class port city situated at the confluence of the Hudson River and the fjord like deep-water Rondout creek. Rondout controlled interior trades to crucial industries in Pennsylvania, and access to the Delaware River via the Delaware and Hudson Canal. Albany and Troy aggregated flows of materials and resources from the North Country and from the Mohawk River Valley, including access to the Erie Canal. All along the Hudson, brick making, ice harvesting, and stone mining were active waterfront industries that defined the water way. The result is a string of river cities dense with 300 years of urban development.

The City of Hudson is a prominent example of a contemporary city defined by these sedimented development patterns. Initially called Claverack Landing, this promontory between two navigable bays was first colonized in the 1660s by Dutch farmers and was later chartered as the City of Hudson in 1783. The city was planned, financed, and initially governed by a group of whalers from Nantucket called "The Proprietors," seeking a safe port out of reach of British pirates in the Atlantic. The city was built around river and marine commerce. Popular, academic, and oral histories of Hudson name the entrepreneurial vision of the Proprietors as an enduring

logic guiding business oriented governance (Bruegel 2002, Stott 2007, Hall 1994). This included an economic and political culture of low taxes and minimal intervention which was conducive to Hudson's rise as a regional hub of illegal and informal economies - sex work, gambling, and trades in drugs and alcohol, all of which readily accompanied the social and material flows of a heavily industrialized port city.

As colonization expanded westward and shifted the material flows of capitalist development along rivers, canals, railways, interstates, and across borders, the City of Hudson experienced wave after wave of boom and bust throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Whaling dried up by the 1840s, and a new railroad sealed the city's South Bay in 1851 (Fone 2005). Heavy industries – ironworks, textile mills, door factories, and breweries – infused the town once again with capital in the 1850s and 60s, before a spate of bankruptcies in the 1880s. By 1905, recovery was in full swing, with new breweries and mills opening. The ironworks built on pilings in the now swampy South Bay was turned into a cement plant. Hudson's Warren Street "boasted fourteen groceries, four confectionary shops, at least two butchers, a fish and oyster shop […] four large variety and dry goods establishments [and] several hotels" (ibid p 138). Yet, by the 1920s, the city was practically a company town dominated by the one remaining industry – cement. In the wake of the Great Depression, Hudson could not regain economic momentum.

By 1966, Hudson was identified as having the most substandard housing per capita of any other city in New York (Morse 1981). This designation catalyzed the formation of a municipal urban renewal agency the following year. The founding members of the Hudson Urban Renewal Agency saw the value in the historic character of Warren Street, Hudson's "central business district." The agency created multiple Urban Renewal plans to organize the preservation of commercial and residential buildings up and down the street. Through a unique

façade easement program, the Urban Renewal Agency covered the full cost of stabilizing and preserving historic details on 40 of the mixed use commercial and residential row buildings on Warren Street. “It is hoped,” they wrote in a 1972 progress report, “that after all work in the rehabilitation area is completed, there will be a feeling of community uplift for area residents, and a new feeling of interest and civic pride in the City’s historic tradition will be instilled in all residents” (Hudson Urban Renewal Agency p 15). Preserving Warren Street was a matter of civic pride and heritage. But on Front Street and Columbia Street, and in the historically Black and working-class neighborhoods close to the North Bay, including the blocks known for brothels and speakeasys, the Agency tore down 286 buildings, clearing 50 acres of dense urban settlement. They relocated 214 families and 70 individuals, approximately 850 people, or nearly 1 in 10 Hudson residents (Hudson Urban Renewal Agency 1972).

In a 1981 case study of urban renewal in ten cities, prepared in partnership with HUD, Morse praised Hudson’s dedicated community leadership which transformed the central business district surrounding Warren Street by “rediscovering and reusing the valued remnants of its past” (p 58). They note that the North Bay neighborhood surrounding Front and Columbia was considered too far gone:

> “Extreme blight and poverty characterized the North Bay neighborhood […]. Two-thirds of its 839 housing units were in substandard condition and the vacancy rate was 10% -- the highest in the city. Indeed, half the substandard units in the city were found in this blue collar and largely black, Polish and Italian area.” (Eury et al 1981 p 66).

Raymond Parish and Pine, a regionally prolific urban renewal planning consultant firm, authored the original comprehensive plan commissioned by the Hudson Urban Renewal Agency. In the

Image 4.6 Hudson's North Bay neighborhood, circa 1956 (Raymond Parish & Pine 1965 p. 90)

Image 4.7 Hudson's North Bay from the north, circa 1965 (Raymond Parish & Pine 1965 p. 47)

introduction to the plan, they wrote extensively on Hudson's multiethnic (European) industrial heritages, but credited the blight in the North Bay to the vanishing industries and the arrival of Black people:

> "One of the latest [industries] to leave was the most notorious. Diamond Street, from third to fourth streets, was known throughout the state as a "Red light" district, the traditional adjunct of the shipping industry. This historic use of the land was ended in 1950, by Governor Thomas E. Dewey, who ordered the "entrepreneurs" and their employees to be dispersed. A ghetto was created as the empty structures were quickly filled with Negro families, many of whom had migrated north to work on farms."

Aside from one other note about "Negro labor" unloading coal trains from Pennsylvania and chopping ice for the storehouses on the Hudson, the sentence above is the only narrative mention of Black life in Hudson, and one that erases the fact of Black life in Hudson for nearly 300 years (Fone 2005).

In the dirt expanse of a demolished North Bay, Hudson's Urban Renewal Agency built a brutalist high rise, Bliss Towers, rising above the city unlike any other structure. Bliss Towers, a 9-story public housing complex with 135 apartments adjacent to a 15 unit project of low-rise, cinderblock town homes, was designed to meet the needs of low income residents, seniors, and people displaced by the neighborhood clearance. But Morse called this project "barren," and blamed it on the criminality of poor Black people:

> Some people feel that from the project's opening the mix of poor blacks and the elderly created severe difficulties. According to the Police Commissioner at the time, the project became a haven for dope dealers, violence was common, and the

> elderly were afraid to leave their apartments. The Hudson Housing Authority was forced to station its own full time policeman at Bliss Towers. With the eventual construction of other housing for the elderly, these problems became less severe. […] Today, in any case the 500 person housing project has one of the lowest crime rates in the city (Morse 1981 p. 75).

In a 2021 interview with a grassroots, Black-led organization called the Hudson Catskill Housing Coalition, Bertha Clark, one of the first residents of Bliss Towers, gives a different perspective on those early days. "It was fun back then," she said, before she described the transformation of the building from a vibrant community hub to a carceral environment where basic social and personal activities, like having a cookout or washing a car, were restricted and surveilled if permitted at all. "There was a big basketball court, it was everything, all kinds of stuff they had you could do back then. Everybody, all the kids, and they had the benches. Everything, and they just started taking stuff away, little by little […]. Now they don't want you to do nothing here […]. It's bad down here, now you feel like you're in prison" (HCHC 2022a).

4.5 REDEVELOPMENT REGIMES: PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TRANSFORMATIONS

The relationship between Urban Renewal, public housing, and geographies and ideologies of carcerality in the United States has been well established (cf Shabazz 2015, Norton 2020, Camp 2016). These patterns hold true in upstate New York. The state Urban Development Corporation (UDC) that Governor Nelson Rockefeller created in 1968 cleared neighborhoods to build vanity projects like the Empire State Plaza, but public political approval for urban renewal and public housing development would eventually run dry. Jack Norton's (2020) dissertation research shows how the UDC pivoted to become a financial vehicle for state investment in rural prison development. Between 1983 and 2000, the UDC contributed to building 36 new state

prisons in predominately rural communities, including 4 new or expanded prisons in the Hudson Valley.

In 1995, the UDC changed their name to the Empire State Development Corporation (ESD). Today, ESD invests heavily in tourist oriented landscape transformations in cities and small towns throughout the state. Many historic cities in the Hudson Valley are cash strapped after a century of capital flight, so they are especially eligible for significant local, state and federal investment in private enterprise, in the forms of tax breaks and deferments, grants and loans, or via development cost sharing. This is part of an ongoing rural economic development strategy focused on downtown revitalization, which understands that the biggest asset cities like Hudson, Kingston, Newburgh, Beacon, Troy, and Catskill have is their livable urban density inherited from a different time and abandoned in such a way that they are often still architecturally intact. Cities and towns like these are full of unique historic factory and mill buildings that have become attractive for adaptive reuse. For example, one new development that received significant ESD funding is the Hutton Brickyards, a hotel and events space on the riverfront in Kingston which opened in 2020 in an abandoned brick factory that had operated from 1865 until 1980. Visitors booking a room at Hutton Brickyards would find this description on the homepage: "Hudson Valley luxury has a new home in Kingston […]. Genuine relaxation and deep connections to nature abound through luxury cabins, elevated cuisine, spa, outdoor activities and uninterrupted waterfront vistas." Hutton Brickyards received approximately $1.17 million dollars from Empire State Development funds, a proud revitalization of a key site in Hudson Valley heritage (Hudson Valley Regional Council 2019).

For another example, local, state and federal tax incentive structures are often critical for the financial packages that enable development in these historically working class cities. One

remarkable and impactful example of this is the creation of Opportunity Zones under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. An Opportunity Zone starts as a census tract that meets a certain economic standard of poverty. Out of all the tracts that meet that standard, each state is able to nominate to be included among the "economically distressed" communities eligible for significant investment from private individuals and companies in return for tax breaks on capital gains. There are very few restrictions regarding the types of investment made, just that capital gains be sunk into LLCs within a qualified Opportunity Zone within 180 days. The entire city of Hudson, the entire city of Catskill, and most of the city of Kingston, including all of the historic waterfront (where Hutton Brickyards operates) are designated Opportunity Zones. Since 2017, multiple billionaires, or the adult children of billionaires, have relocated to the Hudson area to launch businesses (cafes, wine stores), property ventures (hotels, artists' studios, makers spaces), and even social equity oriented projects (like a universal basic income pilot).

Across all these ventures, some of which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, invocations of the regional history are core to both consumer-facing marketing and successful applications for state and municipal tax abatement. These ventures promise jobs and tax revenue from a growing market of tourists, but they are only financially viable because of the lives, past and present, of working class people. These communities are literally necessary for constituting an economically distressed Opportunity Zone, and yet they receive little-to-no benefit from the development that Opportunity Zones enable. Instead, increase pressure on housing has forced droves of community members to leave once vibrant and close knit working class neighborhoods.

4.6 CONCLUSIONS: "GEOGRAPHY AS DESTINY"

The Hudson River is flanked with abandoned industrial infrastructure from three centuries, Gilded Age manorial estates, protected scenic vistas, bucolic small farms, and dozens of small cities with (formerly) cheap rents, historic architecture, and mill buildings left behind by capital flight. The sedimentation of these histories prompted the Hudson Valley Regional Council to proclaim that the region is an example of "geography as destiny" (2019 p 2):

> "Over the last generation, the Hudson Valley has become a nexus where the economic, social, and cultural forces of a major global capital, New York City, meet and intermingle with the dynamics associated with the Valley's small cities, towns and rural areas—vibrant legacies in agriculture and food, industrial innovation […], the arts and outdoor recreation. The 21st Century has seen the divergence of New York State into two distinct economies: the dynamic downstate region driven by New York City's global prominence and a rural upstate economy often lagging behind in the growth in jobs, income and population. The Hudson Valley's geography provides the region with a unique connection between both of these worlds, positioning it as an important laboratory to build a successful fusion between these two parts of the Empire State" (ibid).

In the following two chapters, I will describe how these geographies have been harnessed by a coalition of actors who identified the Hudson Valley as a prime place for experiments in rural economic revitalization driven by food, farming, and artisanal craft. The impact of their pursuit has been disruptive and racialized displacement.

CHAPTER 5

"SERVE YOUR COUNTRY FOOD!"

GROWING THE ARTISANAL AND AGRARIAN HUDSON VALLEY, 2004-2016

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I examine the question: how have agrarian narratives about the Hudson Valley (re)produced racialized geographies of inclusion and exclusion? I will show how the good food coalition acted as a transformative force in the regional economy and helped lay the groundwork for contemporary patterns of racialized gentrification across the urban and rural, focusing on the coalition's orientations from 2004 to 2016. Specifically, in the wake of the 2008 recession, the Hudson Valley became a receiving ground for a wave of young and beginning farmers, farm workers, and small farm advocates who formed a dynamic coalition of interests around their vision for sustainable food systems and interdependent rural economies. Working with interviews, advocacy reports, media, films, and zines, I describe their motivations and investments in Hudson Valley agriculture, the sense of place that they fostered, and the economic and political frameworks they relied on to articulate the moment.

From farm apprentices and owner operators to non-profit workers and philanthropic funders, this coalition was mostly white, mostly well educated, and mostly focused on a vision of rural revitalization centered on food and agriculture. Importantly, many members of this coalition came to this work out of a desire to engage new or different relationships

with land, with their own labor, with their sense of community, and with broader economies that were identified as causing significant ecological and social harm.

Yet, the predominately white food movement coalition in the region normalized BIPOC and working class absence in their visions of rural economic revitalization, re-entrenching racialized imaginations about rural belonging and agricultural leadership. Agrarian innocence played a key role. At the time of this new wave's arrival, plenty of actors in the Hudson Valley food movement were motivated by criticism of how the industrial food system damages urban and rural communities. However, members of this coalition struggled to operationalize meaningful solidarities with people of color, in part because of a durable idea that there weren't many Black, Brown, and working class people with a stake in the future of the Hudson Valley's rural political economy. By advocating for regional economic revitalization strategies centered on small businesses, locally-made craft foods and beverages, and agrarian nostalgia for robust and interdependent rural economies, good food movement workers reified a racialized sense of place, in which performative agrarian aesthetics tied to compelling lifestyles and cheap land value created a shift in the overall terrain of capitalist flows.

5.2 AGRARIAN INNOCENCE AND RURAL REVITALIZATION, 2004-2014

The first goal of this chapter is to examine the motivations, orientations, and self-images of the good food coalition in the Hudson Valley. I consider four general categories of members in a loosely chronological fashion, including landed philanthropists focused on landscape and craft conservation, "hipster" farmers interested in ethical and meaningful lifestyles, non-profit advocacy workers focused on young and beginning farmers, and lifestyle brand consumers dubbed "Rurbanistas" desiring artisanal farm products and rural

experiences. In each group, we can witness how certain imaginaries of meaningful, political connections across the urban-rural divide that ultimately paved the way for the recapture of land values by the wealthy and well-capitalized. Idealized, white-washed narratives of an agrarian and artisanal sense of place have now made accessing that place all but impossible for people without significant wealth. This is in part because of the always-central role of extraordinarily wealthy people in fostering food movement work as investors, consumers, and philanthropists.

5.2.1 Landed agricultural philanthropists

Wealth, estates, and landscapes forged during the Gilded Age and early 20th century in New York played a significant role in establishing the orientations of the Hudson Valley food movement at the turn of the 21st century. Families controlling large parcels of land initially situated the food movement within the context of landscape conservation, part of a long tradition of landholders investing in the maintenance of their view sheds, of open space, and of national history. These elite families, what I call landed agricultural philanthropists, seeded a cohort of food and farming institutions focused on the conservation of agricultural landscapes, small farms, and craft heritages. For example, the Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farming was founded on the family land of George Perkins, a financier and conservationist who purchased 2,500 acres near Cold Spring in 1923. Following the death of his wife Mrs. Linn Perkins in 1993, the Open Space Institute, a well-endowed New York-based land conservation organization, facilitated the conversion of nearly 1000 acres of the Perkins estate into a state park, and dedicated the 225-acre core family farm to a new organization with a mission "to ensure the Hudson

Valley is a region defined by food, where farming thrives" (Glynwood 2022). Glynwood opened in 1997.

The Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture opened soon after, founded and financed in a similar way. Stone Barns had been in the Rockefeller family since the 1890s, operating as a stylized dairy farm (with a stone barn) since the 1930s. In 2004, David Rockefeller led an effort to convert a portion of their family land into protected parks, and set aside the farm as a non-profit space focused on Hudson Valley terroir for organic vegetables and craft food products. The *New York Times* hailed Stone Barns as "the site of a bold new commercial experiment […] meant to take the culinary revolution started by Alice Waters at Chez Panisse in 1971 into the 21st century" (Burros 2004). Waters and Chez Panisse trail blazed the farm-to-table movement from Berkley, CA, but by 2004, New York City was following closely as a national hub of the good food movement with the well-established Greenmarket system and successful farm-to-table restaurants like Chef Dan Barber's Blue Hill in the Greenwich Village. Barber opened his second Blue Hill location at the Stone Barns Center, helping to orient New York City's gastronomic gaze toward the Hudson Valley for the first time (Dominus 2008).

Landed agricultural philanthropy in the Hudson Valley has carried specific aesthetic, moral, and political expectations, while leveraging *significant* financial resources toward a regional artisanal and agrarian sense of place. These organizations place value on the beauty and serenity of rural and bucolic landscapes and on the ecological balance of diversified small farm enterprises. They also center the celebration and conservation of "Old World" or early American artisanal and agrarian labor heritages, like methods of on-farm slaughtering, butchering, meat and vegetable preservation, cheese making, and even

construction practices like timber framing (image 5.1). These features of an idealized agricultural landscape, in combination with seasonally driven farm-to-table gastronomy, are touted as critical tools for economic development in the region. The aesthetic, political, and moral paradigms focused on scenic land conservation, fetishized craft labor, and artisanal products has meant that the Hudson Valley food movement began by catering to the needs, desires, and property values of landed elites.

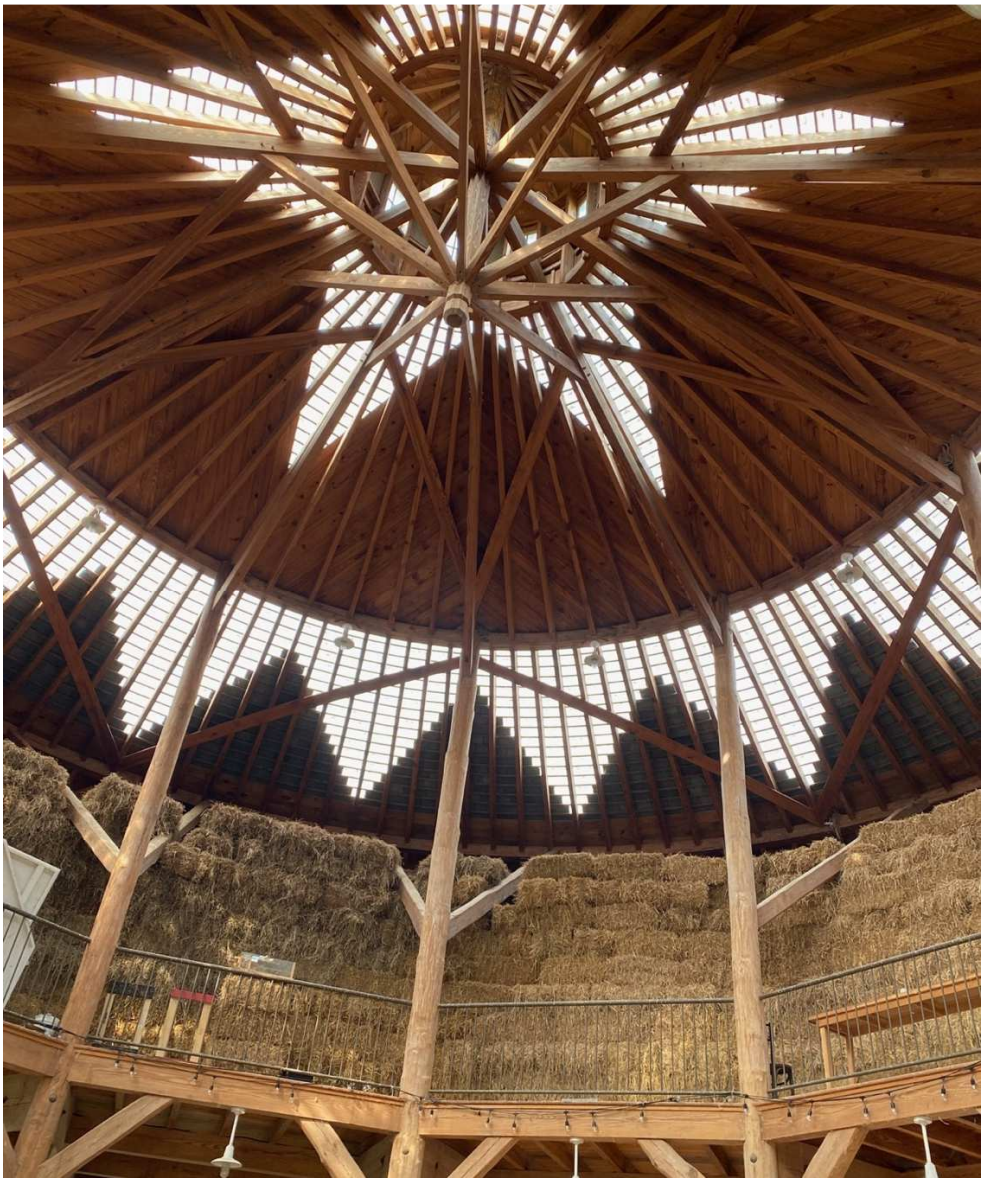

Image 5.1 Shaker style timber framing in the working barn at Churchtown Dairy, a Hudson Valley farm funded by Abby Rockefeller

5.2.2 "Hipster Farmers"

The audience of the projects described above tended to be older and wealthier foodies with established careers and plenty of disposable income, but that pattern began to shift around 2008. In the wake of the recession, when a well-educated and debt-burdened generation entered a dismal labor market (Grief et al 2010), "hipster" farmers, predominately white, were showing up in regional media as plucky and politically motivated heroes of the good life. These farmers were characterized as liberal-arts educated idealists burnt out on urban living and renewing a "back to the land" ethos rooted in a critique of industrial agriculture. Media outlets in New York began to take note of a "mass exodus of 20-somethings" (Merwin 2009) leaving the city to put "their muscles where their pro-environment, antiglobalization mouths are, […] creating small-scale farms near urban areas hungry for quality produce and willing to pay a premium" (Salkin 2008). A piece in the popular NYC culture blog *Gothamist* described them as "often armed with not much more than unwieldy liberal arts degrees" and motivated by the idea "that growing vegetables from seed to harvest might be more appealing than hitting up the […] classifieds every two minutes during temp job downtime." A *New York Times* article described them as "steeped in years of talk around college campuses and in stylish urban enclaves about the evils of factory farms […], the perils of relying on petroleum […], and the beauty of greenmarkets" (Salkin 2008) In the same article, a 26 year old woman named Severine von Tscharner Fleming said that "young farmers are an emerging social movement" (ibid).

Fleming is the founder of a small indie media and movement building organization called the Greenhorns, headquartered in Hudson, NY from 2009 to 2013. The mission of the Greenhorns was to "recruit, support, and promote young farmers in the United States"

(Greenhorns 2009). Fleming and her collaborators enacted this mission primarily by producing creative, attractive, and practical media and events: documentaries, short films, posters, radio shows, a "New Farmers Almanac" series, essay anthologies, guidebooks, zines, and *lots* of events, screenings, dinners, workshops, skill shares, and parties. Working against common perceptions of social isolation and alienation in rural life, Greenhorns wanted to make farming irresistible.

In 2009, Greenhorns released a pocket-sized zine called the "The Greenhorns Guidebook for Beginning Farmers," that opens with a meditation on the question, "Why do we need young farmers?*"* The answer reveals a lot about the orientations of the community of farmers and farm advocates emerging in the Hudson Valley in at that time:

> [It] it is our generation's collective task to reconfigure the country's food system, one farm at a time. Actually, we have a lot of other systems to fix, too, but for us farming is a direct, accessible, and satisfying place to start. After all, it is agriculture that makes our culture possible, agriculture that is universal to all human life, and agriculture where our economy most deeply affects our ecology. Whether you read Pollan or Heinberg, the analysis is in: our food system is serving us badly. It is over-concentrated, over-industrialized, and strongly lobbies for subsidy dollars that keep mega-agri-hegemons feeding corn pap to our most vulnerable citizens. The kids get sick, the rivers get sick, the soils get maxed out, and black plastic blows eerily across the horizon – and in other countries it's even worse. *Yes!* you say. *I know it's a big kettle of fish, a big consortium of corrupt, corporate, GMO factory fish that shit up the estuary. But what can we do about it?* We can

> serve our country food, […] while keeping the country country, and bringing a bit more of the country into the city as well. We can innovate! We can collaborate! We can launch CSAs and food-processing kitchens, raise animals, slaughter them, butcher them, make jam, collect honey, age cheese, harvest fruit, sow grain, and bake good bread. We can start small, interlocking local food businesses that keep money flowing within our community […]. We can work like oxen in the field and eat like kings in the kitchen and, if we stick to the plan, our kids will grow up right in a healthy place with rosy cheeks." (Greenhorns 2010).

This introductory passage is pitched to would-be farmers and food workers who are aware of the multi-valent harms of the industrial food system, and who want to embrace specific forms of interdependent artisanal and agricultural labor. Making jam, collecting honey, and participating in local economies are methods for resisting the "mega-agri-hegemons" who cause harm here and abroad. The alternative lifestyle is imagined as collaborative, relational, interdependent, embodied, and transformative.

Embodied labor takes on an almost purifying power in the discourses surrounding this young farmer movement. In the *Greenhorns* documentary, which followed and defined the "young farmer movement" nationwide, one white farmer says: "The biggest thing is that I want to be hands in the dirt farming. […] I'm doing the best that I can to live honestly. I'm not relying on some economic structures that have been set up, that benefit some and hurt others to make my livelihood happen" (von Tscharner Fleming 2011). Another farmer I interviewed who had worked with the Greenhorns in the Hudson Valley, initially saw farming as a way to give the benefits of her privilege away "like a dandelion."

Small farm labors, and the knowledge, skills, and orientations that accompany them, are seen as critical tools for building healthier communities. A contributor to the Greenhorns blog wrote:

> "As a greenhorn, I choose to vote with my fork. But I also choose to vote with my life. No matter how many dollars I spend on 'green' things, I would argue that land literacy, becoming embedded, herbal training, culinary skills, coping skills and the immersion into a community of relational reciprocity are equally powerful. Probably more powerful."

For each of these people, laboring with "hands in the dirt" creates possibilities for reciprocity, redistribution, and relational embeddedness in vibrant communities. Agrarian and artisanal skills and labors are not just beautiful heritages that create beautiful foods and beautiful landscapes but are methods of reducing complicity in capitalism and creating ethical relationships.

Yet, looking back to the *Greenhorns* introductory text, subjective language limits "who" is imagined to be a part of that community. For example, *we* have a lot to fix; by cultivating locally interdependent food economies where *we* perform a mix of innovative and ancient labors, *we* can eat well, and *our* kids will have a healthy place to grow up. There is anticipation that chipper sloganeering about serving food to *our* country (image 5.2) will meaningfully resonate with readers. *Our* citizens eat "corn pap" and *the* kids get sick, but *we* are not described as getting sick yet. This text is a lyrical and rosy-cheeked agrarian fantasy geared toward and consumed primarily, but not exclusively, by people racialized as white from middle and upper middle class backgrounds.

Image 5.2 Ink drawing featuring the motto "serve your country food" by San Francisco artist Brooke Budner, from the Greenhorns (2010) "Guidebook to Beginning Farmers" zine.

5.2.3 Young Farmer Advocates

Young and beginning farmers in the Hudson Valley began recognizing significant barriers that young people faced when entering agriculture, especially the high costs of land access, the lack of credit or institutional service for small farm models, the lack of affordable health care, and the burdens of student debt. In response, a cohort of young farmers began to pivot away from cultural and social projects like those of the Greenhorns,

towards formal policy advocacy focused specifically on young farmer viability. In 2010, a group of Hudson Valley young farmers formed the National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC) to advocate for state and federal policy that could reduce the barriers for young people entering agricultural careers. Lobbying for transformations in state and federal agricultural policy required bipartisanship, and so it was not in NYFC's interest to reproduce tropes of young farmers as stylish urbanites with liberal arts degrees looking connect with the soil while creating precious amounts of artisanal foods. Rather, they worked to frame young farmers as small business owners working against steep odds, driven by an often patriotic calling toward community service.

In their 2011 report "Building a Future with Farmers," based on a survey of over 1000 young and beginning farmers nationwide, NYFC argued that federal policy to support a next generation of farmers was an essential matter of national security on multiple fronts, including food supply, water conservation, energy sustainability, and climate resilience. Citing the established need for "hundreds of thousands of new and beginning farmers," (Lusher Shute 2011 p. 4), the report argued that state and federal policies were not doing nearly enough to support the people willing to try their hand at agriculture. To the contrary, many state and federal policies governing farm assistance and credit approval were often out of touch with the realities of small and medium scale farming. The survey results showed that young and beginning farmers were more likely to be farming diversified enterprises and prioritizing sustainability on relatively smaller pieces of land, and that they would need to have access to direct to consumer markets, especially when starting up. This is because it can take a long time to establish the scale and business relationships where wholesale farming is marginally profitable, and the start-up capital for the kinds of

equipment and infrastructure necessary for an efficient medium scale farm is an enormous hurdle when starting from scratch. Access to population centers where farmers markets, CSA members, and restaurant accounts can pay the bills is essential, but often these locations are accompanied by significantly higher costs of land. If a would-be farmer didn't come from money or a lucrative former career, inherit or already own land, or otherwise have access to significant startup funds, there might be insurmountable hurdles for accessing routine operational loans. Far from the agrarian ideal of intimate, intergenerational stewardship of a large contiguous plot of land, many young and beginning farmers started on fragments of rented land with zero pre-existing infrastructure, unstable tenancy, and high interest credit card debt.

The National Young Farmers Coalition was hesitant to pursue and embrace strategic narratives that complicated the valorization of small farmers, even as they were called to the surface by external and internal criticism. Addressing criticisms about race and class in the movement space was not just considered a secondary or low priority, but something that could damage the careful, bi-partisan political alliances deemed necessary for dismantling the barriers for small sustainable farmers. In an interview with me, one former staff person at NYFC commented on the leadership's orientation at that time: "[The executive director] was afraid. I think [they were] afraid of losing political traction. […] [They] had worked really hard to build the coalition up in a way that could be appealing to both Democrats and Republicans with, you know, some very neutral opinions." Another said that "lacking a racial equity analysis led to policy solutions that were just perpetuating more harm and also just not very exciting or transformational." The urgency of the crisis of farmland consolidation, the financial precarity of many beginning farmers, and the structural

disadvantages in federal policy and in agricultural economies that stacked the decks against small growers were and are real issues. Yet, organizers and farmers within this community failed to consider how those issues have been and still are experienced differently by various communities of color, nor to direct their organizing work against well documented processes of racialization in the food system.

5.2.4 "Rurbanistas"

Small farmers in survival mode made ends meet by marketing expensive products to wealthy people, and cultivating alternative revenue streams like farm stays, wedding and event locations, and experiential farm programs. In doing so, they often formed a stronger coalitional connection to wealthy and place-hungry rural tourists than to working-class producers and consumers in the region. As more and more farm businesses, farm-to-table restaurants, and experiential farm stays opened, the Hudson Valley began to garner significant attention as a destination for weekenders and second-home owners interested in a particular lifestyle accompanying an agrarian and artisanal sense of place.

