Food, Race, and Planning: A Critical Analysis of County Food Action Plans

THESIS

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Abstract

The American Planning Association reports that food systems planning has been a field of growing interest among planners since 2004. Food systems planning encompasses planning activities that are performed in the context of food production, distribution, access, consumption, and waste. These activities are related to a number of planning issues, including land use and zoning, energy allocation, public health, environmental sustainability, and social equity. Like planning in general, food systems planning operates within the context of competing stakeholder interests and power structures.

One major problem which food planning can address is the sociospatial disparity in food environments across race for measures of access and consumption. Research consistently shows that Black Americans have lower measures of access to nutritionally-dense food than White Americans, as well as a greater number of diet-related pathological outcomes. While there is continued debate about the causal mechanisms behind these phenomena, the evidence is clear that race and food environments are closely correlated.

Many states, counties, cities, and neighborhoods have developed food action plans which address issues such as sustainable food production, healthful food access, and food waste management. However, the author has observed that these plans follow a
larger trend in public policy of being “color blind” or "post-racial", meaning policies created without cognizance of the ways race factors into the issues they address. This is evidenced by many plans talking about race in merely a descriptive way—such as reporting simple demographics—or by ignoring race all together.

This thesis tested this observation by assessing the presence of race-conscious discourse within a cross section of 10 county food action plans. This was accomplished by operationalizing critical discourse analysis through using ranking method based on Julian Agyeman’s (2005) Just Sustainability Index. By measuring this dimension of plan quality, we can analyze and ask further questions about how and why food action plans do or do not talk about race.

This study found that, generally, county level food action plans do not meaningfully address race. That is, that they do not acknowledge the salience of race as an indicator for food access and food environment disparity, nor do they offer recommendations or action steps for remedying such disparity.

According to the framework of critical race theory, these results have a number of implications. First, they show that these food action plans do not recognize the primacy of racism as systemic and institutional. Second, because this kind of “colorblind” planning does not acknowledge the impacts of race and racism, these plans arguably exacerbate the problem of race-based disparities in the food system.
Dedication

For the late Ken Kershaw, my high school Government teacher, who encouraged (and humored) my nascent interest in policy and politics.

Thanks, Coach.
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I consider most of my successes in life to be a combination of luck and support from others. There are too many people who have helped me than can be named on one page.

I have had myriad professors and mentors who have both shaped and pushed against my worldview, for which my gratitude would take lifetimes to express. I really do stand on the shoulders of giants.

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Food systems have been in the purview of mainstream city planning for less than two decades (Born et al., 2005). Food systems planning encompasses planning activities that are performed in the context of food production, distribution, access, consumption, and waste. These activities are related to a number of planning issues, including land use and zoning, energy allocation, public health, environmental sustainability, and social equity (“APA Policy Guide”, 2007). Similar to planning in general, food systems planning operates within the context of competing stakeholder interests and power structures (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Forester, 1989). The place for planners in food systems work has been defined and redefined as this relatively recent area of planning continues to develop. As such, opportunities for research on and evaluation of centralized food systems planning are plentiful.

Research across public health, policy, community development, and planning have consistently found that race and ethnicity are closely linked with issues in food access and consumption: Predominantly\(^1\) White neighborhoods have more grocery stores than predominantly Black neighborhoods, while the latter have more fast food restaurants and convenience stores than the former (Ball et al., 2009; Fleischhacker et al., 2011;

\(^{1}\) In this thesis, “predominantly” refers to the majority demographic in a neighborhood.
Larson et al., 2009; Morland et al., 2002; Oexle et al., 2015; Powell et al., 2007; Rose, 2010; Weatherspoon et al., 2015; Zenk et al., 2005). Additionally, Black Americans suffer from more diet-related negative health outcomes—such as obesity, hypertension, and Type II Diabetes—than do White Americans (Baer et al., 2015; Cummins & Macintyre, 2006; Howlett et al., 2015; Li et al., 2009; Morland et al., 2006; White, 2007).

