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Food Justice and Collective Food Relations

What is food justice?

What is food justice? Food justice is commonly understood as the norm that everyone should have access to safe, healthy and culturally-appropriate foods no matter one's national origin, economic statuses, social identities, cultural membership, or disability. A second dimension of food justice, as commonly understood, is the norm that everyone who works within a food system, from restaurant servers to farm workers, should be paid livable and fair wages and work in safe conditions no matter one's national origin, economic statuses, social identities, cultural membership, or disability (Schanbacher 2010; Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Jayaraman 2013).

Another dimension of food justice, which is found in the words and writing of advocates but is perhaps less commonly appreciated, is that food justice should account for the value of food in relation to the *self-determination* of human groups such as urban communities of color, Indigenous peoples and migrant farmworkers, among many other groups (Desmarais and Wittman 2013; Werkheiser and Noll 2014) (Hospes 2014; Adamson 2011; Alkon 2009; Norgaard, Reed, and Van Horn 2011; Schanbacher 2010; Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Holt-Giménez 2011; Settee 2010). Reflecting on the claims of food justice advocates, *my goal in this essay is to outline a norm of food justice that is based on the value of food in relation to the self-determination of human groups.*

In what follows, I begin by describing the first two dimensions of food justice; I then discuss the role of food in collective self-determination and introduce the idea of *collective food relations*, discussing in particular the role of *manoomin* (wild rice) in the collective self-determination of the Anishinaabek in the Great Lakes region; I then explain how disrupting collective food relations can be a form of food injustice; lastly, I discuss some specific further examples that illustrate these ideas.

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Food justice, distribution and democracy

Food justice is often described in terms of moral norms that should govern some of the key social institutions that make up our food systems. Food systems are complex chains of food production, distribution, consumption and the recirculation of food refuse. Such chains are sometimes referred to as the *farm-to-fork* continuum. Here, social institutions refer specifically to laws, policies and governmental and non-governmental organizations. Key institutions in a food system include corporate food product labeling practices, labor laws and unions, agricultural subsidies, food testing and safety regulations, national food assistance and international food aid programs, and nonprofit organizations working globally to address chronic malnourishment.

The first rather common food justice norm is that everyone should have access to safe, healthy and culturally-appropriate foods no matter one's national origin, economic statuses, social identities, cultural membership, or disability. The second norm is that everyone who works within a food system, from restaurant servers to farm workers, should be paid livable and fair wages and work in safe conditions no matter one's national origin, economic statuses, social identities, cultural membership, or disability. Both norms see food has having value because it provides goods such as nutrition, the fulfillment of cultural preferences, and financial stability. It is up to social institutions to distribute these goods to everyone.

Many definitions of food and food labor reflect the understanding of food as providing nutrition, the fulfillment of cultural preferences, and financial stability. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (UN FAO) understands food security as existing "when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (2014). The United Farm Workers union supports the vision of winning "dignity and respect for America's farm workers through better working conditions and a living wage" (United Farm Workers 2014) and the Restaurant Opportunities Center organization seeks "to improve wages and working conditions for the nation's restaurant workforce" (Restaurant Opportunities Center 2014).

Both food justice norms can be used to identify injustices in social institutions, from international aid to labor laws to agricultural subsidies. And there are many examples of food justice issues in the U.S. and abroad. A recent review article shows some evidence that members of minority and low-income populations in the U.S. suffer relatively higher rates of foodborne illness. A potential reason why is that food safety is inadequately regulated in the retail outlets and food service locations that are frequented by members of these

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groups (Quinlan 2013). A report by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission found farmworkers in the state "living in housing that was extremely substandard, including structural defects, lack of clean running water, exposed wires, overcrowding, close proximity to fields (and thus pesticides) and poor sanitation" (2010, 2-3). Globally, UN FAO estimates that roughly 805 million people worldwide "do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life," most of whom live in developing countries in which political and economic institutions fail to ensure people have enough resources to feed themselves (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2014).

In each of these U.S. and global cases, groups who suffer food injustice are also often the least likely to have access to opportunities to influence key social institutions in a food system. Farm workers, minority populations and poor people, and other groups tend to have two few financial resources, time and political representation to lobby, sway the shape of laws and policies, hire attorneys and consultants, impact voting numbers and participate prominently in public participation and comment opportunities. Food justice, then, often also involves the democratic norm everyone should have the opportunity to participate equally and in culturally-appropriate ways in the social institutions that shape how the food they eat is produced, distributed and used and how food refuse is recirculated.