One prestige magazine called *Modern Farmer,* founded in Hudson in 2013 by Ann Marie Gardner, worked to define and harness that audience. When profiled in *The New Yorker*, Gardner described *Modern Farmer*'s audience as a dynamic group including classic "good food movement" consumers, aspirational farmers, tourists drawn to farm-stays, and urban workers dreaming of backyard chickens. Gardner names a shared trait in this broad group, that they transit the urban and rural, using the term "Rurbanistas" to represent their shared interests:

> "This is the lifestyle of people who want to 'eat food with a better backstory'—from slaughterhouses that follow humane practices, and from farmers who farm clean and treat their workers decently. Also, food cultists

> who like obscure foods and believe that fruits and vegetables taste different depending on where they are grown. Also, aspirational farmers, hobby farmers, intern farmers, student farmers, 'WWOOFers"—people who take part in programs sponsored by the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms [WWOOF] movement—and people who stay at hotels on farms where they eat things grown by the owners. Plus idlers in cubicles searching for cheap farmland and chicken fences and what kind of goats give the best milk. Such people 'have a foot in each world, rural and urban,' Gardner says. She calls them Rurbanistas, a term she started using after hearing the Spanish word *rurbanismo*, which describes the migration from the city to the countryside. Rurbanistas typify the *Modern Farmer* audience" (Wilkinson 2014).

"Rurbanistas" captures a specific cohesion of interests across typical good food movement sites, aesthetics, and economic modes. Rurbanistas celebrate small batch craftsmen, intimate labors, and the possibility of a more ethical, sustainable, enjoyable ways of life, including a more grounded sense of self and of community in revitalized rural places.

A 2015 report on agritourism commissioned by Glynwood also nods to the "Rurbanistas," and represents them as an under tapped market with the potential to provide needed additional revenue streams for struggling small farms. "Deprived of a connection to the land and their food," Katherine Milonzi writes, "a new breed of tourists is emerging, one looking for participatory, sensory-based experiences of unique, natural and craft-focused places" (Milonzi 2015 p7). These higher-end consumers are driving a shift in agritourism away from older methods of what Milonzi calls "agri-tainment," like U-Pick

farms and corn-mazes, towards one where customers achieve "relaxation and rejuvenation through participation" in farm labor (ibid p. 4). This new agritourism model focuses on working farm stays, educational workshops, and place-based products. Milonzi argues that investing in a regional "story of place" where visitors can expect to find a restorative connection to the land and their food could turn the Hudson Valley into a "world-renowned agritourism economy" (ibid p 4). "Increased and improved on-farm experiences," she says, "would contribute to the Hudson Valley's agricultural viability and regional identity, while benefitting farmers, visitors and the local community alike," Milonzi says (p 2).

However, cultivating an agrarian and artisanal sense of place in the Hudson Valley has had damaging side effects for young and beginning farmers. Competition for land has increased as more and more agri-tourism developers and wealthy people interested in a "Rurbanista" lifestyle entered the market for arable acres. Further, an explosion of well-branded, well-capitalized hobby farms and craft business have crowded consumer markets with artisanal products. Even for young and beginning farmers with a relatively high degree of economic resources and privilege, these patterns are seen as foreclosing the possibility of an honest living through laboring on the land. Multiple farmers I interviewed discussed their frustrations about farm businesses that are "high style, low output" and funded by very well compensated external careers in finance, fashion, or, as one farmer put it, "Disney money." GrowNYC reported that:

> "the Hudson Valley's proximity to New York City, with its robust market demand for regional food, creates opportunities that are distinct from most agricultural regions elsewhere in the country. However, bedroom and

> weekend retreat communities have driven farmland prices higher than what is affordable for farmers to purchase or lease" (GrowNYC p 21).

Even in contexts where certain farmland conservation strategies are in place, like selling the development rights for land to a philanthropic conservation trust, there is still stiff competition from "country-estate buyers with no intention of farming" (ibid p 7). As a result, many young and beginning small farm workers run tax-write-off businesses for wealthy land owners, who have varying degrees of involvement in (or conflict with) the farm enterprises they host.

All of these reports predate the COVID-19 pandemic, which launched an unprecedented spike in property values and in the pace of land transition as floods of people sought refuge from New York's strict lockdown in the Hudson Valley. A former farmer I interviewed commented that "if you didn't get in on it before last year, it's done. It's not going back. You can't find five acres of land with a house on it for less than like, $400,000 right now. It's just bananas. Close the book on that. Like, what does that mean?" It may mean that only exceptionally well capitalized or highly subsidized enterprises can enter these idealized inter-dependent, rural-urban agrarian economies. Without transformations in the ways resources are organized among food movement actors looking to develop the agrarian and artisanal economy of the Hudson Valley, these conditions will continue to structure a racialized and classed landscape.

5.3 WHITE ACCESS, BLACK ABSENCE: EFFECTS OF AN INNOCENT LANDSCAPE

Across the above articulations, we can witness a range of thematic tropes characterizing the Hudson Valley food movement coalition's relationships to land, labor, community, and history. This coalition of interests was motivated by multiple interrelated

critiques of the industrial food system's impact on communities, ecologies, and public health. Farming is represented as a satisfying and meaningful way to engage those ideas directly and physically, "hands in the dirt," especially at a time when more traditional imaginations of social mobility, financial security, and life satisfaction through white collar urban office careers were being foreclosed. There is moral, political, and economic value placed on craft and artisanal labor, heritage agricultural practices, collaborative and community based economies, and a restorative relationship with land, things that can be experienced authentically or meaningfully through embodied commitments, becoming "embedded" or having a "sensory-based" experience.

In this way, the engagement of an artisanal and agrarian sense of place functions as a move to innocence for members of this wide ranging coalition of interests. Engaging different relationships to land and labor is seen as a way to "live honestly," to be useful, to contribute to powerful social transformations, and to earn belonging in a community that earnestly needs artisanal and agrarian land and labor. Yet, these articulations are entirely class- and color-blind. They reproduce a particular moralized ideal of agrarian and artisanal labor while at the same time, implicitly limiting the participants in that moralized ideal to only those with relatively high levels of economic and social privilege. They fail to engage obvious and tangible contradictions that many young famers felt, like the awareness that their meager incomes earned with backbreaking labor were entirely reliant on wealthy consumers and other subsidies.

One white former farmer and advocacy worker I interviewed commented on the contradiction that white farmers navigated between their intentions and the reality of farm economies:

> "White farmers got into farming because they wanted to feed people, and not because they want to feed rich people in New York City. They were struggling with that [and] were totally ignorant to, or maybe just ignoring the fact that they were causing so much harm and just expecting to farm *and* make a profit *and* feed people? So many white farmers would say, 'I do farming because of food justice.' And yet, they're not like really sharing power in any way."

This person is identifies a sense of entitlement to profiting from an idealized and meaningful farm career, alongside a desire to do good by feeding people, as a source of harm – in this case, harm is caused by marshalling significant economic forces around whitewashed agriculture. Not all of the people I interviewed characterized white farmers in the Hudson Valley as "causing so much harm," but all recognized a limiting, alienating, or harmful pattern or structure within the food movement's idealized subjects of the agrarian and artisanal Hudson Valley.

Many noted how small farming is an unsustainable uphill battle, which keeps farmers in "survival mode" and hinders them from critically assessing how their efforts match up with their broader goals. One farmer named Rachel (a pseudonym) said in our interview:

> I don't know how to talk about the hardship of farming, like, how much it grips you and how disorienting it is […] the sense of survival is really, really imminent. And the cards are completely stacked against you, the numbers just don't work. They're backwards. And so you have to launch this gargantuan effort, including working just round the clock. […]

Rachel described how, early in her career, she struggled to understand how to engage racial justice as a concept, at first thinking that it "wasn't really my issue, like I worked on other

issues." Even as she became interested in racial justice, it was hard to figure out an "in," a connection between her issues and racial justice issues:

> "I remember having ideas about accessibility, in starting my farm and in early years, I was like, 'what is SBK [a Hudson organization for Black liberation] doing? Do they need custom CSA shares? Like how can I help?' But not in any informed way. I just had no relationships with communities of color. The farming circle that I was immersed in, community housing project that I was hosted by, were not exclusively white, but absolutely majority white, and white culture and ideas. […] I remember a lot of hand wringing, like, we are aware of this idea [of anti-racism], but it feels outside of ourselves and we didn't know the way in."

Engaging more specifically in other politics relevant to or originating from communities of color, beyond just offering those communities food, seemed like a difficult and awkward task.

Further, while farmers like Rachel may not have been directly hostile to people of color, nor in denial about the existence of structural racism, interviewees said that they found the absence of people of color in rural places and agrarian landscapes to be normal and acceptable. Some reflected a general awareness of how relationships with rural place can be imbued with trauma or considered unsafe for racialized people, especially Black people. Others noted how unpaid farm apprenticeships in rural places, often an essential entry point for beginning farmers, is a barrier for working-class people and people of color. An exhausting, vulnerable, and unpaid pre-requisite for a low paying job *is* a discouraging and limiting threshold for entry into the valorized community of small farmers. One former

farm worker reflected that "there are a lot of privileges that I have as a white person and an affluent white person, and experiences that were easy for me to have, because the system caters to me." Reflecting on the absence of farmers of color in her community, another reflected that she "assumed that that was in part because the economics of farming, one might say require, economic privilege." People without those advantages may prefer to pursue "security for themselves more so than this abstract, heavy form of community service."

Young white people with liberal arts degrees were, of course, *not* the only communities interested in farming in the early days of the young farmer movement. Michelle, a Black advocate for beginning farmers in the Hudson Valley, remembered experiences from her work as a former lead coordinator for GrowNYC's New Farmer Development Program. Despite the neutral name, NFDP catered specifically to immigrant farmworkers in New York looking to start their own farm businesses. Michelle described accompanying the primarily Brown and Spanish-speaking farmers that she worked with to some of the regional agricultural conferences around the Hudson Valley. She remembers experiencing significant hostility in predominately white spaces, "people looking at me, like, 'Who the hell are you? You are not one of us.' I show up to conferences with 20 Brown people with simultaneous interpretation equipment. And people would be like, 'Why is she talking in the corner, being so disruptive? Why is she disrupting the meeting?'"

In another part of our conversation, Michelle reflected on her new position with Glynwood. Today, she leads a new (since 2020) regional food access program called the Food Sovereignty fund, providing grants for BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and women farmers in the Hudson Valley to grow food for food access organizations that serve working class

communities in the region. While she enjoys the position and the team she works with, she reflected on how it feels to often be pushed toward roles pertaining to food access, despite her agricultural background: “I think it's a race thing, honestly. I feel like people always want to put me into food, food systems. […] I’m an ag person, I studied agriculture, I have a degree in agroecology. Why do people want to make me a food person?” I asked Michelle to say more about what was at stake in that distinction. “I think it's just that Black people are not allowed to belong to the land,” she responded, “and that we don't belong to the land in the same way that white people can and that we're not farmers and that we don't have some sort of agrarian history.”

> “Neither do these white kids with liberal arts degrees!" I joked.
>
> “I know!” She laughed: “That's the most frustrating thing. They're allowed to fake it ‘til they make it. I can't tell you how irate it makes me that they can just get these jobs and people will believe them. And there's so many examples, and I won't name names, but it's like, they can just show up at some rich dude’s doorstep and be like, ‘I’m a farmer.’”

Michelle’s experience and criticism speaks to the impacts of a broadly racialized imagination of who beginning farmers are, what their needs will be, and what opportunities support their entry into the valorized work of growing food (cf Bowens 2014, Penniman 2018). Michelle’s phrasing, that Black people are not allowed to “belong to the land,” references a refrain and a mission statement from Soul Fire Farm, a BIPOC oriented farm and training center just outside the Hudson Valley in Grafton, NY. In a published interview, co-founder Leah Penniman said that Soul Fire’s training programs for Black and Latino

farmers “is a humble attempt […] to reclaim our ancestral right to both belong to the land and have the land belong to us” (Cummings et al 2019).

Beyond whether or not one belongs in a community of young farmers, the stakes of a white-washed agrarian and artisanal imaginary are about who is *in place* in a changing Hudson Valley: whose labor is celebrated, whose business gets investment, for whom regional and local powers craft policy and develop plans. Centering the earnest cravings of middle and upper class, economically and socially privileged and mobile people to connect more authentically to land, labor, community, and history is an economic strategy that serves the interests of the already-wealthy. This aesthetic, moral, and political paradigm also prevents opportunities for multi-racial power formations working towards food justice.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

The good food movement in the Hudson Valley is a dynamic and unfixed coalition of non-concentric interests. It is narrated by DIY, non-profit, social, and prestige media. It is buoyed with urban-rural flows of cash and capital, from the dedicated CSA member picking up their share at an NYC Greenmarket, to the young farmers and farm workers with class and educational privilege, to non-profit service providers helping new farmers establish their businesses, to the landed philanthropists employing or enabling hundreds of farmers, advocates, and program administrators, and the state development grants supporting the creation of a food- and craft-driven senses of place as a viable strategy for economic growth. Each of these interwoven processes are sites of reproduction of an agrarian and artisanal sense of place in the region, and each have been dominated by predominately white institutions with committed orientations to farmland conservation through private

ownership, and to valorizing the farmers and chefs who are preserving primarily European and “old world" food traditions.

The structure of the stories that white people, and especially migrant middle and upper middle-class white people, tell about their relationships to land, labor, community, and history in the Hudson Valley *do not* have to reproduce the settler colonial and racial capitalist logics which undermine BIPOC and working class futures in the region. The problem is not that people desire meaningful relationships to land, labor, community, or history, but that their imaginations of what those meaningful relationships look and feel like are dependent on an unacknowledged alliance with massive concentrations of wealth and are superimposed flatly onto places with open and contested contradictions. No matter who mobilizes them, narrative fantasies of vibrant, locally interdependent, diverse, sustainable communities, when they are intentionally or unintentionally blind to racialized displacement in the past or present, work to disable critical imaginative capacities. Innocence evades the root of the problem, that race and class are key animating forces in the violently uneven organization of resources across the landscape (Gilmore 2022a).

CHAPTER 6

"MOVING UPSTATE TO SELL NAPKINS AND BUILD COMMUNITY"

GENTRIFICATION IN THE URBAN-AGRARIAN

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The food movement in the Hudson Valley caused an escalation in economic development regimes invested in an agrarian and artisanal sense of place. New flows of capital have emerged alongside this place-making movement, including new state development grants, new incentivizing tax structures, new orientations of philanthropic investment, and a particular wave of wealthy and place-hungry migrants and tourists, who prime the economic pump with consumer spending and market demand. The resulting transition, fueled by people looking to have an "authentic" connection to a "real" place, is driving up the cost of living and marginalizing longtime residents from opportunities, resources, power, and the right to remain. This urban-rural tourism and transplant economy is part of longer pattern of racialized displacement, disinvestment, and exclusion from power in Hudson Valley cities and surrounding counties.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how discourses of regional rural revitalization based on vibrant small business economies and a strong sense of place are used to justify these unequal investment and development regimes. These discourses narrate the *belonging* of small business owners, remote and migrant white-collar workers, and very wealthy tourists as inheritors of a long heritage in the Hudson Valley, and as stewards of an ethical and

vibrant future. The possibility for a satisfying, ethical, creative, and community-rich life is a core theme of regional economic marketing. Yet, communities who are being displaced are vocally and visibly critical of the economic shift toward high end, tourist oriented retail and hospitality. In conflicts over gentrification in these cities, people who are invested in the new economy often make moves to innocence, invoking the agrarian and artisanal sense of place to naturalize the displacement of long-term residents. There is a conflict, therefore, between the coalition of interests benefitting from representations of gentrifying cities as thriving communities full of self-reliant makers, bakers, and woodworkers, and the long-term community residents who do not participate in the same aesthetic performances of artisanal and agrarian place.

In the following sections, I will first describe and situate members of this coalition and their motivations for migrating to Hudson Valley cities. Then I will contextualize and examine two specific gentrification conflicts that illustrate how the marketing of an agrarian and artisanal sense of place is leveraged: one about tourism and small business development and one about AirBnB regulation. In both cases, I will show where community members are in struggle over narratives of belonging, identity, and place in the Hudson Valley cities of Kingston and Hudson. These processes, I argue, exemplify how moves to innocence concretely mobilize racialized displacement.

