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Abstract

ADDRESSING THE GROCERY GAP: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF FOOD ACCESS IN THREE TARRANT COUNTY NEIGHBORHOODS,

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This study examines the impact of food insecurity in three neighborhoods in Fort Worth, Texas. The neighborhoods in this study include, Southside, Stop Six, and Como. Food deserts can be defined as poor urban areas that have little to no access to affordable and healthy food. My methodology in conducting this research was participant observation. Through notes, field observation, and informal interviews I was able to conclude the affects lack of affordable and healthy food had on these three areas. Additionally, I was able to determine if current methods to mitigate food deserts were effective.
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Chapter 1
Understanding the Urban Landscape

Introduction

Driving down the nearly desolate street in the Southside neighborhood of Fort Worth, Texas, the architectural design of the houses shed light on what the community used to exemplify. The architectural design of one house is similar to an oversized bungalow, while another large two-story house has side molding that is inspired by French décor. These homes that once housed prominent members of the African American community are now dilapidated shells of their former glory. Trash swirls around the street; stray cats and dogs trot freely down the road; while street signs lay haphazardly on overgrown lawns. Only a few residents are outside. A small group of black men gather on a porch, talking loudly. While further down the street, a man who perhaps is feeling the side effects of crack cocaine lies in the alley, trying to find some shade from the sun.

Many of the streets in this neighborhood have no one is sight and most of the homes are boarded up. On Evans Street (one of the busier streets in the area) there is a convenience store that has four or five older cars in the parking lot. This convenience store seems to be the neighborhood hangout. Black men of all ages stand in front of the door, drinking, talking and laughing. One woman enters the store and comes out with a small paper bag in her hand, while groups of middle school age children come in and out of the store with chips, soda, and candy. This neighborhood once coined as the “silk road” of Fort Worth black neighborhoods is now commonly referred to as the ghetto or hood. While the term ghetto has many definitions, I will define ghetto as a poor neighborhood plagued by social and economic problems. Research shows that being poor comes with many social disparities that include, a higher rate of joblessness, homelessness, under performing schools, and a plethora of negative health related issues (Massey 1996). Of all the problems that face the urban poor black community, none is more severe than food insecurity.
According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (2014), food insecurity is defined as “the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.” More succinctly, food insecure individuals do not have access to healthy food and they do not know where their next meal is coming from. For the purpose of this research, it is beneficial to note that the USDA examines food insecurity on a scale or continuum that extends from high security (households that have no difficulty purchasing/accessing fresh food); marginal food security (households that may have had problems getting fresh/affordable food but it did not substantially reduce their food intake); low food security (households that reduce the quantity or quality of their food in order to eat regularly); and very low food insecurity (households that do not have the resources to eat on a regular basis.) This paper will focus on the two later subcategories: low food security and very low food insecurity.

Some people are food insecure because they live in a “food desert” (Giang 2008). Food deserts are defined as areas with limited access to affordable and nutritious food. Low income residents who live in food deserts are generally unable to purchase food from large chain grocery stores because they have little to no access stores like Kroger, Tom Thumb, and Brookshire’s, etcetera. For a neighborhood in an urban community to be considered a food desert, individuals must live more than a mile away from the nearest grocery store. A rural neighborhood is considered a food desert, when an individual lives 10 miles away from the nearest grocery store. In the United States 35.5 million Americans is food insecure (Berg, 2008). This number includes households that are categorized as very low food insecurity and low food insecurity.

In this thesis I examine the severity of food insecurity and the initiatives used to alleviate food insecurity in three urban neighborhoods in Fort Worth, Texas. The state of Texas was selected for this research based on the Center for Disease Control 2010 data, which reports the state of Texas had the third-highest rate of food insecurity in the U.S. at 18.5
percent. Fort Worth was the site of this research because of the strong Food Policy Council presence within the city. It was imperative to observe neighborhoods rather than the whole county because each community is unique in addressing food access. The three neighborhoods included in this study are Southside, Stop Six, and Como. Each neighborhood is a historically black neighborhood located in the southwest side of Fort Worth, Texas. The neighborhoods are currently predominately black and have been identified as food insecure or food deserts by the USDA food-desert atlas. In order to understand the food insecurity issues in these unique neighborhoods and how it impacts people’s everyday lives, I conducted an ethnographic study using participant observation, and informal interviews to gain a greater understanding of this social phenomena. Additionally, I used archival data from the Fort Worth African American Genealogical Society to understand the history, construction, and maintenance of these neighborhoods and gain a greater comprehension of their current socioeconomic status.

I visited each neighborhood every weekend over a span of one month. More specifically, I visited Southside in October, Como in November, and Stop Six in December. My first two visits to each neighborhood were spent mapping out the neighborhood. For example, I printed maps of each neighborhood and drove around making notes of all the restaurants, convenience stores, and small grocery stores in the neighborhood. I also observed the outer condition of the stores, individuals visiting the stores, the parking available, and the activity happening around the store. Based on my initial observations, I strategically decided which stores I would visit. When visiting stores I had three main objectives. The first objective was to find out what kind of items the store was selling. Secondly, I examined the prices of the products to get an understanding of how much people were spending at local stores. Lastly, I wanted to talk to the customers of these stores to determine how they perceived food insecurity with their community. I decided to conduct informal interviews because I wanted to have authentic conversations with people who were visiting the stores. My interactions normally started out with small chit chat, which led to broader questions regarding where healthy food
places were located or asking about certain food items that may or may have not been in the store. After my interactions with residents, I would jot down field notes that included descriptive notes and quotes that I could remember from my interactions. I spoke with roughly 40 different residents during my time in the neighborhoods. Each of my interactions varied in length with the shortest discussion being about five minutes and the longest being a little over an hour.

While looking for alternative food options, I reached out to the Tarrant Area Food Bank. I visited the Food Bank roughly 3 times and interacted with staff. Staff at the food bank gave me a tour of the facility, allowed me to interact with volunteers and interns, and gave me access to resources that they used to map alternative food options. I also spoke with staff about the success of each program and the limitations of each program. I also reached out to staff via email and asked follow up questions about various programs. I worked with six staff members at the Tarrant Area Food Bank.

The introductory chapter of this thesis will define the urban landscape as a whole. The initial section will define the city and its functions as it relates to society. From there the researcher will define urban and make a distinction between urban and rural communities. The introductory chapter will briefly touch on theories presented in David Harvey’s (1985) The Urbanization of Capital. For readers unfamiliar with the theory, I will explain how Harvey’s work sheds light on spatial patterns in capitalist cities and housing markets that reflect injustices and exploits different class and racial groups. I will discuss the process of urbanization in America and how it inherently leads to the construction and maintenance of ghettos, which has led to the creation of food deserts within communities.

The second chapter of this thesis examines the barriers that help construct and maintain food deserts in urban neighborhoods. The barriers examined in this portion of the thesis include physical and economic barriers that continue to perpetuate food insecurity in America. The third chapter of this paper examines the impact of food deserts. This section of the paper is broken into two interrelated sections. The first section discusses the impact food
deserts have on individuals who live in food insecure communities. Research shows that residents who live in food insecure communities have negative health related issues (Liping, Sherry, Njai, and Blanck 2012). Additionally, health related issues could contribute to the cycle of poverty and inadvertently create a poverty trap for residents who live in a food insecure environment (Berg, 2008). This portion of the thesis aims to discuss how food insecurity contributes to the poverty trap and prevents people from getting out. The second portion of the chapter discusses the overall affects food insecurity has on the American society based on cost of food insecurity. This chapter also touches on the workforce and the competitiveness of our workforce based on people being affected by food deserts.

The fourth chapter discusses America’s current response to the food desert problem. It examines the supplemental assistance program and the eligibility criteria needed to receive government aid. It also sheds light on current governmental policies that are in place that specifically address food insecurity. The second portion of the fourth chapter discusses the emergency food service program and the dependence many food insecure Americans have on charitable resources. It acknowledges the importance of these programs, but sheds light on the frequency and rate these programs are being used.

Unlike the first four chapters, the fifth chapter begins to look at food insecurity from a micro-perspective. The fifth chapter discusses food insecurity in the state of Texas, Tarrant County, and Fort Worth. This chapter examines the local food insecurity issues found within Fort Worth, Texas. More specifically, I will give background and historical information for each of the neighborhoods that are being analyzed throughout this study.

The sixth chapter discusses the ethnographic research that was conducted and gives detail about the current state of Southside, Stop Six, and Como food insecurity. The seventh chapter will discuss the findings of the research and draw conclusions on what can be done in the future to combat the food desert problem in these areas.
The overall aim for this work is to shed light on the hardships of food insecurity among the urban poor and emphasize the complexity of the food system within our country. In this effort, I address questions such as how do the urban poor perceive food insecurity? How do they navigate the unequal food system? What actions are being taken to change the current reality of the food system? A further aim of the ethnographer’s work is to be objective as possible and influence other researchers to discuss this social phenomenon further.