Food and collective self-determination

Many advocates of food justice—from scholars to organizers to community leaders—claim that food justice involves even more than the distributive and democratic norms just enumerated. They claim that norms of food justice should also account for the value of food in relation to the *self-determination* of human groups such as urban communities of color, Indigenous peoples and migrant farmworkers, among many other groups. Here, I refer to self-determination as the widely-embraced moral norm that human groups have the right to decide their own destinies free from any external compulsion or interference from other human groups.

Consider how food justice advocates use concepts associated with self-determination—such as community self-reliance and food sovereignty. The organization Just Food defines food justice as "*communities exercising their right* to grow, sell, and eat healthy food. Healthy food is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals. People practicing food justice leads to a strong local food system, *self-reliant communities*, and a healthy environment" (JustFood.org 2014, emphasis added). As a key element of food justice, the Detroit Food Justice Task Force cites food sovereignty including "liberating land… for the

production of food *for communities*," "hosting *collective* meals in our communities as a way of connecting people across generations and cultural backgrounds…," and "forging new models of *collective control* of land and waterways" (Detroit Food Justice Task Force 2014, emphasis added). The Indigenous Circle of the People's Food Policy Project in Canada sees "food sovereignty" as embodying the idea of "food as sacred, part of the web of relationships with the natural world that define culture and community" (People's Food Policy Project 2014, 9).

The concepts of community self-reliance, collective meals, community rights and food sovereignty express claims about the value of food as a contributor to a group's *collective* self-determination. Collective self-determination refers to a group's ability to provide the cultural, social, economic and political relations needed for its members to pursue good lives. Food contributes to collective self-determination through its integral roles in family and ceremonial life, as a source of nourishment and income, as a facilitator of trust and good will in society, as a carrier of a group's heritage and knowledge, and as a vital good that political leaders are entrusted to protect through laws and policies. Gustavo Esteva's popular essay referred to this sense of food as "*comida*," or "food-in-context," where "the context is necessarily the social context, the whole human world which comida embeds…" (Esteva 1994, 6). This relationship between food and self-determination differs from how food is often understood in the distributive and democratic food justice norms discussed in the first paragraph. In those norms, food is associated with goods such as nutritional intake, fulfillment of cultural preferences and financial stability.

I will refer to the special relationships between food and collective self-determination as *collective food relations*. Food justice, then, refers to a norm that human groups have a right to exercise and adapt their collective food relations free from external compulsion or interference from other human groups, unless there is a morally weighty reason for this compulsion or interference. By weighty reason, I refer to a category reasons deemed legitimate by the group in question and offered in response to cases of severe moral depravity, such as abuses to fundamental rights to life and freedom from unlawful detention by a group's political leaders or judicial system, or cases of dire need, such as imminent starvation. Food injustice, then, can occur when a group's collective food relations are wrongfully interfered with or coerced by the actions of another group.

How do collective food relations work in relation to food justice? Consider the example of an Indigenous peoples, the *Anishinaabek*[1] of the Great Lakes region, which refer to over a hundred Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi communities and nations spanning areas known by many Settler Americans (including U.S. and Canadian citizens) primarily as Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ontario. Due to 19th century forced relocations, Anishinaabek also live in other areas, such as what is often referred to as Oklahoma and Kansas.

Some important parts of many Anishinaabe communities and nations are the seasonal group activities of tending, cultivating, gathering, harvesting, processing, distributing, storing, and consuming diverse animal and plant foods and recirculating the refuse and unharvested materials in the ecosystem. These native foods, often called *first foods*, include walleye, blueberries, deer, hare, maple, sturgeon and wild rice, among many others. Each year, the activities associated with first foods renew the family, community, cultural, economic, social and political relationships that connect Anishinaabe persons with one another and with all the plants, animals and other entities in the environment, such as water, that are associated with these foods.

The seasonal activities and relationships make it possible for Anishinaabe persons to achieve good lives in ways that they could not achieve through their individual efforts alone. That is, it takes collective action for individuals to have consistent access to diverse sources of nutrition; to feel secure in their social and cultural identities through the food they eat; to have the family and economic support to make free decisions about maintaining or adapting their diets to suit more informed preferences; and to respond to challenges such as climate change. The seasonal group activities and community relationships can be seen as collective food relations that help to make it possible for people to attain a quality of life they could not attain by themselves.

