

“The History of the Land: A Relational and Place-Based Approach for Teaching (More) Radical Food Geographies”

By Jabari Brown, Kevin Connell, Jeanne Firth and Theodore Hilton

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ABSTRACT

The History of the Land (Brown, Connell, and Gorman: 2019) is a workshop, field trip and pedagogical lens developed at Grow Dat Youth Farm in New Orleans and led with teenagers and adults. Using popular education methods, the lesson explores the relational biography of the land on which the farm currently resides. We argue that the history of the land is essential to understanding the spatial and social configurations of contemporary foodscapes; however, critical land histories are not engaged with in many alternative food initiatives (AFIs) and food justice organizations. We offer the adaptable pedagogical apparatus of the History of the Land as a tool for others to further the generative convergence of food geographies and anti-oppression work. In addition to discussing the workshop at Grow Dat, we reflect upon our own learning and healing from participating in an on-going series of history of the land field trips to rural Mississippi where several of us hold deep personal ties to the land. We co-authors are a collective of farmers, food activists, educators and academics. Across differences of gender, race, sexuality, class, location and history, learning about the land together has brought us into intimate conversation about loss, memory, narration, transformation, and how we imagine alternate, liberatory futures.

EPIGRAPH: In reflecting on Plato's Phaedrus, poet and essayist Anne Carson (1988:143) writes:

“Written texts make available the notion that one knows what one has merely read. For Plato this no-

tion is a dangerous delusion; he believes the reach for knowledge to be a process that is necessarily lived out in space and time". In this vein, we have struggled to write this paper, as we believe that the process (how we learn about the history of the land) is of equal importance to the content (what we learn about a place). How can the learning process and the affective dimensions of our relationships with one another and the land be captured in a written article? How can we express that reading about the history of the land is not the same as knowing the land and its history? We highlight these contradictions and tensions and attempt to engage with them throughout the article.

INTRODUCTION

Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013:9) asserts, "It's not just land that is broken, but more importantly, our relationship to land." As Gary Nabhan has written, we can't meaningfully proceed with healing, with restoration, without 're-story-ation'. In other words, our relationship with land cannot heal until we hear its stories." As co-authors we take up these calls by Kimmerer, Nabhan and others by reflecting upon our experiences working within one of these attempts to hear the land's stories: a pedagogical lens called "The History of the Land" (Brown, Connell, and Gorman, 2019). Leo Gorman, one of the original authors of the History of the Land workshop and Farm Manager at Grow Dat Youth Farm (a leadership program in New Orleans discussed in subsequent sections), explains that exploring "our personal and collective past—our cities' past, the past of our places— informs us about our current situation and how we interact in the world". In this article, we show the potential to engage in "re-story-ation" by focusing on our personal narratives and describing our relationships with one another and with the land. We share how the History of the Land workshop is taught at Grow Dat so that others may take up this line of inquiry to learn more (and differently) about the land in their own contexts.

We argue that the History of the Land as a curriculum and pedagogical lens theorizes oppressive structures within foodscapes and then imagines how such structures may be transformed.

This is a needed intervention and tool that we offer for use by others because critical land histories are not engaged with in many alternative food initiatives (AFIs) and food justice organizations. In order to transform oppressive structures and build more equitable relationships with the land and with one another, we contend that food justice efforts need to learn and acknowledge the history of the land where projects take place. Recent calls for land acknowledgments in activist and educational spaces highlight settler colonialist histories and ask us to consider our participation in enduring legacies of dispossession (Reese and Mendoza: 2019). This article wrestles with the question of what it means to acknowledge the history of a particular piece of land, and we share this example from Grow Dat where acknowledging the land has taken the form of an initial two-hour workshop and on-going engagement which continues to deepen and evolve over time (such as the history of the land trips to Mississippi discussed in Part 2). Others have worked to understand the history of the land in their own contexts; we share Grow Dat's approach not to claim authority over the process but rather to add to—and advocate for—this collective practice within alternative food initiatives and beyond.

Radical food geographies within academic scholarship seek out different epistemologies and honor alternate voices, pushing the boundaries of that which is “academic” and “activist”. In this article we attempt to further these goals of radical food geographies through: our collective writing as an exchange between academics, activists and practitioners; our emphasis on knowledge production that is occurring in non-academic spaces; centering our own selves, biographies and relationships throughout the article; and foregrounding different modes of communicating knowledge that are less common in journal articles, such as the oral conversation transcribed in Part 2.

This article is divided into three main sections and each section highlights a different aspect of land history work and utilizes a different method or approach. Part one contextualizes our engagement with land, power and foodscapes (as defined by Panelli and Tupa: 2009, 456) and situates the History of the Land workshop and pedagogical approach within academic scholarship. Part two

features a conversation with a creator of the workshop that shows how engagement with land histories extends beyond the boundaries of the workshop. The final section outlines how the History of the Land workshop is taught at Grow Dat. We conclude by arguing that while learning the history of the land is essential to understanding the spatial and social configurations of contemporary foodscapes, the result is a point of departure rather than an end, a beginning from which to envision alternate futures of radical food geographies.

