

Food Justice and Prison Food Systems: Exploring the Potential for Reframing Prison Food from
Punitive to Restorative

by

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As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. – Romans 3:10

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. – Romans 3:23

"taedet caeli convexa tueri" – Virgil

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ABSTRACT

Prison food system exploration is generally absent within various examinations of food justice work and research. However, this research investigates United States prison food systems in order to inform an understanding of food's roles in these institutions so that prison food issues can be more effectively addressed within the food justice and prison reform movements. Examining United States penal institutions' food systems highlights the consequences of understanding healthy food as a privilege rather than a basic human right. Control, cost, and capitalistic considerations of food have become emblematic of penal injustice. A growing for-profit prison industry, outsourcing of food to private service providers, and growing inmate population burdens all substantiate the concern. In the pursuit of abject punishment we have replaced the innate human quality of life through sustenance with inhumane manipulation of food for cruel and unusual punishment. If the role of the prison is to normalize the inmate towards reintegration within acceptable society then prison food systems are a direct representation of what society perceives as normalization. Data for this research was collected through literature review of food justice literature, prison reform literature and penal law literature. Results conclude that the insufficiency of food justice to incorporate prison food system analysis determines a need. By reframing food from punitive to restorative there is the potential to contribute towards reduced recidivism as well as improving public health rates. This brief study should inspire other academics and activists to engage food justice beyond place-based ideologies and remember that those who are "placeless" deserve just as much potential for transformation.

Keywords: prison food systems, food justice, social justice, rehabilitation, punitive, recidivism, public health

Chapter 1: Introduction

Aramark, the nation's largest correctional facilities food services provider states the following on their website: "Good Food. Better Behavior. Food is a powerful incentive. Learn how FreshFavorites™ helps you manage offender behavior and generate new income" (Aramark, n.d.). The irony of Aramark's claim is that multiple states are now in litigation with the corporation regarding contractual misappropriations. Michigan, Florida, and Ohio have all submitted several lawsuits against the provider for failing to provide quality food or even providing food at all. Aramark has continuously exploited the for-profit appropriation of food to the world's largest incarcerated population.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) website states that over 2.3 million people are incarcerated in the US (NAACP, n.d.). Considering their next fact, that while the US has five percent of the world's population and also boasts 25% of the global incarceration rate (NAACP, n.d.), we begin to see how Aramark has conveniently steered their predatory capitalism towards a booming market. Perhaps more disturbing is the exploitative predatory capitalism exhibited on their website which promotes expensive private food subscriptions and canteen purchases, all of which are sold at a gouging profit for Aramark, exploiting the sentiment attached to food and the price inmates and loved ones are willing to pay for that sentiment.

These examples serve to illuminate the formation of argument that prison food systems are important to engage with because of the inherent conflicts between food as source of revenue, food as punishment, and food as manipulation directed by the penal institution and the risk of negative consequential outcomes for the inmate. The intention of the prison is to *break down* and *normalize* (Foucault, 1977). Is food one method that the system uses to break down the

individual? The prison food apparatus is not unintentional and serves to “transform the civilian subject into the ‘inmate’” (Godderis, 2006, p.63). Godderis (2006) writes:

Through the disciplining of prisoner’s bodies, the control and surveillance of the consumptive process works with other elements of the prison to achieve this transformation. The prison food experience is a particularly powerful site of this subjectification because it continuously recurs throughout every day and works to estrange one’s self from one’s body and a sense of personal identity. (p.63)

Conversely, “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants” is the tag line from Michael Pollan’s bestselling book, *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto* (Pollan, 2008). This biblically revered and trending manifesto has spurred a cultural and social shift by increasing concerns surrounding the industrial agricultural complex, diseases, and weight gain. Proselytized ethical messages such as those that Pollan has delivered have contributed to an awareness that affects purchasing decisions about how and what to consume. While Pollan (2008) is largely lauded as contributing to food system improvement, he falls short of engaging systemic and institutional forms of racism, gender, classism, and poverty. Instead, opting for a tone of ethical consumption from the perspective of a white middle-class norm, he dismisses the opportunity for a larger dialogue around food justice. Also reiterated throughout Pollan’s writing is the technology of the self, or the freedom to expand one’s ethical capacity based on exploration of ideals and practices (Zimmerman, 2015). In prisons, yet another level of othering persists when inmates no longer have the privilege of exploring their ethical selves through food choices that might contribute towards the technology of the self.

In contrast to Pollan’s (2008) emphasis on ethical consumption, the legacies of institutionalized and historical oppression are addressed within food justice movements. Food

justice advocates challenge existing policies and systems that have contributed to a dysfunctional and antithetical food system. Typically, though, food justice movements often focus on affected communities be they urban, rural, enclave, or neighborhood and the movement for food justice becomes confused with the movement for food security. Largely absent from these efforts are the thousands of inmates that fill America's prisons and jails who are daily subjected to a life of consumption deprived from political or personal preferences and whose considerations, instead, focus on survival.

Even though prison populations contribute to a notable percentage of the food system, given the size of the incarcerated population, and that food holds physical and social significance in prisons, we do not know much about the dynamic of consequences of this food system nor how it functions. Does food as punishment contribute to recidivism? Are historical traumas replicated within prison food systems? Food justice research and activism has yet to substantially address these concerns. Likewise, prison reformers have yet to substantially address food beyond the framework of food security. By analyzing food as a mechanism of power in prison, it may be possible to reform food systems in prison and create a more socially just environment in U.S. penal institutions.

As incarceration rates increase, the inmate population in America's prisons (long-term sentences) and jails (short-term sentences), both private and public, represents a growing population whose public and mental health problems, and their probability of recidivism could be reduced if the American prison food system was reformed. If we continue to dismiss prison populations within food justice research, analysis, and practice then we risk not only the continued abuse of food as an unjust mechanism of power but also act as silent participants in the

continuing erosion of inmate public health outcomes, increased recidivism, and abuses of penal authority.

This research project aims to inspire food justice discourse and practice towards incorporating prison food system reform discourse and practice. The research that does exist often focuses on the cultural significance of prison food while little attention has been paid towards examining the intersectionality of incarceration, food, and injustice in the U.S. (the majority of existing literature comes from researchers based in Canada or Europe). Why has our exploration of food justice been limited to only visible communities, tied to place, with which the researcher can readily identify? Is it because, as Shicca (2012) writes, “activists attach meaning to shared experiences, and through interactive and signifying processes [in which they] develop culturally relevant frames meant to convey grievances” (p. 457)? Should activists be engaging more interactively, undertaking signifying processes, in order to create momentum by assisting inmates with a voice? Has discourse and epistemology been driven by a *place-based* food justice, rather than recognizing *space-based* food justice? Thus, this research identifies a gap in food justice which fails to address United States correctional institution food systems in order to promote understanding of food’s roles in these institutions so that prison food issues can be more effectively addressed in food justice and prison food system reform movements.

Chapter 2: Background & Significance, argues that there are multiple reasons why prison food systems needs to have greater recognition within food justice discourse. Further research of food’s roles in prison is important as a growing American prison (both state and federal) population combined with the continued privatization of prisons have made food a secondary consideration, rather than a priority. Budget cuts, outsourcing to catering services, and the reduction of meals served demonstrate food’s use as a mechanism for punishment.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology, explains why both policy and academic literature-based research were necessary for this research. Literature provides an excellent stethoscope in which to ascertain the heartbeat of a movement. As social justice activists begin to engage within broader policy reform, the time is ripe to begin the conversation of what penal reform could potentially entail. It is my intention that this research will act as a catalyst for reform of the prison food system. Through exploratory research, I will establish a foundation for a new framework that may provoke further academic and political action around prison food systems in the future, as we begin to recognize the value of this discourse. It is limiting to the food justice movement to overlook the treatment of invisible populations that are representative of all communities in which we participate.

In Chapter 4: Results, Analysis and Contribution, I relate theory and findings that support the potential for prison food system reframing through three research questions. First, I ask how food justice movements address food in prisons, if at all, in order to empower both the body and soul of the inmate, using food as a means of rehabilitation rather than a means of subjugation. This exploration illustrates how food systems scholarship might engage prison food systems for further academic research. Second, I ask what roles food plays in prison systems. Through analysis of existing literature and media, this thesis presents an introductory explanation of how and why food is a mechanism of power and why prison food systems deserve to be addressed and understood. Lastly, I ask how alternatives are currently emerging in prison food systems through the efforts of food justice and prison reform advocates, and whether these engagements are challenging systemic injustices or simply applying neo-liberal remedies. It is important to recognize the many projects that have popped up around the country within the past few years that work towards providing inmates with the capacity to grow their own food, connect with the

land, generate a sense of empowerment and purpose and provide additional employment skills while also reducing recidivism rates. These projects and programs are fewer in number compared to other institutional purchasing (farm-to-school, for example) and community food arrangements. Prison gardens, farm-to-prison programs, and nutritional requirement reform as well as increased research and activism could mitigate some of these additional burdens that inmates face for either short or long-term periods of time. While there is extensive literature on community gardens, farm-to-school programs, co-ops, and food system localization, there is an apparent lack of resources on prison food system reform. However, it is important to understand that the culture and authority that thrives in prison creates an alternative society that is unlike what free society experiences. Thus, it is best to enter this exploration without bias and view inmates not as creatures of crime, but as humans deserving of the same basic fundamental rights that we all strive for.