A number of authors and researchers have explored the possible reasons for why these inequities exist. One key theory is that they are the result of 20th century patterns of urban development which favored investment in White communities over Black communities through practices like redlining, urban renewal, racial steering, and zoning regulations. These practices reinforced de facto segregation, centralized poverty, and market disinvestment in predominantly Black communities (Lipsitz, 2011). The disenfranchisement of Black residents’ ability to access and consume nutritionally-dense food, therefore, is directly influenced by the patterns of urban development which fostered the migration of supermarkets out of urban neighborhoods and the ingress of corner stores and fast food restaurants which took their place (Eisenhauer, 2001; Kwate, 2008; Williams & Collins, 2001). This history is the bedrock of the food desert model which asserts a direct connection between the built environment and food behaviors (Lee, 2012; Morland, Diez-Roux, & Wing, 2006).

However, other scholars have argued that there is not a clear causal relationship between food environments and health. Rather, the built environment is only one of many variables influencing food-related decision making. This is evidenced by the fact that the food desert model remains highly contested (Block & Subramanian, 2015; Caspi et al., 2015; Oexle et al., 2015; Powell et al., 2007; Rose, 2010; Weatherspoon et al., 2015; Zenk et al., 2005). Additionally, Black Americans suffer from more diet-related negative health outcomes—such as obesity, hypertension, and Type II Diabetes—than do White Americans (Baer et al., 2015; Cummins & Macintyre, 2006; Howlett et al., 2015; Li et al., 2009; Morland et al., 2006; White, 2007).
2012; Sadler, Gilliland & Arku, 2016) and that empirical studies have shown that introducing supermarkets into food deserts does not necessarily effect the intended change in food behaviors (Cummins, Flint, & Matthews, 2014; Dubowitz et al., 2014). These examples demonstrate that individual agency also plays a role in food behaviors.

Rather than attributing racially-oriented sociospatial food disparities to either structural environments or individual behavior, a number of scholars have argued that these disparities are far from univariate. Rather, they are the result of an entanglement of political, social, economic, and environmental influences (Sadler, Gilliland, & Arku, 2016). A theoretical framework that accounts for how this network of forces reproduce a specifically racial disparity is critical race theory.

Critical race theory asserts that racism is not merely a collection of incidental discourses, attitudes, or behaviors. Rather, racism is systemic and institutional (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This would explain how manifestly segregated food environments and food-related health outcomes have been caused by such a complex network of factors. Additionally, critical race theory offers a critique of the “colorblind” or “post-racial” ideologies which assert that race is no longer a salient variable in political, social, and economic landscapes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This thesis will rely on the framework of critical race theory, drawing on its fundamental tenets in order to structure this research and its subsequent analysis.

Although evidence shows that race and food access and consumption are closely correlated, I observed that many food action plans do not address race beyond merely reporting descriptive demographic data. This observation led to the overarching research
question this thesis has been designed to address: How do food action plans address race within their text?

This research question requires a methodology rooted in discourse and content analysis. Rather than analyzing the creation or implantation processes, this thesis instead focuses solely on the text of the documents. According to Van Dijk (1993), discourse analysis is well-suited for exploring issues related to race and racism.

The study of the discursive reproduction of racism through text and talk provides...more insight into the relations between various structures of text and talk on minorities on the one hand, and the mental, sociocultural, and political conditions, effects, or functions—that is, various “contexts” of the reproduction of racism—on the other hand (p. 93).

Van Dijk (1993) explains that the way we do or don’t talk about race reveals underlying social and cognitive models of race. Given critical race theory’s emphasis on critiquing colorblindness, this type of content analysis is appropriate for measuring the ways in which planners address race within the text of plans. Understanding how textual content mediates ideas surrounding planning, power, and race can assist planners in being more thoughtful and deliberate about the ways they can encourage equity through constructing the language of plans.

The methodology for this project will draw on Julian Agyeman’s (2005) Just Sustainability Index. The JSI was created in order to critically analyze how sustainability-related organizations talk about equity in their mission statements, guiding documents, and programmatic materials. The index uses a rating system of 0-3, which 0 representing
no mention of equity and 3 representing equity being a core goal area. After rating each organization, they were able to be ranked and analyzed based on their scores. Schrock, Bassett, & Green (2015) adopted this same methodology in order to analyze how equity was discussed in sustainability action plans. I have chosen to implement a version of this methodology because of its capacity to answer the research question, it’s implementation of discourse-based analysis, and because of its success as used by both Agyeman (2005) and Shrock and colleagues (2015). The details of how the index has been changed to reflect discourse on race in food action plans will be explained in the methodology chapter.