6.2 "SMALL TOWN MIRAGE:" CRAVING COMMUNITY

In increasing waves over the last 30 years, many people have relocated to cities in the Hudson Valley because they have been relatively affordable and decent places to live, where there is a sense of possibility for a particular relationship to place. The patterns of economic decline described in Chapter 4 made cities like Kingston, Catskill, Hudson, and

Beacon close-knit, predominately working-class and multi-racial cities, and attractive places for artists, retirees, and small entrepreneurs at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st. Hudson, for example, experienced a storied transformation in the 80s and 90s when a flush of queer men, artists, and designers left New York City and transformed Hudson into a regional hub for the trade in fine antiques. Recently, as with the "Rurbanistas" of the previous chapter, many migrants and visitors have been motivated by the desire for more meaningful relationships to land, labor, and community, and they have identified the Hudson Valley as a region where those relationships are possible. Many of the recent migrants to Hudson and Kingston are middle and upper middle class people, – farmers, artists, trades workers, or remote workers – with a mix of economic and social privileges, and many with earnest, community oriented motivations and justifications.

In this context, historic urban centers are directly linked to discourses of transformative community possibility. For example, Rachel, one of the farmers from last chapter, moved to Hudson in 2012 because living in a small town with an active main street was a core part of her vision for starting a cooperative farm. She described wanting to contribute to community life in the kind of place where people had long term relationships, where she might find someone leaning on a parking meter and hollering across the street to check in with a passing neighbor they've known for many years. Although she grew up in near-by rural Connecticut, the Hudson River Valley was like a "hole on the map," a place she had never heard of people moving to. Arriving in Hudson for the first time, however, she witnessed a what she called a "small town mirage" in three acts:

"…And I parked my mom's station wagon on the corner of Warren and 6th.

And I got out and I looked to my right, and there was the Greenhorns office,

> which had […] a basket of lentils with dead turkey wings stuck inside and like a live rabbit and a bunch of pennants and flags and all kinds of artsy cool stuff [in the window]. And I looked to my left and there was this really great street art tag. And I kid you not, I walked around the corner, and someone was leaning on a parking meter, waving like "Hey Bob" across the street. And then like five minutes later a marching band came down the street. Which now I know is actually very common! [laughs]"

For Rachel, the presence of long term relationships, organic creativity, community celebrations, and weirdness were indicators of a healthy and vibrant community that she would hope to enter and serve as a local farmer. Rachel also demonstrates the importance of small cities like Hudson in the young farmer movement. The Greenhorns, NYFC, and *Modern Farmer* all had their offices on Hudson's main street. These small, old, dense, and diverse cities and towns surrounded by farms communicated a kind of urban-rural futurism that was appealing to people being displaced from post-recession economies in gentrifying metropoles like New York City and San Francisco.

Many other non-farmers who moved to the Hudson Valley around the same time as Rachel describe similar motivations, values, and cues for feeling "at home." Sara Franklin, who moved to Kingston around 2014, recently reflected on herself and her peers in their 20s and early 30s who "entered adulthood via the gig economy" (Franklin 2020). For her community of creative workers and sole proprietors, leaving certain professional opportunities in New York City behind and moving upstate to smaller markets could be a real risk. The tradeoff that Hudson and Kingston offered was more flexibility and opportunity to grow their creative and professional practices in a community of likeminded

peers. "We felt rich in community, if not in cash," she said (Franklin 2020). Reyhan Harmanci (2014) wrote similarly about taking a job at *Modern Farmer*. She and her partner could afford to live there on one income, so her partner could work on a novel. Reyhan described the comfort she found initially in Hudson's tangible ethnic, economic, and individual diversity:

> "I had wandered around the town's wide main drag, Warren Street, which had a CVS, two coffee shops, an apothecary, an animal shelter with kittens in the window, a farm-to-table diner (Grazin') and an inordinate number of antique shops. Sure, stuffy weekenders clogged the sidewalks, but so did loud teenagers, groups of women in head scarves and young parents. And weirdos. So many weirdos, beardos, a guy on a unicycle. A woman in a motorized wheelchair clutching a small dog wearing sunglasses" (Harmanci 2014)

"This is possible," Reyhan told herself. She could leave a bigger city and imagine a life in Hudson not just because of the routine amenities of urban living (coffee shops and restaurants) but because of the tangible diversities of ethnicity, class, and self-expression, in a place affordable enough for her partner to forego wage work for creative work. Molly Birnbaum, also a *Modern Farmer* worker, published similar commentary in a *Fast Company* article about dating apps in a rural place. A smaller dating pool forced her outside of her typical comfort zone, as she found herself going out with "farmers, construction workers, photographers, writers, and even a professor from Bard." Rachel, Sara, Reyhan, and Molly each describe encountering the communities within historically working-class, racially diverse, and disinvested port cities. To varying degrees for each of them, the allure of the location is the sense of creative possibility in an affordable place with a palpably close knit and dynamic community. This is the

"small town mirage" Rachel described in passing: a feeling of belonging and possibility in a place where relationships to land, labor, and community might not have to follow familiar patterns of extraction, segregation, and exhaustion.

However, Rachel also described how creatives with abundant resources who move to Hudson to develop their projects often use hollow invocations of relational life in small towns. She and her partner jokingly call this trend "moving upstate to sell napkins and build community." "There was some urban couple" she said, "that decided to 'move Upstate and bring community there.' And what they actually did was like, start a boutique Bed and Breakfast where they also sold home goods." People choose the Hudson Valley as the place to launch a hotel, a line of homewares, a farm, or a restaurant, and they use the invocation of "community" as a kind of branding tool and moral aesthetic shield.

Today, cities like Hudson and Kingston are being actively marketed as an ideal place for wealthy people to live or visit, because there is opportunity here to engage in a "real" life, "real" labor. "Real people work and live here," wrote one real estate journalist covering Kingston's booming pandemic housing market in 2021 (Caldwell 2021). Pursuing this desire for "real" life means fashioning an aestheticized relationship to working-class neighbors and histories. For example, consider this excerpt from a write up of Hudson's "elegant transformation" in *The New York Times*:

> "In a sleek shop window across the street labeled House, there's a tractor seat affixed to the base of a vintage office chair below a mask by Donald Baechler. Is it a gallery? Another home-design store? It turns out to be the real estate firm of James Male, who is also a landscape designer. His storefront, he said, reflects his business model and the interests of his clientele, who aren't coming to Hudson

> ‘just for the farmers’ market and the mountain views,’ he said. “They come because it’s a small American city, still a little rough around the edges, that they hope to make a life in” (Green 2014)

The most affordable listing available from House in December 2021 was an 1870s Victorian listed at $565,000, described as a “project for the visionary buyer with deep pockets.” Yet, Hudson’s rough edges are framed as an opportunity for life making, a signal for hope in the real estate section of the *Times*.

6.3 “ELSEWHERE” STORIES: MARKETING COMMUNITY

The representation of Hudson Valley cities as place where working creatives can find a meaningful connection to an artisanal and agrarian sense of place is a central theme of the marketing among businesses catering to wealthy clientele. For example, in December 2019 a luxe new co-working space called Barnfox appeared next-door to a chic new bakery called Breadfolks on Warren Street in Hudson. A block away, a new café opened attached to The Maker, a hotel that had been steadily amassing prime storefronts for their forthcoming gym, juice bar, and restaurant. The imagery invoked by these business names – a fox in the barn, humble folks making bread, a craftsperson who makes things – tie the agrarian and artisanal sense of place to the gentrification of Hudson’s main street.

Breadfolks is a stark and minimalist bakery selling perfect croissants, hand-shaped loaves, stoneware, enamelware, chili crisp, and coffee in a white-tiled space with a quote attributed to John Muir above the shelves: “for everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.” Breadfolks is a visibly well-capitalized start-up, with an imported multi-deck oven, stacks of brand new baking pans and dishes, and a posh but minimalist renovation.

Yet the owner, Norman Jean Roy, a successful portrait and fashion photographer, announced the business in local press by saying, "We're just people making bread" (Sucato 2020). "What I love about Breadfolks," he added, "is we bring a level of craftsmanship and quality to a town that wouldn't necessarily have access to it but has a thirst for it" (ibid). The term "folks," he later notes, is to communicate a lack of ego in the project. Breadfolks, it should be noted, is one at least of four hand-shaped, hearth-baked, artisanal bakeries to open or operate in Hudson in the last 10 years, and one of three that were in active operation in 2019. Roy's self-positioning as the provider of good bread to a hungry town is the first of several examples of small businesses in the area narrating their belonging in an agrarian and artisanal sense of place.

Another way that visionaries with deep pockets narrate their belonging in a city like Hudson is through an ethos of preservation for Hudson's 18th and 19th century architecture. This is often accompanied by marketing that evokes nostalgia for 18th and 19th century settler entrepreneurial imagery, or implies an intergenerational tradition: a "general store" or a "mercantile" called "Farm + Provisions" or "Something & Sons." For example, William Farmer & Sons' Bar & Boardroom, which opened in Hudson in 2016 is ostensibly a farm-to-table restaurant with a hotel and "mercantile" attached. The restaurateurs describe their vision as born of a love affair with a 19th century building and with the surrounding bounty of the Hudson Valley. They tell their story of discovering Hudson like this:

> "Hudson, NY serves as a commercial center to many burgeoning restaurateurs, musicians, artists and shop owners. But it's also surrounded by the bounty of the Hudson Valley, from beautiful farms to popular hiking trails and more. For this reason, Hudson is often referred to as the "Downtown of

> Upstate," and it was right on the edge of this very downtown […] that we fell in love with a building and a vision. […] [A]s many NYC ex-pats can attest to, one too many visits can tip the scale from weekend delight and discovery into full time, all-out love" (Wm. Farmer and Sons 2021).

The old buildings, the beautiful setting, the creative community are all part of specific and recent form of gentrification that is directly marketable to a class of migrant and wealthy New Yorkers looking to find a meaningful connection to place.

As businesses like Farmer & Son's illustrate, the city of Hudson—historic, entrepreneurial, buzzing, and beautiful—has become a branding tool to indicate a certain kind of timeless style and material quality inherent to things that were made by artisan labor. For example, Zio & Sons are proprietors of This Old Hudson, a short-term rental listing, photo-shoot location, and retail concept born out of love for old buildings with good bones. "It started with a single house," they describe:

> "Like many true love stories, this one began somewhat unexpectedly. New York City-based creative entrepreneur Anthony D'Argenzio decided to head upstate for a quick getaway to Hudson and fell hard for a fabulous, century-old fixer-upper on the outskirts of town, perfect for country weekends. But the more time he spent in the bustling river town, the clearer his vision became: The Hudson Valley was his home." (This Old Hudson 2021).

D'Argenzio later collaborated with a small scale, hand-made bag manufacturer to release a limited run of $500 waxed canvas backpacks, called "The Hudson," intended for "multi-disciplinary creatives and travelers" (ONA 2022). D'Argenzio's projects exemplify the ways

in which Hudson's actual community has been packaged as a commodity for place-hungry weekenders.

Similarly, across their digital marketing, The Maker creates a narrative of the history of the City of Hudson focused on settler entrepreneurialism, communities of craftspeople, and two centuries tourism. Their team is "[i]nspired by the wide range of creatives native to the Hudson Valley […] to bring a bespoke experience to both the close-knit upstate New York Community and travelers alike" (The Maker 2022) The local landscape, which bears the evidence of deep histories, creates the context for this community:

> "Nestled by the enduring Hudson River, our city of Hudson is rich with originality from its highly preserved architecture and vibrant communities to its maritime history. Centrally located in the heart of the Hudson Valley, it is surrounded by an abundance of farms, Catskill Mountains and natural beauty making it an ideal retreat from New York City" (ibid)

The Maker further contextualizes Hudson's historic emergence, naming the turbulence of successive economic waves.

> "From whaling and international trade in the 18th century, to cotton and textile mills in the 19th century, to cement plants in the 20th century, industries have come and gone. […] The last 20 years in Hudson have been a remarkable renaissance, driven by artists, antique dealers and creatives that have made this city their home" (ibid).

Within this narrative, the authors of these stories position their hotel, restaurant, gym, and juice bar as inheritors of a long tradition of tourism and trade along the turbulent Hudson River. They position themselves and their peers as rightful stewards of Hudson's future.

At a soft opening in pre-pandemic 2020, Barnfox announced that they would limit memberships available to local people to just a dozen spots, saying that their primary business model was for travelers who could afford membership rates akin to $995 for any 36 days per year. Their targeted audience has significant disposable income to dedicate toward membership in "a diverse, community-driven environment, led by a passion to work, gather, and play – ***elsewhere***" (Barnfox 2021b, emphasis added). What does it mean to provide meaningful connections to land (restorative access to nature), labor (working is a pleasure in a beautiful place), community (thriving and approving locals), and history (those beautiful old-boned buildings) in a place called "elsewhere?" Elsewhere implies an ideological displacement of the complex and racialized socio-material histories the have composed Hudson Valley cities like Hudson and Kingston. Remaking local histories to center an agrarian and artisanal sense of place naturalizes the belonging of hoteliers, restauranteurs, and multi-disciplinary creatives, while rendering invisible the Black, Brown, and working-class residents that sustained community vibrancy here for generations. New proprietors of this new aesthetic all tell similar story: they all visited "elsewhere," fell in love with its history, and mobilized their resources, which were acquired somewhere else, to join a thriving community of small business owners, makers, craftspeople, artists, and stewards of land and of valuable architecture. People invested in the tourism economy describe the residents of "elsewhere" as eager and approving of the vision, collaborative and open, or, in Roy's case, hungry for a quality of craftsmanship they can't realize on their own.

Yet, the marketing strategies of businesses like these are directly disrupting the land, labor, community, and history of the residents of "elsewhere". One farmer shared firm opinions about the way businesses like these "talk the talk" through aesthetics that are

celebratory of hardworking laborers and thriving local economies but fail to "walk the walk" when it comes to establishing local relationships with farmers or to creating an environment that's respectful to workers. Regarding Farmer & Sons, she says:

> "They have a three paragraph essay on the wall that's basically the most 'help us help them' in regard to farmers. Like, 'we honor the legacy of hard working entrepreneurs that work the land' and they don't buy from farms! They bought token amounts, like maybe 12 orders over three years. There's all kinds of farm-washing like that."

Regarding her experience working with the Maker, she was even more direct:

> "[T]hey paid an architect to design their towel rack. And yet, when I delivered vegetables there, I had to go around four corners and five doors to get a stack of three crates of vegetables into their service kitchen. That's bad for everybody that's coming in for that kitchen. I mean, they get milk, they need volume, and someone is carting that around, across handmade tile floors through four foyers and three atriums. It's completely backwards."

These businesses, she says, are "asinine" and "completely unself-conscious" about "buying up Main Street real estate" to build spaces that cater exclusively to high end tourists. As they capitalize on an artisanal and agrarian sense of place, these businesses actively exclude other long-term producers of place and belonging in Hudson.

6.4 "STRANGLE THE TOWN:" GENTRIFICATION CONFLICTS

In conflicts over gentrification, boosters for a tourism based economy often evade clear arguments about the skyrocketing cost of living that actively displaces long term residents. COVID-19 made this context impossible to ignore. The pandemic's pressure to

flee New York City, alongside a revolution in remote labor, ignited an already hot real estate market. Home prices rose, listings sold immediately, rents skyrocketed, short term rentals like AirBnB lurched toward 100% occupancy, staying there for months. There was rapid speculation in investment properties. Sara Franklin described how "a 1,500-square-foot home a few blocks from ours listed in late June [2020] at $210,000; the first offer came in from someone who drove by and bid without setting foot in the house; three days later, the house went into contract for more than $30,000 over the asking price after an all-cash battle" (Franklin 2020).

It would have been impossible not to have some awareness of this context, for anyone making small talk in a coffee shop, walking the street in their neighborhood, seeing for sale signs, renovation dumpsters, new faces, and circulating social media posts in neighborhood groups. Yet, in conflicts over the transition, the coalition invested in an artisanal and agrarian sense of place in Hudson and Kingston deflected criticism by narrating themselves as the rightful stewards of local and regional economies. In this section, I explore this dynamic with two examples.