Understanding the Urban Landscape

In order to understand food insecurity in an urban community, it is important to understand the city and urban landscape because it helps me understand the overall formation and maintenance of food deserts in urban neighborhoods. What is a city? At first glance, this is a simple question; however, when analyzed further, it is complex. If several people were asked to define a city, one could expect to get quite a few different responses. Some may define a city as a specified area of land, while another may answer by saying it is an area that is governed by a municipality. Each of these responses is correct, yet it does not speak to the full spectrum of the city. From a sociological standpoint, the city has many functions. Lewis Mumford defined it best when saying, “the city in its complete sense is a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theater of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity” (1983:94). More specifically, a city is an intricate system of groups, structures, and mechanisms.

The process of urbanization has helped define cities, as we know them today. Urbanization at its core is the process of development and extensions of the city. While urbanism in itself is positive and can lead to population growth, economic advancement and larger kinship groups (Mumford, 1937), it also has a down side. Many theorists who have studied urbanization have found that the process of urbanization is marred by injustice and an unequal livelihood for people in different socioeconomic classes (Harvey, 1990). For example, urban geographer, David Harvey suggests that cities reflect the “logic of capitalism.” Harvey
claims that spatial patterns in capitalist cities reflect inherent injustices and contradictions of capitalism (1990: 27). Looking at the structures of cities today, that may be accurate. Many cities perpetuate these systematic injustices and inadvertently exploit the poor at a disproportionate rate, which tends to affect blacks at a substantially higher rate than other ethnic groups. William Wilson stated (1996, 115), “Many of the most rapid increases in concentrated poverty have occurred in African American neighborhoods.”

In order to fully understand the making of the urban landscape it is best to define the importance of urbanization in relation to the city. Urbanization refers to the physical expansion of urban areas. In America, our biggest times of urbanization were during the industrialization and great migration periods. Industrialization, or the advancement of technical enterprises, changed the economic make up of America. Industrialization provided many jobs for Americans leading the way for greater economic advancement. As people began getting jobs, many Americans of every socioeconomic status moved to areas that had a booming industry. Toward the end of the industrialization and progressive era periods, many blacks moved across the country during a period called the Great Migration. The Great Migration was the relocation of blacks from the rural south to cities in the North, Midwest, and West. While much research focuses on the urbanization in the north, many black Americans in the south moved closer to areas that provided work and economic resources. Due to racism, blacks were unable to occupy some areas of the city; therefore, they built their own cities among cities (Massey and Denton, 1993).

In the United States, many low-income neighborhoods, or urban core areas, have a disproportionate number of blacks. The racial makeup of low-income urban communities is believed to be the result of residential segregation. Policies known as Jim Crow laws, enacted between 1876-1965, outlined where minorities could live, work, and commune. Under these laws, racially restrictive housing covenants, bank lending practices, and job discrimination were completely legal. Racially restrictive housing covenants were legal contracts that prohibited the
purchase, lease, or occupation of a piece of property by a particular group. Under Jim Crow, banks did not have to lend to blacks, nor did business owners have to employ minorities. Due to this, many blacks were pushed to the fringes of the city, where resources, and businesses where sparse within the community. In order to survive, many blacks, created and opened their own businesses, including grocery stores, convenience stores, and restaurants (Massey and Denton, 1993).

Although Jim Crow was abolished in 1965 with the enacting of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many people continued to institute unfair policies and practices to limit minorities from owning and occupying property. The Federal Housing Administration began a practice called redlining that continued to perpetuate residential segregation in spite of the law. At its core, redlining was the practice of denying or charging more for services like banking, insurance, health care, and jobs. In more literal terms, it refers to marking a red line on a map to identify areas where banks would not invest. These unfair practices continued well after segregation was deemed unlawful. In the mid 1970’s and early 80’s minorities, primarily blacks, began to experience social mobility. At this time, the minority middle class left the traditional minority community and went to other prominent areas in their cities. Many of the people who stayed in the urban areas were unable to leave because they did not have the money or resources to do so (Massey and Denton 1993).

The integration of middle class blacks into the mainstream was the beginning of social deterioration and ghettoization of the urban landscape. William Julius Wilson discusses this phenomenon in his book The Truly Disadvantaged (1987). Wilson explores the consequences of the middle class leaving the traditional community and suggests that the middle class residents provided the leadership, role models, and values/norm system for the minority community at large. Wilson also argues that the middle class provided a sort of “social organization,” which consists of social networks, neighborhood responsibility, and formal organizations like businesses, clubs, and political organizations. With the exit of the middle
class, the social organization that the middle class provided left the neighborhood as well. Wilson refers to the population of people who stayed in the traditional neighborhoods as the underclass. Essentially his argument is that the underclass is unable to assimilate into mainstream society because they lack the training and skills needed to thrive in the American occupational system.

The Persistence of the Ghetto

In order to understand the persistence of the ghetto, it is important to understand the persistence of poverty and how intricately they go together. Although segregation has been abolished for roughly 50 years, many people still feel the consequences of the systematic injustice. Douglas Massey stated, “Opportunities and resources are unevenly distributed in space” ([1996] 2009:165). Some areas within a city have safer streets, better homes, better businesses, and more effective schools. When segregation was deemed illegal, individuals who could afford to leave these neighborhoods, mainly middle to upper class African Americans, moved in hopes of going to neighborhoods that had better resources. As a result of this move, the lower socioeconomic African Americans that could not afford to move out of their neighborhoods stayed. The integration of the middle class African American into mainstream society hurt the lower socioeconomic African Americans tremendously. When many of the middle class families moved, they took their businesses with them. For the few businesses that remained, many were unable to sustain themselves because they did not have the same customer base as before. Consequently, the economic opportunities all but diminished in predominately black communities. Although segregation was abolished, there were little changes made in government. Policies were not enacted to help support black and minority neighborhoods, which caused the “underclass” to all further behind economically. Regrettably, many of the issues that plagued black neighborhoods before segregation remained after integration, which included, limited opportunities for advancement, inadequate education and schools, and income equality (Wilson, 1989).
This reality is true for many people that live in these neighborhoods today. Over time due to lack of resources and governmental neglect these areas have become run down, isolated, and virtually forgotten by those who do not live there. The lack of resources creates a cycle that reinforces poverty. Steinberg (2008) uses several examples to paint a picture of the cycle of poverty. In one of his illustrations, he discusses how transportation (a resource not always available to the poor), can reinforce poverty. Steinberg states, “when poor people’s cars break down, they often lose their jobs, making it difficult to fix their jobs and get more jobs” (p. 177). While this is just one example, many people that live in low-income neighborhoods today have been there for generations and find it increasingly more difficult to get out. In addition to tangible resources, there are intangible resources also known as social capital or relationship capital. Many people who have the opportunity to live in more affluent neighborhoods use their social class to network and advance economically and/or professionally. The poor do not have the same type of social capital and have a limited network of people to help them advance upward. Consequently, the cycle of poverty continues.

Interestingly enough, research has shown that attitudes concerning the persistence of the ghetto are a matter of preference. One explanation that has been postulated by researchers suggests that blacks like to live in predominately black neighborhoods. Contrary to this belief, survey data shows that “blacks continue to express strong support for the idea of integration (Bobo 1996:177).” This survey data indicates that blacks would like to live in racially mixed neighborhoods. Similar to these attitudes, research shows that whites openly express wanting more racially integrated neighborhoods. However, whites tend to be more unwilling to put these attitudes into practice. Researchers Bobo and Zubrinsky data suggests that whites support for open housing generally declined as the number of blacks moved into their neighborhood (1996). Ultimately, the persistence of segregation can be attributed to a number of factors, which include attitudes, preferences, and resources.
Despite the causes of racial segregation, or the persistence of the ghetto, concentrated segregation in itself results in a negative outcome. Naturally as inequality grows, poverty increases as well. Due to this, those who live in highly segregated neighborhoods are more susceptible to high levels of income inequality, joblessness, poor housing, inadequate education, inadequate schools, and an increase in health disparities. While each of these problems is a unique issue, this paper will focus on the unequal health issues that impact impoverished neighborhoods.
Chapter 2
Understanding the Food Desert Landscape

Place matters when it comes to food and health inequality. Where a person lives can impact a person’s livelihood and overall health outcomes. Researchers and theorists alike have noted that health outcomes are influenced by different factors, such as the extent of medical services, individual behaviors that affect nutrition, and social structures that are out of a person’s control (Walker, Keane, and Burke 2010). In many poor areas, medical service providers are hard to find, access to healthy and affordable food is at an all-time low, and many of these areas are crime ridden and have very little structure for healthy activities. If we consider these factors, people who live in middle and high-income neighborhoods tend to have a greater chance of having better health. The issues that plague lower socioeconomic areas disproportionately affect blacks. This chapter will discuss the food desert landscape and social structures that restrict lower income people from accessing healthy and nutritious food, the overall health outcomes for people living in these areas, and the costly affects poor nutrition will have on the overall economy.