The practical significance of this thesis lies in its potential to offer recommendations for addressing power and racial disparities in food planning. Many other scholars have explored the relationships among planning, race, power, and food (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Guthman, 2011), but this thesis goes a step further to analyze how the discourse found in planning documents themselves is a key part of that relationship.

This thesis will be organized into four remaining chapters. The literature review will explore observed sociospatial food environment disparities, the driving forces behind these disparities, and how critical approach can inform the need for a race-conscious approach to food action plans. The methodology chapter will detail the food plans and criteria for selection and provide a comprehensive plan for conducting the analysis. The results and analysis chapter will show the outcomes of the methodology and will provide an overarching analysis of the results. Finally, the conclusion and discussion will
synthesize the results, explain theoretical and practical planning implications, discuss limitations, and recommend future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Current academic literature exploring the racially-oriented development of food environments is cross-disciplinary and vast. This literature review will focus on three key areas of this research: First, the review will outline research on observed sociospatial food environment disparities in order to show that empirical research concludes that these disparities do, in fact, exist. Second, it will give an overview of the race-neutral methods that planners and policy makers have attempted in order to remedy these disparities, and why they have not been successful. Finally, the review will argue why a more critical, systemic, and race-conscious approach must be taken in order to appropriately address food environment disparities. These areas of research will inform the research proposed for this thesis by justifying the need for the research and situating it in both empirical and theoretical literature.

Observed Sociospatial Food Environment Disparities

Research on food environment disparities is clear: predominantly Black neighborhoods have poorer healthy food access than predominantly White neighborhoods for a number of measures of food access, as will be shown in the following section. These measures include grocery store density, prevalence of fast food restaurants and convenience stores, and diet-related health outcomes.
There are myriad studies showing a correlation between Black neighborhoods (meaning neighborhoods with a higher percentage of Black residents than the percentage of Black residents in their respective cities) and low grocery store saturation when compared to White neighborhoods (Baker et al., 2006; Ball et al., 2009; Larson et al., 2009; Morland et al., 2002; Powell et al., 2007; Rose, 2010; Weatherspoon et al., 2015; Zenk et al., 2005). One study found that predominantly Black neighborhoods had 52% the amount of chain supermarkets available in predominantly White neighborhoods (Powell et al., 2007). Another study found this disparity as four times more grocery stores in White neighborhoods than in Black neighborhoods across four states\(^2\) (Morland et al., 2002). Further, researchers have also found evidence to support the claim that race is a more salient factor than income in grocery store disparity; that is, regardless of income, Black neighborhoods are more likely to have fewer grocery stores than White neighborhoods (Bower et al., 2014; Fleischhacker at al., 2011).

In addition to a lower density of grocery stores when compared to White neighborhoods, Black neighborhoods also have a much higher prevalence of fast food restaurants and convenience stores (Block et al., 2004; Fleischhacker et al., 2011; Franco et al., 2008; Kwate, 2008; Larson et al., 2009; Lewis et al., 2005; Morland et al., 2002; Oexle et al., 2015). In practice, this means these residents have more access to foods that are high in energy but low in nutritional density (Caspi et al., 2015; Mui et al., 2015; Paeratakul et al., 2003). A number of empirical studies have found that individuals who consume fast food regularly suffer more poor diet-related health outcomes than

\(^2\) Mississippi, North Carolina, Maryland, and Minnesota
individuals who do not regularly purchase fast food (Moore et al., 2009; Vogel et al., 2015), and that there are greater rates of obesity in neighborhoods with high densities of fast food restaurants than in neighborhood with low densities of fast food restaurants (Li et al., 2009). While some studies looking at fast food and convenience store food outlets have shown mixed results (Powell et al., 2007), many of them point to a disparity in fast food restaurant density between predominately Black and predominantly White neighborhoods.