6.4.1 Boycott Barnfox!

Several months into the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, an Instagram account called "Boycott Barnfox" was created by an Ulster County-born white woman in her 20s, living between Kingston and NYC. She was motivated by a desire to document and archive dissenting opinions from the community opposed to runaway gentrification (Brown 2020). The account created an opportunity for informal organizing, but it also sparked a flurry of social media circulation. In the fray, someone allegedly made death threats on social media against the Barnfox co-founders. Then, according to the boycott organizers, Barnfox

systematically blocked any Instagram account holders who followed the "Boycott Barnfox" account, regardless of whether they took part in the negative comments. With avenues of communication shutting down, the Boycott folks began to organize a public list of demands: that Barnfox make affordable memberships available for locals, that they make free WiFi available to Kingston students, that they allow local non-profits and community groups to utilize the space for free, and that they donate small portions ($15 per $325-$495 monthly membership was suggested) to local community groups. Then they organized a virtual town hall with the owners of Barnfox, Tim Tedesco and Freddy Pikovsky.

On the Zoom call with several dozen people in attendance, the discussion began calmly but quickly escalated. One attendee, a man named Kris, shouted over others, asking what gave the townhall organizers the right to single out one small business with demands. Barnfox, he argued, served the community of other small business owners who were very invested in Kingston and in need of a co-working space. His repeated warning to other small business owners in attendance was *what stops these agitators for coming after you*? Several attendees shared his perspective, even if they disapproved of his intensity. An audience member named Johnny wrote in the chat: "Attracting experienced talent to Ulster County is vital to grow our ability to build and created [sic] businesses and grow opportunity for all." To which another, named Phoebe, replied "Ulster County is rich with experienced talent, talent that can often be overshadowed and undermined by business and attractions that cater to a more affluent crowd, one mainly comprised of upstate weekenders and non-natives."

Participants on the call continued to point this out that Kingston and Hudson were at tipping points, and that Barnfox's business was organized in service of those tipping the scales toward higher costs of living and the displacement of long term residents. Some

pointed out that Barnfox opened two weekender-oriented luxury co-working spaces and Hudson Valley concierge systems in the middle of a significant and obvious historic juncture that was undeniably restructuring the fabric of land ownership, labor and employment, community composition, and visons of the future in two historically close knit, working class cities. But rather then engage this context, Barnfox founders described what efforts they had already made to engage the community – hiring a 23 year old community engagement manager from another county, organizing community yoga days and free events, and hosting canned food drives for the food bank – and suggested that those efforts should be enough. Their defenders focused on positioning themselves within the robust communities of small entrepreneurs and creatives who they identified as the backbone of Kingston's economic past, present, and future. Deflecting criticism by invoking small business artisans as saviors of a struggling small town is a move away from accountability and toward innocence.

6.4.2 "Shockingly anti-tourist!"

Along with new businesses like Barnfox, AirBnB has become a prominent feature in the community fabric. Many new building owners invest specifically in high-end renovations and luxury accommodations with the vision of running a popular AirBnB that capitalizes on the agrarian and artisanal aesthetic. Wide planked floors, hand-hewn beams, and farm style kitchens are often desirable elements of AirBnBs in Hudson Valley cities, towns, and villages.

In the City of Hudson, community concern about AirBnB is divided. On one hand, AirBnBs generate significant local tax revenue, not just in lodging and sales tax, but through the economic impact of tourist spending (HDC 2020). On the other, hundreds of

dwellings that once housed people in long term arrangements now welcomed a weekly flood of strangers. Like many of the recent changes, the speculation in AirBnB has hit working-class communities and communities of color the hardest. In interviews conducted by the Hudson Catskill Housing Coalition for their video series "Our Voices," residents of color reflect on gentrification, the housing shortage, and what is being lost. Bertha Clark, who spoke about Bliss Towers in Chapter 4, complained that there are *no* available and affordable apartments anywhere in town. "It's all AirBnBs, and if it's apartments, they want $1500, and they're gonna make sure a Black person is not gonna move in there" (HCHC 2022a). "The gentrifiers who exist in Hudson," says local young person, artist, and activist Dezjuan Smith in another video, "I know they love this place because, you know, quote unquote, 'it's diverse, it's amazing.' But like, if there's no more affordable housing, what makes Hudson a diverse place will be gone" (HCHC 2022b).

Marginalized residents have begun organizing against this threat of displacement in several ways. In 2017 and 2018, a coalition of community organizers worked to elect the City's first ever Black mayor, Kamal Johnson, a progressive candidate born and raised in Hudson. In the same year, they also elected a new progressive majority to the city's legislative body, the Common Council. In 2019, the Council introduced legislation to place a 6 month moratorium on permits for new short term rental listings. In 2020, as the pandemic started to shake both the housing market and the service industry, the Council followed up with legislation that imposed a series of regulations and restrictions on AirBnBs. The regulations included new code enforcement and inspection provisions, signage and fire safety guidelines, and the need to notify neighbors within 150ft of the listing. Most importantly, the legislation limited regular AirBnB operation to owner-

operators who lived full time in the same building as the listing. In the strictest version of the legislation, instead of grandfathering in existing operators to continue indefinitely, the law included a sunset period of 2 years, giving landlords currently operating Airbnb's time to pivot to regular long-term tenants after typically making extensive investments in renovating and furnishing a short term rental space.

Coalitions invested in the tourism economy pushed back. In June 2020, the Hudson Development Corporation (HDC) released a report summarizing the significant economic impact of each bed available for rent across Hudson's hotels and AirBnBs, arguing implicitly that the city stood to lose about $32,000 in annual economic activity for every AirBnB bedroom forced offline. Although the context for the legislation was the severe and widely recognized shortage of affordable housing, the impact of AirBnB on the housing market was not mentioned in the report, nor in the opening comments and presentation at a town hall meeting that HDC hosted with local councilperson John Rosenthal. Instead, these topics were debated in the open question and answer session via Zoom. Exchanges both in the conversation and in the Zoom chat reveal, once again, how people invested in the tourism economy often dismiss serious concerns about displacement by valorizing tourist oriented businesses as the saviors of the town. Consider the following excerpts from the conversation:

> *Krystal Heinz: "John, you said that we need housing- has the council investigated any of the housing in surrounding communities, Greenport, Catskill, Claverack? I understand a desire to be in Hudson, but in two square miles, we have limited housing stock […]"*

John Rosenthal: "To the first point. I don't know if you're asking me to then suggest that people just move out of the community-

Krystal: I just, you know, places get expensive, and people move. I would love to have a house on the beach. I can't afford it. And well…

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Michael: "Well, this is Michael the owner of [Nautical Nest Hudson, a boutique bed and breakfast] […] My experience is, you know, seems like at least eight months out of the year, we're sold out, you know, which is good, good for the town for obvious reasons. […] If you start taking away beds there, people can't come up to the city, we will strangle the city's economy and in every single way. […] But to now talk about removing our livelihoods from people who've been operating in the past to me doesn't make sense.

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Greg: "And what's the government doing about the drug dealing on State Street and about the murder happened last month, the city people aren't causing these problems. […]I think we should welcome with open arms people who want to spend 50 bucks for an entree in town."

Greg especially says the quiet part out loud. State Street is a historically Black and working-class street, part of the original urban renewal area in Hudson, and where Bliss Towers is situated today. Greg references the murder of a Black teenage boy, who had been an active member of the ReGen Garden club and student at the Social Justice Leadership Academy, and who had been shot and killed by another young person earlier that summer. Greg, however, fails to see how $50 entrees are related to the forces disrupting multi-generational

close-knit communities in Hudson, and how that disruption, precarity, criminalization, and reinforced poverty creates the conditions for violence.

The chat featured even more direct commentary, elevating AirBnB landlords not only as saviors of the town but as victims at risk of losing their homes (rather than their investments), as the following selection [sic] reveals:

John Schobel: *Lots of people don't want to be full time landlords, and many of them have purchased and renovated properties.*

Michael G: *if you kill short term rentals, you kill tourism and you kill the town*

John Schobel: *That ASSUMES that they will put them on the market.*

dylan weidman: *City was fine before tourism*

Sara Black: *What will they do, leave them empty?*

Britt Bulla: *That assumes they'd go on the market.*

Kristal Heinz: *Perhaps rents are expensive because of the high tax rate here in Hudson?*

johndarby: *THEY ARE FORCING PEOPLE TO PUT THERE HOMES ON THE MARKET*

Michael G: *city was not fine. are you kidding?*

Michael G: *city was poor*

[...]

Sara Black: *They're compelling landlords to rent units to people who live here at market rates.*

John Schobel: *I'm going to sell mine - it'll become a one family home. Many will. Less rooms = less dollars for hudson = less need for workforce houses.*

Monica Byrne: *Even if all the STR's that aren't owner occupied, became available, the market rate would still be a representation of the investment in the property.*

John Kane: *Agreed. City was definitely not thriving by any economic metric before tourism came.*

Sara Black: *If a landlord can't afford that, they didn't make a wise investment.*

Shaun H: *i have a multi unit-4 apartments— 1 is STR. I keep the other 3 LT Rentals very affordable (section 8) only because I can cover costs with the 1 STR in the building. No plans to displace those great long term residents. Without STR there's no economic balance.*

Michael G: *and btw those homes back on the market will not be "affordable"*

johndarby: *IT WOULD SEEM YOU ARE VERY ANTI TOURISM*

John Schobel: *Stunningly anti-tourist.*

Eric De Feo: *I discovered Hudson via Airbnb, and then moved here. Hudson has really old housing stock - I would imagine a lot of the money made is reinvested in renovation/upkeep.*

John Schobel: *OFFER ADDITIONAL VISION FOR ECONOMIC PROSPERITY THEN. But don't kill the golden goose.*

dylan weidman: *Stuningly anti poor people*

In the above excerpts, people invested in the tourism economy represent AirBnB regulation as a life and death matter for the town's economy and for the business owners and landlords who depend on tourists to protect the value of their investments. Individual landlords are described as simply sustaining themselves and the old buildings that they carefully restored with extra income earned from short term rentals. Even though the law protects the ability of owner operators to list their primary residence or units attached to their primary residence on AirBnB with few restrictions, multiple attendees said the law would force residents to give up their homes. The message is that, before the tourism economy, the city was too poor to solve problems around drugs and violence. AirBnB owners were not causing those problems, they were solving them.

Narratives of the Hudson Valley as a place where visitors and transplants can find meaningful or authentic connection to an **artisanal and agrarian sense of place** function as moves to **agrarian innocence.** The stories that business owners and investors are telling justify

their arrival as people who have a *right*—an invitation, even—not only to make a life in the Hudson Valley, but to reinvent the place in their image. By polishing the motivations of investors, developers, and wealthy consumers into a discourse of authentic connections to land (to nature, to a sense of place), to labor (via the ownership of one's own entrepreneurial efforts), to community (to creative peers, to the everyday intimacies of neighbors), and to history (via the stewardship of old buildings and of regional industrial heritage), these narratives obscure the connections between a luxury tourism economy and a visceral pattern of racialized displacement that has already damaged and threatens to entirely evict generations worth of working- and middle-class Black and Brown communities, histories, and relationships to place.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS

An agrarian and artisanal sense of place is rooted in idealized and whitewashed imaginations about the past, present, and future of the Hudson Valley; that sense of place is at the root of a renewed, heavily capitalized, and state-subsidized rural revitalization agenda focused on regional tourism and high-end amenities. People who participate in this agenda are described as hungry for more meaningful and less extractive relationships to land, labor, community, and history, and they've recognized the Hudson Valley as a place where those relationships feel possible. When situated within broader flows of concentrated state and private capital, including the sedimentation of past patterns, they are directly implicated in the destruction of Black, Brown, and working-class ability to remain and belong in place. The resulting cultural and economic exclusion and displacement of marginalized communities of color is obvious, palpable, and publicly contested. In conflicts over the impacts, however, agents of this rural revitalization agenda often invoke an agrarian and

artisanal sense of place as a move to agrarian innocence, a way to normalize and justify their activities while ignoring or actively discrediting the communities harmed.

Within racial capitalist and settler colonial logics, relationships to land, labor, community, and history require dehumanization, organized by instruments of private property, eviction, policing, confinement, and erasure. In the Hudson Valley, the dominant coalition of interests is narrating visceral changes in the landscape, where long term residents face significant precarity in the aftermath of organized abandonment, as a regenerative plan for the regional economy where the future *depends* on urban-rural tourists. Actors mobilizing the most recent Hudson Valley urban-rural development plan tell stories of land, labor, community, and history that normalize Black and working-class placelessness and absence.

As noted through various stories in this chapter, this process *is* contested. One recent example is the Juneteenth Freedom March in June 2020, spearheaded by Mike Alert, a Black, Hudson-born student and Social Justice Leadership Academy alum. Mike had a vision for young people in Hudson and Catskill to march towards each other across the adjoining Rip Van Winkle Bridge, to meet in the middle over the Hudson River, and to show their unity behind three calls to action: “Defend Black Life, Defund the Police, Fund Black Futures.” (image 6.2). When Mike posted the photograph below to his social media accounts after the march, he captioned it with the phrase “History Made!” From the bridge on that sunny day, working-class youth of color asserted their continuation of long and personal histories of Black and Brown place in the Hudson Valley, and their visions for the future here.

Image 6.1 View of the Juneteenth Freedom March from the Hudson River, 2020. Image courtesy of the Social Justice Leadership Academy.

CHAPTER 7

NON-INNOCENT STRATEGIES FOR FORGOTTEN PLACES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As the previous chapters demonstrate, patterns organizing the distribution of resources for place- and life-making in the Hudson Valley are changing. Renewed possibilities for urban-rural tourism and agricultural industries have shown their viability, and so the residual landscapes of past economic regimes—old brick yards, textile mills, timber framed barns, and close-knit urban neighborhoods—are once again up for reinterpretation. In this chapter, I show how this pattern holds across the Hudson Valley's carceral geographies, where recent efforts to reduce state budgets and close underutilized and expensive facilities have opened opportunities to redevelop carceral sites into spaces that serve new regional agendas. In recognition of this emergent conjuncture, this chapter considers the question: where might organizers invested in food and farming locate the sites and practices of struggle against racialized displacement in the Hudson Valley?

The previous two chapters, it is useful to note, already include some examples of sites and practices relevant to this question. The Rip Van Winkle Bridge, for example, was a chosen site for a specific practice, the Juneteenth Freedom March and a banner drop uniting two sides of the river; the banners, incidentally, were made by three farmers. Many farmers and gardeners that I spoke with have already been participating in and experimenting with intersectional methods of mutual aid and community projects in response to recent

escalations in displacement crises. This is not an opportunity to map the strategies of emergent community organizing – this dissertation cannot hold that project. Instead, I have shown how invocations of an agrarian and artisanal sense of place serve as durable shields for actors organizing resources in the interests of racial capitalism. This chapter investigates sites and practices for disabling and dismantling an artisanal and agrarian sense of place, and practices for pursuing the creation of abolition geographies.

I begin by examining three accounts of recent and ongoing shifts at the interface of food, agriculture, and carceral geographies that I observed while working with the Freedom Food Alliance: a transitioning prison farm, a decommissioned women's prison reimagined as a food hub, and a policy limiting incarcerated people's access to fresh foods and community support. In each case, we can witness how the dehumanization of incarcerated people and their communities, as well as the annihilation of working-class BIPOC place in the Hudson Valley, are core logics and processes that give internal coherence to proposed redevelopment plans. Each shift is unfinished, and there are many more like them yet to come as "decarceration" follows shifting state development strategies and needs. In this context, the landscapes that the Victory Bus traversed each week can be understood as examples of what Gilmore called "forgotten places," places made by sedimented histories of racialized, organized abandonment. Forgotten places are rich with critical linkages that can make certain non-innocent political formations imaginable. In this chapter, I describe how the Freedom Food Alliance and other abolitionist food and agriculture projects in the region are rewriting racialized and dehumanizing logics of urban-rural economic development in New York. If organizers invested in food and farming learn to see and cultivate political relationships within forgotten places, they

may be able to form and leverage power in the emergent conjuncture, to intervene in the unsettled agendas transforming the landscape.