As mentioned before, a food desert is an urban neighborhood that does not have ready access to fresh, healthy, affordable food. A food desert in an urban area means that a person is one or more miles away from healthy and affordable food; while in a rural town someone must live 10 or more miles away from healthy and affordable food. Based on a 2009 study, several conclusions were made about the existence of food deserts in the United States. The researchers of this study found that “urban core areas with limited food access are characterized by higher levels of racial segregation and greater income inequality” (Walker, Keane, and Burke 2010:878). Furthermore, they found that about 2.3 million people (2.2 percent of the overall population) do not have access to a supermarket or large grocery store and they have little to no access to transportation. However, there are about 11.5 low-income Americans who are more than a mile away from the nearest supermarket/large grocery store and do have
access to transportation. Overall, roughly 4.4 percent of the population is located in a food desert.

Many conservative researchers and think tanks have argued that to be hungry in America is virtually impossible (Berg, 2008). However, research has shown that many people who live in poor neighborhoods face hardships that make it difficult for them to have access to affordable, quality food. One of the many hardships or barriers that food desert residents have to overcome is lack of personal transportation. Admittedly, many urban areas have public transportation such as a city bus or train, but this can be a hindrance in accessing healthy food. A study done by the USDA, Economic Research Report indicated that people who use public transportation spend “significantly more time traveling to the grocery store” than people with personal transportation (2009:12). The time spent traveling on the bus or train affects what people buy. For many people using public transportation means that can only buy as much food as they can carry. Also, they buy food that generally “keeps” well during potential long bus and train rides. Usually these purchases are processed or canned food because they are easier to carry and they have longer shelf life.

Transportation does not serve as the only barrier for people located in food desert regions. In a study conducted by Rose and Richards “food goes beyond the food environment and incorporates the built environment and individual characteristics” (Walker et al. 2010:878). For many low-income neighborhoods crime such as burglary and assault are a common reality. As a result of this, many people have to take crime into account when going to the grocery store. For instance, if a person who is living in a low-income neighborhood has to take the bus or train to get to the store they must take into account what they can transport quickly through a neighborhood that may be unsafe. Researchers Walker and Keane (2010) shed light on this phenomenon in their study by stating, “individuals riding public transportation might feel unsafe walking in their neighborhoods.” They concluded in their study that many
residents go without food for days until they can find a ride from a neighbor or friend, or they opt for a less nutritional food item from a nearby convenience store.

With transportation and safety related issues as two significant barriers for individuals who live in low-income neighborhoods, many residents are dependent on the food resources available in or around their neighborhoods. In many low-income neighborhoods, convenience stores, small grocery stores, and fast food restaurants are the only food outlets that are in walking distance. Small stores and convenience stores that are found in these neighborhoods are generally filled with non-nutritional items like processed and canned foods. These stores also tend to have higher priced foods than local large chain grocery stores.

According to Economic Research Services (ERS) of the United States Department of Agriculture, the smaller stores account for higher food prices compared to larger supermarket stores. Also, the ERS report suggested that smaller stores tend to stock name brand items and do not give consumers the option of buying off brand items. To make matters worse, these items are in smaller packages, yet the prices are three times higher than regular brands. As a result of this phenomenon many shoppers may be dissuaded from buying healthier items because they are unable to afford them. In a study conducted by Chung and Myers, they examined food items in 55 stores in Minneapolis. They found that only 22% (n=256) of chain supermarket stores were located in urban areas. In contrast, they identified nearly one half of non-chain stores (smaller stores) were located in the urban areas (Walker et al. 2010). Along with small grocery stores, convenience stores are also a main staple in lower income neighborhoods. Convenience stores include gas stations and stores like Walgreens and CVS. Convenience stores have very little healthy food options and usually raise the prices three times more than supermarkets. This creates an even larger food disparity among poorer residents. Due to this, residents have limited, unaffordable food options.

Admittedly, while there are a limited number of nutritional items in small stores and convenience stores, there are a few healthy items. Conservative pundits have often argued
that in poorer areas, many residents choose to be unhealthy. In a qualitative study conducted
by Walker, Block, and Kawachi (2012), the researchers observed 24 participants buying
patterns in low-income neighborhoods. They found that while residents had access to healthy
food options at their small grocery stores, they selected “energy dense” food. When asked why
the participant selected this type of food, the researchers identified several key themes. For
one, many of the participants bought food based on the ability to “make food stretch” or make
food last longer. Another factor was overall income. Most of the participants were only paid
once a month and needed food that lasted the whole month. Lastly, many of the participants
used food vouchers and coupons for their purchases. There are not many fresh food items that
can be bought with a coupon or food voucher. While this study did identify patterns in low-
income buyers, it isn’t fair to suggest that the individuals want to live unhealthy lives. In contrast,
the ERS report (2009) cited that when prices are lower low-income families would buy healthier
foods. Both of these studies illustrated that the deciding factor for all purchases is the overall
cost of food. If it is cheaper to buy canned fruits and vegetables or processed food, those foods
will be the buyer’s preference.

Large grocery stores are virtually non-existent in low-income neighborhoods. Researchers Shaffer and Gottlieb (2002) discuss this phenomenon while researching food
deserts in Los Angeles County. They observed, “the higher the concentration of poverty within a
neighborhood, there are fewer supermarkets” (p. 120). They also noticed that the “higher the
concentration of white people in a neighborhood, the greater the number of supermarkets” (ibid
120). Many food advocates and activist have suggested that in order to eliminate food deserts,
grocery stores should be built in low-income areas. Theoretically, this is a good idea; however,
in practice, it is virtually impossible. Building a large grocery store is based on a strict economic
framework. This framework does not work in low-income areas due to various environmental,
social, and political barriers, which further contribute to the food desert problem (Pothukuchi,
2005).
In order to determine the economics behind food access it is important understand consumer behavior, food retailer behavior, and the overall food market. For consumers, food, like many other products is considered a normal good. In economic terms, a normal good is a service or good that increases in value as income increases (ERS, 2009). In this case the demand for food increases as income increases. This can potentially explain why higher income neighborhoods have more access to more food. Additionally, the "higher the price is of a food, the lower quantity is demanded" (ERS, 83). On the other hand, the higher price of a substitute food, the higher the demand for that food will be. Unlike high-income consumers, low-income consumers have tight budget constraints that may deter them from purchasing name brand goods. As a result, many low-income consumers may choose to buy substitute foods. Substitute foods, while cheaper, may be an unhealthy alternative to the higher priced (non-substitute good). For example, a low-income family may choose to buy hamburger meat instead of steak or canned fruits instead of fresh foods.

Also, when considering the consumer, one must consider the travel cost and time cost required to purchase food. As mentioned earlier, people that reside in a food desert must take into account various factors like transportation, safety, shelf life of the food, and preparation time. When considering these factors, demand for certain foods may be lower than substitute foods. The convenience of picking up food from a restaurant or fast food place may be more feasible and cheaper than preparing a meal at home. Consequently, the demand for healthier food changes for this particular consumer. Lastly, demand for healthy foods may be minimal if individuals do not know which food is best for them. Lack of education in low-income neighborhoods regarding food, health, and wellness can deter low-income people from purchasing healthier food (ERS, 2009) because they may not know the health benefits of the food or how to prepare it.

Along with consumer behavior, food retailer behavior and supply factors can prevent access to affordable and healthy food in underserved neighborhoods. According to the
ERS report (2009), “supply is driven by the costs of goods” (p.84). In the case of supermarkets this includes, land, machines, and the labor needed to build and operate a grocery store. This also includes the cost of stocking the shelves with food. The fixed cost to open a grocery store includes, the land and materials needed to build the store, while the variable cost include what it cost to operate the stores (ERS, 2009). In order to determine the probability of a grocery stores opening, food retailers must look at the differences between fixed and variable cost in areas they would like to place grocery stores.

According to Giang et al, (2008) if a store has higher fixed cost, retailers must determine if they need to charge a higher price for goods or limit the range of products sold. The ERS report (2009) suggests that urban areas land prices are usually higher due to zoning requirements enforced by the local government. In rural and suburban areas, the fixed costs are a lot less. Therefore, many of the grocery store products in these areas are being sold at a lower price and more products available to consumers. Furthermore, research suggests that larger stores tend to be able to survive more easily than smaller grocery stores because larger stores are able to buy items in bulk and receive huge discounts on food. Unfortunately, smaller stores that stock fewer products do not have this luxury. They must spend more in order to get the products and must sell the food at a higher cost in order to make a profit. The difficulty of food retailer’s ability to make money in urban communities serves as a barrier in low-income neighborhoods and contributes to the food desert landscape.