The intent of this thesis is not to propose a solution of how to reframe food in prison from punitive to restorative, but rather to address the possibility and encourage academics and activists to pursue the possibilities. There are more models to be uncovered, more statistics to be learned, and more alternatives to be presented, but advocates must remain vigilant at recognizing the “capillaries of power” and dig deeper than simply addressing injustice with a hoe and a handshake.

Chapter 2: Background & Significance

2.1. Incarceration In The United States

The United States incarcerates more individuals than any other country on the globe. Violent and non-violent offenders continue to overflow our federal and state prisons. Although both classes of offense have remained consistent, or even declined, the length and category of offenses has increased due to policies such as the “three strikes” law, the arbitrary “war on drugs,” and now the “war on immigration.” As of December 2013, roughly 1.5 million individuals were incarcerated in state and federal prisons, or roughly eight percent of the American population (Carson, 2014). The larger incarceration total is over 2 million held collectively in juvenile correctional centers, county jails and other detention facilities. It is significant that our country boasts 1,719 state prisons and 102 federal prisons (Wagner & Sakala, 2014). These statistics highlight a need for continued analysis of the impacts of incarceration. Incarceration creates deep social divides that may never be bridged. These are not merely statistics, but lives that might never reach their potential. These figures should inspire and incite activists and academics alike towards leveraging issues such as prison food systems and food’s cultural, social, and physical significance in prisons within broader prison reform.

While the scope of this research does not allow for deep exploration of the general assumption of U.S. penal law that once found guilty, sentencing involves time served (loss of liberty) as well as a loss of most civil liberties. Foucault (1977) has written: “This ‘self-evident’ character of the prison, which we find so difficult to abandon, is based first of all on the simple form of ‘deprivation of liberty’” (p. 232). The U.S. prison system has historically shown its abuse of power as the disciplinarians of judicial law by exploiting loss of liberty as a means for further subjugation of individual determinism. By serving inmates sub-par foods, impacting

prison population health outcomes, and participating in exploitative food system contracts, the U.S. prison system fails to address the basis of human existence while simultaneously expecting incarcerated individuals to return to society as rehabilitated members. It is a failure of “give less and expect more” reasoning.

Again, Foucault (1977) has written: “Prison continues, on those who are entrusted to it, a work begun elsewhere, which the whole of society pursues on each individual through innumerable mechanisms of power” (p. 302). Food, a requirement for life, has the innate capacity to constitute a “mechanism of power”. As wards of the state, inmates are ultimately rendered defenseless against the authority of those who control provisioning of food. Does food reinforce powerlessness? Are these mechanisms of power and punishment, as applied to food distribution and consumption, utilized as a means to remind the inmate that their life is dispensable and their future is dependent on the mercy of the penal system? Is Foucault’s “work begun elsewhere” responsible for the disproportion of incarcerated African American men in America’s jails and prisons (Foucault, 1977, p. 302)? These are issues which food justice has failed to address. Food plays many roles in prison and reinforces many of the social injustices that pervade society, thus, food deserves to be examined within food justice scholarship.

What are the risks involved with incarcerated populations consuming from an anachronistic prison food system? If incarceration delivers punishment for deviating from normal society (i.e., poverty, unemployment, homelessness), then does food injustice reinstate these social and health disparities by limiting the possibility of returning to society as a rehabilitated member? It is not hard to imagine how recidivism rates might drop if the state returned inmates as healthy and whole individuals rather than dumping them back into the same established systems of failure with additional burdens. This use of food as a mechanism of power

also illustrates an exemption of jurisprudence intended to protect inmates from additional harm to their person while at the same time legitimizing law as a function of punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation, and incapacitation (Naim, 2005, p. 11). Does the food consumed while incarcerated present long-term effects on society as a whole, as most of the inmate population will at some point be returned to “normal” society with the expectation of being a rehabilitated member?

Given the compromised quality of life during and post-incarceration, this research will focus on whether a life can be renewed through discourses of food justice: if food is punitive, then it can be made restorative. Rather than use food as a mechanism of power, perhaps prisons could use food as a mechanism of empowerment instead. The potential to address issues of individual disempowerment behind prison walls promises the amazing capacity of engaging inmates in a transformative shift with potential for dynamic rehabilitations post-release. Reducing recidivism rates and increasing opportunities, as well as public health outcomes, would be an incredible shift in empowerment for those who have been branded as invisible and undeserving within our society. If we sow seeds of policy reform now, we are granting individuals a choice of destiny in the future, which is understood as necessary in any truly free society.

2.2. Does Food Justice Sufficiently Engage Prison Food System Reform?

Searches for peer-reviewed academic literature that focus on issues of food within U.S. penal institutions yield sparse results. The obvious conclusion is that there is a gap in social justice and food systems discourse, research, and practice. The critique of research is invaluable as it increases public awareness and simultaneously acts as an agent for change towards identification of a *problem* that requires *fixing*. Social justice confronts the institutionalized

racism, classism and sexism imbedded within the policies and laws that have contributed to disproportionate benefits and burdens experienced by different members of society. Likewise, food justice examines access to the foods we consume as well as food system organization through a historicized framework and the lens of institutional racism, classism, sexism and economy. “*Food justice* [emphasis in original] represents a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities” (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015, p. 3). In order to apply food justice consideration to prison food system reform analysis, the histories and institutions that have led to disproportionate incarceration rates amongst races, incomes, and geographies must first be examined before conceptualization of a food secure American penal system can be achieved. This thesis questions where prison food reform fits into current food justice discourse. In effect, this research is a call for a dovetailing of current sub-movements (food sovereignty, food security, food rights) into a canopied movement that engages *all* populations affected by food injustice rather than partiality, fetishized food topics, and populations from silos of various ideologies, geographies and movements. Prison systems are an unmeasured mixture of various and intentional political and economic leveraging at the cost of certain sectors of society and, thus, deserve a more comprehensive explanation rather than a blanket definition of food as simply survival.

It is sometimes said that prisoners deserve the food they get and are privileged to receive it, given that innocents go hungry. For example,

[Inmates] are not on vacation, or dining out at a family restaurant. Inmates are typically served food not unlike what I was fed at school as a child. When you commit a crime, you voluntarily give up the right to pick and choose. Much like a child, you must sometimes make do with what others have provided for you. If

you don't like it, try your best not to get locked up; once you do, you're at the mercy of state to choose your food, and other inmates to handle and prepare it.

(Waite, 2009)

Statements such as those made by the cited author, while understandably invoking moral and ethical dilemmas, fail to adequately take into consideration just how a person arrives at a prison or jail and if they have been sentenced or are awaiting trial. Advocates of social justice have an obligation to examine these inadequacies and empower individuals towards opportunity after their release.

The challenges within food justice are not only the myriad of definitions and strategies but also the over simplification and “othering” that persists within arguments of ethical consumption. Pollan (2008), as discussed in Chapter 1 of this project, essentially renders invisible the millions of people who are excluded from an engagement with choice in the white middle-class marketplace. The reductionist argument of ethical consumption fails to incorporate the myriad of socialized influences that contribute to institutionalized powerlessness. Barnett et al. (2005) argue that ethical consumption in and of itself includes a “moral-selving” in that the “individual’s everyday consumption routines are ordinarily ethical...[through the]...activity of constructing a life by negotiating practical choices about personal conduct” (p. 28). For some in society, those negotiations are impossible if they are ward of the state through incarceration in a penal institution.

The goal of this research is to explore how penal food systems and social justice intersect, while addressing the lack of academic literature within this area of focus. Drawing on literature from penal theory, food systems, and social justice, the opportunity exists to create a new discourse that explores the topic of prisoners and their connection to the foods they are required

to consume. This exploration should illustrate how food systems scholarship might engage prison food systems for further academic research. The possibility for evolution from punitive to restorative prison food might be the catalyst for broader prison reform. Prison reform, like moving water up a hill, is a slow process given its inherent complexity. Supreme Court Justice Kennedy has conservatively advocated for prison reform. According to Ferguson (2014), “Justice Kennedy agrees that the current prison system actively seeks ‘to degrade and demean the prisoner,’ and he concludes ‘a purpose to degrade or demean individuals is not acceptable in a society founded on respect for the inalienable rights of the people’” (p.17). Prisoners, as well as their impacted families, represent some of the poorest in America. Given the correlation between income status, varied state laws regarding voting rights of inmates and convicts, and voter participation it takes only quick math to realize the diminutive size of interest group politics. Consequently, there is a lack of political will for reform (Naim, 2005, p. 12). In recognition of civil rights versus civil liberties, there should be a consideration of food liberties. If a civil liberty is a right that is protected by laws then those laws as well as popular conceptualizations of offender civil liberties deserve examination. If a right is a legally protected liberty, academics and activists should affectively challenge those in the position of creating and amending rights, thus increasing the political will for prison food system reform.