PART 1: LEARNING AND TEACHING FOOD JUSTICE AND SETTLER COLONIAL HISTORIES

This section is written in the first person from by Theodore Hilton in order to highlight that relationships to scholarly literature are personally situated. This brief literature review highlights texts that have informed our understanding and situates our engagement with land histories within academic scholarship, before considering these key concepts in relation to other modes of teaching and learning highlighted in this article.

This section situates the History of the Land workshop among scholarly literatures concerning settler colonialism and food justice. I came into these discussions through an activist-academic interest in power dynamics around land ownership claims in the Southeastern United States. I am a white man from northeast Georgia with long familial ties to central Mississippi. My interest in these literatures was sparked by multi-racial, place-based social justice activism I have been exposed to, which makes space for learning about the often-observed histories playing out in the places where I live and where I am from.

The workshop was first developed for youth enrolled in Grow Dat Youth Farm's youth program. Grow Dat is a leadership program for teenagers located near the neighborhoods of Gentilly and Lakeview in New Orleans' 1300-acre City Park. Founded in 2011, Grow Dat aims to provide meaningful paid work for young people while increasing access to fresh, affordable, sustainably grown food. In a city with an educational system that is largely segregated, Grow Dat attempts to

create an intentionally-diverse space where young people (and staff) come together across race, class, gender expression and other axes of difference. Every year, around forty youth from around the city participate in a six-month leadership program. They spend half their workday on the fields learning sustainable agricultural practices, and the other half in activities focused on cultivating both leadership skills and a critical analysis of the food system. The program uses food justice as a frame incorporating sustainable agriculture, social justice, and anti-oppression concepts. The concept of food justice explicitly connects food practices to other ways of conceptualizing and navigating structural exclusion (Reese: 2017, Penniman: 2018). By situating the farm within deeper histories of environmental and social change in this place, the workshop relates contemporary food justice work to a legacy of resistance against settler structures of colonialism and plantation production. The History of the Land curriculum also draws particularity of the concept of “land” as a fungible factor of production or political boundary, subverting these constructions to the many “stories” that precede, co-exist, and contend with them (Goeman: 2008).

Scholars considering settler colonialism frame the invention of exclusive property rights as a mode of settlement by dispossession (Wolfe: 2017), a self-referencing set of claims on legal legitimacy (Glenn: 2015), and a structure coercing Indigenous assimilation to settler logics (Coulthard: 2014). Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) target the notion of property as they call for “unsettling” notions of propriety built on settler colonial logic. For them, settler colonial land and power claims intersect with educational practices and worldviews that normalize present-day inequalities and enduring Eurocentrism. Warning of the potential for settler systems to co-opt critical criticism to appear reflexive and therefore innocent, these authors’ “ethic of incommensurability” challenges educators to intervene. As we will elaborate in later sections, the History of the Land workshop incorporates critical interventions, oral and written histories to cultivate an unsettled sense of the complex stories playing out on the land.

Just as stories of City Park's land today cannot be told without attending to violent histories, they also unfold along with their contemporary continuities: incarceration, which functions as a spatial fix for depopulating land and maintaining racialized workforces (Gilmore: 2007, Watson: 2007); uneven development, through which certain spaces in New Orleans receive disproportionate public resources (Azcona: 2006, Bledsoe et al: 2017), and in linkage to petrochemical companies profiting off of environmental degradation nearby (Austin: 2006). Youth involved with Grow Dat grow up in this landscape of unequal neoliberal urban governance. Privatization of education, mass transportation, and housing have characterized New Orleans for as long as many can remember. Contextualizing these recent developments among deeper stories of survivance and resistance, the History of the Land workshop underscores that this present paradigm is created, contested, and can be overcome.

RACE, THE SOUTH AND BLACK AGRARIAN TRADITIONS

Much political discourse today projects the southeastern United States, as well as US agricultural spaces, as white (see Wright: 2018). This phenomenon can be partially attributed to massive political influence of plantation elites in regional, national, and global geopolitics through the 20th century, including federally funded mechanization and land consolidation programs that disproportionately dispossessed Black farmers on a systemic scale (Woods: 1998, Sherrod: 2012). State and federal heritage investment enhanced these structural dynamics by aestheticizing plantation spaces as scenes of white opulence (Adams: 2007).