Consider how the relationship between collective action and living well works in the case of the collective food relations of one particular Anishinaabe first food. Wild rice, or *manoomin*, grows in shallow, clear and slow-moving waterways and ripens early in the fall, when it is gathered and then processed through activities such as drying, parching, hulling, and winnowing. Manoomin helps to promote basic nutrition for Anishinaabek owing to its rich vitamin, mineral and protein contents. As a dried good, it can be stored and used for food security in winter and spring months. Consistent access to manoomin is

[1] I tried to use English spellings of words in Anishinaabemowin (the language of the Anishinaabek) that can be identified by diverse Ojibwe, Potawatomi and Odawa people and people who work in relation to this language. I recognize that there are many accents and spelling systems and that the one I am using is in some ways the least similar to how members of my Tribe (Potawatomi) engage in English language spelling.

protected by a political and economic system involving rice chiefs and committees, who have stewardship responsibilities to monitor the rice beds and related ecological conditions, look out for and punish poachers or early harvesters, determine the right times to harvest, and advise different families about where and when they can set up rice camps, in which entire families temporarily settle close to the rice beds during August and September. The natural resources and environmental agencies of many Anishinaabe Tribal governments, such as the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe or the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, devote staff time to learning about the biology and ecology of manoomin through engagement with elders and ricers and performing in-house scientific research and habitat restoration (Great Lakes Restoration Initiative 2014).

Anishinaabe treaty organizations, such as the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority (CORA), engage in research and policy advocacy to protect manoomin in ceded territories where many Anishinaabe communities exercise rights to steward and harvest the plant. Treaty organizations were established to represent different Tribes who are signatories to treaties such as the 1842 Treaty of La Pointe in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan and the 1836 Treaty of Washington in Michigan. Many treaties protect Indigenous rights to harvest and gather certain species, such as manoomin.

Treaty organizations are responsible for playing a part in ensuring that sustainable populations of species harvested and gathered by Tribal members exist. For example, "GLIFWC focuses on the preservation and enhancement of manoomin in ceded territory lakes. Annual surveys are performed on existing beds to determine density and overall health of bed. Select lakes are also reseeded for the purpose of enhancement or re-establishing old beds. Recently, GLIFWC completed a comprehensive wild rice lake inventory in the ceded territories with documentation necessary to develop and launch a comprehensive wild rice management plan." This information is often used in policy context as evidence to show that environmental threats, such as mining, are harming rice populations, which is a violation of treaty rights (Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission 2013; Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission 1995).

Anishinaabe-led nongovernmental organizations, such as the White Earth Land Recovery Project or the Native Wild Rice Coalition, are involved in a diverse range of projects to focus and stimulate cultural life and economic viability around manoomin (LaDuke 2003; Andow et al. 2009; Johnston 1993). Individual families across the Great Lakes advocate for their right to steward and harvest in areas where Settler Americans are not accustomed to their doing

so, such as Odawa/Potawatomi Lee Sprague and his family. Recently, Sprague and his son established harvesting and a rice camp on a lake in Michigan where most of the Settler American residents had little awareness of Anishinaabe ricing even though there is a substantial amount of naturally growing manoomin (Jimenez 2014).

Access to the nutritional value of manoomin requires family, economic, social and political relations; these relations are, in turn, made possible through manoomin. Other foods, such as the commodity cheese and spam distributed to some Anishinaabe through U.S. food assistance programs, or microwave meals, cannot replace manoomin as comparable contributors to the establishment and maintenance of these relationships. Yet, for many Anishinaabe, what I just described represents only the surface of Anishinaabe-manoomin collective food relations. For example, the rice camps are supposed to be places that intermingle hard work with storytelling, dances, rituals, games, courting, and education that strengthen bonds between Anishinaabek of different families and generations. At other times of the year, manoomin is used during feasts, ceremonies and other celebratory or holiday gatherings. The different manoomin cleaning processes such as sorting are time consuming and done throughout the fall and winter with family members. Anishinaabe harvesting of manoomin only removes about 15% of the seeds, leaving the rest for natural reseeding and other animals to eat. Manoomin not only brings Anishinaabe together, but a number of waterfowl, muskrat, deer and invertebrates eat the seeds or use the plant for cover and brooding. These activities help to recycle and to spread the seed (Vennum 1988; GLIFWC 2006; Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission 2013).