A review of empirical fast food access studies found that 76% of studies showed an association between high fast food access and low income residents, and 10 of 12 studies showed an association between high fast food access and low White population density (Fleischhacker et al., 2011). As of 2007, a predominantly Black and Latino neighborhood of 30,000 individuals in California had one supermarket and 36 convenience stores (Freeman, 2007). One study in New Orleans found that Black neighborhoods have 2.4 fast food restaurants per square mile while White neighborhoods have 1.5 fast food restaurants per square mile (Block et al., 2004). A similar study in Baltimore found that Black neighborhoods had significantly more fast food restaurants and convenience stores than White neighborhoods, as measured with a Healthy Food Availability Index (Franco et al., 2008). Similar results have been found in New York (Galvez et al., 2008), Los Angeles (Lewis et al., 2005), and South Carolina (Oexle et al., 2015). Additionally, other studies have shown that fast food saturation in predominantly Black neighborhoods is generally a nation-wide issue (Larson et al., 2009; Morland et al., 2002; Powell et al., 2007).
In addition to retail disparities in built food environments, there are also health outcome disparities among residents living in differing food environments. These outcomes include obesity, Type II Diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and other illnesses related to diet (Baer et al., 2015; Cummins & Macintyre, 2006; Howlett et al., 2015; Li et al., 2009; Morland et al., 2006; White, 2007). Additionally, there are disparities in general nutritional adequacy, particularly in fruit and vegetable consumption (Baker et al., 2006; Morland & Filomena, 2007; Reitzel et al., 2016). Similar to food retail saturation, these health outcome disparities are marked by race and income divides.

Many studies have found that Black neighborhoods have higher rates of obesity than White neighborhoods (Cummins & Macintyre, 2006; Howlett et al., 2015; Morland et al., 2006; Ogden et al., 2006; White, 2007). Given that these same neighborhoods also report high levels of food insecurity, one might ask how food insecurity and obesity can exist in the same place. This phenomenon is known as the “hunger-obesity paradox” (Chen Cheung et al., 2015; Dinour et al., 2007). Dietz (1995) has argued through a case report that there is in fact a causal relationship between hunger and obesity. For example, high-glycemic index carbohydrates—which are more likely to be found in neighborhoods with low socioeconomic status residents—can increase hunger while also encouraging overeating (Roberts, 2000). Additionally, this paradox could be a result of psychological adaptation: food insecure individuals may be compelled to overeat when food is available (Polivy, 1996).
This literature review has thus far shown that sociospatial food environment disparities exist and that they are racially-oriented. However, in order to better understand what a successful planning intervention would include, it is important to understand possible planning-related causes for the existence of these food environment disparities in the first place. One mechanism which has been extensively studied is how the history of planning-driven housing discrimination has led to other kinds of discriminatory development, including food environment development.

A number of housing-related policies and planning projects throughout the Twentieth Century have had racially-oriented effects. Redlining—a practice in the 1940’s in which neighborhoods were ranked in order to assess mortgage lending risk—led to few opportunities for homeownership in a number of Black and immigrant neighborhoods when compared to White neighborhoods (Hillier, 2003). Post-war urban renewal oversaw the mass displacement of the urban poor in many major cities. Real estate agents used a technique called blockbusting to encourage White residents to leave neighborhoods and sell their homes at low prices by fabricating a fear of Black “infiltration” (Mehlhorn, 1998). Restrictive covenants written into home deeds prohibiting members of certain races or ethnicities from buying them ensured homogenously White neighborhoods. As a result of these practices, many American cities remain de facto racially segregated today (Lipsitz, 2011). This segregation of not only housing, but also of private and public resource allocation, has meant that White neighborhoods have consistently benefited
from affluence, stability, and investment while Black neighborhoods, by and large, have not (Reece et al., 2015).

Eisenhauer (2001) explored a history of supermarket migration out of urban areas and into suburbs through the lens of these racially-charged planning practices. She argues that “declines in urban health are integrally connected to urban history and urban context, which are in turn connected to issues of class and race” (p. 126). As White residents moved into suburban areas and people of color and low-income residents were concentrated into urban areas, the perception of “urban obstacles” discouraged market activity and investment in urban cores. Eisenhauer refers to the net loss of supermarkets in these areas during the 1980’s as “supermarket redlining”, which—as the name suggests—had a number of ramifications for low-income residents and residents of color. Because these trends in residential segregation happened gradually over decades, the decline of urban health linked to low access to nutritional needs has been a slow, generational phenomenon.