The fact of Black farmers' existence counterpoints this [white] myth, inviting different questions about the land. Centrally involved in liberatory movements since emancipation, Black farmers "fought for the right to participate in the food system as producers and to earn a living wage in agriculture in the face of racially, socially, and politically repressive conditions, using land as a strategy to move towards freedom" (White: 2018, 4). But other practices of food production for survival and resistance build this story as well. Judith Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff (2009) describe the

practices of enslaved African people arriving in the Americas, who combined their agricultural expertise and crops with plants and cultivation practices they were exposed to through connections with Amerindian peoples. Carney and Rosomoff argue that these practices and relationships made possible the survival of enslaved African people along with white settlers in the early colonies.

In the following sections, we situate the History of the Land workshop as a pedagogical tool for thinking through complex histories. Part two shows how a conversation across difference creates space for learning about the multiple and complicated stories playing out on the land (see hooks and Berry, 2009). There are many stories that we tell about the land and our relationship to it, and many that we do not tell. This truth allows us to see that there are limitations to our narratives about land, justice and sovereignty. Part three details the pedagogy and content of the History of the Land workshop at Grow Dat, a method to hear the land's multiple stories and help us imagine new futures.

PART 2: BUILDING NEW RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LAND

In this section we share an oral exchange between Jabari Brown and Jeanne Firth. Jabari, a Black man from Mississippi, and Jeanne, a white woman who grew up in Kansas, have worked together on the intersections of oppression and food systems for almost a decade. They spoke next to the hand-dug bayous of what is now Grow Dat in City Park on one of the shortest days of the year—the needles of the bald cypress trees had just begun to turn from green to brown.

Jeanne: Through our history of the land trips I've learned that your family purchased land in Canton, Mississippi, through the Louisiana Land Bank in 1926. You grew up on that land, surrounded by family living in adjacent homes. What stories did you hear about the land?

Jabari: There are questions I have asked, and there are answers that I have not heard. Everything I've learned has been secondhand from my mother and her siblings; the parts of the story that are missing are my granddaddy's words and my grandmother's words. I know that my grandmother worked in a daycare and my grandfather was a farmer who had cows and peas. He also

worked at a wood factory in town, and three generations of my family worked at that same plant: my grandfather, my mother and my brother. There is a deep connection of working with our hands, not just in growing food but also in the art of building things.

I always heard from my mother: “never sell the land”. And at first I was like, “why would we sell?” However, as an adult I learned that the ownership of land and homes is one of the things that creates upward mobility in society, especially for white folks. I’ve heard people talk about their transition from one house to the next, and this is totally different messaging than what my mother received from her father and that I received from her: “never let go of the land”. I hadn’t heard of the economic system in which land is transferrable until recently! The boom and doom that comes from buying up land and selling it—that is just a completely different relationship to land than the one I was brought up with. My family holds a worldview that honors being in relationship with the land, as opposed to having domination over the land. How would our relationship to land as a country be different if this was our collective understanding?

As I travel across the U.S., I see towns—like New Orleans, mostly Black—that are in the process of being gobbled up and gentrified. I ask, “how is it that Black folks are able to profit from redevelopment?” As opposed to being forced out, or having to work in those places where the people who live in these communities are drinking coffee, walking their dogs. Rather than a small group of people going from place to place to place, racking up millions and billions of dollars from real estate, can we build new systems and new relationships to land?

Jeanne: Why take Grow Dat youth and a multi-racial cohort of adults (including the authors of this article) to your family’s land?

Jabari: At the heart of it is me wanting others to have the connection to the land that I have. I understand that all Black folks won’t have the same affinity to nature as I do. However, the lack of access to undeveloped land has meant that POC haven’t had the opportunities to rediscover and build intimate relationships with nature.

For Mississippi to see this multi-racial group of folks, and for that group to see Mississippi—and specifically *my* Mississippi—it is a joy. There is no better way for me to understand how I relate to humans than through nature. As I've understood the intricate webs of nature more, I've understood people more. I understand myself more. Nature is all of us. I don't know if you'd call this a radical thought, but I know that I am a part of everything that exists. This wooden bench we're sitting on, those trees, these leaves, that water. Even water has memory! We are going to die. We are going to fold back into the system of life and we will show up differently. Although it was not often a part of conversation, it is very clear that if you put something on the ground, it's going to return to the ground—the ground is going to consume it, you know?! And if I honor you and I don't honor where we are going [points to the dirt] and people who are already there [points down again], and those who are going to come after us—it minimizes, well, it causes me to question my relationship with all that is visible, that I'm not seeing the life in all things. So that is one of the outcomes of these land trips, to acknowledge that [singing] there is life there is life there is life everywhere. For real.

Jeanne: That moves my heart. I feel reverent hearing you say that.

Jabari: Let's parallel that which I just described with a system of capitalism which is: turn over, turn over, make more and more and more. That as opposed to what it is to be more and more in relationship. Indian scientist and food sovereignty activist Vandana Shiva talks about what it's like to be in relationship with the land. What it's like to be yourself; what is it like to care for animals. We are all living beings. We share the Earth. We don't get another Earth. Love the one you're with, [laughing] we gotta love the one we're with.