The potential for food justice in the fight for restorative treatment of inmates is a remarkably neglected topic. How can the food movements’ various perspectives be applied to prison food systems? Food justice gives recognition to the marginalization and racialization of how and what food is accessed. It is the fundamental basis of the movement towards redistributing imbalances ensuring everyone has access to food of nutritional quantity and quality. Food justice acknowledges that “food” is more than just a basic human right and works

to “overcome structural inequalities” (Sbicca, 2012, p. 456). Specifically, “food justice places the need for food security—access to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate food—in the contexts of institutional racism, racial formation, and racialized geographies” (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009, p. 289). This research investigates whether and how food justice has given equal consideration to prison food systems within the discourse of institutional food system reform.

2.3. Roles Of Food In Prison: Food As A Mechanism Of Power And Punishment

Given the secure nature of prisons, researchers don’t know much about prison food systems. It is difficult to gain entry and even more difficult to ascertain specific contractual and procedural literature unless you have legal access into the system. I have attempted to investigate what roles food plays in prisons through literature analysis, realizing that information may be biased. Food has been established as a method for punishment. Either by denying an inmate or providing an inmate with unpalatable food, prisons have been able to encourage or discourage behavior. Food as profit is another role that is becoming more apparent as private service providers bid for the opportunity to maximize their profit margins by minimizing prison food budgets. Food also holds cultural and social associative value that provides yet another dimension within the prison food system analysis.

In examining the roles of food in correctional institutions, two major concerns are the role of food in providing for individual well-being and its potential for justice through reform. This research investigates food’s role as nutrition and whether food is meant to further subjugate a class of people as an additional means of punishment or is merely a facet of care. With a trend towards privatizing prison food (Reutter et al., 2010, online), there is still debate concerning what rights an inmate has to food of nutritional adequacy once incarcerated. A majority of prison mandates constitute a *nutritionally adequate* daily caloric intake of 2,600 calories for men and

2,300 for women with no direction on how those calories are to be nutritionally allocated. In fact, “...some institutions, such as Alcatraz, deliberately offered a daily total diet of at least 5,000 calories, combined with minimal exercise, to make prisoners more lethargic and less likely to engage in violent behavior” (Enc. Prisons, n.d.). Correctional facility meals are not regulated by Food and Drug Administration guidelines and instead are decided by facility officials (Collins, S.A & Thompson, S. H., 2012, p.211). Indeed, prison food law offers no protections other than maintaining certain minimum requirements be met: leaving wardens to run their prisons as they see fit (Naim, 2005, p. 21, p. 1).

This research also asks about the consequences of treating prison food systems as a source of profit while examining the public vs. private dichotomy of U.S. correctional facilities. For example, in 1938 the state of Alabama passed a law, still in effect today, that gave sheriffs \$1.75 per jail inmate per day to be used for food (Reutter et al., 2010). If the sheriff was able to feed an inmate for less cost, they were able to pocket the remaining allotment. Obviously, this law incentivized the sheriff to provide the least amount of food possible while gaining a little on the side for themselves. The same sort of incentives can be witnessed with the introduction of institutional catering companies like Aramark that exploit the quality of food while considering profit before quality of life (Reutter, 2010). Utilizing food as a source of profit, highlights the point that food is used as an agent to re-instantiate the ineffectual position of the inmate.

Lastly, I examine the cultural significance of food in correctional facilities. For example, illegal spreads (meals prepared and consumed outside of dining areas) provide a sense of community sharing within the microcosm of concrete and barbed wire. Similar to the concept of altering behavior based on training, food is used as a reward. The authenticity of food is also used as a means of celebration in that emphasis is placed on real turkey on Thanksgiving, for

example, in order to avoid exacerbating depression that is brought on at holidays. A better understanding of the roles that food plays in prisons will add to the case that food justice ought to incorporate more focus on prison food systems as these roles represent the intersectionality of oppressions.

2.4. How Can Prison Food Systems Be Engaged To Create Prison Food Systems Reform?

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* Foucault (1977) writes: “The prison, that darkest region in the apparatus of justice, is the place where the power to punish, which no longer dares to manifest itself openly, silently organizes a field of objectivity in which punishment will be able to function openly as treatment and the sentence be inscribed among the discourses of knowledge” (p. 256). Absent from these discourses of knowledge is the exploration of food that is mandatorily served to inmates, thereby giving it power as an uncontested form of additional punitive harm and reinforcing the power of normalization discourse. If the prison has the power to define the axis of control, then scholars and activists must work to challenge these discourses with alternatives to the dominant systems of power.

Few, if any, scholars have addressed alternative food systems in America’s penal institutions. Given the momentum towards reforming institutional food programs, such as state Farm-to-School programs and Edible Schoolyards, the possibilities for prison food reform exist. In Chapter 4: Results, Analysis, and Contribution, one program in Washington’s Department of Corrections (DOC) is reviewed because of its extraordinary deviation from the norm in that it is aspiring towards a sustainable campus, including food provisioning and waste management. How might additional programs such as this rewrite the basic American understanding of penal justice?

I also examine the roles of food in rehabilitation, now that gardens are again commonplace in correctional facilities. These gardens provide job skills that can be beneficial upon release and allow inmates an additional opportunity to participate within the economy in a socially acceptable way. Gardens, aside from providing food for the prisons, provide inmates with a sense of community investment whereas their offenses have marked them as members of community disinvestment. Gardens also contribute to the sustainability of a prison and help with reducing costs by providing food, composting food waste, and reducing landfill. However, it is important to address the cultural and historical significance of the connection between slavery and agriculture, and the legitimate potential for living wage opportunities.

There are new ways of moving forward, as demonstrated by Washington's willingness to integrate new methods of food production into the standard manual of prison administration. Practitioners, activists, and administrators are experimenting with a growing number of garden projects, agricultural skills training, and prison food system improvements. Thus, it is important to ask to what degree are these programs providing a positive impact. In Results, Analysis, and Contribution, these questions are examined.

Chapter 3: Methods & Methodology

3.1. Epistemological Statement

Examining US penal institutions' food systems highlights the consequences of understanding food as a privilege rather than a basic human right. Control, cost, and capitalistic considerations of food have become emblematic of penal injustice. A growing for-profit prison industry, outsourcing of food to private service providers, and growing inmate population burdens all substantiate the concern. In the pursuit of abject punishment we have replaced the innate human right of quality of life through sustenance with inhumane manipulation of food for cruel and unusual punishment. A transformative worldview, therefore, seems an appropriate philosophy to apply to this topic as I attempt to intertwine, as Creswell (2013) said, "politics with a political change agenda to confront social oppression at whatever level it occurs" (p. 9). Transforming food from punitive to restorative provides a mode of empowerment for the incarcerated individual to realize their value and potential in society rather than having food reinforce their exclusion from society during incarceration and afterward.

As the philosopher Durkheim has posited: "one must systematically discard all preconceptions as well as attend to the 'inherent properties' of the phenomena" (Lazar, 2004, p. 15). While it is my present belief that increased imbalances in power structures are manifesting through incarceration for profit and penalties based on arbitrary sentences for violent and non-violent offenses it is also essential that my personal values discard preconceptions of the prison system as an "unjust" and "flawed" institution of punishment in order to address the truth inherent to the system. My present preconceptions also incorporate the belief that prison "food" is wrought with both nutritional deficiencies and power imbalances that reinforce the power of the disciplinarian over the subjected individual. As we continue to privatize these functions of

power, society bears the brunt of the external costs in that potentially productive members of society are removed and situated within a revolving door of recidivism thus eliminating the chance of rehabilitation.

Meyer (2003) has written: “the onus is on the researcher [to make] any biases...evident” (p. 454). While I firstly identify as a student and prospective researcher, I also acknowledge my identity as a white, middle class, Anglo-American who has never been incarcerated. After participating in a domestic relationship with a felon, I was inspired to explore this topic. It is because of him that I take great steps to remove bias towards criminals and their crimes. It is my intention to untangle the moral ambiguities in preconceptions of inmates and who is “deserving” of reforms while simultaneously accepting and minimizing the influence of my bias. My positionality, thus, is that while children and the infirm are certainly worthy of our work towards institutional food reform, no less are the lives of those serving time in America’s correctional facilities worthy of being considered.

3.2. Methodology

A historical analysis of connections between food and criminal justice may help create discourse that acknowledges the distance between prison food and food justice. Foucault has argued that “Things [mean] something and [are] ‘true’ ...*only within a specific historical context* [emphasis in original]” (Hall, 2003, p. 347). If knowledge and power have contributed to current discourse, which neglects the roles of food in prison and an offender’s well-being, then it stands to reason that a historical analysis of how common discourse developed might help to provide solutions as to how to contribute towards a more relevant, liberating, and productive discourse that does address justice in prison food systems.