The overall market also plays a significant role in shaping the food desert landscape. Basic economic models assume that the markets are perfectly competitive. This means that markets are fairly equal on all fronts. The hope is that the supply and demand conditions would operate efficiently in the market. While in theory markets are equal, in reality not every supply and demand condition operates efficiently. An example of this is supermarket redlining. As aforementioned, segregation prevented many services to minorities. Although there was a market for grocery stores in black urban neighborhoods, redlining prevented this;
therefore, constituting a market failure because the market was not competitive. It is also important to note that housing market discrimination also limited the ability for minorities to have better access to food. Limiting the areas in which minorities could live limited people’s access to supermarkets.

In sum, the urban food desert landscape has been intricately created by a number of unjust factors. Gaining access to healthy food is hard for low-income residents because they may lack personal transportation to get to the store often. They may also have the barrier of crime in their neighborhood, which affects what foods they buy and when they shop. There are also major barriers to health and affordability of the foods that residents buy. If residents are unable to get to a large grocery store, they must rely on local convenience stores or restaurants for food. Research shows (Michimi and Wimberly 2010) that convenience stores mark their prices up and have less healthy food options available. All of these factors limit people’s opportunity to access affordable and nutritious food, which results in hardship for poor people.
Chapter 3
The Impact and Cost of Food Deserts in America

Food deserts in America have an extreme impact on the overall health and wealth of the country. Food deserts are sometimes seen as a “poor persons” problem. Yet, that is not the case in the grand scheme of things. While the larger population may not be directly impacted by the consumption of unhealthy food, everyone suffers economically and financially. This chapter will highlight the effect of unhealthy foods on individuals, as well as the overall impact food deserts and food insecurity has on the collective whole.

Many researchers (Michimi and Wimberly 2010) have suggested that poor access to healthy and affordable food has a direct causal relationship to severe health outcomes among lower socioeconomic and minority people. Some of the negative health outcomes that are directly associated with diet intake include obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer. Many studies are in agreement that there are a lack of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low fat milk in stores within low-income neighborhoods. Even more, research has shown that consumption of these foods generally leads to a lower body mass index and lower rates of obesity. In an effort to improve access to healthy and affordable food to reduce obesity and diet related diseases among various populations, the USDA reviewed several studies to understand the significance the physical environment has on negative health outcomes. The ERS (2009) concludes that most food insecurity research hypothesizes that individual and physical environments impact dietary decision among residents in low-income neighborhoods. While the researchers agree that physical environment does influence dietary decisions, the report suggests that the hypothesis is oversimplified.

In contrast, a 2012 report by Liping et al did not think food insecurity and health related problems were oversimplified. Upon surveying and conducting a study of 66,553 adults from 12 states the researchers concluded, “food insecure adults are more likely to have low
nutrient intake, hypertension, diabetes, depression, and other mental problems” (p. 1403). Even more, the researchers in this study found that “food insecure adults rely on low cost, high energy foods, which lead to overconsumption of energy and result in obesity” (p. 1403).

In a 2009 study, two tiendas (small stores) were studied in North Carolina. These tiendas were located in a low-income neighborhood and primarily served Latino customers (Jilcott-Pitts, Bringolf, Lloyd, McGuirt, Lawton and Morgan 2013). In one store, healthy options were offered, while in another store the energy dense food was sold. The researchers found that customers who shopped at stores where fruit and vegetables were available, it increased food and vegetable intake by one full serving. The other tienda (store) showed no change in buying and consumption patterns. While there was a positive correlation between access to healthy food and consumption, it was very small overall. In another study conducted by Larson et al. (2010) the researchers found that “better access to a supermarket is associated with reduced risk of obesity and better access to convenience stores is associated with increased risk of obesity” (p. 54).

Based on these studies it is fair to say that access to supermarkets, as well as healthy and affordable food is not the sole cause of diet related diseases, but contributes to the overall health of an individual. While having healthy options increases the chances of healthy food consumption, having a high number of unhealthy options increases the chances of unhealthy consumption. Research has illustrated that diets high in saturated and trans fat, refined sugar, and sugar-sweetened beverages have led to multiple diet related diseases.

The Cost of Food Deserts

Individuals who don’t have access to affordable and healthy food impact everyone in America. Research has found that food insecurity hurts people financially, personally, and professionally. The first and most significant way that food insecurity hurts all of us is that it weakens the American economy. Lack of healthy food increases health care cost for everyone. Additionally, if there are a higher number of unhealthy people in the country,
productivity and educational attainment decreases. For example, Berg (2008) states, “hunger not only impairs physical growth and health, but it saps peoples energy and makes it impossible to concentrate, thereby compromising performance at school, work, and home” (p. 46). If people are unable to concentrate and be their most productive selves, then America as a country has an economy that is unable to compete internationally.
Chapter 4

America’s Response to the Food Desert Problem

In the last five years, food deserts and food insecurity have been a part of a national discussion. This is partially due to First Lady Michelle Obama’s “Let’s Move” initiative, dedicated to solving childhood obesity. Although the initiative is focused on children, it has opened a discussion to healthy lifestyles in America overall. As a result, eliminating food deserts has become part of the national conversation in hopes that it will help achieve the Let’s Move goals. In 2011, Ms. Obama set a goal to eliminate food deserts in 7 years. Unfortunately, that goal is not attainable due to budgetary cuts and reduction in SNAP/health related benefits. This chapter will focus on how America is addressing the current food desert problem.

On a federal level, food insecurity and hunger is addressed through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program commonly known as SNAP. SNAP is a benefits program that allows low-income individuals and families to receive food vouchers that they can use at participating stores. SNAP is the largest program designed to help with the food safety net. While the program is designed to help low-income individuals and families, not every low-income person qualifies for SNAP. The eligibility requirements for SNAP require that a person have no more than $2,500 dollars of resources in the bank, they must have a substantially low income that is 130% at or below the federal poverty line, which is currently at $24,250 for a family of four. Additionally, SNAP administrators take into account family size, employment, and disability. Based on all of these factors a person is given an allotted monthly amount of vouchers to purchase food. Recent numbers show that as of June 2014 the SNAP program had 46.5 million people receiving benefits. Other federal programs that are part of the hunger safety net include Women, Infants, and Children commonly known as WIC and the School Based Meal Program.
While these programs help families and individuals gain access to healthier foods, there are some significant barriers that continue to hinder people from becoming food secure. One of the main barriers is the eligibility requirement to receive SNAP. While the SNAP program helps millions of people throughout the county, the rigid eligibility requirements do not help all food insecure families and people. Once a family or individual gains a better income or has more resources in the bank, they are ineligible to receive SNAP benefits. This makes it extremely difficult for anyone to get ahead and thus continues to leave people in the cycle of poverty. Even more, in the past few years there has been a reduction in SNAP resources, while food prices begin to climb. As a result of this, many low-income individuals and families are turning to charities to fill the gap to supply people with food.

According to a 2009 report by Feeding America, emergency food assistance programs are becoming a staple in American homes. The charitable food system, or food bank, was created in 1967 in Arizona as a way to ensure that food was available when people endured economic setbacks. The food bank was created to be a temporary means for people until they got back on their feet. Unfortunately, this is not the reality today. Millions of food insecure Americans use the charitable food system as a way to make it through the end of the month. In a 2010 Hunger in America study, Feeding America researchers found that “more than a third, 36% of pantry clients reported visiting the pantry at least once a month during the prior year” (2009, 7). The frequency in these visits illustrates that food banks and pantries are no longer being used for temporary bouts of hunger, but as frequently, if not more than federal benefits.

In comparison to federal benefits, food banks/pantries have strict requirements in participation. Many pantries have individuals go through rigorous interview processes and only allow people to visit the food pantry once every three months. There are very few food pantries that let people receive food on a consecutive basis (Berg 2008). Even worse, data has shown that the number of food pantry participants has increased in the last few years due to the
economic downturn (Feeding America 2010). While pantry participation has increased, food banks and pantries continue to obtain the same number of food (Feeding America 2010). Therefore, many food banks and pantries have to turn low-income participants away because they don’t have enough food to serve everyone. Despite this reality, there is a perception among the American people and government that charities can do it all when addressing the food insecurity issue. However, charities were designed to be a temporary relief for people and operate as such. Many food banks are non-profit organizations with limited budgets, people, and capacity to tackle the food insecurity issue alone.

While charities are seeing more attendance among their participants, many individuals and organizations have come up with new innovative ideas for addressing food deserts and food insecurity. One of these initiatives includes community gardens. Community gardens are gardens that are planted and tended to in either low-income areas or the food will contribute to low-income neighborhoods. While community gardens serve a great purpose in giving low-income residents an opportunity to obtain healthy food, community gardens are not a viable option to alleviating hunger completely. There are many things that must be taken into account when starting a community garden. For example, some environments are not conducive to planting a garden. There must also be someone who tends to the garden and its overall condition. Very few people may have the skill set or desire to look over a garden (Berg 2008). Additionally, a garden may not yield enough food to support a whole community. As a result, while community gardens have been a successful model in some neighborhoods, they shouldn’t be the primary model for low-income residents gaining access to healthy food.