As I close this chapter, I reflect briefly on ways that some members of the good food coalition have moved toward anti-racist practice, noticing three thematic methods: to tell the whole story, to follow the leadership of marginalized communities, and to distribute resources beyond the scarcity mindset. Noticing limits and weakness in these methods individually and wholistically, I then offer two additional methods, "somatic abolition" and "reselecting our ancestors," as practices for imagining relationships to land, labor, community, and history that may be useful for people seeking to engage in abolition geographies.

7.2 CARCERAL GEOGRAPHIES OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

My study of Hudson Valley carceral geographies started when I began organizing with the Victory Bus Project, a transportation service for people in New York City with incarcerated loved ones in the Hudson Valley. The Victory Bus was co-founded in 2011 by a young Black farmer, Jalal Sabur, and Herman Bell, at the time a political prisoner incarcerated for nearly 40 years. Sabur and Bell launched the Victory Bus in response to budget cuts at the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), which had resulted in the termination of publicly funded, free-to-use prison visit transit services. These prison busses had connected people in New York City to their loved ones incarcerated hours away in rural upstate communities, and in the absence of their vital service, a private market of transit providers sprung up. Many private services came with strict rules, high prices, and inflexible schedules, so Sabur, Bell, and others started a grassroots service run by farmers, incarcerated people, and their families. They offered door-to-door visit transportation, supportive community, organizing

opportunities, and fresh food for people on the inside and the outside of prisons. I worked with the Victory Bus team part-time for 18 months in 2015 and 2016.

The service was grassroots. Each week, ride organizers, typically people who used the service themselves, called through their networks and asked who needed a ride. We would work together to figure out how many boxes of food we needed and what should go in them. Strawberries were ready in time for Father's Day. One farm had callaloo. Another always had potatoes. Throughout the week, I would support the effort by gathering or confirming orders, picking up the food, and getting it all into cold storage an hour away. On Saturdays, I joined many small- and medium-scale direct-to-consumer farmers and farmworkers on the road in the dark morning, making their way to markets. In New York City, The Victory Bus was also joining a steady flow of people leaving the city to come upstate. Some were coming for an AirBnB in Livingston or Hudson or for a second home in Rhinebeck or Ghent. Some were boarding private prison busses before dawn to arrive at their destination in time for visitation hours (Boryga 2014). The Victory Bus and the produce driver (me or occasionally another volunteer) would meet on or near prison campuses. The service rotated each week between several hubs, each with 3 or 4 facilities. Some hubs were busier for us than others, and I became familiar enough with the routes to drive them from memory. Many more I only visited once or twice, and some prisons we never serviced. I made a point to visit those sites on my own.

In this work, I encountered a wide range of features and patterns that illustrated processes of carceral development in the region over time. For example, our destinations were often carceral campuses with a cluster of several facilities – men's and women's prisons, prisons at different security levels, work release sites, processing sites, secure centers, youth prisons run by the Department of Child and Family Services. Their arrangement, composition, and situation

relative to their surroundings pointed towards histories of carceral development. Some prisons, like Shawangunk (built in 1983), are low slung, relatively invisible brick buildings, nestled behind hundreds of acres of rolling fields. Ulster (built in 1990), a medium security men's facility, is non-descript in the periphery of the castle like Eastern (built in 1900) (Image 7.1). Old prisons like Eastern and Fishkill (1896) tower over nearby towns or roads, or, like Sing Sing (1826) and Green Haven (1942), are encased in high and imposing ramparts. In clustered campuses, the proximity of visibly old and visibly new facilities charts the leap in pace of carceral construction between the first 200 years of the project and the following 20 years (Norton 2020). Patterns of carceral visibility, prison situations, and aesthetic coding reveal how the coalitions and agendas that concretized carceral development in the region positioned their projects in relation to the broader political and moral economies of the valley.

Image 7.1 View of Eastern Correctional Facility in Napanoch, NY, 2016.

7.2.1 "Criminals, not farmers:" closing prison farms

At Eastern Correctional Facility this pattern is particularly clear, according to a feature on the New York State Correction History Society (NYSCHS) webpage, a simple but rich digital archive run by retired DOCCS worker Thomas McCarthy. Eastern was built "like an upstate cloisters - a fortress, with the mountains in back and the Rondout Creek in the front" (NYSCHS n.d.). "Conceived as a 'reformatory,'" writes the NYSCHS blogger, presumably McCarthy, "it was intended as a more helpful and hopeful place than the state prisons. The site was selected on the strength of its farmable land, fresh water, ready supply of lumber and stone, and its proximity to existing and planned transportation systems" (ibid). The author traces Eastern's shifting role in the carceral project, first as a reformatory for boys, followed by a 45-year run as an institute for developmentally disabled adults, before shifting to back to a reformatory in the 1960s, and finally converting, in 1973, to a maximum security prison for men and boys 16 years and older. McCarthy assigns Eastern a reputation for competent, ethical, and humane management. He claims that administrative leadership invested in standardized procedure and professionalism at Eastern in the 70s and 80s, paving the way for a culture of fairness, as opposed to "arbitrariness and favoritism," across DOCCS (ibid). In 2005, a piece in *The New York Times* noted that Eastern was generally regarded as the best maximum facility for an incarcerated person to be placed in, because of its abundance of enriching programs, vocational training, and opportunities to earn bachelor's degrees through a nearby private liberal arts college (Buruma 2005).

At Eastern in 2016, while working with the Freedom Food Alliance, I noticed a feature that stood out among the other sites I visited. Approaching the campus from the road one morning, I studied the large orienting sign that points visitors, delivery workers, or staff in different directions (image 7.2). At the bottom of the sign, an arrow pointing left was simply

labeled “Local Farm.” I followed the road to the left, wrapping behind the main buildings and finding no signs discouraging my access. Several agricultural buildings came into view, including a silo with a red sign that simply read “The Local Farm” (image 7.3). There was a nice greenhouse that, on closer inspection, was overgrown and not in use, and a large white metal shed oddly labeled “The Red Barn,” with a Dutch style wooden barn, also white, to the rear. These buildings were marked like agricultural fetish objects. “The Local Farm” and “The Red Barn” are iconic but empty signifiers of agrarianess. While I did not confirm details about these specific buildings, it is reasonable to assume that this site was part of an agricultural vocational training program, one of many that had operated in New York prisons. Across this system, incarcerated farm workers in New York have raised vegetables, grains, beef and dairy cows, providing their products—meat, milk, sour cream—to their own prison kitchens and selling the surplus on the open market. Eastern’s vocational dairy program at the historied Eastern Colony Farm surrounding the prison, was even given a Dairy of Distinction award by the American Dairy Association in 1995 (NYSCHS nd, Nearing 2016).

The same pattern of DOCCS budget cuts that would end public prison visit transportation in 2011 also shuttered 12 agricultural vocational training programs in 2009, including the one at Eastern and at four other Hudson Valley prisons: Sullivan, Greene, Green Haven, and Shawangunk. Although the programs are noted in local reporting as successful “rehabilitation” tools (Nearing 2016, Kryszak 2009), they also frustrated local farmers with subsidized competition, and the costs of security for their essentially un-paid work force meant that they still operated at a steep loss (costing $3.4 million annually across the state). For incarcerated dairy workers, positions in agricultural vocational programs were often considered desirable because of the ability to be outside, in fresh air, caring for animals. DOCCS spokesperson Eric Kriss,

Image 7.2 Orienting sign for Eastern Correctional Facility, 2016

Image 7.3 The Local Farm at Eastern Correctional Facility, 2016

however, was quoted in 2009 saying that these workers were "criminals, not farmers by trade," and that skills learned on the farm were less relevant to a "majority of inmates [who] come from and return to urban areas" (Kryszak 2009).

Ideologies and economies of incarceration in New York have relocated racialized and working class people from urban centers into shifting agricultural contexts since 1818. Across these two centuries, agriculture has shifted in and out of fashion as a "rehabilitative" strategy. In a 1926 annual report for a carceral reform school for girls in Hudson, for example, the board of directors justified purchasing a neighboring farm, saying "Bringing the girls from the cities, who have never had contacts with nature, in harmony with the great outdoors, gives a thrill for new life" (Immarigeon 2013 p. 18). Yet, by 2009, right as the wave of young farmers in Chapter 5 were growing a regional political economy organized around farms and rural tourism, Kriss reaffirmed that incarcerated people no longer have a place in the agricultural landscapes that surrounded them. Closing these programs would open 2,000 acres across the state, including nearly 800 in the Hudson Valley, that could be leased to local farmers. Those farmers would primarily cut the fields for hay, a critical and land intensive component of the dairy industry's supply chain. The money saved and the lease revenue generated, Kriss noted, would make a dent in DOCCS's budget gap, with the added benefit of "preserv[ing] the properties as active farmland" (ibid).

Over the last few years, the future of the farm at Eastern, called the Colony Farm, has been up for debate. A 2018 feasibility study, funded in part with $25,000 earmarked by U.S. Senator Charles Schumer, considered the development of the Colony Farm for mixed use agritourism and outdoor recreation. A local farmer named John Adams, whose multi-generational family farm includes a significant agri-tainment operation, has been a central

booster for the vision of utilizing the Colony Farm for recreational and agricultural tourism. Though the project has not progressed since the feasibility study, it remains an open item on the local development agenda, and in 2021, Adams argued again for his vision in the local press: "Instead of being a prison town, we could be a recreational gateway community," he said. "We could provide amenities for tourists" (Callahan 2021).

7.2.2 Urban Green Food: re-developing closed prisons

Other prison towns are staking a claim in economies driven by food, agriculture, and tourism. On a hill above the city of Beacon, a prison called Fishkill houses 1,800 men in multiple security levels. Just down the street, however, a minimum security prison for women now sits empty. This prison, called Beacon Correctional Facility, had only opened in 1981 but was scheduled for closure in 2013 in another round of DOCCS budget cuts. The same round of budget cuts (alongside damage from Hurricane Sandy in 2012) also shuttered the Bayview women's prison in lower Manhattan; with these two closures, the state eliminated minimum security facilities serving adult women in New York and ended significant work-release opportunities for incarcerated women near New York City. Both prisons were slated for re-development.

In 2014, the Empire State Development Corporation (ESD) issued a call for proposals for the redevelopment of Beacon Correctional Facility. They received just one response prepared by the Doe Fund, an NYC non-profit focused on transitional services for formerly incarcerated people and unhoused people. The Doe Fund imagined turning the 36 acre plot into a workforce development center for formerly incarcerated people. They envisioned:

> "a place to link Hudson Valley farms with New York City restaurants and distribution points. [Doe] proposed creating a food processing and distribution

> hub that would wash, pack, process and distribute produce from local, small and mid-sized farms. The site would also have a working farm. And a youth program would provide training and paid work in the culinary arts; food processing; warehouse operations; sales and marketing; and commercial driving, logistics and distribution" (Ferro 2017).

Beacon, commuting distance from NYC and readily accessible by MTA train, could have anchored a unique project that served formerly incarcerated people and working class youth, centering them within the economic opportunities surrounding an artisanal and agrarian Hudson Valley. Local officials at every level of government, however, came together to oppose the plan. They argued that Doe's proposal was "inconsistent with the site's mixed-use, recreational and destination development potential" (Simms 2019). "It really needs to be something creative, something innovative and something that really bolsters the economy of the region," then Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro said (Ferro 2017). Without local political support, The Doe Fund withdrew its proposal in 2017.

ESD reissued the call for proposals in 2018, and the following year selected a newly formed coalition called Urban Green Food to redevelop the site, promising $6 million in state support after the project cleared additional rounds of feasibility and approval. Urban Green Food is a partnership between a real estate development firm, Urban Green Builders LLC, along with a local mission-driven non-profit farm and a local artisanal bakery. Their proposal included a small farm, commercial kitchen, 103-room hotel, recreational spaces, athletic spaces (including a track facility and a velodrome), "maker spaces" for local artisans, and classrooms. The proposal was an artisanal and agrarian grab-bag of uses that satisfied local officials' sense of mixed-use, destination development potential. In an ESD press release, Urban Green Builders principal Eric

Anderson was quoted, saying "Urban Green Food is thrilled to get to work on this project that uniquely combines some of our greatest passions—hospitality, agriculture, sports and recreation—in a town and in a valley we've long loved and admired" (Sucato 2019).

It is worth noting that Anderson and a handful of other "urban green" LLCs registered to him are seeking to redevelop several historic buildings or campuses into mixed use athletic, hospitality, arts, or residential spaces across the region, with poor results. The sites include a former state-run homeless shelter in Chester, NY and an apartment building in Poughkeepsie originally built in 1911. The latter building collapsed under Anderson's watch in 2018, injuring one person and prompting several lawsuits (Pantuso 2020). Yet, Anderson was still considered eligible for state funded development opportunities and was awarded the Beacon bid the year following the collapse. Since their selection, Urban Green Food has not advanced the project through additional rounds of state and local permitting and approvals. At a recent Beacon City Council meeting, one resident criticized the project, calling it "pie in the sky," and a "bike farm" (Simms 2022). It remains to be seen if Urban Green Food's vision will come to fruition, but their selection as stewards of the Beacon project shows that state and local redevelopment priorities are aligned behind an agrarian and artisanal sense of place.

7.2.3 "Bring Back Care Packages:" prison food and community connection

Other vagaries in DOCCS budgets and political contexts in recent years have impacted access to life sustaining foods for people in prison. Prison food is deadly in New York State as it is elsewhere, with nutrition deficits that actively shorten and worsen lives. Commissaries rarely if ever offer fresh foods or minimally processed foods, and what *is* available (like a small selection of bananas, onions, or apples) is both incredibly expensive relative to rates of incarcerated pay and often rotten, according to folks that I have organized with. Therefore,

friends, family members, and abolitionist organizers often support incarcerated people with fresh and nourishing food, books, clothes, toiletries, and other supplies delivered through the mail or at in-person visits. Although most incarcerated people do not receive this support, many have written about the broad impacts of care packages inside, that that are vital lifelines to family, community, and nourishment.

While working with the Freedom Food Alliance, the impact of policies governing incarcerated people's access to fresh food and care packages was tangible in our weekly routines. For example, depending on the facility or the type of visit, Victory Bus riders might take the food we offered along with other foods they purchased inside to share during a family reunion visit or to give as a care package to their loved one. Anything brought in would first be carefully examined by staff for contraband, banned items, and compliance with packages limits. Incarcerated people have restrictions on the weight, number, and contents of packages they can receive each month, so Victory Bus riders also regularly opted to take some or all of the food back to their homes. After riders went inside for their visit, there was typically a shuffle of remaining bags of produce from my trunk into coolers on the Victory Bus van. However, at some facilities, classified as "TV Facilities," packages were all but banned. This is because of an illustratively arbitrary policy trading TV access for access to regular packages. The TV facility policy allows incarcerated people to organize a referendum, deciding whether to make personal television sets available for purchase at the commissary in exchange for limiting the number of packages that incarcerated people can receive from two per month to two per *year* and containing *only* food – no books, toiletries, or clothes. For the many incarcerated people who do not receive packages from external support systems, the choice may be straightforward. At the one TV facility in our network, we always packed the food to go home.

Recently DOCCS has operationalized changes to their internal policies governing care packages (Directive 4911) and limiting people's already precarious access to nourishing foods. A short lived change to Directive 4911 in 2017 banned care packages all together unless they were ordered through a private "secure vender" system, with only 6 private vendors authorized. Arguments for the ban focused on security issues and screening difficulties, but a coalition of organizations fought back vehemently. After significant social and prestige media attention created mounting pressure, Governor Andrew Cuomo reversed the policy and packages returned to normal in January 2018 (Kelly 2018). In 2020, when DOCCS imposed COVID-19 restrictions that stopped in-person visits and all hand-delivered care packages, mailed packages became a lifeline for many people inside. Then, in spring 2022, DOCCS amended Directive 4911 again, this time with what organizers considered a strategically more palatable framework. Rather than enforcing the use of a "secure vendor" system, the amended directive says that all packages must now come through "a vendor," and that home-assembled packages delivered through the mail or in person would be banned. Critics of the ban note that, because vendors like Amazon or Walmart provide little to no information about product weight or shipping methods, the new policy effectively shunts people seeking to support incarcerated loved ones to the same market of prison-specific suppliers enforced by the "secure vendor" program (Dholakia 2022). These vendors are *prohibitively* more expensive for working class people who support their loved ones through careful saving and shopping.