Manoomin is tightly woven into the fabric of collective food relations that connect Anishinaabe to their bodies, ecosystem, culture and heritage, and social, economic and political institutions (Vennum 1988; GLIFWC 2006; Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission 2013). Anishinaabe scholars such as Scott Lyons and Deb McGregor would likely advise that even referring to manoomin as a noun does not do justice to the fact the Anishinaabemowin language consists of mostly verbs, which differs from the predominance of nouns in English (Lyons 2010; McGregor 2008). Indeed, manoomin is usually expressed as a verb, such as the verb form *manoominike*, which conveys complex notions of the collective actions associated with the plant that I have described earlier in this essay. So by using nouns I am already capitulating to the linguistic norms and epistemologies of Settler Americans.

Anishinaabe group lives are hard to imagine without manoomin. Indeed, Anishinaabe migrated to the Great Lakes region from the East Coast hundreds of years ago because they had been instructed to settle in the land where food

grows on the water. According to one Anishinaabe elder, "There is no substitute for wild rice. My whole way of being as an Indian would be destroyed. I can't imagine being without it. And there is no substitute for this lake's rice." (Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission 1995). Manoomin is intrinsically valuable to the very constitution and expression of Anishinaabe group identities (Vennum 1988; LaDuke 2003; Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission 1995; Andow et al. 2009; Johnston 1993).

This account of manoomin is meant to express that the value of foods is not just that they provide goods such as nutrition, the fulfillment of cultural preferences and financial stability. In the case of manoomin, the food is a kind of hub whose value lies in how it can bring together many of the collective relations required for people to live good lives. The hub-like quality of certain foods, such as manoomin, allows them to convene biological, ecological, cultural, social, economic, political and spiritual aspects of a way of life. While social institutions such as rice committees, ceremonies, and treaty organizations help to distribute goods associated with manoomin such as nutrition and cultural preference fulfillment, it is *not obvious* to many Anishinaabe persons that these social institutions would be able to thrive very well if another food were *instantly* substituted for manoomin. Speaking of treaties, for example, Norman Deschampe, former Minnesota Chippewa Tribal President, said "We are of the opinion that the wild rice rights assured by treaty accrue not only to individual grains of rice, but to the very essence of the resource. We were not promised just any wild rice; that promise could be kept by delivering sacks of grain to our members each year. We were promised the rice that grew in the waters of our people, and all the value that rice holds" (Andow et al. 2009, 3). The "very essence" of manoomin and "all the value" it holds refer to the collective food relations that I have described.

It must be noted that manoomin cannot *just* be replaced. Here, though, I must caution readers to also note that my brief account of manoomin is only a slice of Anishinaabe life. Not only are Anishinaabe communities and nations involved with many foods, but Anishinaabe persons and families live diverse lifestyles both within and outside of the jurisdictions of Indigenous governments. Manoomin can mean many different things to many different Anishinaabe persons. As with any human group, dialogue and debate exists about the ultimate meaning of significant aspects of life such as first foods. However, it is nonetheless true, as the sources I have cited bear out, that Anishinaabe governments, treaty organizations, non-governmental organizations and families invest enormous energies into the protection, harvesting and consumption of manoomin and desire future generations to continue these activities. Finally, it is certainly the case that Anishinaabe

societies are not static but adaptive, and there is always the possibility of a future in which manoomin figures less prominently than it does now. Yet, as I hope to show in the next section, all forms of adaptations are not equal in a moral sense, and there is a key difference between adaptation that Anishinaabek see as morally legitimate and adaptation coerced and dictated by Settler Americans.

Food injustice as interference with collective food relations

Despite it being hard to imagine Anishinaabe identity without manoomin, Settler Americans have done quite a bit to threaten it. Neighboring Settler American groups engage in activities such as mining, damming, growing commercial paddy rice for mass distribution, and recreational boating that directly affect manoomin and its habitat—especially the relationships between manoomin and water. These activities can change water levels, water flow, and water quality in ways inhospitable to manoomin; they can also change the diversity of plants and animals in ways that alter the suitability of the habitat for manoomin. Many Anishinaabe are also concerned that Settler Americans who breed and grow varieties of commercial paddy rice for mass harvest have not taken enough precautions to ensure that these varieties do not overtake naturally growing manoomin. Moreover, in the mid-20th century, Settler Americans became interested in eating "wild rice" and some Anishinaabe people adapted by selling their harvest to others who would finish it off reservation. The Anishinaabe rice was sold at a premium price since it was hand harvested. In the 1960s and 1970s, when Settler Americans determined how to domesticate wild rice, this reduced the price, closing Anishinaabe people out of the market (Wallwork 1997). Settler Americans further destroyed the market through laws and policies that allowed Settler companies to market wild rice as if it were harvested and processed by Anishinaabek (LaDuke 2007).