One of the most successful food projects that have been instituted in many urban neighborhoods in various states is the corner store project initiative. The concept of the corner store initiative project increases the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in corner/convenience stores. Research has shown that storeowners were willing to carry healthy foods in their stores; however, there are several concerns with the corner store initiative. In a
study done in North Carolina (2010), when store managers were asked what their customers usually bought they responded, “snacks, chips, little cakes, and candy” (Jilcott-Pitts et al. 2010:3). Also, when the participants were asked how the healthy foods were selling in their stores many of the participants suggested that, “it depended on the time of year.” The study implied that in the summer, healthier foods sold better than non-healthy foods. Overall, the participants said that their stores were not “really places where people come looking for healthy food.”

In contrast to the storeowners, customers discussed the affect healthier food options had on them. The in-depth customer interviews showed that customers were willing to buy healthier food at the convenience store if it was available. However, customers discussed that cost would play a major role in their buying patterns when it came to buying fruits and vegetables. Also, the quality of healthy food played a major role in the customers purchasing the food. Overall, the data showed that customers did buy more healthy food when it was available to them. There was not a significant change in the customer’s purchases of healthy food. Since there are not huge statistically significant changes in food buying patterns, many of these initiatives are cut after a year because they are grant funded and don’t garner significant improvement in eliminating food insecurity. For continual success for these types of projects, it is important that the convenience stores price the food at an affordable rate. Also, there must be some sort of educational program to coincide with these types of initiatives, so residents can know the value of healthy food over processed food.

Another food project that is very popular among the different communities is developing different benefits in the SNAP program. SNAP, also known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and formerly known as the Food Stamp Program allows low-income families to pay for food by using government issued vouchers. SNAP can be used to purchase designated items in certain stores. If the new SNAP initiative is adopted, it will allow families to use the vouchers at larger supermarket stores. The benefit of this is that customers
will have greater access to healthier food at a lower cost. The new SNAP initiative also takes into account travel cost, and preparation time for customers from low-income neighborhoods. As a result, the new initiative will include an in kind benefit. The significance of the in kind benefit allows consumers to buy more food than they originally could. Even more, it serves as an incentive for residents coming from long distances.

One of the newest and most innovative food projects includes the Internet grocer service. A 2011-2012 study done in Chicago found that while there were many unique ways to give residents food such as new supermarket development, facilitating transportation, and using farmer’s markets/street vendors as supplemental food sources, they were extremely costly. As a way to reduce cost, the city of Chicago tested the Internet service option. The Internet service program allowed 34 caregivers who took care of children between the ages of 2-14 years of age to order food through the Internet service option. The caregivers noted that they usually went out for food. Throughout this program, they were able to order food via the Internet and get the food delivered to the caregiver’s home.

When evaluating the study, researchers looked at purchasing patterns among the caregivers, as well as accessibility for delivery. The research found that the majority of the food purchased included meat, fish, poultry, and eggs. While vegetables were the next thing purchased, they were tied with carbonated drinks. Overall, the study outlined the feasibility and acceptability of the Internet Grocery Service. Participants thought that it was a convenient way to purchase quality foods and were open to trying it again.

While grassroots initiatives have been very popular in the last few years, food policy has stymied quite a bit. As the income gap continues to increase, and SNAP benefits have more stringent requirements, very little has been done on the policy side to address food insecurity. Currently, the USDA Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service, funds projects that lead to food system change in the community they serve. When one applies for the grant, they have several target areas they can select for programmatic purposes. The
options include, healthy food availability, healthy diets, nutrition program participation, local food marketing, sustainable agriculture, and food related entrepreneurship. While these grants cover a gamut of food related causes, they serve, as a pipeline to bring healthy food to communities that otherwise wouldn’t see it.

The Obama Administration is taking a hard look at how communities play an implicit role in health outcomes. In January 2013, Obama unveiled a new initiative called Promise Zones. The Promise Zone initiative provides tools needed to revitalize communities. One of the outcomes of this initiative is bringing healthy foods to communities. In order to do this, the healthy zone initiative is financing and forging partnerships with various entities in hopes of combating access to healthy food within their respective neighborhoods. Currently the Obama Administration is focusing on changing five cities to serve as their baseline. The idea is that once this information has been established, the government can create programs that change the discussion of food deserts. While each of these programs are good in theory, there must be some more immediate action to take place that requires strategies to lessen SNAP requirements, increase minimum wage, close the income gap.
Chapter 5

History of Food Insecurity in Texas, Fort Worth, and Tarrant County

While food insecurity is a national problem, some states have to deal with the reality more than others. In 1999 the Department of Agriculture released a state-by-state report of levels of food insecurity in America. The report found that the highest levels of hunger were in places with high levels of poverty (Berg, 2008). Furthermore, the top three states that had the most food insecurity included New Mexico, Mississippi, and Texas. Although this report was conducted in 1999, the numbers have remained fairly constant. Unlike the 1999 report, Texas no longer ranks third, but second in having the highest number of food insecure people. In a 2009 report, data indicated that Texas had a statistically higher household average of food insecurity at 18.5% of the population compared to the national average of 14.7% (Raimondi, 2013:899). More specifically, according to the Feeding America Food Gap Analysis, 2,007,186,000 people are food insecure in Texas.

Although Texas has the second highest food insecurity rate, there have been very few policies enacted to help alleviate the problem. The most promising legislation in the area food insecurity and hunger in Texas include the school lunch program. The school lunch program is designed to provide nutritious lunches for low-income students at a reduced or free cost. In the past two legislative sessions, the Texas State Government has pushed that school meals should be healthier for students. While there is a significant amount of controversy about the healthier options for students, many agree that this program is beneficial. While this program is considered a win in the area of hunger, there are no new policies that address food insecurity for the overall public. The Texas Department of Agriculture currently offers community project grants to help foster a better food system through innovative projects. Although this service is available to people, there are many barriers for receiving the state grant. Firstly, a reputable agency must apply for the grant and there are a number of requirements that must be
met before applying. Additionally, many of these grants focus on rural areas and not urban areas within Texas.

County Level Food Insecurity

While food insecurity is a big issue in Texas, some counties suffer from food insecurity more than others. Generally areas that have a higher population of people have a higher rate of food insecurity. Based on this fact, Tarrant County is one of the counties that lead in food insecurity. Tarrant County is located in the northeastern part of Texas and is bordered by Dallas County. According to 2010 census data, Tarrant County had a population of 1,911,541 people, which is roughly 7% of the Texas population. Tarrant County covers 863.61 square miles and 2,095 people per square mile. Within Tarrant County there are several large cities, which include Fort Worth, Arlington, and Grand Prairie. Fort Worth houses the county seat. Black and Hispanic residents comprise 43.5% of the population. According to census data, 15.2% of the population of people is below the federal and state poverty line.

The socioeconomic conditions of the county are important to understand because they influence the health status of the overall county. In Tarrant County alone, 18%, or 325,860 people are considered food insecure (Feeding America 2010). According to data on the Feeding America site, food insecure individuals in Tarrant County have trouble meeting SNAP eligibility requirements. More specifically, data shows that 58% of food insecure people in Tarrant County do not qualify for SNAP eligibility requirements, 7% meet the requirements, while the remaining 35% of people don’t qualify on a consistent basis. The startling reality of this data is that many people are going to bed hungry with little to no food options and no government support. In Tarrant County alone, there are a number of areas that have high populations of food insecurity. Three of those areas include Como, Stop Six, and Southside communities. While similar in nature, these neighborhoods have very different backgrounds. In order to understand how the neighborhoods became high-risk areas for food insecurity, it is important to understand the history of these neighborhoods.
History of Three Fort Worth Neighborhood

Southside

From a demographic standpoint, each of these neighborhoods is categorized as African American neighborhoods. Among the three neighborhoods, the Southside community is the oldest neighborhood. When referring to Southside, it is important to understand that the Southside neighborhood is divided by interstate highway 35. For purposes of this paper, we will be referring to the most eastward area of the Southside neighborhood, which is east of interstate highway 35. This portion of the Southside is a predominately African American area. This area is also commonly referred to as the near southeast. By 1907 Fort Worth was beginning to become a modest entrepreneurial hub for African Americans. During this time, there were more than 50 African American owned businesses within the city. Historians have noted that these businesses included doctor’s offices, hotels, barbershops, grocers, beauty shops, funeral homes, and butcher shops. As black owned businesses began to flourish around the city, the first black millionaire in Fort Worth, Mr. William “Gooseneck” McDonald, moved his business to the Near Southeast side of Fort Worth. William McDonald, known as Bill among colleagues, was the owner of the Fraternal Bank and Trust. The bank’s primary mission was to be a financial services company for African American clients who were interested in opening businesses.