Jeanne: I'm curious what it feels like to have us there—to have young people sleeping on the floor of your church, to have us camping out next to your creek in the woods?

Jabari: There are multiple feelings that come up. It feels joyous to share people—my Aunt Babe, my Mama, and others—to share them with you all, to walk around and for us to notice the land together. It feels like a joy. I also feel some anxiety because people are always changing, and I

am always changing as well. There are ways in which I've changed that doesn't always fit within the system I grew up in. So I can feel some angst with that. My brother and sister stayed in Mississippi to raise their families. Myself, I took a different journey, to live beyond the borders of Mississippi. But there is something that is honorable about watching a place and people transition over time. Sometimes I regret my decision to move away for what it will mean for generations to come. My nieces and nephews grew up similar to me, close to the land and around family as my people have for nearly a century. That's something I forfeit because of what I'm doing. It isn't right or wrong but it has different costs and benefits of me not being there. They have a different story than mine.

Jeanne: I can relate to that having left Kansas. I wonder what I've given up, going somewhere else, away from my family and ancestral roots. Why is it powerful to tell the history of the land through people like Aunt Babe?

Jabari: My Aunt Babe is 103—she is a library! An African proverb says that when a person dies a library burns to the ground. How can I quickly disseminate the information that she has to offer? I don't think it often is that you're in the company of people who are 100 years old: it feels like a jewel to be able to share. You've heard Aunt Babe's stories—she has stories galore. She has stories that are living and she won't always be living.

Jeanne: I remember when we visited the cotton gin with Aunt Babe that had been active when she was a child. I wonder what changes have happened in her life? When you said "it's honorable to watch a place change over time", I wondered: "what has Aunt Babe witnessed?"

Jabari: Aunt Babe saw the deforestation of Mississippi—I'm sure when she was younger there were tons of stands of long leaf pines. More recent history is that of the Civil Rights Movement—she was a fully grown woman at that point with grown kids, fifty years old. She saw the ways in which "development" (quote on quote) happened around us and under us: technology, the way we build out towns, the resources that are no longer there. In which ways have we created the problems that we are living with today because we were not in the right kind of relationship with the land? Aunt

Babe is a person who I often find myself learning from, and it's just one story. If we went and talked to your grandparents I'm sure we'd hear a totally different story which is equally amazing.

Jeanne: Since you've brought the conversation to my family, you know I think a lot about my relationship with the land in Kansas. Despite living in Kansas City, I grew up feeling connected to my rural family, deeply rooted in farming on the prairie heartland. We are relatively new arrivals to the U.S., but I think often of this Wendell Berry (1969, 607) quote which speaks to my white, settler colonial relationship to land:

I am forever being crept up on and newly startled by the realization that my people established themselves here by killing or driving out the original possessors, by the awareness that people were once bought and sold here by my people, by the sense of the violence they have done to their own kind and to each other and to the earth...And so here, in the place I love more than any other and where I have chosen among all other places to live my life, I am more painfully divided within myself than I could be in any other.

Jabari: The thing I hear in Berry's voice is the opposing thoughts and feelings of enjoying the land AND of acknowledging what your presence on the land has meant for other families. Africans that were enslaved and white folks are not indigenous to this country. So I think this conversation has to start with Indigenous folks. That's a reality that looms large for me. I have such pride in the land, and my journey has been different from my grandparents' journey which is different from the journey of your grandparents. Here I'm acknowledging the difference of whiteness and Blackness, of *coming* to the U.S. or being *brought* to the U.S. None of those truths negate the fact that there were people here before all of us. There are multiple ways that we can repurpose land and give land back. Indian Island in Humboldt Bay was recently returned to the Wiyot tribe. What does it mean to repatriate [pointing down] this land?

Jeanne: Exactly. I feel like everyone I know who is working on this topic comes to this crux: so once you learn the history of the land, what comes next? I immediately hear you talking about questions of reparations and repatriation. Where does this line of inquiry take us?

Jabari: Given our current political system, it seems far fetched that the U.S. would give Indigenous folks and formerly enslaved folks money and land. It seems the opposite of what the United States *is*. But it's possible. It started once with forty acres and a mule, Reconstruction. But each time it started, there was something put in place to halt it, to stop it dead in its tracks. I don't think America really wants to create the opportunity for "success for all" because that threatens white superiority. That's what I really think. So that means that the people making decisions cannot be majority white folks. It's about control, it's about power, the consolidation of power for the white race: border control and Trump's fence along our Southern border; barring folks from "shithole countries"; anti-abortion efforts against Planned Parenthood, attacks on women's rights. It's all the exact same thing: the preservation of white power. I just saw this statute of Dr. King, and there were phrases of his speeches engraved in the marble. I was wowed reading it because the words were never more salient than they are today, and they were said fifty or sixty years ago. That makes me excited to have the will to fight, and it makes me sad that the fight is the same fight.