In states such as Minnesota, manoomin has declined by half in the last 100 years (Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission 1995; Andow et. al. 2009). In Michigan, it is commonly accepted that only 12 locations of naturally growing manoomin are left and residents have largely forgotten that it is an important part of the heritage of the territory. Declines and threats to manoomin in such a short time period put immense and rapid pressures on the collective food relations of Anishinaabe groups—forcing them to adapt at an uncomfortable pace. Without manoomin, Anishinaabe lose an integral glue holding together biological, family, social, cultural, economic, ecological, political and spiritual dimensions of group life. Anishinaabe nations today face many challenges, including relatively higher rights of diabetes, food insecurity and hunger (Sarch and Spicer 2008; Cho et. al 2014). Certain ceremonies are becoming less common (Wallwork 1997). Though, according to some, the

U.S. has improved the quality and distribution of commodity foods, Anishinaabe persons in nations such as White Earth see the protection and revitalization of manoomin as integral to fully addressing problems of nutrition, cultural decline and poverty (Siple 2011).

Importantly, Anishinaabek see Settler American threats to manoomin as breakdowns in these parties' responsibilities to respect the collective food relations of Anishinaabek (Vennum 1988; LaDuke 2003; Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission 1995; Andow et al. 2009; Johnston 1993). Ironically, activities such as recreational boating or eating paddy rice or mining are part of the collective food relations that Settler American groups rely on to pursue what they deem are good lives, such as being able to enjoy cheap or mass-produced foods. These settler groups have pursued the establishment and continuance of their collective food relations *at the expense* Anishinaabe collective food relations. That is to say, Settler Americans have engaged in external compulsion of Anishinaabe collective food relations by pressuring Anishinaabek to abandon ricing and dictating the pace of Anishinaabe adaptation; they have also interfered with Anishinaabe collective food relations through pollution and commercial rice production. Settler Americans fail to grant moral consideration to the special value of first foods such as manoomin as key hubs for Anishinaabe collective self-determination that cannot be replaced easily.

These activities exemplify one form of food injustice, when one group impacts a shared food web in ways that interfere with the collective food relations of another group or compel these collective food relations to change, without having a morally weighty reason for doing so. Compulsion and interference are harmful when they target the hub-like qualities of food that are hard to replace. Moreover, there are no morally weighty reasons that Settler Americans can offer to defend their harmful compulsion of and interference with Anishinaabe collective food relations. A morally weighty reason, as I understand it, would be a reason why threatening manoomin is a tough but necessary tradeoff in order to avoid some far more terrible outcome to community members' lives (e.g. imminent starvation) or avoid the commission of heinously immoral actions (e.g. violations of fundamental rights to life and be free from unlawful detention). The fact that others derive benefit from interfering with a group's collective food relations is not itself a morally weighty reason to do so. Furthermore, this morally weighty reason should be one that the affected group, in this case Anishinaabek, would accept as a legitimate reason. Since such considerations would have to be legitimate to Anishinaabek, they could not rest on colonial or racist portrayals of Anishinaabe

collective food relations or privilege Settler ways of life over Anishinaabe ways of life.

A large literature exists where food justice is described in terms of what I am calling collective food relations (Estabrook 2012; Patel 2013; Jayaraman 2013; Pulido 1996; Pellow 2007; Holt-Giménez 2011; Hofrichter 1993; Alkon and Agyeman 2011). Indigenous peoples in particular are often targets of food injustice in other parts of the Great Lakes region where I live and work. The Mohawk Indian Territory, which spans U.S. and Canadian borders, is among the most polluted Indigenous communities in North America because of historic and ongoing industrial operations of companies such as General Motors (GM). The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, the Tribal government, discovered mercury, PCBs and other chemicals in some of the fish populations depended on by Tribal members. For example, in the 1980s, people in the region found out that the closed GM plant had two dormant sludge pits containing PCBs. New York State wildlife epidemiologists found high levels of PCBs in fish and other aquatic wildlife. A three part risk study (fish, wildlife, breast milk) focused on contamination in fish found that "PCB, dioxin, and mercury throughout the study area exceeded criteria for the protection of piscivorous wildlife" (Sloan and Jock 1990, 26).