Mr. McDonald not only moved his business to the Southside area, but he also purchased a 12-bedroom mansion in the predominately white area. Mr. McDonald’s move slowly created a trend for other African American business owners who were looking for a more centralized location to do business within the black community. Shortly after McDonald moved to the area businesses such as the Ethel Ransom Memorial Hospital, I.M. Terrel School, which served as one of the only black schools in the area, and Prince Memorial CME established roots on the Southside of Fort Worth. Black business owners began moving their businesses into the neighborhood and slowly, upper middle class and middle class blacks began to
purchase homes in the area. While African Americans were moving into the neighborhood, the once all white community was becoming an African American neighborhood as whites began to move out. By 1920, the Southside was a predominately African American neighborhood (Cary, 2008).

By the mid-1920's the Southside area was a bustling area for blacks and became known as African American business district. Even more, the Southside was often referred to as the "silk road" of the black community due to the large concentration of wealth in the area. Despite the depression, the mid-20 and early 30's ushered in small economic growth and a diversity of black owned businesses in this area (Cary 2008). While the government largely ignored this area, many blacks supported one another and were able to withstand the great depression (Cary 2008). Surprisingly, some of the most successful ventures on the Southside were grocery stores. One historian noted that, "black grocery stores, which were sole proprietors or partnerships with other family members, were key institutions that grew and prospered because racial segregation gave them a semi-monopoly in the city (Cary, 2008:33).

By the 60's the Southside began to lose some of its prominence within the African American community. Two factors contributed to this phenomenon. The first and most surprising thing that halted the growth of the Southside was President Eisenhower’s enactment of the 1956 Federal Aid Highway Act. This bill also known as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act was an expansive public works project that would expand the highway system in the United States (Cary 2008). The original purpose of the act was to expand the highways for defense purposes, so that troops could safely travel throughout the country if needed. As a result of this act, Interstate Highway 35 was constructed in Fort Worth. This highway bisected the Southside neighborhood. More specifically, the business district was cut off from the residential district. With the construction of the highway, many customers found it harder to access stores that were once readily accessible. Due to this, some of the businesses within the community had to close down (Cary 2008).
While the highway act momentarily crippled the Southside area, it still remained a booming area for blacks, the biggest detriment for the Southside area was integration. With the desegregation of black schools and businesses, many people who would have normally come to the Southside for basic goods and services no longer saw a need to come that far. Also, as prominent members of the community began to die, many of their children did not maintain their family business or homes because they had other opportunities and resources than their parents. Consequently, almost all of the businesses and homes were eventually left unattended and abandoned.

Stop Six

While Southside is one of the oldest black communities in Fort Worth, Stop Six was established shortly after the Southside; therefore, making it one of the oldest black communities in Fort Worth as well (Cary 2008). Stop Six, which is in the eastside of Fort Worth, got its name because it was the sixth stop on the electric powered train made from Fort Worth to Dallas (Cary 2008). Unlike the Southside, the Stop Six area was a poor rural community. Many of the blacks in the community worked for white employers in the surrounding all white neighborhoods, Poly and Meadowbrook. While many of the Stop Six residents did business in the Southside of town, they couldn’t afford to live there. As a result, they settled near their employers in the undeveloped community in east Fort Worth. The first black resident in the Stop Six area was Amanda Davis and her 10 children (Cary 2008). Ms. Davis commonly referred to by residents as Ms. Amanda bought a one-acre tract of land and raised poultry. Shortly after her purchase, a couple, the Cowan family, purchased a three-acre tract of land and produced a variety of vegetable products (Cary 2008). Due to segregation, small businesses such as beauty shops, barbershops, and cafes were located in the Stop Six area.

Similar to the Southside, integration slowed down the development of the Stop Six area. The small economic growth in the neighborhood became virtually non-existent once Fort Worth became a more integrated city (Cary 2008). Very few residents left Stop Six because
many couldn't afford to leave; however, the growth of the neighborhood halted. Unlike the Southside, the neighborhood was not left abandoned, rather the opposite happened, and many residents stayed and have continued to live in the Stop Six area for generations. Many residents that live there now are families that have endured generational poverty.

Como

Of all three of the neighborhoods, Como is by far the most unique. Originally the Lake Como area was a predominately middle class white neighborhood. The small manmade pond, referred to as the “lake” within Como, was created to provide water to generate electricity for a new gambling pavilion (Cary 2008). In 1893 the gambling facility burned down and slowly the Lake Como area became a segregated community for middle class blacks (Cary 2008). Lake Como is wedged in between the middle of extremely wealthy predominately white communities, which include, Ridglea, Westover Hills, and Arlington Heights. Before integration, many of the white residents living in these neighborhoods employed many residents who lived in Como (Cary 2008). Similar to Stop Six, there was small business activity in Como (Cary 2008). However, many residents went to the Southside business district for larger purchases such as groceries, clothes, and banking. The distinction between Como and the other areas is that Como was the hub for African American political activity within the Fort Worth community (Cary 2008). Many of the Como residents held positions on the Fort Worth school board, city precinct committees, and other local positions. It was said, “in order to secure a black vote in Fort Worth, then the candidate must secure Como” (Cary 2008:81). Similar to the other neighborhoods, integration halted the growth of the Como area. However, Como is still fairly populous with lower income residents whose family was unable to move out of the area. Como also has a very large elderly population that still resides in the area.

Each of these neighborhoods has a deep history. Once neighborhoods were integrated, the black owned grocery stores in this neighborhood began to close down until there were no more left in the Southside. The reality is that residents in the Stop Six and Como were
always in a food desert; however, the condition became worse with the closing of the Southside markets.
Chapter 6
Food Insecurity in Southside, Stop Six, and Como

I observed Southside, Como, and Stop Six neighborhoods. I visited each neighborhood for one month to gain a better understanding of their food options. During the months of October, November, and December, I visited community centers and food stores located in each neighborhood. During my observations, I learned that each neighborhood has distinctive patterns that make them unique. In order to paint a clear ethnographic picture, I engaged in participant observation, including direct observation and conducted informal interviews with residents from the respective areas. More specifically, I spoke to 40 residents while visiting different food stores within the three neighborhoods. Residents gave me information regarding the kinds of food that was available in the stores and where I could go to purchase various items.

While the primary focus of visiting these neighborhoods was to uncover access to affordable and healthy foods, I uncovered the intricate complexity of urban life and the difficult reality of trying to survive with little resources. The USDA considers Stop Six a food desert, while the Southside and Como are considered “high risk for food insecurity.” Once I studied the neighborhoods and the food options each neighborhood had available, I began to search for healthier alternate food options. I discovered that the healthiest options were programs through the food bank. I visited the food bank and informally interviewed program coordinators who organized various food programs in the neighborhoods I was studying. The coordinators gave me information regarding each of their programs and the limitations of each. Based on this information I was able to make several conclusions about food disparities in the three neighborhoods.
The heart of the Southside neighborhood is Evans Avenue. Prior to integration, one of the main grocery stores, Bazy’s Grocery Store, was located at Evans and Hattie Street (Cary 2008). Owned by Samuel Jenkins Bazy, the Bazy family created a retail grocers association of black grocery stores in the mid 1930’s (Carry 2008). The purpose of the Retail Grocers Association was for black grocers to collectively buy products from wholesale distributors and enabled them to lower their prices to accommodate black customers. While the Bazy Grocery Store was the largest grocery store in Fort Worth for blacks, the Southside neighborhood was also home to Lucille’s Fine Food, and B.D. Davis Fresh Grocers Veggies and Canned Food. Because Southside was the most centrally located area for blacks, most of the grocery shopping was done in this particular neighborhood. For other black owned grocery stores that were located outside of the Southside neighborhood, they were still affected by business in this area because they were members of the Retail Grocers Association.

I met with an elderly 70-year-old woman named Colleen1, who lived in the Southside before the neighborhood changed in the mid 70’s. Colleen was a dark complexion woman, with a short haircut. She told me she was a cancer survivor and lived near the Southside all her life. She did community work for the area. Colleen explained the dynamics of the neighborhood and discussed the business district. In describing the neighborhood, Colleen said:

Once you hit Evans Avenue, you knew that you had entered the “silk road” of the black community. Evans then was like 35 now; it served as an imaginary line between white Southside and black Southside. Every black person had to come to Southside for something. IM Terrel was the only black school for black kids in Fort Worth, Arlington, and Mansfield, so everyone was bused to the Southside. If you didn’t go to school here, then your parents shopped here. If you were privileged enough to live here, then you were rich. All the well-to-do black entrepreneurs and their families lived in the Southside.

1 All names have been changed in this paper.
When I asked Colleen about grocery stores in the neighborhood, she fondly replied, “Southside had black owned businesses of all sorts, even grocery stores. Baby, when I tell you, you could get anything here, I mean you could get anything here.”