Do you know that Wall Street is in the business of farming? Even teachers' pensions are buying up thousands of acres of farmland, all along the Mississippi river. Smaller family farms are bought up and consolidated and are being managed not by people, but by Wall Street. This promotes more and more mass agriculture because nobody's invested in the land for what it means for air and water and for frogs. They don't care—that's not their concern. Is it possible to hold so much land and hold so much money, and NOT have caused or done harm? Is it possible? In this system of oppression, we all have blood on our hands in some way. There has to be a new theology besides win/lose, it has to say "together we win". Not just win, but we thrive, we excel, we go further, we do much more together than we do separately. But that isn't what exists in Western culture.

Jeanne: Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) writes that humans are some of the newest beings on the planet. Most of what we're surrounded by right now (plants, animals) have been on Earth in some form for hundreds of thousands of years. She cites Indigenous knowledges and practices that look to

other beings, like trees, to teach us how to live, asking them “how have you survived and thrived for thousands of years?” Maybe humans are still learning.

Jabari: That’s the greatest hope I’ve heard about humanity in a very long time—that we just don’t know how to live yet. (END)

This transcription attempts to capture the dynamic learning and affective dimensions of conversation and exchange which, we contend, are necessary to the process of creating new stories and new ways of being in relationship with the land and with one another. Storytelling is a way of knowing within Jabari Brown’s African American culture, and is a way to engage in Nabhan’s process of “re-story-ation”. Jabari stresses that “some things can only exist in relationship with other people; some thoughts can only surface when you are in dialogue with others”. To further this point, at a Junebug story circle workshop that Jabari and Jeanne attended together in 2011, John O’Neal (1940-2019; a former field director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and a founder of the Free Southern Theater) taught that we must listen to others’ stories and that they must, in turn, inform our own stories. Further, we contend that transcribing this “alive” conversation as it happened offers a freedom from the requirement of perfection (a white supremacist value) that is often expected of the written word.

Jeanne and Jabari’s’s dialogue highlights what you gain when you engage in learning the land’s history: Jabari says the “prize” of this kind of work is the feeling of being in meaningful relationships, even when those relationships have troubled histories. Jabari describes this kind of learning as “not a bird’s eye construction of knowing—it’s intimate”. If there is going to be food justice (or any type of justice), then we must first learn the histories of the land in order to build new relationships with the land. In the article’s conclusion we return to the question, “Where does this line of inquiry take us?”

PART 3: TEACHING WITH RELATIONSHIP IN MIND: THE “HISTORY OF THE LAND” WORKSHOP AT GROW DAT

This section is written from the perspective of one of the authors, Kevin Connell. Kevin is the Co Program Manager of Curriculum and Instruction at Grow Dat.

How do we build new relationships to land? How do we understand histories of violence and dispossession in our own communities as a starting place for right relationship to land and to each other? The History of the Land workshop is our attempt to begin to address these questions in the context of our youth program. The question of “*What’s happened right here?*” serves as a container for approaching challenging histories of settler colonialism and enslavement as well as conversations about just futures.

How we do this work matters. I will use the first person below because my positionality is important as I approach these questions. Stories and silences in my own education serve to normalize power relationships that echo plantation structures; I benefit from these power relationships as a white person. What does it mean for me, a white man whose ancestors enslaved people, to work on a farm alongside people whose ancestors were enslaved? What does it mean for us that the very land on which we do this work was once a plantation?

These are ongoing conversations, not questions with easy answers—there is no History of the Land test at the end of the workshop. Following radical educational theorist Paulo Freire (1972), at Grow Dat we believe that liberatory education requires that everyone teaches and everyone learns, that we reflect on our own experience and envision solutions together. Asking questions is a key pedagogical practice in popular education, and questions guide the workshop (and this article). Meaningful relationship with each other is essential for this work. Feelings matter; all kinds of knowledge have a place here.

This workshop has grown out of popular education techniques and is always a work in progress—resources and questions have changed as our understandings grow in relationship with each

other. I use ‘we’ in the description below because this workshop is led collaboratively by groups of youth and adult facilitators. My hope is that other educators will find our questions or activities useful as they seek to build alternative educational spaces that emphasize relationship to land and to each other.

TIMELINE

Participants start in small groups with a pile of images from the history of this land: our farm’s fields, a cypress swamp, two old maps, a sugarcane plantation, a golf course, an Indigenous *calumet* ceremony, a flooded stadium, among others. Groups work together to order the images chronologically, adding dates, titles, and questions to create a timeline of what they already know. Participants identify their own background knowledge and gaps in their understanding. For example, why don’t we know the names of the Indigenous peoples of this place?

