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More Than Just Food: Food Justice And Community Change (California Studies In Food And Culture)



Synopsis

The industrial food system has created a crisis in the United States that is characterized by abundant food for privileged citizens and “food deserts” for the historically marginalized. In response, food justice activists based in low-income communities of color have developed community-based solutions, arguing that activities like urban agriculture, nutrition education, and food-related social enterprises can drive systemic social change. Focusing on the work of several food justice groups—including Community Services Unlimited, a South Los Angeles organization founded as the nonprofit arm of the Southern California Black Panther Party—More Than Just Food explores the possibilities and limitations of the community-based approach, offering a networked examination of the food justice movement in the age of the nonprofit industrial complex.

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Customer Reviews

"More Than Just Food offers critical perspectives on food justice projects—from what Broad characterizes as more obviously flawed white-savior-outsider-led endeavors to the more sympathetically portrayed but still imperfect CSU." (International Journal of Communication)

"More Than Just Food highlights the powerful role that food can play in connecting communities, celebrating cultural histories, and establishing a more just society for all. Combining

the rigor of a scholar and the passion of an activist, Garrett M. Broad offers both practical and theoretical contributions that will help the food justice movement continue to grow." — Bryant Terry, author, activist, and recipient of a 2015 James Beard Foundation Leadership Award

"Community-based organizations throughout the country are working to promote health, equity and sustainability through urban food activism." — More Than Just Food offers an in-depth investigation of the potential for such activism to achieve social and racial justice in Los Angeles and beyond. As a scholar-activist, Broad offers insightful suggestions for future movement organizing, media storytelling, and policy advocacy." — Alison Hope Alkon, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of the Pacific

"More Than Just Food is an utterly compelling and intellectually satisfying discussion of the historical and contemporary relevance of food justice concerns to any serious conversation about racism, community organizing, and social justice more generally. Garrett M. Broad has written a powerful account of how and why the politics of healthy food access and activism can shed new and valuable light on questions of inclusion, fairness, and inequality in an interconnected and neoliberal world." — John L. Jackson, Jr., Richard Perry University Professor and Dean of the School of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania

In "More Than Just Food", Dr. Garrett Broad, a communication scientist and faculty member at Fordham University, provides an in-depth analysis of the industrial food system, many of its effects on society, and potential avenues for systemic change. He describes and analyzes the actions of community-based food justice organizations, and through interviews, gives voice to the perspectives of local residents and young people who endure food injustice. Early on in the book the author examines possible root causes of food justice-related problems and builds a case for concern with the global industrial food system. The productivity of the global industrial food system is spectacular, but it is a deeply flawed system which has given rise to a national crisis: privileged citizens have an abundance of food while marginalized minorities languish in "food deserts". Broad points to a wide range of problems related to the industrial food system, including corporate consolidation which leads to widespread exploitation across the globe, large-scale and chemically intensive industrial agriculture and its detrimental effects on natural resources and the health of livestock, dietary and public health problems, chronic diet-related diseases, and food safety and access issues. The book then brings into focus the issue of food insecurity and describes in detail the magnitude of that problem for food consumers in the United States. In 2013, for example, 14.3 percent of households had inadequate access to food at some point in the year due to lack of money or other resources.