Since Evans Avenue was considered the epicenter of business in the Southside, my research began there. I spent the first two weeks of time in Southside riding around the neighborhood. Much of my time was spent on Evans Avenue, because many of the other streets only had houses, churches, and funeral homes.

Evans Avenue is a fairly long street that begins at the most northern tip of the Southside and intersects its way into the neighboring community, Morningside. The most northern point of the street, which meets with interstate highway 35, is nearly desolate. There are a few dilapidated homes, and a large abandoned church that sits on the corner of Evans and Hattie. The boarded up windows and doors suggest that the home are abandoned, but there appears to be people living in the homes. Male voices coming from the inside of the homes suggest that people are staying there. Further along the street, there are several stretches of land before I come across two people. I observe a well-dressed man, wearing slacks, a button down shirt, and a hat sitting in a lawn chair on the corner of one of Evans and Missouri Street. The man yells at a darker black woman who is wearing small shorts and a cut off shirt. The woman rolls her eyes at the man and continues to walk down the street in the opposite direction of him toward the abandoned homes.

As I continue to head south on Evans, the homes begin to look a little more inhabitable. Many still have boards hanging from their window frames, but a few of the homes have windows that are blocked by exterior bars. Unlike the northern part of the street, these bars, suggest that people reside in these homes. Even more, the prevalence of bars suggest that I am in a different social setting in which crime is a factor. As I continue along Evans, I see a group of four Hispanic men remodeling what appears to be a large abandoned home. When I
reach the intersection of Evans and Rosedale, there is a 7 Eleven convenience store and Jack-in-the-Box fast food restaurant.

After visiting the Southside several times, I decide to visit the 7 Eleven. The 7 Eleven parking lot is filled with eight cars that are unevenly parked. Black men hang outside of the 7 eleven. Some stand along the wall of the convenience store, while others sit in the passenger seat with their doors open or windows down. Music comes from the cars and the men talk over it. There are two women that come out of the store. One woman carries a baby. There are also a few kids that look to be around middle school age who walk into the convenience store and come out of the store a few minutes later with sodas, candy, and a bag of chips. I park in the filled parking lot and go into the grocery store. There are more people outside than inside the store. It is no different than most convenience stores. There are junk food items on the shelves and sugar-based drinks packed in the freezers and the food is not affordable. Single packaged items are double what one would see in a large chain grocery store. After a few minutes I leave the store. I stand outside for a while and notice that the convenience store is a “hangout” spot for local residents. Many men meet up and talk about a wide variety of things happening within the neighborhood. Yet very few actually enter the store to purchase anything. The individuals who entered and left the store with items were kids that looked to be around 11-13 years of age. I asked one of the black men who appeared to be in his early 30’s if there were any grocery stores, or “decent” food places to get food in the neighborhood. I explained that by decent, I meant healthy. The man snickered and said, “Nah, ma. Only white folks get that shit.”

On that same afternoon, I continue along Evans Avenue and observe what seems to be a mom and pop grocery. The writing on the wall reads “Harvey’s Food Store.” It is a large tan building that sits on the right side of Evans. It appears to be in good condition based on the outward structure. There are no boarded up windows, or exterior bars. However, I notice that there are no cars parked in the parking lot. The only person that surrounds the building is a
very skinny white man that sits in the shade of the front door. The man appears to be asleep, but as I get closer I notice that he is awake. His eyes are slightly open and he is trembling. Since there were no cars in the parking lot, I opted not to go into Harvey’s Food Store.

Leaving the food store, I come across Sam’s Liquor and Grill the next block over. Similar to Harvey’s Food Store, Sam’s Liquor and Grill appears to be closed. There is no one in the parking lot; however, there are exterior bars that block the windows. As I continue along the Evans Avenue strip, I exit the Southside neighborhood and enter Morningside. Once entering Morningside, I turn around and observe the other streets in Southside. Southside is generally a residential neighborhood. There are little to no businesses once you leave Evans Avenue. While many of the houses are gone or dilapidated, the few houses that do stand are surrounded by huge yards. Additionally, there are several old churches and funeral homes that are seemingly in business, yet look very run down.

After riding around for several weekends in Southside, I observed no healthy food stores for residents and most people told me to go to other areas that were outside of the neighborhood. Upon visiting the anti-poverty coalition in Tarrant County, I discovered that the Tarrant Area Bank food bank provided services to help mitigate the high rate of food insecurity within the Southside neighborhood. The Tarrant Area Food Bank provides three types of services for Southside. The first of these services is the Kids Café. The Kid’s Café is a program designed for children by providing meals in safe environments. The Kid Café’s were located at two recreation centers. There were also Senior Citizens programs that were located at two nursing homes. The senior citizens programs deliver fresh and frozen food products to senior citizens, along with information sessions about various health related topics. The food is delivered once a month. In order to qualify for the food, seniors must be 60 years or older and live within the zip code of the senior center. The most unique program that was offered in the Southside community was the Southside Community Garden. One food bank associate explained the significance of the garden by saying, “Unfortunately, the garden can’t alleviate
hunger, but it does provide a sense of community among residents. We have seen a decrease in vandalism since the garden has been here.”

The Southside neighborhood is a real representation of how a community can be crippled by social disorganization. The neighborhood that was once the hub of black entrepreneurship is now densely populated with limited resources. Even worse, residents accepted that they lacked proper food, insisting that it was just a way of life. There was no sense of urgency to find alternative options and fight for better access and affordable food. While the Tarrant Area Food Bank did provide additional support, many of the food options only helped a small population of people, or were more of a social endeavor than a program to help eliminate food insecurity in this neighborhood. Ultimately, charity was the only alternative means for the Southside.

Stop Six

Like the Southside, I spent an equal amount of time in Stop Six. My journey started on Amanda Street, which was named after the first black resident of Stop Six. During my time in Stop Six, I had the opportunity to speak with an elderly black couple that talked about the neighborhood with much nostalgia. During one of my many visits they said, “Stop Six used to be a rural community for blacks. I am not really sure when it became the ghetto, but families that lived here used to help each other and share things. There were never many shops, just a community, you know.”

Unlike the Southside, Stop Six is a tightly packed with people. The homes and yards are small, and they are pushed closely together. While many of the homes have bars on their outside windows and chipped paint, they are still in pretty good condition. As I drive down Amanda Street, I notice that Stop Six is a busy neighborhood. Many people stand outside in their front yards and talk to their neighbors. Children of all ages roam around playing in the street and men hang out on certain corners. On any given day, I would see a number of people hanging outside of homes or sitting in mass groups in their front lawn or porch. During the
month that I visited Stop Six, I noticed there was a larger police presence in the neighborhood, suggesting that they may have a higher rate of crime. In conjunction with the vast number of police stations and cars roaming the neighborhood, there were many churches. On Ramey Avenue alone, there were six churches.

Unlike the Southside and Como neighborhoods, Stop Six was not only considered a high-risk food insecurity area, but a food desert by the United States Department of Agriculture. In a recent study done by the Tarrant County Food Policy Council, 80 percent of the stores in the neighborhood were considered convenience stores that sold little to no affordable or healthy foods. I made note of several different stores in the area. While driving through Stop Six, I came across Miller Grocery and Grill, Oasis Food Store Beer and Wine, JW Food Store, and Stop Six Food Market. There were also two restaurants, Mr. Joe’s Restaurant and Williams Chicken. Each of these stores was the size of a gas station. They also had very limited amounts of healthy food and the prices were double what I would find in a grocery store. For example, I attempted to record all the prices I observed. I also bought a bag of chips and soda from Stop Six Food Market. The chips cost me $1.65 and the soda cost me $2.00. I later went to a chain grocery store and spent .85 cents on a bag of chips and $1.08 on a bottle of soda.

I observed that while the stores were small, each of them contained a fairly large quantity of grains, which included pasta, dry beans, and rice, as well as large quantities of cereal. Beyond that, there were a lot of canned foods within the stores, as well as beer, sodas, and high sugar drinks. There was also a large quantity of “snack” foods such as chips, and candy. I noticed that very few people were inside the stores, but a large majority stood outside the stores to talk. I asked one young lady where I could get some vegetables. She laughed and said, “You won’t really find no vegetables at this store.” After probing her to find out where she goes for fruits and vegetables in the neighborhood, she told me, “They just build a Fiesta down the road, but there are no stores really out here like that.”
I discovered that the Tarrant Area Food Bank had some alternative emergency food options for the Stop Six community. Some of these programs include food pantries, kids café, senior programs, and the most popular of all, the mobile food pantry. Local churches sponsor the food pantry programs in Stop Six. Low-income residents could come to the churches and pick up food on certain days. Other guidelines mandated that individuals who were utilizing the food pantry were only permitted to come to the pantry once every month. While the pantry serves healthy food, there are not many fresh food options. Most of the food offered is canned food, grains, and cereal. These options were very similar to what is in the small stores in the neighborhood.