After this introduction, we move to the main activity of the lesson: our “tour through time.” For this hour-long walk, we divide the complicated history of this land into four chunks: Bulbancha; Al-lard Plantation; Creating City Park; Katrina and After. We visit a place on the farm that evokes each time period. At each station, we hang up images and texts to trees and whatever else is around to create four outdoor museums. These museums, and most importantly, the land itself, serve as a starting point for our conversations.

BULBANCHA

Our first stop is an old live oak that spreads its winding branches over a lagoon. Bald cypress, mulberry, and cabbage palms surround a clearing, and we often see egrets, cormorants, blue herons, and alligators here. As the light filters through palm fronds, it’s possible to imagine the swamp that preceded the city of New Orleans.

Participants often know this land was a swamp; the outdoor museum adds details. The Choctaw name for this land is *Bulbancha*, meaning “land of many languages,” and is home to numerous Indigenous peoples—Chitimacha, Houma, Bayougoula, Washa, Chawasha, Tchoupitoulas, Acolapissa, Atakapa-Ishak, among others. I’ve relied on tribal websites, Indigenous scholars (especially Elizabeth Ellis’ work on the petit nations, 2015) and the work of local Indigenous historians, artists, and activists (Monique Verdin, Jeffrey Darensbourg, Jessi Parfait) to assemble the texts in our museum, with an eye toward emphasizing both the diversity of these cultures and their endurance into the present day. We use a mix of historical and contemporary images (of Chitimacha basket weavers, Houma palmetto houses, an 18th century map of New Orleans) and some text (a list of Chitimacha vocabulary, the Story of the First Canoe) to paint a picture of what this land was like before the arrival of the European capitalist project.

We keep these images in mind as we ask the group to consider some questions: What kind of knowledge would Indigenous peoples have needed to thrive on this land? In what ways did Indigenous peoples impact this ecosystem? What would this land look like today if Europeans had never arrived? What lessons can we take from Indigenous ways of living and thinking as we struggle to maintain our city in an era of floods, subsidence, and climate change?

A comprehensive history of the incredible diversity of Indigenous nations that traded, hunted, and lived on this land is out of reach for this conversation. In telling history in this way we run the risk of being reductive and leaving participants with the racist assumption that Indigenous societies were static, innocently fixed in a perfectly harmonious relationship with the land. Exploitation of land and people can seem natural and inevitable from our current vantage point, but Indigenous cultures related and relate to land in radically different ways *in the very place where we’re standing*. What alternatives can this open up for us today?

ALLARD PLANTATION

Next, we walk out onto our fields. If we turn back the clock to the early 1800s, when this land was a plantation, what would we see? Often participants answer “sugarcane, slaves working, a plantation house”. We add to this understanding by emphasizing the massive amount of labor, destruction, and violence involved creating a plantation from a swamp. Enslaved people constructed canals and levees to drain the land, felling hundreds of trees. Where today many different crops grow among native plants and trees, we would have seen only sugarcane in the 1800s – a monoculture reflecting European slave owners’ singular goal: extracting wealth from people and land.

Here our outdoor museum displays an image of the Allard plantation house that stood nearby, images of similar plantations, and sugarcane and cotton to touch. Newspaper ads describe enslaved women who escaped, and there’s also information on maroon communities that dotted the swamp around New Orleans.

Participants are familiar with the historical fact of slavery. Sabria Earin (an alumni facilitator) noted that the way slavery is often taught in school diminishes enslaved people’s power. Students can internalize the idea that slavery ended only because white Union troops rescued Black people in the Civil War. How does such a narrative reinforce white supremacy today? To challenge this dominant narrative, we focus on resistance in this unique landscape.

In our region, plantations almost always fronted a body of water (often the Mississippi River, in our case, Bayou St. John) to connect the products of enslaved labor to global markets. This waterfront is the highest elevation since all the land in this region was built by sediment deposits from the Mississippi’s annual floods. Most plantations were long rectangles that sloped gradually from the natural levee at one end to cypress swamp at the other.

This geography is key for resistance: enslaved people would escape to the swamp, sometimes temporarily, other times setting up permanent settlements. This landscape also aided in the 1811 Slave Revolt when enslaved people planned and organized across ethnicity and language to raise an army of at least 500 people on the German Coast upriver from New Orleans (Diouff: 2014,

Seck: 2014, Rasmussen: 2011). Participants of all ages are often surprised by this history. Why didn't we hear it in school?

Slavery is often described as an omnipotent system, yet enslaved people raised armies and created autonomous communities just miles from New Orleans. In our own time, capitalism treats people and landscapes as disposable, and it can be hard to see alternatives. Maroons looked to the swamp and saw the possibility of another world. What can we take from their example?