To answer my research questions I rely on two primary methodologies: literature review

and discourse analysis. By participating in a literature-based research, I might find that the issues have been raised but links to sufficiently chain the focus together are missing. I had intended to participate in interviews, which would be representative of the voices of the affected, in this instance, incarcerated individuals. I have, however, opted to focus solely on literature as a data source and this may give the perception of exclusion. While I recognize the gap, I feel that in the beginning stages of this work it is best to firstly focus on introducing new frameworks and discourse. It is my intention to utilize inclusive practices, like interviews, in future work produced on this subject.

The second methodology applied is discourse analysis. By analyzing food and criminal justice throughout history it might be possible to create a new discourse that acknowledges changes in the meaning and roles of food in prison. Methodologically, this means engaging a Foucaultian method of genealogy by tracing backwards for a common string amongst issues of criminal justice, social justice and food justice. Until we begin the conversation and open it up for further discourse, current words and ideas will remain static and bear little relevance towards acknowledging these power imbalances and rectifying them. I am proposing that we actively rethink what it means to engage food justice within the framework of prison reform. Sources such as the prison food services that Aramark provide serve well to illustrate this need.

I approach this work through feminist methodologies. I hope to acknowledge how marginalized communities (in this case, inmates) are excluded from the discourse of food justice and the ways in which we might incorporate their experience. By acknowledging “there are many versions of social reality, all of which are equally valid” (Burns & Walker, 2005, p. 68) I hope to bring attention to the need of a new discourse that sees beyond the label of “criminal” and acknowledges the dignity of a fundamental human right. While current hegemonic beliefs of

criminal justice and penal justice may have been created by white male symbols of power, the time has come to challenge their reign. We must allow new voices, counter to the social power paradigm, to create a “shared commitment to drawing attention to the deep and irreducible connections between knowledge and power (privilege)” (Burns & Walker, 2005, p. 66).

3.3. Methods

My research first asked: what does food justice mean and how does it engage prisons, if at all? What common ground exists between food justice and prison food reform? Data were collected through a review of food justice literature, prison reform literature and penal law literature. For this research question, as well as for questions two and three, I gathered literature using the EBSCO, LexisNexis, and WorldCat databases from Marylhurst University’s library as well as resources from the University of Texas. I searched for peer-reviewed academic articles as well as broadened my net by utilizing Google Scholar for academic articles, blog entries, and other forms of news media. Key search words for prison food literature were “prison,” “institutional,” “food,” and “history.” Key search words for prison reform literature were “prison” and “reform.” Key search words for penal law literature were “United States,” “penal,” “law” and “history.” The unit of analysis for this study was broad; focusing analysis on theoretical frameworks, prison food system-relevant topics present in the literature, and food justice and associated movements. This strategy provided a broad view of prison food, policy and practice, and food justice topics. Data was sorted based on historical relevance, topic relevance, and filtered for American subject matter. Emphasis was placed on contributions that explore historical timelines and theoretical frameworks.

Secondly, I asked: what are the roles of food in prison? Again, data was collected through a review of food justice literature, prison studies and penal law literature. Key search words for

prison food literature were “prison,” “institutional,” and “food.” Key search words for prison studies were “prison,” “reform,” “history,” and “culture.” Key search words for penal law literature were “history,” “American,” “penal” and “law”. I narrowed down pertinent articles based on topic relevance. While there are multiple interesting and important facets to the roles of food, I focused data analysis on the following categories: food procurement, inmate resistance, current policy, historical accounts, and cultural significance.

Lastly, I asked: how can prison food systems engage food justice and prison reform to create restorative prison food system reform? Data was collected through a review of food justice literature, prison food literature and prison reform literature. Key search words for food justice literature were “prison,” “food,” “justice,” and “rights.” Key search words for prison food literature were “prison,” “institutional” and “food.” Key search words for prison reform literature were “prison,” “reform,” “garden,” and “farm.” For this research question I focused data analysis on the following categories: inmate perspective, magnitude of project scale, sustained activity, and outcomes. I acknowledge that as these programs are relatively new within the latest iteration of the American prison complex, best practices might not yet be determined. However, even early stage programs can still serve as models for further exploration and replication.

Chapter 4: Results, Analysis and Contribution

This chapter answers my three primary research questions by providing findings and analysis. My first research question's analysis explains how food justice movements could productively collaborate and engage prison food system reform with the expectation of empowering both body and soul of the inmate as a means of rehabilitation rather than a means of subjugation. Second, I explain what roles food plays in prison systems in order to substantiate the need for restorative reform. Third, and last, I provide analysis of prison food system reform and how it is presently perceived by food justice and prison reform advocates. Current prison food policy serves as a reminder that inmates in prison are "placeless" and survive in a limbo in which laws and administration operates within a grey area. Thus it is important to remember to view

the prisoner as both agent and subject...Prisoners' personal identities influence the way they react to prison structure and to prison authority, leading to a diverse set of acts that can be labeled as 'resistance'. Recognizing prisoners as subjects also pushes society to acknowledge the moral and ethical dimensions of imprisonment. The individuals we confine are not monstrous others but people with personal histories. Why and how society chooses to punish these individuals are inherently moral questions that demand attention. (Godderis, 2006, p. 257)

As recently as January 2015, officials in New York City agreed to eliminate solitary confinement for youths 21 years of age and younger at Rikers Island, one of the country's largest and most feared jails, effective January 2016. Studies show that between the ages of juvenile detention and 21 years of age, the brain is still developing and being held in solitary, rather than with the general population, does more irreparable harm than disciplinary good. "A large body of

scientific research indicates that solitary confinement is particularly damaging to adolescents and young adults because their brains are still developing. Prolonged isolation in solitary cells can worsen mental illness and in some cases cause it, studies have shown” (Winerip, M. & Schwartz, M., 2015). Because Rikers Island is a jail, and not a prison, those who are unable to make bail are held until their sentencing, which can take years. Even though these inmates have yet to be convicted and sentenced, they may spend the majority of their incarceration in solitary confinement experiencing the worst form of punishment that our prisons deliver.

While one might feel that prison food justice would benefit the worst of society, statistics show that the worst of society are not who are mostly incarcerated. Rather, it is those who have made social errors, not necessarily offenders who have committed violent acts. To begin to engage prisons, we need to better understand the prisoners subject to prison food. This analysis shows that these offenders are increasingly non-violent offenders. Violent crimes are down, yet incarceration rates are up. Nonviolent crimes account now for the majority of incarcerates.

“Between 2001 and 2013, more than half of prisoners serving sentences of more than a year in federal facilities were convicted of drug offenses. On September 30, 2013 (the end of the most recent fiscal year for which federal offense data were available), 98,200 inmates (51% of the federal prison population) were imprisoned for possession, trafficking, or other drug crimes. Since 2001, the percentage of federal prisoners convicted of violent, property, and drug offenses have decreased. Federal prisoners serving time for public-order crimes—including weapons offenses, racketeering, extortion, and regulatory offenses—has increased, from 26% in 2001 to 36% in 2013. The percentage of inmates in federal facilities serving time for immigration offenses remained stable over the

past 13 years. There were fewer (down 1,500) felony immigration offenders in 2013 than in 2012 (Carson, 2014).

This warrants another shift in discourse toward understanding criticism of prison systems and mass incarceration from the perspective of individual blame to a broader understanding of what constitutes the crimes that have been committed and whether basic human rights are stripped by arbitrary social laws (marijuana possession, for instance). The purpose of imprisonment should not be to punish people further than their crimes necessitate. A positively productive penal system would offer greater opportunity for the inmate upon release, rather than inflicting greater harm to the individual, thus becoming a barrier towards rehabilitation and positive life contributions. My first research question asks whether food justice movements have incorporated prison food system reform within academic and advocacy discourse.

4.1. Research Question 1: What Does Food Justice Mean And How Does It Engage Prisons, If At All?

Food provides the power to heal both body and spirit. Prison, on the other hand, is designed to break the body and spirit. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* Foucault (1977) wrote: "...the procedure of access to the individual, the way in which the punishing power gets control over him, the instruments that it uses in order to achieve this transformation; it is in the technology of the penalty, not in its theoretical foundation; in the relation that it establishes with the body and with the soul, and not in the way that it is inserted within the legal system" (p. 127). While conviction carries the stigma of unethical behavior, inmates are in fact capable of and demonstrate ethical considerations throughout not only their relationships while incarcerated but outside as well. Therefore, current discourse on food and ethics should not exclude inmates as agents of ethical consumption, but rather as individuals who have lost their

capacity for demonstrating their ethical considerations. Moreover, ethical considerations regarding food consumption fail to engage food justice and instead dismiss those who aren't participatory as being unethical regardless of their existing and unorthodox ethical codes. The call to "vote with your fork" dismisses those who aren't even eligible to vote in general political elections, never mind with food choices.

Undertaking a literature-based analysis proves challenging when there is a lack of literature to analyze. Searches that contained keywords of "prison food systems" and "food justice" netted few, if any results, depending on which search engine was utilized. Google Scholar, for instance, provided a few white papers that contained all keywords while academic search engines such as EBSCO provided none. Therefore, it is apparent that food justice has indeed insufficiently examined prison food systems.