The mobile pantry offered more fresh food than the pantry. The mobile pantries program is a “traveling” pantry that delivers fresh food to residents. In order for the Stop Six neighborhood to have a mobile pantry, they are connected with a partner agency, Mayfield Baptist Church, who sponsors the pantry. The mobile pantry comes every fourth Wednesday to Amanda Avenue and provides fresh food to residents that qualify for the food. The food is distributed to clients in an outdoor setting. People receiving the food are given a box and can go down the food line and select different items until the food is gone. Stop Six is one of the biggest mobile pantry sites with nearly 700 families served monthly. I asked volunteers and recipients about the success of the program and got several different responses. A volunteer of the program stated, “the program is good, but some people have to be turned away because we run out of food.” One of the recipients of food said, “the food is good, but sometimes I don’t know what stuff is or how to cook it.”

Of all the neighborhoods, Stop Six is the neighborhood that has the highest food insecurity and the most resources. However, due to the large number of people in need within the community, many of the residents are unable to take advantage of the healthy and affordable food available.
Como

The Como neighborhood is the most fascinating of the three. Unlike the other two neighborhoods, Como is geographically close to two grocery stores, which include Tom Thumb and Central Market. However, neither of these stores is affordable for residents; therefore, the neighborhood is considered “at risk” and “food insecure.” Additionally, Como is the smallest but most populous neighborhood of the three. My journey in Como begins on Horne Street, which is the main street that runs through the center of the neighborhood. It is 10:00am on a Saturday and the street buzzes with black people. There are kids, a few women, and a lot of men who are walking around. I notice that some people stand outside of their homes, while others just walk the street aimlessly. There are a group of men who sit in a front lawn drinking beer, and another group talking loudly on the other side of the street. As I go around the neighborhood, I come across the Como Food Mart.

Como Food Mart is a small shop that is the size of a convenience store. There are three small parking spots that sit in the front of the store. The small lot is crowded with five guys and two women. I enter the small store and find three aisles lined with over-priced junk food that is more expensive than a traditional grocery store prices. The walls are lined with shelves of alcoholic beverages and soda. There are also three slot machines in the store. Two guys play the slot machines, while another looks over their shoulder. The cashier is a Middle Eastern man who sits behind a plexi-glass window.

I go further down the street and come across Sunny’s Food Store. On the outside, Sunny’s Food Store looks as if it should be closed. All the windows are boarded up; however, there are quite a few people and cars in the parking lot of the store. I notice the door is ajar, and some people are going inside. I am suspicious of all the activity going on in the parking lot, so instead of going into the store, I wait in the parking lot. After a few minutes, I still feel uncomfortable and decide to return to Sunny’s again the following week.
The next weekend I return to Sunny’s and I observe men that are standing alongside the store meet certain cars that pull up, and hand the driver small packages through the window. It looks as if these are drug deals, so I opt not to go into Sunny’s Food Store. I continue down the road and come across Como Como Neighborhood Market. It is very similar to Como Food Mart, which is a block away. The Como Como Food Mart is black owned. Similar to the other stores, very little activity is happening in the store, but rather outside of the store. In addition to the Food Mart’s, Como has several eateries. The restaurants include Virgie Lee’s Seafood and Chicken, Swanson’s Diner, Drews Place Restaurant, and Bibi’s Quick Snack. I visit Virgie Lee’s and Drew’s Place. I ask to see the menu before the wait staff seats me. I notice that each of these restaurants offer very few healthy options. Virgie Lee’s Seafood has mainly fried seafood dishes, while Drew’s is a “southern” style restaurant that contains quite a few fried items.

In an effort to find healthier options food options, I stop by Como Community Center to find out about various food options. One elderly black woman at the center explained that they had local pantries at the center and at some churches. She also mentioned that residents benefitted from a community garden that was nearby at Ridglea Baptist Church. I followed up with the Tarrant Area Food Bank to find out about the Community Garden in Como. Upon speaking with the Community Garden coordinator, I found out that the garden primarily benefits the senior population in the Como community. While the church supplies the overall land for the garden, various people “rent” plots of the land and plant fruits and vegetables for the neighboring Como community. Once the food is harvested, the church stores it in their food pantry and distributes it to Como residents. The residents who qualify for the food pantry services are able to come during the designated distribution times and collect food. Residents are also able to work in the garden. One of the elderly residents explained that he liked “working with his hands and giving back to those in need.”
Como is a unique neighborhood because of its geographic location. Although wedged in the center of very wealthy neighborhoods, there is great need in Como. Food insecurity is a norm for residents in and in order to survive, residents must turn to other measures to find quality food.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

In spite of their differences, Southside, Stop Six, and Como share many similarities. As mentioned earlier, each of these communities were once home to some of the most prominent African Americans in the city. Due to integration and lack of government support, these neighborhoods are now impoverished areas that hold glimpses of its former glory. Food insecurity is just one of the many social consequences of persistent poverty in these communities. With that in mind, it is important to discuss whether the current initiatives are effective.

While the current initiatives to alleviate food deserts are admirable, it is important to determine if they are making a true impact or not. The current measures to alleviate food insecurity in these neighborhoods are largely charitable grassroots efforts. More specifically, all of these programs are considered “emergency” food programs. Many of the participants who are recipients of the food are dependent on emergency food programs on a monthly basis. All of the communities in this study had centers and organizations that housed a senior program and a kid’s café program. While both of these programs provide free and fresh food to two populations within the community, it isn’t a program that helps the community as a whole; nor, does it solve the food insecurity problem; it merely puts a Band-Aid on the issue. In order to run these programs, there has to be a well-established center willing to host such programs. Due to this, many of these programs do not have a long tenure. For example, each of the programs has been in existence for less than 10 years. This is largely due to the fact that many of the partner agencies are able to retain the number of people needed to coordinate and organize such programs.

Similar to the aforementioned programs, mobile pantries and community garden program are emergency food programs as well. In order to participate in the mobile
pantry, participants must meet SNAP requirement and are only able to visit the mobile pantry once a month. Many of the mobile food pantries do not supply enough food to aide families for the whole month, or the pantries run out of food before everyone that needs food can receive food. Many of the pantry services are dependent on organizations and centers that are willing to host a pantry site. Additionally, the organization must have staff to administer and organize goods. Again, while these services are helpful, they are not a viable option for addressing food insecurity.

Of all the initiatives, community gardens have become one of the most popular in the country. Also commonly referred to as urban agriculture, the idea of community gardens has been a topic of discussion in various media outlets for several years. Community gardens serve are a very unique initiative, but they also have significant limitations. Theoretically, community gardens can serve a lot of purposes in the community, which include providing fresh food, and teaching community members about gardening and sustainability. Community gardens can also serve as a central hub for community members and be a safe zone for community activities. While all of these factors are positive, this doesn't solve the food insecurity problem as a whole. While the Southside and Como community gardens have been successful endeavors, there have been numerous problems in developing the gardens. For example, the north Texas soil is proving to be a challenge when planting certain vegetables. Additionally, depending on the weather and overall environmental climate, the crops may not yield enough food to support residents. Beyond the environmental challenges, there must be someone to manage the garden and assist others who want to work in the garden. For Como this has been a challenge in the past and continues to be a problem presently. Unlike Como, the Southside garden has a large population of elderly people who are willing to work the garden.

Currently, Tarrant County depends on charitable efforts to address food insecurity. However, in order to truly make a difference, there must be a macro-level approach in addressing food insecurity. In order to do this, coalitions, and residents must engage multiple
government sectors that address health, transportation, education, and employment. Even more, political leaders must be able to articulate the problems and stand behind coalitions that are fighting food insecurity and make these issues the center of legislative priorities.

While Tarrant County has a well-organized coalition, Tarrant County Food Policy Council, the council must generate more data driven research to persuade legislators that there is a significant food insecurity problem within the county. Research must be multi-faceted and illustrate the current food retail options available to residents in these neighborhoods, the nutritional value of items found in these stores, and the health inequities found in these neighborhoods versus food secure neighborhoods. On a micro level, the current initiatives must continue to be utilized, but there must be a more sustainable way to stimulate healthy food retail in neighborhoods with low access.

While this study analyzed the current grassroots efforts that were being used to address food insecurity within these neighborhoods, this research project did not explore sustainable grassroots efforts that worked in other communities. A comparative study of successful, long-term grassroots initiatives would be helpful to the overall study because it could offer insight of more successful initiatives that could potentially be adopted in these areas. Overall, residents living in neighborhoods such as Southside, Stop Six, and Como must live in a healthy environment to achieve a fair distribution of society's resources. In order to truly close the grocery gap in these three neighborhoods, there must be collective partnerships and shared responsibility among government, private, and social sectors. Serious policy and grassroots efforts must be made to address food insecurity, or the outcome may worsen and be a detriment to society overall.
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Biographical Information

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