CREATING CITY PARK

We walk to a concrete bridge over a bayou where an anhinga can often be spotted drying its wings on fallen oak. It feels wild in this space. Today, it's easy to think of City Park as a "natural" space, but the images here tell the story of a constructed landscape.

A photo titled "Digging lagoons by hand" shows that this swampy habitat is not a naturally occurring bayou but an artificially constructed waterway hand-dug by Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers in the 1930s and 40s. Much of the park was built during this period, though construction began as early as the 1870s. The first people to work on transitioning the land from a barren treeless post-plantation landscape to the lush green space we know today were prisoners. Elites worked to reinstate white supremacist power structures post-Reconstruction by imprisoning Black citizens and leasing them out to work on plantations—slavery by another name. A first-person narrative in our outdoor museum explains that the park was off limits for people of color until 1958. When Black citizens of New Orleans were finally allowed access to the park, the public pool was closed and filled in to avoid integration.

The land changed, and plantation structures endured. Program Manager Kaya Jones speaks about the creation of City Park as inventing a landscape that was safe for elite whites. This meant creating a certain kind of "nature"—the inviting landscape of manicured lawns and columned pavil-

ions, not the foreboding swamp. Safety for elite whites also meant that Black people could construct the park or work in service roles, but not engage in leisure activities alongside whites.

Jonshell Johnson (a former educator at Grow Dat) brought the lens of profitability to my understanding of the transition of the land from plantation to park. Elites converted this land because it was profitable. When Europeans settled here, the strategic location and the capacity to produce sugar made the land valuable. As New Orleans continued to grow into a global city in the post-Civil War era, why would converting this land to a park be more profitable than using it for agriculture? What makes land valuable today? How *should* we place value on land?

KATRINA AND AFTER

Our last stop is a row of satsuma trees alongside what we call the Tee Field—named after the golf course that preceded our farm. Tiny lettuce and carrot plants are just emerging from the soil. Beyond there are hoop houses, and clumps of cypress and willow. Interstate 610, which runs right next to our farm, adds the roar of traffic to an otherwise pastoral landscape.

Who is the park for today? “Everyone!” is the response we most often hear to this question. We invite participants to keep this question in mind as we look at the resources. Several address the question of golf courses in City Park. Though less of the park is devoted to golf post-Katrina, protests and controversy surrounded the recent construction of the Bayou Oaks South Course in 2017. Protesters cited concerns around private space in the park and the course’s impact on wetlands. We ask if anyone in the circle uses the golf course, where annual membership is \$3,000. Who has access to that land?

What else costs money in the park? Another resource shows entrance fees for a new children’s museum, art museum, botanical gardens, mini-golf, and amusement park. The prices range from \$5-12 per person. We ask participants again: Who is the park for? If there is exclusion in terms

of who can access the park today, does it resonate with past forms of exclusion on this land? What's changed and what's remained the same?

Post-Katrina, New Orleans became a laboratory for neoliberal reforms. Blackwater mercenaries patrolled the city in the days after the levee breach. Hospitals and public housing were privatized and the school system was replaced by an all-charter model (Adams: 2013, Lipsitz: 2006). These processes are at work in City Park as public space is enclosed. In our gentrifying city, how do neoliberal processes of privatization and deregulation echo colonialism, slavery, and segregation?

Kayla White, another alumni educator, asked a question while leading this lesson that has stuck with me. After the Great Depression, we saw the government create public programs to respond to a disaster. After Katrina, we saw a great privatization. What if there had been a post-Katrina WPA instead? What would the park and the city look like today?

CITY PARK OF THE FUTURE

We remind participants of what we've seen: this land has been a cypress swamp where Indigenous peoples made their home, a sugarcane plantation, a park for white people, a golf course, and a non-profit farm. Now, we ask participants to think of how this land *should* be used. Putting aside the question of what would be realistic or pass through City Council, what would be fair and just?

Participants explore this question in groups and make maps of their City Park of the Future. We lead this activity with a wide range of participants: from elementary school students to adult geographers. Here is an incomplete list of responses beginning with the more common ones:

- Public swimming pool
- Improved public transportation to and around the park
- More food production
- Habitat for native plants and animals
- Housing for the homeless
- History of the Land museum
- Waterpark
- Restaurants and food trucks
- Community gardens

- Bike paths
- Museum of indigenous history
- Art museum where anyone can display their work
- Return the park to Indigenous peoples
- Solar panels
- Hair salon for people and dogs, free after 5pm

Black feminist organizer and writer adrienne maree brown (2017, 2019) emphasizes the importance of imagining the future we want. This lesson invites participants into this work on a small scale. Here we redesign the park. Later in our youth program, we redesign the grocery store, our neighborhoods, our city. In an ideal world, where would our food come from? What would justice look like and feel like? If we can't imagine answers to these questions, we're caught in a permanent posture of saying no to whatever oppressive conditions are cooked up next by people in power.