The Food Justice Movement challenges institutions of oppression from the perspective of race and class. Prisons are highly racialized and classist institutions. While I would argue that food justice is the most applicable framework with which to catalyze prison food system reform, it may prove beneficial to break the exploration of prison food systems down into smaller, more explicit frameworks. "The [food justice movement] is working to integrate myriad concerns, necessarily making the movement's ideological foundation more complex. Yet, this foundation provides fertile soil from which to grow a new network of organizations and institutions required for transformative social change" (Shicca, 2012, p. 465). The following frameworks of food violence, food apartheid, food rights, food security, and food sovereignty address some of these historically systemic processes of oppression in order to establish how food justice has multiple dimensions for engaging discourse within prison food system reform.

Food violence suggests an imbalance of power where one has greater access to a

commodity and exploits this leverage to inflict harm on another. In this case, inmates have few protections from which to deflect harm towards their person. Inmates are no longer able to consume food based on preferences and instead are conditioned to accept food items provided to them regardless of emotional and physical health impacts. “Counteracting discourses in food system governance form the structural or institutional drivers of ‘food violence’: if these discourses are not discussed and reconciled ‘conflict and violence associated directly or indirectly with food security’ will remain.” (Hospes, 2014, p. 125) Given the trauma associated with violence in prison, present prison food systems contribute toward food violence by rendering the inmate powerless and subject to harm.

Food apartheid refers to a situation in which food is intentionally plentiful and accessible for one sector of society, while intentionally absent and inaccessible for another. The term food apartheid also applies in that non-white offenders are intentionally targeted by police, and thus segregated from society by incarceration, which connects to an overall criminalization of persons of color. Similar to food justice, food apartheid recognizes this intentionality and “lends itself to an analysis of the *structural* [emphasis in original] causes behind the condition” (Sbicca, 2012, p. 461). Prison food systems, functioning within a highly racialized geography, create an environment of apartheid by intentionally making healthy food inaccessible for inmates and thus failing to produce true rehabilitative opportunity.

Food rights, or, “When access to healthy food is accepted as a human right – i.e., inalienable, universal, interdependent with and indivisible from all other human rights – this acceptance brings with it the modern understanding of rights-based approaches” (Anderson, 2013, p. 113). While revoking most rights upon incarceration is the penalty for an offense, the right to healthy food is inalienable. Prison food system reform would acknowledge the human

right of inmates to receive healthy food.

While food policy in the United States is directed at alleviating food insecurity affecting the nation's population, inmates of America's penal institutions are experiencing hunger and nutritional scarcity. The United Nations has defined food security as "a situation that exists when all people at all times have physical, [social] and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2008). I would argue that it is food insecurity when both the legal system *and* the penal system deter individuals from access. The fundamental purpose behind food security is to retain the right of ALL people (even incarcerated) to the food necessary for an active and healthy life. Alkon & Norgaard (2009) have written that: "Access to healthy food is shaped not only by the economic ability to purchase it, but also by the historical processes through which race has come to affect who lives where and who has access to what kind of services" (p. 300). Inflated commissary prices, menus that lack nutrient density, and intentional suppression of meals served reiterate how an inmate experiences food insecurity.

Food security is generally an organizing principle while food sovereignty is recognized as a political demand for production and consumption representation within governing policy. "Food sovereignty is not about sovereignty of food. It is about sovereignty of people and values assigned to food" (Hospes, 2013, p. 121). How can incarcerated populations organize as sovereign when their community is, by definition, powerless and therefore incapable of organizing political action? Geographers differentiate "place" and "space" by writing that "place is understood to be the location of clear-cut ethical commitments, while space serves as a shorthand for abstract, alienated relations in which distance intervenes to complicate and extend the range of moral duties" (Barnett et al., 2005, p. 24). The influential geographer Doreen

Massey refers to power geometry, explaining that time-space compression allows for an axis of power based on movement (Massey, 1994, p. 149). The power of those who are incarcerated is limited by immobility, inability to identify with place while at the same time creating social and cultural identities within space. While food justice tends to focus on creating sovereign spaces, in prison there exists a population who are powerless to pursue conventional strategies for sovereignty. Therefore, it should also become part of the movement to develop theories that engage space-based food justice into the common discourse and epistemology. Both deserve inclusion in this new discourse of prison food justice because while we anticipate a transformative political agenda we must also recognize the limitations of inmates who have less leverage for political empowerment while still deserving community recognition and positive reform.

All of these perspectives should be applied toward creating an understanding and awareness of prison food justice and whether the discourse is actively engaging all populations, even invisibles such as incarcerated populations. By omitting inmates from the general discourse of food justice we neglect a huge percentage of our American population who, without our voices to articulate their situation, are left voiceless. Food is being used as a tool of prison reform but generally within gardens and as therapeutic opportunities. Rather than address a blanket remedy of food production, however, prison food reformers must begin to examine the connection between food, institutionalized disenfranchisement, and systemic oppression within opportunities for reform. Simply focusing on production fails to address the underlying histories that have led us to where we are. It is a superficial solution rather than an oppositional tactic that holds the American penal system liable for reform.

Food justice and/or food security is a growing concern with various organizations and reformers working separately, in their various states and DOCs, towards providing inmates with alternative opportunities once released and during incarceration. Working individually hasn't yielded a collective response and neither have these alternatives to the standard absence of state rehabilitation methods been given the opportunity to be named, such as prison food system reform or prison food justice. Once something has a name, it has a life, and thus has greater capacity for momentum.

Certainly, though, food fills many roles within prison life and prison order. Outside of the sub-frameworks provided, are there more salient approaches for encouraging and engaging academic research and advocacy participation within prison food system reform? Food justice discourse and epistemology are driven by a *place-based* food justice; perhaps because an inmate loses their autonomy while incarcerated we, in turn, overlook their contribution to power redistribution as identified by connection its to place. Recognition of the prison as "space" contributes to the identity of the inmate, positively or negatively, and considers *space-based* food justice. Now that I have defined the examination of food justice within the prison food system, I will examine some of the roles that food serves within the prison food system in order to illustrate how food justice might better address food within prison culture.

4.2. Research Question 2: What Are The Roles Of Food In Prison?

A food system is involved with, but not limited to, the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food. A prison food system engages these components of the food system within the context of a correctional facility. Historically prisons provided their own food as well as inmate labor for preparation. Eventually budgetary concerns shifted food procurement to outside distributors who could provide the volume of food needed at lower cost.

Presently, there are fewer or no cafeterias. For some prisons, food is trucked in via corporate catering companies and warmed (if at all) on site. All of this has implications on not only inmates' quality of life and health as well as serious cultural, societal, and economic repercussions. Caloric intake is usually in the form of low cost starches and processed food items like "cheez" and meat products. Recently the trend towards adopting a reduction to two meals a day on non-working days and weekends with cold meals served for lunch on the remaining days has gained momentum. Most inmates complain of being hungry after the last meal is served typically at 4:00 p.m., and thus supplement their diets, if they are able with expensive commissary items like instant ramen noodles, beef sticks and corn chips.

Concurrently there are also discussions arising from a proposal in Nevada where a sheriff has requested that inmates be held financially responsible for the foods they are provided while incarcerated (Sonner, posted: 02/08/2014). If inmates are unable to pay for their food while incarcerated, they are expected to pay back their bill after their release. This raises the question of whether those who are incarcerated due to circumstances of poverty are then returned to the same levels of society at a greater disadvantage, as not only are they now labeled as "ex-convicts," but are also faced with an increased burden of poverty from which might seem inescapable.

The limited presence of academic literature regarding prison food systems makes it difficult to analyze based purely on peer-reviewed scholarly research. Both the intentional global food crisis created by industrial agriculture and prison food procurement are a means of predatory capitalism. Privatized prisons exist solely for the profit of investors, profiting off the lives of incarcerated individuals. The food served to inmates is also an intentional capitalistic venture as it creates another growth market for subsidized industrial agriculture. "Virtually every

food system in the world is tied to the global food system in one way or another, which is itself shaped by the corporate food regime. This regime is financially dominated by the monopolies of the industrial agrifoods complex and politically managed by the national governments and multilateral organizations that make (and enforce) the free trade, labor, and property rules that make it possible to create and enforce a globalized food regime” (Holt-Giménez, 2011, p. 313). Beyond the global implications of prison food systems are the often silent and mysterious adaptations of prison life. Throughout the following sections, I elaborate on some of the roles that food plays within the confines of prison culture.

