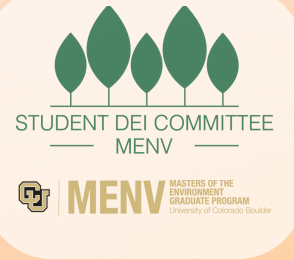


Environmental Justice Educational Series



Organizers marching to end hunger in 1968

Part 5: Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) *The History of Food Apartheid for Black Americans*

From our previous post, we learned about **redlining** and followed its impact through 2020, where Black and Latine communities faced disproportionate deaths during the height of the COVID pandemic as a result.



Photo from Solidarity Day march in 1968

Troublingly, but unsurprisingly, redlining impacts another facet of health, survival, and well-being for marginalized communities: access to nutritional foods.

Let's learn a bit more about words and their importance.

Historically, we have used the term ‘food desert’ to define “census tracts where a significant part of the population is a mile or more from the nearest supermarket, as these are assumed to provide the best and most affordable access to healthy foods.”

Recently, there has been a shift away from using ‘food desert.’

By stating something is a desert, it implies that this is naturally occurring, and does not acknowledge intersectional inequalities, such as race and income, that lead to inequitable food access.

Food deserts also make us think of an “empty, absolutely desolate place...but there is so much life, vibrancy, and potential in these communities.”
- Karen Washington

Instead, there is a shift towards:

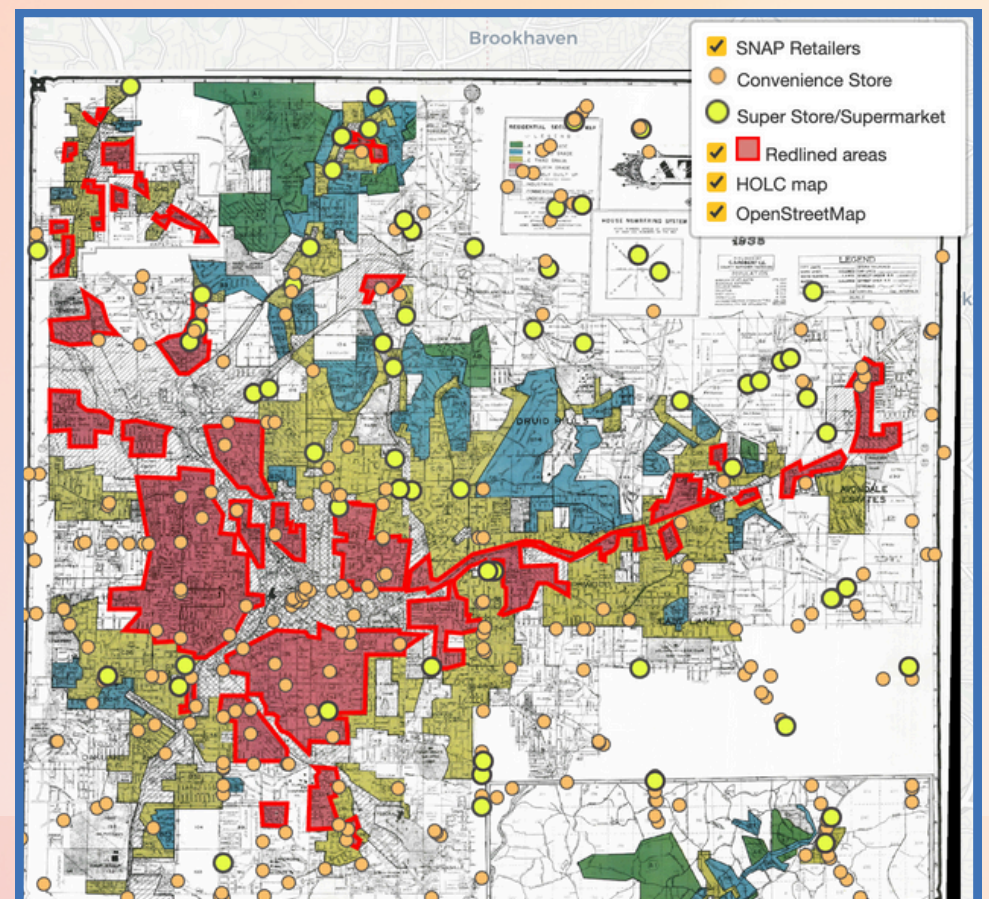


Supermarket Redlining: Locational decisions of food retailers showcase intentional disinvestment in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color



Food Apartheid: A term that describes how racism and political power affect our food systems both domestically and internationally.

This encourages a “historical understanding of food systems and names the oppressive, unequal racialized systems of power that govern food consumption, production, and distribution.”



Map of previously redlined communities and current supermarkets

Using deliberate language requires that we analyze how racism and class-based inequalities have created a national food system that benefits the wealthy.

In addition to redlining's effect on the distribution of supermarket access, many Black farmers in the U.S. had land stolen from them.



Photo from Human Rights Magazine



In 1910, Black farmers owned over 16 million acres, marking the peak of Black farmland ownership before rapid dispossession.



This happened through theft by state-sanctioned violence, intimidation, lynching, financial discrimination, denial of farm benefits and more.



By 1997, Black farmers lost over 90% of the 16 million acres, resulting in a cumulative loss of \$316 billion. Losing this valuable tool for wealth creation contributes to intergenerational poverty.

The result?

White Americans own more than 98% of U.S. land, amounting to 856 million acres valued at over \$1 trillion.

Black Americans, despite making up 13% of the U.S. population, own less than 1% of rural land, valued at \$14 billion.

This imbalance of ownership puts “wealth, influence, and decision-making concerning the entire food system in the hands of very few,” fueling food apartheid. This disparity makes it hard for small stores to compete, and allows food corporations to shape perceptions about what we should eat, and why.



Processed foods, which contain lower nutritional value and are higher in sugar, fat, and empty calories, are not only cheaper and more accessible, but are more heavily marketed to food insecure households than unprocessed.



These key factors are linked to the racial and economic disparities in diet-related illness.



In the Central City neighborhood of New Orleans, Louisiana is Recirculating Farms, an urban, community-based farm.

New Orleans is well-known for food, but locals are unable to access it due to cost barriers and food apartheid. Michael Richard, manager of Recirculating Farms, believes that community-based farming:



allows residents to feel ownership of a place



builds collective power



grows farmers through technical assistance

It can also:



contribute to food diversity



increase habitat and biodiversity



enhance stormwater management

While urban farming can play a role in ending food apartheid, it cannot be the only tool.

What more is being done?



Land trusts hold land for community and urban farms, allowing for growth of growers and bringing back a connection to food and land in communities.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing \$70 million in partnerships to improve outreach to underserved producers & communities, expanding access to assistance



Project Protect is a working group across Colorado that aims to adequately protect and appropriately compensate agricultural workers.



Fair Foods Standards Council monitors the development of a sustainable ag industry, ensuring human rights and long-term interests of workers and growers is advanced.



Recirculating Farms in NOLA

What can you do?

**Find your own community garden and join
(or start!) a National Young Farmers Coalition**

**Advocate for and support
immigrant farm workers**

**Educate yourself and follow
farmers on social media**

**Purchase from your local farmer
& farmer's market, if you can**

**Support local restaurants that
support local farmers**