DOCCS's justification for this policy was focused again on security, blaming a recent spike in violence and overdose deaths inside prisons on contraband arriving in the screened care packages. Critics note that DOCCS did not supply any kind of data supporting this claim, that improvements in screening or drug treatment might be a more direct solution than banning care

packages, and that, as is widely understood, prison staff operate the primary supply lines for contraband inside prisons (Hamilton 2022). This ban, critics argue, uses incarcerated people and their families as scapegoats for structural issues while leaving deadly conditions unremedied. Further, organizers against the policy, inside and outside prisons, claimed that it was passed to appease the correctional officer's (CO) union, members of which were angry over a recent state law limiting their discretionary use of torturous solitary confinement (ibid). The struggle to #BringBackCarePackagesNY is ongoing at the time of writing.

For now, organizers connected with the Freedom Food Alliance still focus on using nourishing foods to build community in the wake of mass incarceration. The Sing Sing Families Coalition, founded by a Victory Bus family, has been hosting monthly free farm stands on the sidewalk outside of the prison for two years. The food comes from the Freedom Food Alliance's new project, Sweet Freedom Farm, and several other farms and food aggregators that make donations. As of August 15, 2022, visitors to Sing Sing can no longer take the food inside, but the farm stands have continued, and the coalition is active in renewed efforts to permanently protect incarcerated people's access to life-sustaining foods and community connection through care packages.

7.2.4 "Grow food, not prisons:" a new urban rural relationship

In each of the above examples – the Colony Farm reimagined as a gateway for tourists, the Beacon women's prison slated to be a hotel and "bike farm," and the efforts to restrict incarcerated peoples access to nourishing foods, we can easily identify processes of place annihilation at work, where Black, Brown, and working class people from predominately urban communities are discursively and materially barred from benefitting or participating in the life-sustaining bounties of an agrarian and artisanal Hudson Valley. In each of the above examples,

there are also direct interfaces wherein farmers and rural economic development advocates can identify real stakes in the outcome of "decarceration" and "prison reform." Likewise, struggles to increase access to life sustaining foods, community connection, and connection to the land for incarcerated people and people returning home from prison have value. At the same time, these strategies might run the risk of reaffirming carceral extraction, making prisons appear reformable and more humane. There is a deep need for expanded abolitionist critique and abolitionist organizing in the Hudson Valley, to prepare communities for more closures, more transitions, more rushes of state and private investment.

Even in contexts that are politically aligned with racial justice, white supremacy culture is still a barrier for considering abolition and seeing abolition geographies. For example, when I first began organizing with the Victory Bus, I often struggled with how to explain this project in public and to my peers. I was keenly aware of the baggage that might accompany my representation of the project as a white farm worker and non-profit worker. Without care and intention (or even with it), I ran the risk of objectifying incarcerated people and their loved ones as people made "good" by "good food." I also struggled to write funding pitches for the project because I was used to grassroots campaign planning focused on structural change made by pressuring strategic targets with clear demands. At the time, as Carruthers (2019) and brown (2017) have described, the social justice-oriented non-profit world was still brimming with a movement building mentality focused on numbers, scale, and big structural change, dominated by a flush of consultants following the success of the Obama for America campaign organizing model. I understood that the ability to raise enough money to continue to offer an affordable, reliable service depended on demonstrating scalability and strategic targeting. Providing direct services was, and still is, often less competitive for funding among progressive avenues.

The Victory Bus, our informal network, was not very legible as strategic within this set of logics. While members would attend protests and support allies and friends organizing to close Rikers Island, to end solitary confinement in New York, to release aging prisoners and parolees, or to mourn violent deaths at the hands of COs, our weekly labors were not focused on typically organizing mobilizations targeting key decision makers who could close more prisons. Instead, the Victory Bus created a humanizing space focused on community care, nourishing food, and disrupting the racialized the urban and rural binary. The Bus asserted that people who have been historically dispossessed and displaced from land and food sovereignty, who are also harmed by the interlocking systems of food apartheid and over-policing in segregated cities, have the right to rest, take up space, nourish themselves and each other, be on, and belong to the land in a place otherwise organized around their violent exclusion. The Bus wove interconnections between the discontinuous forgotten places (Gilmore 2008) where prisoners are from and where they are warehoused, and it disrupted racialized coding about who could participate meaningfully in the nourishing abundance of the Hudson Valley.

As the Victory Bus refused the destruction of Black, Brown, incarcerated, and working-class senses of place and belonging in the Hudson Valley, it produced abolition geographies, networks of people and places where that refusal is cultivated and maintained, where alternative logics are practiced, honed, and shared. Traditions of abolition root this intersectional, grassroots, slow-growing, healing-oriented project in a critical analysis of the racialized production urban-rural space, and in Black agrarian traditions of cooperative economics and direct community care. “Grow food, not prisons” is a chant, slogan, and mission statement that the Freedom Food Alliance uses, which can be understood as a counter agenda for the carceral Hudson Valley. Deceptively simple, the phrase does *not* endorse redevelopment projects like

those planned by Urban Green Food or the Friends of Colony Farm; the goal is not to replace prisons with an agrarian and artisanal sense of place. Rather, the phrase makes us ask what food, farms, and prisons have to do with each other, what forces have entangled them in the landscape, and how coalitions of people organized around growing food might destabilize and denaturalize prison economies and carceral projects, to create something life sustaining.

Milk Not Jails (MNJ) was an organization in New York also focused on this question, as described in a 2012 article in *Edible Manhattan:*

> "What on earth do milk and jails have to do with each other? 'That's the first question everybody asks,' says Lauren Melodia, [MNJ's] founder, who may be the only person in New York City with the background to see the connection. She knows the local food world (she's worked at several Union Square Greenmarket stands and manages a CSA in Bed-Stuy). But she also knows the prison movement, having organized a long—but ultimately successful —campaign to slash the outrageous prices prisoners were being charged for phone calls. After that campaign, the 30-year-old spent a year in an upstate prison town, investigating obstacles to reform. And here's one of the biggest: the farming industry, which used to be the basis of the upstate New York economy, has been decimated by the dominance of mega-processors that set their own (low) prices for what farmers produce. (The biggest of them, Dean Foods, controls 70 percent of the Northeast's milk market.)" (Smith 2012)

MNJ worked to build a strategic alliance of upstate dairy farmers against New York State's prison industry. Their vision was to create a cooperatively owned milk distribution enterprise "big enough to give Dean Foods a run for its money" (ibid). In a 2013 episode of the Laura

Flanders show, MNJ organizers are shown using popular education style theater performances and parades, at county fairs and on city streets, offering ice cream and information about the interconnections between the collapse of the dairy industry, the rise of mass incarceration, the shared harm and shared stakes that consumers and producers of milk can identify, to motivate a prison abolitionist politics. Melodia is shown addressing a small crowd at a state dairy festival, saying "we're here to build an urban rural relationship that's not centered around the prison economy, but around a healthy economic alternative, agriculture." Today, MNJ is apparently disbanded, their agenda unrealized. Urban-rural organizing across forgotten places, however, is still a critical method for destabilizing and dismantling both the carceral regime and the racialized reproduction of an agrarian and artisanal sense of place.

As I noted previously, since the time that the Victory Bus began running, and in the wake of multiple world-shifting uprisings for racial justice, people racialized as white within the Hudson Valley good food coalition have begun engaging a broad spectrum of strategies toward "anti-racism," "racial equity," "diversity, equity, and inclusion," and "racial justice." While this dissertation cannot hold a full analysis of these practices, the next section introduces and considers the limits of three interrelated themes emergent within my study of strategies for racial equity in the good food coalition. I then offer two additional examples of practices emergent in explicitly abolitionist spaces that may be conducive for non-innocent placemaking for people invested in food and land based organizing.

7.3 TOWARD ABOLITION GEOGRAPHIES: METHODS FOR FREEDOM AS A PLACE

"It's just the total lack of awareness," said a former staff person at the National Young Farmers Coalition. "I remember a time when I was thought 'there just aren't that many Black farmers in the Hudson Valley, guess there's not much I can do there.'" Despite

a lot of well-known criticisms, the normalized absence of Black people in the Hudson Valley's good food coalition made it been easy to avoid deeply grappling with questions like: why are organizational membership, staff, representational figures, customers, and audiences almost entirely white, and what does that mean? "There was already so much harm from the good food movement being so white," she remembers, "and appropriating all of the farming practices [developed by Black farmers in the U.S., eg] the CSAs and the land trusts and… There was just no interest from white folks in learning that until… yeah, until you couldn't ignore it."

Many of the people I interviewed shared this person's feelings regarding the whiteness of the food movement over the years prior to 2020. "It's not like I couldn't have done a better job of recognizing why there weren't many farmers of color in the Hudson Valley," she said, "without waiting for [an influential and respected Black farmer] to be like 'your platform's really white,' which is essentially what happened among a few key interventions. Why weren't we listening to Karen Washington [Black farmer in the Hudson Valley and venerable food justice organizer] before that? I think that's the question." As shown in Chapter 5, moves to agrarian innocence are core parts of the reasons why, as well as fear, shame, and an inability to translate growing awareness into tangible, meaningful action. Fear of messing up, fear of losing political power, and fear of losing the farm were recurrent themes for young farmers in survival mode, and their advocates.

Almost every interviewee racialized as white could name a watershed moment for them, when they realized something needed to change in how they related to the good food movement. For some, it was an anti-racism training specifically for white people in the food movement. For others, it was the release of *Farming While Black* (Penniman 2019). For some, it was in 2016,

when another series of filmed state murders of unarmed Black people, combined with growing direct actions and engagements from critics of color, began to peel individual workers and projects away from the colorblind political inertia of their broader communities. For others, it was 2020, when many other patterns of inertia broke as well. In this time, there have been a range of observable ruptures, strategies, and practices emergent in the good food coalition scene toward anti-racism.

Across my study of this shift, I notice three interrelated thematic methods within recent calls for pursuing racial equity. The first is the call to "tell the whole story." Telling the whole story can mean a range of things, from performing land acknowledgements, to acknowledging BIPOC agrarian innovation, to recognizing the invisibilized labor of migrant farm workers, and naming unrecognized contradictions interior to food and farm movement narratives. Telling the whole story is a way to "correct and expand the narratives and representations of agriculture" (NYFC 2016), and to undo the erasure of BIPOC belonging in positions of leadership in agriculture. It is considered a critical step in processes of repair and accountability. Yet, unless accompanied by changes in relationships of power and in processes for organizing resources, changes in representation do not deliver racial equity.

Relatedly, the second theme is the call to defer to the leadership of marginalized communities. Beyond just diversity and inclusion, white anti-racists are recognizing the need to follow the lead of people directly impacted by racial capitalism and settler colonialism. Deferring to marginalized communities might look like handing over the reins of platforms or projects to BIPOC people, bringing on BIPOC leaders, collaborators, or staff, and inviting (and compensating for) critical feedback from frontline community leaders. Of course, as with telling the whole story, deference strategies run the risk of tokenization and extraction, and without

robust engagement in the theories, histories, and practices of liberatory Black and decolonial struggle, tokenized inclusion can often enable co-optation and "justice-washing" of projects that do not challenge racial capitalism. An over-emphasis on deference can also just be a means for white people in multi-racial coalitions to avoid conflict and avoid cultivating their own critical, subjective, or embodied analysis of their shared stake in dismantling white supremacy.

The third theme is the call to meaningfully resource marginalized people and communities, i.e. to move the money, make reparations, and leave behind the scarcity mindset. Being resourceful might look like taking on the heavy lifting for a grant application that primarily benefits a BIPOC organization. It might look like transferring hundreds of acres of land acquired via intergenerational wealth into the possession of BIPOC stewards. Resourcefulness without the scarcity mindset might look transforming expectations associated with wages, productivity, urgency, and rest. One critical aspect of this method is the call to give the money away with few to no restrictions, requirements, or aspects of surveillance. This change is especially significant in processes of grant-making. Widening avenues of reparative investment and wealth transfer is important, but as with the first two themes, heeding this call must be supported by principled relationships and rigorous analyses of the problems at hand, or money may pour into reformist reforms that cement the status quo.

Abolitionist practice – incommensurable, emergent, non-innocent, and rooted in real histories of struggle – is a valuable tool for discernment at this time. To build and inhabit abolition geographies, organizers need methods for principled collective decision making and conflict engagement. They also need methods for orienting those decisions and those resources, not only in an analysis of history and power, but also with respect to subjective and embodied positionality. In the following two sections, I offer two relevant strategies.

7.3.1 "We won't dissociate from us:" somatic abolition

The first strategy I learned at Sweet Freedom Farm. Sweet Freedom Farm grows and harvests organic vegetables, grains, and sugars (maple, sorghum, and apple) on a piece of land that has been a collectively stewarded community farm for nearly 20 years, incubating many small farms, herbalists, and community organizations. The produce grown at Sweet Freedom is distributed through mutual aid networks, emergency food distribution programs, at the Sing Sing farm stand, and at a large, biweekly CSA-style distribution serving 120 working-class BIPOC families in a nearby town. A start up farm, Sweet Freedom is in the early stages of laying a foundation for longer, larger visions. These visions include serving as an incubator for BIPOC-led food and farm cooperatives; welcoming and nourishing people returning from incarceration with housing, community, and well-paying jobs; mentoring and supporting youth of color; and re-producing models of collective land stewardship that create permanently affordable housing and farmland.

Stewarding resources collectively in this context requires enduring, long term relationships that are sturdy enough to weather significant changes and challenges, including conflicts, harms, repairs, or dissolutions. Given that the traumas inflicted by racial capitalism, settler colonialism, and other forms of structural white supremacy are unevenly experienced, welcoming people into collective contexts means needing to be able to listen and relate across difference, to engage and transform conflict, to recognize boundaries and endings, to be able to come and go. At Sweet Freedom Farm, forms of slow cooperative practice are core to the groups understanding of abolition, as demonstrated in the following excerpt from an interview I had with some of the farmers in 2021.

"When capitalism is fully running, everyone is thinking like this," Jalal said, gesturing with hands next to his eyes, to say that everyone has their blinders on, head down in the work. "Farmers, all the young farmers and everybody up here are disassociated like this," he said, again with his hands cupping around his eyes. "But when we're talking about abolition, or a network of abolition farmers, you can't be disassociated anymore. We're like, 'No, we're not gonna be disassociated from us. We're gonna be together.'" Resonant with the broader theme of "farmers in survivor mode," focused on grinding work and unable to organize laterally, Jalal holds abolition as a principle and practice centering relational movement. Likewise, CJ, a farm partner, said that being an abolitionist farm "means that we're not just another farm that's trying to produce vegetables, we're trying to operate in a way where we're being inclusive and…"

"Holding history," Z, who works at the farm, interjected.

"Holding history and holding..." CJ paused. "I think we work really hard to all listen to each other, and to operate under values that are that are moving, working towards that reality. I think it means that the way that we hold conflict is different, I think it means the way that we operate with money is different."

Practices of conflict engagement and decision making over strategies and resources at Sweet Freedom Farm are informed in part by the concept of somatic abolition, developed by Resmaa Menakem (2017). Somatic abolition recognizes the body and embodied experience—including experiences of emotion and of trauma as it impacts and persists in bodies—as a critical terrain for understanding not just how white supremacy is experienced and upheld, but how it can be dismantled. Recognizing the significant impact of embodied experiences of fear, anxiety, despair, and security on maintaining white supremacy culture, somatic abolition recalls trauma informed somatic therapy work, in that it attempts to slow and disable emotional triggers to make

space for nuanced engagement with conflict. Methods of embodied conflict engagement informed by somatic abolition focus on fostering a nuanced awareness of the bodily experiences of stress and emotional reactions surrounding and stemming from conflict, especially conflicts imbued with racialized power discrepancies. In practice as a strategy for disrupting white supremacy, somatic abolition is a skill set that relies on careful listening and witnessing (of oneself as much as other people), methods of verbally resonating in conflict, of slowing conversations down, of encouraging and enabling attention to posture and body language. These conflict strategies do not move quickly, nor do they prioritize certain outcomes, like accepted apologies or continued collaborations, over others. For white people, the potential of somatic abolition is to notice and work to disable the embodied and emotional drivers underlying moves to innocence – especially the shame and fear that white supremacy culture fosters.