4.2.1. Food as nutrition.

“The United States Supreme Court has consistently ruled that prisoners have the right to an adequate and varied diet, including the right to tailor meals to religious prescriptions and medical needs” begins the entry on food in the *Encyclopedia of Prisons and Correctional Facilities* (Bosworth & Thomas, n.d.). Food may fill a belly, but nutrition will fill a soul. While supporting an adequate diet alleviates the risk of starvation for the prisoner, it does nothing to provide preventative care for, nor maintain, physical health. The *Encyclopedia* continues:

Traditionally, food was used in prisons as a means of reward and punishment. In the nineteenth century, for example, incoming prisoners were often served bread and water until they had earned the right for such luxuries as meat and cheese. In the Eastern penitentiary in Philadelphia, breakfast was sparse and monotonous, consisting of coffee, cocoa or green tea, and a mix of bread and Indian mush. The primary meal at midday consisted of substantial portions of boiled pork or beef, soup, potatoes or rice, sauerkraut, and tea. Indian mush and tea constituted the

evening meal.

Under the medical model of rehabilitation that emerged in the early 20th century, prison food became linked to scientific notions of nutrition. Prison diets were examined for the caloric content rather than used primarily as a means of control. Healthy prisoners, it was believed, would be productive workers and, ultimately, reformed citizens. In recent decades, the science of nutrition has remained crucial to the provision of food in most prisons. Usually, diets are carefully planned and standardized. Some facilities post the weekly menu, including nutritional analyses of each meal listing caloric, fat, cholesterol and sodium content of each prepared item. In addition, all federal prisons are meant to have a salad bar and offer a ‘heart healthy’ version of the main meal. Fried and baked chicken, for example, or French fries and baked potatoes may be served at the same meal.

State prisons, however, vary dramatically, in part because contracting food services out to the private sector is becoming increasingly common. As a result, many do not match the federal standards. However, because of both formal and informal pressures, such as prison reform efforts, prisoner litigation challenging conditions, and the nation wide influence of the American Correctional Association in providing minimal standards before individual prisons receive accreditation, prison food has improved dramatically (Enc. Prisons, online).

The food provided to prisoners consists mostly of prepared and processed foods (i.e., canned, frozen, or reheated).¹ Although already at a low cost per inmate per day for

¹ The exclusion of sample prison food menus was deliberate in the writing of this research project. States vary, institutions vary, and levels of secured barracks vary. Therefore, I found it best to not include menus in order to

food purchasing, Aramark is now a competitive outside food service provider and has been able to reduce the cost per inmate per day to around a dollar an inmate for two or three meals while professing to maintain nutritional guidelines. In new institution models, there is seldom a kitchen area integrated into the floor plan. This is because more prisons are outsourcing their food preparation to corporate canteen services. For these models, food is typically prepared at an offsite location and then trucked to a facility where it is rolled to cell block units and either served cold or reheated in warming carts. Inmates might consume their meals inside their cells and thereby, lose another aspect of daily interaction, eating at a communal table, thus reinforcing isolation from society. It is precisely this point, that food has the capacity to reinforce isolation from society, which should inspire the food justice movement towards engaging prison food systems.

4.2.2. Food as cultural significance.

As in any sort of social situation, habits derived from food alteration and/or consumption can carry on with an inmate long after their release. Perhaps a preference for foods that were purchased in the canteen can carry a sort of personal significance. If vegetables or meats were typically served overcooked or rancid then avoidance of these items is possible even after release from incarceration, thereby creating an association of food with trauma. “The symbolic relationship that humans have to food is intensified in prisons because consumption is a constantly recurring act and, within the context of a total institution, life *is* [emphasis in original] acts that are done on a consistent and repetitive basis” (Godderis, 2006, p. 62). Prison food can also be used as incentive. While less common, prison work groups sometimes receive “outside” food as incentive for hard work such as pizza delivery. Thus food, symbolic in nature within

eliminate the perception of some food as “better” or “worse” the lack of federal oversight means these menus are highly interpretive.

prisons from last meals served upon death sentences to rewards for positive behavior substantiates the concern that food justice ought to further incorporate prison food.

Again, the *Encyclopedia of Prisons and Correctional Facilities* provides an insight as to the cultural significance of food in prison:

In prison, food creates or ameliorates conflict, establishes social boundaries of power and status, and provides a significant element in prisoner culture. Prison meals establish a routine for prisoners and staff. Inmates are not required to go to meals, and some manage to avoid them all together by living off commissary items and ‘gifts’ from others. For most, however, meals provide a valued opportunity to interact with others.

The scarcity of desirable food in prison creates an illicit market for alternatives. As with other scarce resources, competition generates an underground acquisition and distribution system. Some food can be obtained from the prison commissary or kitchen by theft and cooked in the privacy of one’s cell.

Those who can acquire quantities of high-quality food use it as a status-enhancing currency by sharing it with friends or impressing outsiders. Those particularly adept at obtaining quality merchandise develop a reputation as a valued peer. Pilfered food can be returned to the cellblock and distributed or sold, sometimes in collusion with staff. For well-connected inmates, a cell can be turned into a mini-cafeteria where food is sold (Enc. Prisons, n.d.).

Food can serve as a means for establishing one’s identity within the penal environment. While most other forms of self-individualization are removed, food can act as an instrument for expression. Godderis (2006) writes: “Eating is a recurring and necessary part of survival that

becomes a key element of the regular prison routine. Furthermore, because of the symbolic power that food possesses, it is a form of communication through which expressions of domination and resistance can be made” (p. 256). In 2013 inmates in California’s state penal system undertook a historic hunger strike in protest of solitary confinement as torture and demanding “dignity, respect and equality” (Ashker, Castellanos and Franco, 2014). Inmates reversed the power structures so that food became a symbolic representation of their individual power in demanding humane treatment. These inmates utilized food (refusal to consume), normally a mechanism of power reserved by authorities, as a lever of solidarity.

Inmates also use to their advantage ingenious, illegal, and crudely fashioned tools created with common and confiscated items. Inmates craft zingers, hot pots, and other methods of applying heat to food in order to “cook” within their cells. Sandra Cate (2008) has recounted this experience through an inmate interview:

Finding their jailhouse diet bland, monotonous, an insubstantial, inmates in the California penal system invent alternative meals. ‘Spread,’ the generic term for these creations, describes the inmate-created foods most often built around a single ingredient, instant ramen noodles. Beginning with this noodle base, the inmates concoct variations that approximate their favorite foods on the outside, often those with distinctive flavorings and textures. Kermit Sanders, an inmate at San Francisco County Jail 5, or CJ5, as it is known for short, describes the culture of spread:

I learned about spreads when I came to prison. Spread consists of institutional canteen commissary food items. Basically soups. Top Ramen noodles. And then from there you go to the other stuff: tuna, beef, chicken,

tamales, herrings. And different things like that. You got chili-bean spreads, you got seafood spreads. My favorite is Going-Down-South Hog Spread.

You take pig skins. On the average, when I fix spread for just me and someone else, I would take two bags of pork skins, two bags of jalapeño pretzels, four beef sticks, and I would take a big bag of Cheese Crunchies. I would grind all that down with the Top Ramen, and I call that Down-South spread, ‘cuz it’s full of pork. I also like making spread with herring, also with tuna, oysters, with mayonnaise. Spread can be any food item, but the base of the spread is Top Ramen noodles. Most of the time we make spread because we don’t want to eat what the institution is serving and it’s a way of getting full at night (p. 17).

The cultural significance of food carries greater value than simply to fill the belly. I have provided this background to further illustrate the impact that prison food imparts to inmates, the prison apparatus, and food systems in general. This is yet another reason why food justice should incorporate prison food system analysis.

4.2.3. Food as punishment and as a tool for behavior modification.

During one of the greatest disasters (natural event combined with antiquated engineering and contested social relations) in United States history, Hurricane Katrina, inmates were left abandoned in their cells as Orleans Parish Prison staff fled for higher ground. “With a pre-Katrina incarceration rate of 1,480 prisoners per 100,000 residents, New Orleans had the highest incarceration rate of any large city in the United States... Although Orleans parish itself was 66.6 per cent black prior to Hurricane Katrina, almost 90 per cent of the Orleans Prison Parish (OPP)

population was black” (National Prison Project of the American Civil Liberties Union, 2007, p. 84). After a week of suffering through flooded cells, no water, no food, and horrific sanitation conditions inmates were shuttled from the jail to an overpass that served as a temporary holding block until transportation was available to deliver them to surrounding Louisiana prisons and jails. Sandwiches and bottles of water were thrown to the inmates while they fought hungry and angry in order to feed their empty stomachs. An eleven-month investigation following Katrina reported that:

Although OPP evacuees were handed a sandwich when they first arrived... food was delivered more haphazardly after the men were placed on the yard. Hunt [a Louisiana prison location] guards threw bags of sandwiches over the fence into the crowd and hungry prisoners fought one another for food. One man writes: ‘When we was finally given food they took bags with one or two sandwiches and threw them over a barbed wire fence, and you had to fight for it like dogs. If you didn’t eat, you just went hungry.’ One 53-year-old man, held on a parole violation, reports: ‘Most of us older guys did without food and water while there because guys was fighting, cutting each other, the deputies was just looking and laughing. They were throwing sandwiches in the crowd like they were in New Orleans, at the Mardi Gras!’ (National Prison Project of the American Civil Liberties Union, 2007, p. 88).