Furthermore, imagining the future we want should be fun! In this activity, we dream together. Initially, when small groups would have ideas that I thought were silly, I'd try to direct them toward "bigger" questions of access and land redistribution. Now I think that both these things should exist at the same time. We can imagine a future park that includes a museum of Indigenous history *and* a waterslide. The future should be just *and* fun. After all, it's where we want to live.

In the same vein, when there is an element of fun, of play, we emphasize that everyone deserves a seat at the table when we imagine the future we want. Because this lesson takes place outdoors, and includes a participatory activity like this one, we invite all kinds of participants into the conversation. Questions of justice belong not only in university classrooms (where access is heavily shaped by race and class privilege), but on a Thursday morning field trip with New Orleans public school children.

After sharing our designs for the future of City Park, we conclude our lesson with questions. Is it important for us to know this history? Once we know, what do we do now? Does it influence how we think about our work, or organization, our personal lives?

In my description of this workshop you have missed the squish of the mud beneath your boots when you walk on the farm, you missed the smell of the bayou, you missed the sounds of the young people's voices and the conversations and understandings that grew. But you are also on land every day – what are the stories of your university, your neighborhood? We invite you into this work where you live, with your community. Start the conversation.

CONCLUSION: “AND ONCE YOU KNOW, WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?”

Dispossession of Indigenous land, slavery, segregation, and privatization are not unique to the history of Grow Dat's 7-acre plot; neither are traditions of resistance, marronage, or other decolonial practices. When we tell these stories with this spatial lens, they become palpably present (Daigle and Ramírez: 2019). The conceptual container of the land itself can hold history in a different way than a textbook (Wildcat et al: 2014). It matters for us, here, today if we tell it in this way.

Indigenous peoples gathered, hunted, farmed, and lived where today there is a nonprofit farm. Enslaved people cut sugarcane in the field where carrots are harvested with teenagers. The decision makers on this land have historically been white people, beginning with colonialism and carrying notable continuities through the post-plantation state and the emergence of nonprofit organizations (Smith: 2007). How can Grow Dat disrupt that model today as an organization that currently has some control over the land where we work? When are we unconsciously reproducing oppression that's happened on the land, and when are we doing something different? When we make decisions about land, how do we make sure voices that are historically excluded are included? We can't know the answer to these questions if we don't know the land's stories (see Ramírez: 2015). What tomorrow holds for this land depends on our efforts to disrupt the domination of land and people.

We offer this adaptable pedagogical apparatus and tool not only to those working in food-scapes, but to scholars and educators of all kinds as a way of making broad historical processes more real. We hope this can be particularly useful in thinking about, and creating processes for, ex-

pansive and justice-focused land acknowledgements. What is the history of the land where you are sitting as you read this article? What Indigenous territory are you in? What was the land before it was what it is today? if you teach at a university, how did the university get the land? Who gets to be there today? Historically?

We co-authors have shared aspects of our biographies and personal learning about the history of the land regarding loss, memory, narration and transformation in ways that emphasize the relational and affective dimensions of this kind of work. As Kimmerer and others stress the importance of hearing the land's stories, we argue that learning the history of the land is a both individual and collective endeavor which is essential to understanding power in the spatial and social configurations of contemporary foodscapes. However, excavating history is not the end of the process but rather a point of departure, a beginning. In our experience, learning the land's history brought us to the urgent issues of access, land redistribution and reparations. Just as questions are the method that drive this workshop/process, questions will arise in your collective learning that do not have easy answers. We must not shy away from these questions but instead use them to imagine—and bring about—an alternate future. As Jabari Brown expressed, we must keep seeking to build new relationships with the land.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES:

Jabari Brown is an observer and conscious participant in nature's many ecosystems. His superpower is (re)introducing humans to nature and nature to humans using various processes like storytelling and community circles in a non-hierarchical, healing and powerful way. He's frequently quoted, "Turn over a new leaf, take a new path home, understand a little more about the world we share with all other beings".

Kevin Connell is an educator and urban farmer in New Orleans. His work with youth and adults focuses on outdoor learning, popular education techniques, thinking critically about capitalism, and envisioning a just and sustainable future.

Jeanne K Firth is on the founding staff team at Grow Dat Youth Farm and recently completed a PhD in Human Geography and Urban Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her dissertation ethnography is "Feeding the City After the Flood: Foodscape Philanthropy in Post-Katrina New Orleans".

Theo Hilton is a PhD candidate in cultural anthropology at Tulane University. Theo's dissertation project, "From Petro Plantation to People's Preservation: Louisiana Free Settlements and the Long Road to Recognition," considers the intersection of historic preservation and environmental justice for activist residents in communities founded by freedpeople along Louisiana's River Road.

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