The toxicants have affected culturally- and economically-significant fish species (such as perch and bullhead), whose harvesting and consumption formed the fabric of Mohawk communities for hundreds of years. The toxicants have entered mothers' breast milk through fish consumption. Native scholar Elizabeth Hoover writes that "In communities such as Akwesasne, the relationship between fish—whose duty it is to cleanse the water and offer themselves as food—and humans—whose role it is to respectfully harvest these fish—has been interrupted by environmental contamination" (Hoover 2013). Hoover describes how different family relationships and cultural ceremonies no longer include fish. Yet simply switching to other food sources is not so easy an alternative for Mohawks.

Groups such as the Mohawk Mother's Milk Project (LaDuke 1999), the Akwesasne Environmental Task Force (Tarbell and Arquette 2000), and the St. Lawrence River Institute of Environmental Sciences are seeking to better understand the full impact of contamination. Arquette, of the Akwesasne Task Force, argues that "When traditional foods such as fish are no longer eaten, alternative diets are consumed that are often high in fat and calories and low in vitamins and nutrients. This type of dietary change has been linked to many health problems such as type II diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, cancer, and obesity" (Arquette et al. 2002, 261). The context of Arquette's words is actually an anecdote from when a Settler toxicologist

congratulated members of the Akwesasne community for lessening their consumption of contaminated fish. The community members had to educate the toxicologist about how refraining from eating certain fishes is actually part of a larger interference to Mohawk collective food relations because of the health, cultural and many other tradeoffs.

Currently, the Task Force is developing and implementing holistic forms of risk assessment that capture how food contributes to collective self-determination, both for the sake of the Mohawks but also to educate Settler Americans. For the Mohawks, then, interference with fish erodes collective food relations that support health, family life, subsistence, and culture. There are no morally weighty reasons why groups of Settler Americans should engage in industrial activities (or fail to clean them up) that threaten Mohawk first foods.

Collective food relations beyond Indigenous peoples

Other groups experience food injustice in ways that can be described as wrongful interference in their collective food relations. In Detroit Michigan, a city of about 700,000 residents, trends starting in the 1950s led to the decline of the street car system and population shifts to suburbs from which African-Americans were segregated and unwelcome. This resulted in today's situation where roughly 80% of the population is African-American, 30% of Detroiters live below the poverty line, one in five lack good transportation options, and African-American Detroiters live on average 1.1 miles farther from supermarkets than residents of mostly white neighborhoods.

Most Detroiters rely on relatively expensive and unhealthy food that they buy from some 1,000 food retailers, found mostly in impoverished neighborhoods, such as liquor stores, gas stations, party stores, dollar stores, bakeries, pharmacies, and convenience stores. 69.1% of Detroiters are obese or overweight; 21% of Detroit's youth are overweight. Detroiters die from heart disease at a rate 50% higher than the national average (White 2011, 2011). African-American organizations such the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) and D-Town Farm are actively expressing views tying food injustice to collective food relations. Scholar and DBCFSN board member Monica White discusses how members of these organizations feel they "cannot count on others to provide them with healthy foods because availability to such food is based on race and class privilege. They note that those who live in more affluent communities have mechanisms to monitor available food. They also have easy access to safe and clean food and a wider range of healthy food options" (White 2010, 199). Malik Yakini, founder of the DBCFSN, argues regarding African-Americans, that "much of our traditional

food culture has been lost over the past generation, due to the rush towards convenience in the post-World War II period, and then the fast food proliferation which occurred in Detroit and other places throughout the country. Our families today rarely sit down and eat a meal that's prepared from scratch" (Wallace 2011).

For many African-American Detroiters, the solution for achieving food justice is also closely tied to collective food relations. The *Be Black and Green* website, inspired by Yakini, seeks to network, support and promote Black farmers, gardeners and food activists. The philosophy behind the website is to advocate "African self-determination" and "to build a Black Food Sovereignty movement." Self-determination and food sovereignty are discussed in terms of Black people's heritage from "Africans enslaved to work on large and small agricultural projects… [and] expertise in growing rice, indigo and other plants…" Moreover, after the end of slavery in the U.S., "most people of African descent continued to be tied to the land either through tenant farming, sharecropping or in some cases ownership. Millions of Africans migrating from Georgia, South Carolina, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Florida, and Louisiana to 20th century industrial cities like Detroit, Chicago, Gary and Cleveland brought their agricultural heritage with them. 'Be Black and Green' is a call to reclaim our agricultural heritage. It is a call to embrace our ancestral mandate to recognize the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things and to work always for the greatest good. It implores us to dare to use our own cultural experience as the foundation for forward movement. It situates us within our own historical continuum." (Be Black and Green 2014).