The horrific Katrina abuses are a revealing and untold story of how food has served multiple roles as a lever for abuse, grounds for protest, means of behavioral modification, excuse for celebration, and as a contribution towards individual or group status. Again, I use the Encyclopedia of Prisons to substantiate the concern for food as a method of punishment, even

though the entry clearly states that, by law, it may not:

Other than restricting access to the commissary, food may not, by law, officially be used as punishment. There is no longer any such thing as a diet of bread and water. Inmates even when in disciplinary segregation are entitled to nutritionally adequate meals. Ordinarily these are from the menu of the day for the institution. However, some super-maximum security facilities serve what is known as a ‘food-loaf’ or ‘meal-loaf’ (sometimes nutraloaf) to recalcitrant inmates, especially those who continually throw feces or urine on staff. This product is made up of the ingredients of a regular meal, for example hotdogs, potatoes and beans that have been mashed together, baked like a meat loaf, and served. Although nutritionally adequate, and thus not equivalent to a diet of bread and water, in serving, taste, and aesthetics, it functions as a form of punishment, even if defined as a ‘dietary adjustment’ (Enc. Prisons, n.d.).

Through ridiculous gimmicks, prison food (specifically, nutraloaf), is now prepared for curious outsiders to consume in order to validate their “othering” of the incarcerated experience. National Public Radio recently ran a story on adventurous tastings at a closed Pennsylvania penitentiary. Participants were able to feed their curiosity and experience what many in solitary confinement are forced to consume without wonderment (Barclay, June 11, 2013). As disingenuous as these activities may seem, the silver lining is that they at least contribute to the growing demand that nutraloaf no longer be served as a method of punishment.

Some institutions have even gone as far as to limit meals served on nonworking days (Saturdays and Sundays) to only two meals per day. Their justification is cost savings at the

expense of inmates' hunger. Food is typically served without seasoning in order to remove the tedious task of adjusting for taste (mainly to observe individual health restrictions) for each individual. Flavorless food may also be another method of reinforcing the monotony of time and lost pleasures (simple tastes like bitter, spicy, salty, etc.). For example, sugar collected from the food line (and a prized additive) risks confiscation by a guard. Inmates are quick to point out that while the guard may follow them to their bunk only to remove the sugar from the inmate's possession, it is possible to purchase sugar from the commissary (Godderis, 2006). Thus, the act of confiscation serves to reinforce the power and position of the guard. Interestingly, kosher foods are becoming increasingly requested as these meals usually contain better quality foods. Kosher meals are more expensive (costing on the average two or three times more than the standard daily meal budget), and thus, the inmate has to bureaucratically substantiate that they require kosher food by filing a written request with the Chaplain (Enc. of Prisons, n.d.).

Despite legal pronouncements to the contrary, prison food is still used as a form of punishment. This punishment is more nuanced than simply withholding food, but rather, takes the flavor, preparation, quality and times of service. Now that the exploitation of food in prison has been established as punitive, the proceeding section will explore the potential for prison food to be reformative in more detail by introducing current programs, their outcomes to date, and contributions towards the future.

4.3. Research Question 3: How Can Prison Food Systems Be Engaged By Food Justice And Prison Reform To Create Restorative Prison Food System Reform?

Production of food has a long-standing history within the penal environment. There are many prison farm and garden initiatives currently operating across the United States, some of which are based on the premise of holistic rehabilitation. This research question explores some

of these restorative opportunities. In order to examine food production initiatives, it is important to clarify that prison farms and prison gardens are two very different machines. Prison gardens are typically considered as an elective activity that provide inmates with an opportunity to learn new skills and to contribute towards a food source for the inmate population and/or community. Prison farms, on the other hand, utilize inmates as labor (some contest as slave labor) for agricultural production. A lot of prison farms in the South were, or are, continuations of plantations. Prison farms typically produce an insular food source, feeding their facility as well as others in the same state. For state-run facilities, prison labor does produce considerable savings, albeit at the cost of the inmate who requires little to no compensation or might receive one day shaved off a sentence for every 24 work hours performed, but for private prisons, it amounts to pure profit. “Prison farms have grown increasingly marginal. In 2005, the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that only 298 facilities still employed inmates in agricultural labor, a 12% drop from 1990. The nation's remaining farms, such as Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, feel anachronistic, or like relics of a system that reduced convicts to sheer manpower” (Lybarger, 2013). Under the US constitution, this use of prisoners is the only legal form of slavery that is still allowed.

It can be argued that prison farms indeed discriminate by race and reinforce the connection to slavery through sentences of hard labor. “The 13th Amendment expressly permits and forever enshrines slavery ‘as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted’ (Reutter, 2012). With slavery still permissible in the U.S. penal system another example of oppression and the need for food justice exploration within prison food systems is substantiated. “Almost 3% of black male U.S. residents of all ages were imprisoned on December 31, 2013 (2,805 inmates per 100,000 black male U.S. residents), compared to 1% of

Hispanic males (1,134 per 100,000) and 0.5% of white males (466 per 100,000)” (Carson, 2014). Given the racial disproportion of inmates, this creates an alarming example of legalized black slavery still existing in the United States. In 1999 an incarcerated poet, Daniel Harr, wrote an article for *Criminal Justice* entitled “The New Slavery Movement.” In it he likened the privatization of prisons, at that point in history a ten-year-old industry, to slavery. He writes, “Press releases and letters to CCA shareholders [a Nashville-based company called Corrections Corporation of America] clearly indicate that the private-prison ventures are solely designed to profit from the transfer, housing, and utilization of human beings, the very essence of slavery as it was over a century ago” (Harr, 1999, p. 30). Some prisons, however, have negotiated the balance between exploitation of labor and providing inmates with empowering, reformatory opportunities with which to assimilate the foods they are required to consume. This next section provides examples of positive restorative programs currently underway and should inspire hope for future positive restorative progress, as it does exist.

4.3.1. Prison food’s restorative potential.

Stafford Creek Corrections Center (SCCC) in Aberdeen, Washington is the first known Farm-to-Prison pilot program. The DOC has worked extensively to forge a partnership with a local college, Evergreen, and now uses multiple DOC sites for restoration habitat nurseries, farming fish, and sustainable prison programs. By utilizing local growers and processors, SCCC has committed to maintaining a healthy environment that positively impacts not only inmates, but the surrounding communities as well. The facility has been growing their own fish in closed-system hatcheries and processing the fish at a nearby facility. They are also utilizing local growers for whole foods (i.e., potatoes rather than boxed instant potatoes), and growing some of their own produce for consumption. While on a site visit to SCCC, inmates were asked their

thoughts on the quality of food served: those that were nearby responded positively to the question and answered that it was better than most (personal communication, 2010). Food can be restorative to the community and inmate population as it contributes towards a local economy while also contributing to the overall mental and physical health of inmates.

San Diego's Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility has started a program called Farm and Rehabilitational Meals (FARM). FARM is another, and more recent farm-to-prison program, through which inmates are learning soil remediation, agricultural skills, and self-affirmation. The program was inspired by evidence of reduced recidivism rates at other facilities like Rikers that have initiated such programs. California now struggles with a 61% recidivism rate, while participants in these programs have shown to return at rates of 5 to 10 percent (O'Connor, 2014).

After engaging in several internet searches, university library databases, and listserv requests, I have yet to find any substantial farm-to-prison programs beyond that which has been started at SCCC in Washington State. Nor is there any apparent academic discourse on farm-to-prison or what value a farm-to-prison movement could potentially provide for inmates. There are some blogs postings that have mulled over the pros and cons. Conversely, there are numerous academic papers that herald the benefits of farm-to-school programs. This lack leads to a conclusion that a fundamental focus shift in "community-based" institutional food reform towards inclusion of the forgotten and oft taboo communities of prison populations is necessary.

There are numerous platforms that have been created for the sole purpose of connecting food growers to purchasers. These same platforms could be utilized to connect prisons with potential growers who are empathetic with and sensitive to the hurdles that exist within prison bureaucracy. These models present opportunities for replication with the intention for

redistribution of imbalances while providing economic incentives for willing participants (i.e., growers). For example, using an Oregon-based website, “FoodHub,” I posted a hypothetical ad seeking growers interested in pursuing the idea of creating food networks with local prisons. While some recognized the bureaucratic red tape involved with servicing a prison, responders did not feel that it would be a barrier and would pursue if the opportunity were available.

It is important to note that many, if not most states, have gardens integrated into their prison programming. Some of these have been around for decades at the behest of prison administrators (e.g., Rikers Island in New York), while others are relatively new programs inspired by non-profit partnerships (e.g., Lettuce Grow in Oregon). Some utilize the gardens as a means of offsetting food costs while others utilize the gardens for rehabilitation, therapeutic purposes, and skill enhancement. The question that has not been addressed, however, is whether these programs are fully embracing food justice’s premise of challenging intersectionalities of oppression. If not, they are simply food security programs, which, while providing value, use a different framework and have different expectations.