We learn that the problem of food insecurity is also intimately related to the profit motives of corporations. Probably the most prominent example covered by the media is the lack of access to nutritious foods in low-income neighborhoods. Ultra-processed foods generate much more revenue for corporations than minimally-processed health-promoting foods, and this results in a paucity of nutritious foods on store shelves, particularly in low-income areas, giving rise to "food deserts". In response to growing public criticism, producers claim to be responding to consumer demand, but government has directly and indirectly subsidized the production of commodity grains that form the raw ingredients of these foods. Meanwhile, entire industries have grown up around the promotion of unhealthy foods. The author gives a broad overview of problems which stem from the global industrial food system, which sets the stage for a scholarly examination of how social injustice arises from such problems and how it may be possible to address them. Over the past few decades food movements with diverse motivations, goals, philosophies, and strategies emerged to promote food system sustainability. While the major agrifood corporations and financial institutions tell stories of technological solutions and trade liberalization, alternative food movements have other narratives which the corporate food regime ignores: transformation of social structures, cultural values, and food justice. The multitude of food movements to surface over the past few decades as a whole embrace a wide range of agendas. Some focus on changing individual consumer habits, for example, while others focus on the battle against obesity. According to the author, the action of the American alternative food movement has been characterized first and foremost by a community-based orientation which emphasizes the importance of cultivating family, community-based, and institutional environments that support healthy food choices. However, the development and management of many of these initiatives has often lacked direct participation from the very communities that suffer from food injustice, limiting the social justice potential of the alternative food movement. The author examines a promising subset of the alternative food movement - the food justice movement. Driven largely by locally-focused nonprofit organizations, it has emerged in recent years in response not only to the failures of the industrialized food system, but also in response to popular American progressive food activism, which often ignore issues of race, class and injustice in their programming. In doing so, he draws from a networked case study of Community Services Unlimited (CSU), a food justice group located in South-Central Los Angeles. Through the lens of CSU's work, the author argues that the mainstream of the American alternative food movement frequently benefits already-privileged white communities while programs centered in historically marginalized neighborhoods often become public relations campaigns for their sponsors and deliver little in the way of enduring food justice for local residents. Community-based activists

motivated by food injustice, on the other hand, make food a centerpiece of their organizing work but at the same time insist that by focusing on food alone they will not reach their goals. They are guided by broader visions of social justice, the growth of critical consciousness, the development of alternative institutions, the promotion of economic development, and the cultivation of skills for health and well-being. I have worked over the years with many experts who study food injustice, such as food economists who in many respects are themselves food activists, who have all but given up hope of salvaging impoverished communities and food deserts. From their perspective, attempting to attract youth to food activism through gardening is a futile endeavor and they would advise instead building vocational schools to educate the young so they can escape from their communities. This book provides a powerful counterpoint to that view. The reader comes to realize that this view misses the point. As the author writes, In my months and years participating with CSU, I never got the sense from staff and volunteers that they saw their handful of mini urban farms, garden workshops, or even their social enterprise as the answer to meet the material nutritional needs or environmental justice concerns of hundreds of thousands of South LA residents. Instead, CSU staff and community partners spoke of starting a conversation, cultivating sets of skills, and building a model for change that could be refined, expanded, replicated. The skeptic is confronted with the sound scholarship and the methodology of a communication scientist, which is well-documented in the book, an aversion to hype, as well as the first-hand lived experience of the author as a long-time food activist. Indeed, the author himself is blunt about "undeniable limits, contradictions, and lingering questions" and at the same time the reader takes away a largely optimistic, but balanced sense that there is good reason for hope. This book is true to its title, "More than just food"

More Than Just Food: Food Justice and Community Change lives up to its title by connecting the quest for food access with larger issues of racial justice and social change. Focusing on the work of food justice groups in South Los Angeles, the book offers valuable insights for communication scholars, media practitioners, and anyone connected to the food justice movement from activists to funders. More Than Just Food is rooted in Broad's engaged ethnographic research working as a volunteer with the food justice organization, Community Services Unlimited (CSU). Broad examines how the organization, which grew out of the Southern California Black Panther Party, operates within a networked communication ecology. At the heart of the exploration are questions of how the organization seeks balance between social change ideals and the compromises necessary to maintain

fiscal solvency, between a focus on community needs and broader national and international movements, and between communicating with local residents and larger publics. While Broad roots these questions in a very particular case, the discussion has relevance to many groups seeking social change at the local level while swimming in the seas of non-profit or development industry power structures. You can find a longer review here: [...]

This book is a great (and accessible) examination of what it means to do food justice. The term "food justice" is very popular right now with many organizations using it to describe their mission and actions, but, as more and more activists and scholars are pointing out, just claiming to be doing "food justice work" doesn't necessarily lead to transformation in local food systems and communities. The author details his years-long work with a local food organization and discusses openly and honestly about the opportunities and pitfalls that accompany this type of work. I think this book would be great for food studies, community studies, or other students interested in really unpacking the term "food justice," as well as practitioners and activists who want to take a reflective look at their practices.

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