The African-American community has created important organizations that seek to achieve food justice through unique collective food relations. DBCFSN founded the D-Town Farm, which "utilizes sustainable, earth-friendly food production techniques to produce thousands of pounds of high-quality fresh produce each year" (White 2010, 196) . The goal, for Yakini, is to "grasp larger control over the food system and to build self-reliance in our community" (White 2010, 196). DBCFSN has also created the U-Jamma Food Buying Club and engaged in numerous actions to influence the Detroit City Council, which led to the creation of the Detroit Food Policy Council, which seeks to bolster the conditions needed for groups such as African-American Detroiters to cultivate unique collective food relations in ways that do not limit other groups' ability to do so (White 2010). White claims that organizations associated with Be Black and Green, such as The DBCFSN and D-Town Farm, and others also are viewed as a first step in building partnerships with other community-based organizations, as well as public agencies, so that residents can work to rebuild their city (White 2011).

DBCFSN recognizes the importance of African-American collective food relations at the same time that it acknowledges the reality that other groups who share the Detroit region inevitably influence African-American Detroiters' collective self-determination. The policy-related work of DBFCSN shows that food justice not only involves establishing food sovereignty based on establishing a group's unique food relations, but also ensuring that other groups acknowledge and take responsibility for the ways in which pursuit of their own collective self-determination can commit food injustice. This effort to establish intergroup responsibilities is shared by the other groups discussed in this essay. Anishinaabe Treaty organizations, Tribal governments and families engage in widespread advocacy to educate Settler Americans about their responsibilities to consider the moral importance of manoomin. A good example is the bi-annual *Nibi* (water) and Manoomin Symposium, which one of the member nations of the Chippewa Tribe of Minnesota hosts and invites representatives of research institutions, private industry, and state government in order to build accountability toward Anishinaabe ways of life. In Akwesasne, I briefly touched on the educational work of the Task Force and referenced several other efforts, such as the Mother's Milk Project.

The significance of food justice

In the work just discussed, food justice is understood as more than norms ensuring people's access to certain amounts of healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate food and ensuring opportunities to participate democratically in law and policy. Food justice is a matter of refraining from compelling or interfering with the collective food relations that serve as part of the undergirding of a group's collective self-determination. Because each communities' collective food relations are unique, other groups have a responsibility not to compel or interfere with the hub-like qualities of foods that are important to different groups, whether African-American Detroiters or Anishinaabek in the Great Lakes region. This sense of food justice highlights both the importance of group control over collective food relations but also the inevitable interdependence of groups within shared food webs. On my interpretation of the claims of many food justice advocates, there is a norm of food justice that requires all of us, as members of human groups, to consider how the collective food relations to which we belong interact with the collective food relations to which other human groups belong.

Satisfying this norm is a heavy responsibility, which is perhaps why some global food justice advocates see this norm as a matter of human rights. *La Via Campesina* has defined food sovereignty as a human right, "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound

and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Claeys 2013). But it is a human right to collective self-determination, not just a right to have access to a commodity. Monica White argues that while the work of D-Town Farm is certainly in "agreement with humanitarian agencies and human rights advocates that all citizens should have access to healthy food," there is far more to it than having enough healthy food. This is because "…they are not interested in relying on governmental or humanitarian bodies to deliver this food. Instead, they choose to provide food for themselves and their community. In providing an alternative behavioral option to dependence on the state, they prefer to act in ways that demonstrate agency and empowerment" (White 2010, 206).

I see White's remarks about the significance of food justice as in line with the value placed on first foods by Indigenous peoples. The Mystic Lake Declaration, written by diverse Indigenous peoples, claims that "We declare our Native Nations and our communities, waters, air, forests, oceans, sea ice, and traditional lands and territories to be 'Food Sovereignty Areas,' defined and directed by Indigenous Peoples according to our customary laws, free from extractive industries, unsustainable energy development, deforestation, and free from using food crops and agricultural lands for large scale biofuels…" (2009).

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