4.3.2. Risks in prison food reform activism.

Prior to analyzing the intersectionality of oppression, it is easy to praise programs that appear to be making positive contributions. However, given the multiple dimensions of intersectionality, things are not always as they superficially appear. An anonymous resident of the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans has said that “these kids don’t need to learn how to garden, they will do plenty of that when they wind up at Angola (a farm prison) and won’t be looking to do more of it when they are released” (personal communication, December 2014). Also, the intersection of historical slavery and agriculture within these farm prisons must be addressed. Lastly, is there any sort of long-term financial stability in skill training for gardeners?

It can be enjoyable, and it does offer a new skill, but will it substantially contribute towards keeping recidivism rates down?

Should a transformative approach rely on neoliberal solutions like creating employment opportunities, rather than addressing root causes of poverty and crime? Also, it should be considered that while there might be an opportunity for an additional job market, agricultural jobs typically pay low wages and expect hard work in return. Unless one has a personal dedication to the backbreaking work of agriculture, then there is little incentive to continue this work once one is released. Additionally, Karl Marx expounded upon a concept called the Industrial Reserve Army, which theorizes the State and present capitalism maintain a consistent pool of unemployed workers. By intentionally declining to provide every worker a job that matches their skill set, the system is able to control by removing employees and adding employees, effectively depressing wages. If we train inmates to grow food, are we naively keeping wages low for them and contributing to the revolving door of poverty and incarceration? Are we feeding the machine? Lastly, the intentions of gardens should be examined.

Garden projects associated with crises arising during eras of dramatic social change included subsistence aims, to be sure, but have assigned higher priority to other discursive goals. Such goals center on the production of subjectivities: citizens constructed by prevailing and/or emergent social categories or definitions of the era. School gardens and city garden plots at the turn of the twentieth century, for example, typically were organized by upper and middle class reformers to achieve the moral, cultural and esthetic uplift of poor and working class people...Especially important to these reformers was inculcating a strong work ethic and steady work habits... (Pudup, 2008, p.1230).

Have gardens in prisons become the social reformers paradigm of acceptable social rehabilitation? Gardens, in all their beauty, can also serve to reinforce white-privilege norms such as those that Pollan (2008) extolled and contribute towards the argument for/against ethical consumption. At best, these programs limit the punitive conditioning of food and work towards reframing prison food to restorative. There is always room to learn more.

4.4. Contribution

Prison food, at present, is punitive. It not only supports the production and distribution of industrial foodstuffs, but also reiterates to the inmate that their human worth is representative of what they are fed. It serves as a tool to diminish social worth and value by limiting the inmate's ability to apply any choice in how or what food they are served. It manipulates emotional and physical health and disrupts future public health by functioning in a laissez-faire system of oversight. Restorative food, conversely, would work to ensure that inmates receive nutritional foods that encourage positive outcomes. Whether the inmate chooses positive outcomes for themselves or not, the prison would be providing what they profess to claim: rehabilitation.

By reframing food from punitive to restorative we have several opportunities for transformation. Firstly, it could contribute towards reduced recidivism. "The national recidivism rate for those who have been imprisoned has climbed to 67.5 percent. The notion that prisons serve as 'houses of correction' can no longer be maintained. They exist now as holding pens with incapacitation as the objective. Rehabilitation has been discredited, and resources for it have grown scarce" (Ferguson, 2014, p. 16). Secondly, it offers additional employment opportunities post-release. Gardens, for example, provide job skills training that can be beneficial upon release. At present, most inmates are released without any sort of marketable job training, and then they are expected to not return to selling drugs or other illegal activity as a form of income

when no other opportunities are available. Thirdly, it would contribute towards improving public health in the present and future. “Mass incarceration has become one of the major public health challenges of our time. The millions of people who cycle through our nation’s courts, jails, and prisons every year experience far higher rates of chronic health problems, infectious diseases, substance use, and serious mental illness than the general population” (Cloud, 2014). While there are many facets to improving public health, reforming the prison food system would certainly improve public health in prisons.

Food justice, or the examination of institutionalized and historical forms of oppression in the food system, ought to highlight the injustice of prison food systems that affect an already racialized and classist institution and a stigmatized population. Denying food as nutritional nourishment within prison walls is no less a case of food apartheid than recognizing how grocery store chains fail to service low-income neighborhoods. Appreciating food as culture within prison walls is no different than the organizing principles of food sovereignty that work to retain cultural identity. Providing alternative models for prison food system reform is no different than the momentum surrounding authentic food security and ensuring that populations have access to sufficient and nutritious food. Recognizing the roles of foods within prison culture and their political counterpart within the food justice lexicon helps to identify pathways forward.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The intention of this research was to identify a gap in food justice in its failure to address United States correctional institutions' food systems. Food justice ought to promote the understanding of food's roles in these institutions so that prison food issues can be more effectively addressed in the food justice and prison reform movements. "Architecture, rules and regulations, decisions, reactions and punishment ideologies are all 'elements of the apparatus' – overt and covert factors that combine to form the lived reality of the penal institution. Food inside prison is one of these elements that acts as a site of contention where struggles over power, and identity (de)construction and maintenance can be played out" (Godderris, 2006, p. 256). Whether through the hotly contested serving of "nutraloaf" during solitary confinement, the arbitrary delivery of nutritional requirements for sedation, the dependence on processed foodstuffs, or the reduction of meals served there is ample evidence that American prison systems utilize food to reinforce the power structures as they exist within the apparatus.

Prison food is a mechanism of power that is often overlooked and seldom challenged, although it represents a large component of the American food consumption landscape. There are invisible populations, hidden behind bars of steel and walls of concrete, absent from the mainstream perception of consumers, whose lives are no less worthy of consideration within the developing epistemology of food justice. By challenging the existing American penal system through continued research and reform advocacy this thesis has argued that institutional and historical oppression ought to be examined in connection with race, class, and gender. It has also presented models such as SCCC that, equally important, work towards creating positive local agricultural, community, and economic partnerships. By acknowledging existing success stories we can promote replication of models and creation of new models based on social justice, food

systems, and prison reform partnerships. Beyond the arguments for creating alternative modes of economy as positive social contribution, is the potential for food to heal both body and mind.

In the context of the penal system, food is treated as a generosity bestowed upon the inmate, rather than a tool that might aid in the rehabilitation that prisons profess to engineer. One possibility is to create more supportive partnerships with prisons in order to collaboratively design integrated food system reform. A second possibility would be to create online networks that link growers and prison food procurers while providing the bureaucratic experience and ability to navigate the hurdles for each party involved. Most importantly, political and legal action is necessary to challenge the existing laissez-faire system of allowing wardens to negotiate nutritional requirements while they are also incentivized to pursue budget reductions. Engaging food justice, food security, and food sovereignty in a dovetailed movement would simultaneously be oppositional, transformative, and alternative. All three are necessary in order to contribute towards prison food system reform.

Examples such as the recent Rikers Island decision to eliminate solitary confinement for inmates 21 years of age and younger highlight that prison reform is being proactively (if slowly) pursued as the inhumanity and injustices of our American penal system become more apparent. More and more media is giving attention to issues of prison food as witnessed during the past year that this specific research project has developed. It is appropriate that consideration of prison food justice should enter into discussions of reform as well. It is essential that advocates delve below the surface and challenge the capillaries of power that continue to exploit the dynamic of “two quite distinct classes of men, one of which always meets on the seats of the accusers and judges, the other on the benches of the accused” (Foucault, 1977, p. 276).

It is important that activists and educators considering the solutions and alternatives

proposed to create a more just food system within prisons and jails, are aware of the potential disparities and the potential for further subjugation of the inmates. Gardens invite the risk of neoliberal assimilation, enabling the state to defer action based on nurtured independence of individual destiny. Agricultural skills are insufficient in themselves to enable a living wage opportunity for inmates once released. Also important to consider is whether these skills reinforce institutionalized racism by reiterating slavery and agricultural dependency. I have argued that the benefits of reforming the prison food system outweigh the costs of maintaining the status quo, one must be aware and alert so as not to reinforce existing disparities within prison food reform activism.

This brief study should inspire other academics and activists to continue to contemplate food justice beyond the visible boundaries of place-based ideologies and remember that those who are “placeless” deserve just as much insight and potential for transformation within their given “space”. Now that these issues have become academic and public knowledge, it is my hope and intention that others will continue this work, as it is a wild forest begging for exploration.

As food system discourse becomes more common the even the most stalwart of conservatives agreeing that our food system is in dire need of redirection, the agenda must evolve. The direction of food system research and activism need not resign itself to safe subject matter. While our schools and neighborhoods are important, America’s incarcerated population is just as worthy of our time and attention. This is a critical time to address mass injustice and potentially impact the effects of the growing mass-incarceration industry in our country.

Foucault (1977) ends *Discipline and Punish* with these words: “In this central and centralized humanity, the effect and instrument of complex power relations, bodies and forces subjected by

multiple mechanisms of 'incarceration', objects for discourses that are in themselves elements for this strategy, we must hear the distant roar of battle" (p. 308).

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