In an epithet to Chapter 1, I quoted poet, artist, and activist Ricard Levins-Morales, who said that white anti-racist organizers worry too much about being right, not making mistakes or causing harm. "It's not about that," he said. "There are things in life we don't get to do right. But we do get to do them." (Levins-Morales 2015). When he says that there are things in life that we don't get to do right, he's not discouraging study, care, growth, or accountability. Rather, "the essential thing is that we don't give up and walk away. […] It is important to learn and improve and become wise in the ways of struggle […]. But that comes with time. It comes after the idea of not being in the struggle no longer seems like an option." The task of anti-racist white people is not to be right, or to never harm again. The task is to continually put our shoulders to the extractive "wheel of history," to identify and continually hew our efforts against a structure of support that damages all of us, if unevenly. The task is to abandon innocence, and to understand that not being in struggle is

not an option. These are sustaining orientations for the pursuit of incommensurable, emergent abolition.

7.3.2 "Who are my people?" reselecting our ancestors

The second method resonates with the first, relating to whiteness, identity, history, and accountability in struggle. This method is "reselecting our ancestors." The term comes from Raymond Williams (1961) and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022a) and describes a certain anti-fixity in the transmission of radical lineages across generation. Williams writes:

> "In a society as a whole, and in all its particular activities, the cultural tradition can be seen as a continual selection and re-selection of ancestors. Particular lines will be drawn, often for as long as a century, and then suddenly with some new stage in growth these will be cancelled or weakened, and new lines drawn. In the analysis of contemporary culture, the existing state of the selective tradition is of vital importance, for it is often true that some change in this tradition – establishing new lines with the past, breaking or re-drawing existing lines – is a radical kind of contemporary change. We tend to underestimate the extent to which the cultural tradition is not only a selection but also an interpretation. We see most past work through our own experience, without even making the effort to see it in something like its original terms. What analysis can do is not so much to reverse this, returning a work to its period, as to make the interpretation conscious, by showing historical alternatives; to relate the interpretation to the particular contemporary values on which it rests; and, by exploring the real patterns of the work, confront us with the real nature of the choices we are making." (Williams 1998 p 56)

Reselecting our ancestors *does not* mean reassigning oneself a new, different, or less violent biological or cultural heritage. Rather, recognizing that the selective process even exists may create an opening for recognition of alternative choices. As Gilmore (2022a p 490) summarizes, the concept of re-selecting our ancestors "disavows fixity" in determining how the organization of social life is perpetuated. Instead, we can see how "even the least coherent aspects of human consciousness—feelings—have dynamically substantive shape" (ibid). Feelings, shaped by the accumulated knowledges, narratives, practices, and embodied charges of social life, are a terrain for cohering and organizing struggle. If we understand whiteness as a relationship to self and others that reaffirms racial capitalist extraction, enacts place annihilation, and harms us all, then reselecting ancestors as a white person means recognizing a shared stake in dismantling white supremacy and learning the liberatory traditions that have already imagined, prefigured, and enacted white supremacy's destruction.

One way that I was introduced to this method was at Soul Fire Farm in Grafton, NY, as a participant in an Undoing Racism Farmers Immersion (URFI) program, a week-long workshop for white people in the food movement. This training was the first time that I learned critical histories of the construction of whiteness in laws governing land, labor, and community in the United States. Though I was no stranger to concepts of anti-racism and anti-oppression through my experiences in climate and food justice organizing, this was the first space I had ever shared with white people exclusively focused on learning together and processing, among many things, how whiteness had stolen things from us too: languages, cultural memories, spiritual practices, humanizing relationships to ourselves, our bodies, and other people. We were prompted to consider questions like "What is your history? Who are your people? How did you become white?" (cf Penniman 2018 p 312). The point in

answering “who are my people?” is not to form a stable and fixed identity from which to approach organizing, but instead to recognize the non-totalizing ways we have been produced by whiteness, and the ways we can defect from or betray whiteness. It was one of the most restorative, grounding, and profound experiences in my life. It was also “the first time in decades,” as Soul Fire co-director Leah Penniman described in *Farming While Black,“*that so many European-heritage people had slept, worked, and taken meals on the Land” (2018 p 59).

At Soul Fire, the struggles against the expressions of racial capitalism - food apartheid, mass incarceration, police violence, gentrification and displacement - are indelibly interlinked with the life-affirming labors of growing, preparing, sharing food, and caring for the Land. As Soul Fire hosts dozens of trainings, fellowships, immersions, and alternatives-to-incarceration programs for youth in conflict with the law, primarily and intentionally for BIPOC people, they welcome “thousands of strangers each year, along with their traumas and burdens, to come and heal on this ground. The Land generously and relentlessly composts their pain into hope” (ibid). When a few dozen white people were on the Land for the first time, Penniman - who is a practiced Manye (Queen Mother), initiated in the Vodun/Vodou religion in Odumase-Krobo, Ghana (ibid p 54) – dreamt that the Land was restless and disturbed and inquired about the source of the trouble through divination. She learned that “Azaka, Haitian Spirit of Agriculture, Guardian of Farmland, Friend to Peasants, was confused and upset that there were so many ‘police’ on his farm” (Ibid p. 59). We, the white food movement workers, had offended the Land with our arrogance (ibid). We did not mean to harm the Land, but what we unconciously carried had left an impact on the Land and on the people who stewarded it. To make amends, Penniman invited us to take reparative and restorative action; we could express our humility and gratitude

by making offerings of corn meal and by eating with our hands for the remainder of our time together. I remember casting cornmeal on the ground with a jumble of feelings: gratitude and relief for the invitation to make things right alongside a kind of grief for the lack of reparative practices in my own relationship to the Land.

A sense of alienation from land drives many of the good food coalition actors in Chapters 5 and 6. The question is, how might we tend to that grief as settlers and participants in racialized displacement, without using moves to innocence to reconcile our sense of entitlement to belonging, leadership, resources, and power? Unlike evoking "Old World" artisanal and agrarian craft heritages as many of the actors in Chapters 5 and 6 did, reselecting ancestors is not an innocence project. The point is not to elide, obscure, or bypass realities of inherited legacies of racial violence, nor to subsume, steal, or perform other ancestries to assuage guilt. Rather, it is a call to identify, commit to, practice toward, and situate oneself within liberatory traditions. As Gilmore says, "it is history that gives us a sense of ourselves as a political constituency, which is why we keep re-writing it" (Gilmore 2022b p 33).

7.4 CONCLUSIONS

At a stop on her book tour in Athens, GA in 2019, Leah Penniman opened her talk in a manner familiar to many: she acknowledged the Indigenous communities who have lived on the land where we were now gathered, she invited us to say aloud the names of some of our ancestors and elders who have shaped our lives, and she told us a story about her own ancestors in West Africa at the time of the slave trade. Facing an uncertain and terrifying future, Penniman shared, West African women braided seeds into their hair, believing that there would be a future worth living for themselves and their descendants. They did not give up on us, Penniman said, and so we cannot not give up on our descendants either (cf: Yu

2018). Penniman was clear that these invocations cannot be empty gestures. When we call into the present day the stories and names of our ancestors, elders, and predecessors on the land, we can re-narrate and remake ourselves, our sense of what is possible, and of what work we must do. This is an organizing practice informed by the abolitionist legacy of countless Black and Indigenous stewards whose senses of self, community, and possibility defied the logics of a racial, settler, capitalist worldview.

Learning to see and position ourselves in relation to forgotten places, and to cultivate durable relationships while organizing across them, are critical tools for developing what Gilmore (2022 p 489-90), called an "infrastructure of feeling," the "consciousness-foundation, sturdy but not static, that underlies our capacity to recognize viscerally (no less prudently) immanent possibility as we select and reselect liberatory lineages." An agrarian and artisanal sense of place may be a kind of infrastructure of feeling that organizes social and material relationships in the interests of racial capitalism. But learning to see forgotten places, learning to situate oneself within non-innocent traditions of principled, cooperative struggles against racial capitalism and settler colonialism, can develop the emergent "infrastructures of feeling" that build abolition geographies.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

I have worked to situate and show how logics of racial capitalism and settler colonialism are enrolled in the production of a recognizable "agrarian and artisanal sense of place" in the Hudson Valley, defined by food, agriculture, and rural revitalization through urban-rural migration and tourism. These regional development agendas characteristically normalize the displacement and absence of BIPOC and working class neighbors, collaborators, and leaders, in the past, present, and future. The plans are mobilized by a dynamic coalition of interests, actors who articulate and utilize an agrarian and artisanal sense of place to organize vital resources across the landscape, iteratively and unevenly. Within racial capitalist and settler colonial logics, relationships to land, labor, community, and history require dehumanization, organized by instruments of private property, eviction, policing, confinement, and erasure (see table 8.1). In the Hudson Valley, the dominant coalitions of interests are narrating visceral and dehumanizing changes in the landscape through the romantic agrarian innocence of yeomen, artisans, and other hardworking and self-reliant entrepreneurs.

If we understand that people make places, but not under conditions of their own choosing (Gilmore 2022b), what are the conditions for making places in a way that "come to grips with dehumanization?" (Gilmore 2007 p. 243). In my field work as a scholar organizer focused primarily on conditions for and practices of white anti-racist organizing, I have observed how multi-racial coalitions of activists engage abolitionist (which is to say, Black, decolonial, and

Table 8.1 Schematic summary of an agrarian and artisanal sense of place and "forgotten places" (Gilmore 2008) as they inform relationships to land, labor, community, and history.

	In an artisanal and agrarian sense of place...		**In forgotten places...**
	...racial capitalist and settler colonialism require:	*Agrarian innocence shields racial capitalist relations behind:*	*...incommensurable and emergent abolition envisions:*
Land	Enclosure, dispossession, eviction, alienation, confinement, extraction, precarious tenancy, interrupted stewardship, gentrification	Bucolic farms, idealized viewsheds, romantic and restorative nature, "connection to place," landscape conservation	Collective and cooperative land management, respecting rights and sovereignty of land, rematriation of land to Indigenous stewardship
Labor	Enslavement, wage-slavery, poverty wages, incarcerated workers, globalized networks of labor exploitation.	Artisanal entrepreneurialism, honest work, work that does not hurt anybody, sticking fingers in the soil, knowing your farmer	Labors and wages that sustain and nourish life, collective decision making about labor, slowing work, anti-urgency, labors of love and of healing
Community	Racialized displacement, neighborhood destruction, social isolation, white supremacy culture, barriers to multi-racial working class solidarity.	Interdependent local economies, community service, vibrant creative community, community supported agriculture	Strategies for long-term collective governance, conflict engagement, harm reduction, embodied relationality, rights to leave and to remain, methods of repair
History	Genocide, erasure, displacement, and cooptation, and false linearity	Conservation of historic architecture, conservation of agrarian and artisanal craft, carrying on vital traditions, Old World aesthetics	Telling the whole story, contextualized power relations, solidarities rooted in shared histories, "reselecting ancestors," reparations,

feminist) intellectual frameworks and practical traditions, to cultivate "more humanly workable" relationships to self and to place, for individuals and collectives. The impact of these traditions is visible in moments when agendas are set, decisions are made, conflicts are engaged, collective efforts are delegated and organized, resources are allocated, and relationships are cultivated and

experienced by fleshy bodies and unfixed subjects, across and within an always unfolding matrix of power (Collins 2010).

There are many projects that this dissertation could not hold. In an era of uprisings, pandemics, historic droughts, and many more disruptions, this project deliberately avoided mapping the intimacies of mutual aid and community organizing. Future research outside of the formal constraints of a doctoral dissertation may be able to hold co-authorship for grassroots audiences as a core value. There are vital, time sensitive, and materially consequential projects to prepare for, organize around, and carry out. For example, it was recently determined that Bliss Towers, the urban renewal-era high rise in Hudson, is deteriorated beyond repair and is slated to be demolished and redeveloped in the coming years. I have already begun working with educators, organizers, and archivists to engage the currently dark archive of the Hudson Urban Renewal Agency, rich with strategic plans, property surveys, photographs, transaction records, and relocation files. By illuminating the continued threads of logic justifying Black and working class neighborhood destruction in the past and present, this project may help articulate what is at stake in the next redevelopment plan for the North Bay, and bolster arguments for community-directed reparative investment.

Likewise, many people anticipate that the Hudson Correctional Facility, which transitioned in 2016 from a medium security men's prison to a prison for a small number of minors, could be scheduled for closure and re-development in the next decade. The landscape conservation organization Scenic Hudson has already purchased significant development rights in the surrounding areas and plans to create a park and trail system around the prison. Other neighbors are eager to see the property put on the municipal tax rolls as luxury housing. Some organizers imagine transforming the facility into a community land trust for affordable housing

and food sovereignty, or to utilize the property to enact reparations. The aftermath of COVID-19's impact on Hudson Valley housing and land markets has meant that many real estate consultants, planners, and affordable housing developers are rooting down in the region, and there is a deep need for critical analysis of development initiatives invoking "the community."

One theme that was unaddressed in this work but is critical to future research is non-metaphorical decolonization and "land back" movements, specifically as they relate to cooperative land stewardship structures, land trusts, and landscape conservation. For example, many of the actors described or interviewed in Chapter 5 are involved in affordable farmland preservation projects and, in the wake of critical interventions from and engagements with indigenous activists and thinkers, are examining how their work upholds the primacy of settler stewardship and private property on stolen land. An expanded version of this project would include a more thorough engagement with this interface, examining the impacts of agrarian innocence and how some organizers and advocates are striving to undo them. How settler people racialized as white navigate toward "settler harm reduction" may be a fruitful course of study.

Another unaddressed but essential theme is the question of the non-profit industrial complex (Incite! 2017) and the role of charitable non-profits and private foundations in shaping the region. What are the ethics, risks, and realities of organizing in a significant flood plain for global capital and big philanthropy? There is no more significant example than Peter Buffet (son of world historic billionaire Warren Buffet) and his family foundation, Novo. Novo has been accused of unceremoniously and unilaterally withdrawing promised funding from the redevelopment of the Bayview Correctional Facility (mentioned in the previous chapter) into a restorative justice center for women returning home from incarceration. Instead, Novo consolidated their focus on the City of Kingston and Ulster County, where they are currently

investing tens of millions of dollars annually into projects like the Hudson Valley Farm Hub, Radio Kingston, and dozens of community organizations, enterprises, and services. Novo is not alone, though. A new generation of landed agricultural philanthropists are creating farm and land projects focused on climate resiliency (Wally Farm), food security and nutrition (Sky High Farm), and platforming indigenous artists and thinkers (the Forge Project) in the region.

Meanwhile, since writing began, places like Hudson and Kingston continue to change. Breadfolks suddenly closed in late 2022 amid whispers of a larger franchising project. Barnfox Hudson made the leap from a Warren Street storefront to managing an entire converted 19th century warehouse (previously the headquarters of digital maker-market, Etsy). There are many other eccentric adaptive re-developments underway or freshly opened. How can long-term residents and community members fight for the right to belong to this place?

An ability to see the many abolitionist histories woven into the landscape of the Hudson Valley may contribute to unsettling the innocence of people, like me, who came here to stick their hands in the earth and make a life out of it. Abolitionist thought is necessary for guiding and informing relational organizing practices toward unsettling the innocence embedded in an agrarian and artisanal sense of place, and forging an intersectional, multi-racial, BIPOC- and working class- led coalitional framework for food justice, housing justice, and a just transition from mass incarceration. Abolition is a tradition, a theory, and a practice that can help us forget about innocence, sit with incommensurability, and experiment with forms of organizing that affirm our mutual humanity on and through land.

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