While Eisenhauer (2001) explored supermarket location disparity, Kwate (2008) addressed possible causal mechanisms of the differences in fast food restaurant density between White and Black neighborhoods. She asserts that residential segregation in the 20th century created four distinct pathways which have shaped food environment disparities. These pathways are population characteristics, economic characteristics, physical infrastructure, and social processes. Like Eisenhauer, Kwate asserts that the density of fast food restaurants in Black neighborhoods compared to White neighborhoods is directly linked to racial segregation policies.
While Eisenhauer (2001) and Kwate (2008) focus on how vulnerable populations are affected by changes in food environments on small scales, many authors have also examined how this same phenomenon happens on larger scales. Kaufman (2005) asserts that the globalization of the food system during the later decades of the 20th century led to a concentration of power into a few transnational agribusinesses. While this has led to greater efficiency in food production, Kaufman argues, it has also fostered a number of problematic practices such as mono-cropping, greater use of inorganic fertilizers and pesticides, and industrialization of animal and crop husbandry. Clapp (2016) contends that because of vertical integration—that is, corporations acquiring the means of production throughout their supply chains—agribusinesses are able to garner increasingly more power to work entirely in their own interest. The result, Clapp says, is a global food system which does not work in favor of the most vulnerable.

Many researchers have argued that there is a clear correlation between poor food environments and poor diet-related health (Bastian & Napieralski, 2015; Black & Macinko, 2008; Herforth & Ahmed, 2015; Lopez, 2007; Moore et al., 2009; Oexle et al., 2015; Van Hulst et al., 2015; Yan et al., 2015; Xu, Wen, & Wang, 2015). A comprehensive study by the United States Department of Agriculture found a statistically significant correlation between non-nutritious food choices and living in an area with poor food access (Rahkovsky & Snyder, 2015). Some researchers have asserted that built environments impact health outcomes in more ways than just through food availability. For example, built environments which discourage physical activity have been linked to poor diet-related health outcomes (Black & Macinko, 2008). Herforth and Ahmed (2015)
argue that the correlation between health outcomes and the built food environment is so nuanced that more complex tools for monitoring food environments need to be developed. Others have argued that these disparities are more complex than simply the nature of the built environment (Diez-Roux, 1998; Guthman, 2012; Pampel, Krueger, & Denney, 2010; Zenk, 2015).

Pampel, Krueger, and Denney (2010) have claimed that there are a number of variables linking low socioeconomic status and poor diet-related health. While some of these mechanisms seem obvious—such as income and distance from a grocery store—others point to a larger social context, including class distinctions and community influence. Other researchers have studied how psychological issues such as stress (Zenk, 2015) and mental illness (Cabassa, Ezell, & Lewis-Fernandez, 2010) are connected with the low-socioeconomic status/poor diet-related health outcome correlation. Additionally, a number of studies have shown that there is a disparity between objective measures of food environments and resident perceptions of food environments, providing evidence for the argument that the physical food environment itself is not the only causal mechanism for poor health outcomes (Freedman & Bell, 2009; Gase et al., 2015; Giskes et al., 2007; Usher, 2015). These results show that while studies have tested many theories on the causes of these food environment and health outcome disparities, they continue to provide evidence for the proposition that race consistently plays an integral role in these disparities.

Cummins and Macintyre (2006) have argued that focusing on individual food environments can lead to overlooking larger social and political contexts. For example,
they contend that other developed countries do not see the same diet-related health outcomes in poor food environments as are seen in the United States:

It is probably not that the food environment is important in the USA and Canada and unimportant elsewhere but rather that the environmental processes that explain geographic differences in obesity may be different. The social, cultural, economic, and regulatory environment that governs the provision, purchase, and consumption of food is likely to differ markedly between nations and these differences may be expressed at the neighbourhood level within countries (p. 102).

They go on to argue that a history of racial segregation and a lack of economic regulatory practices are two possible reasons for this difference between the United States and other countries.

While planners and policy makers has played a role in creating these problems, they have also played a role in trying to solve them. The American Planning Association released a comprehensive white paper on food systems planning in 2005 as a result of a number of issues in food consumption and production relevant to planning. These issues include increasing interest in urban agriculture, globalization of food production and trade, a need for more efficient use of land and energy in food production, the centrality of food in public health, homeland security, and disaster preparedness (Born et al., 2005). In a policy guide on community and regional food planning, the APA recommends comprehensive food systems planning and regional food councils as tools to address these issues (American Planning Association, 2007).
In 2000, Pothukuchi and Kaufman found that food systems planning was overwhelmingly absent from planning practice, education, and research. A Special Issue of the Journal of Planning Education and Research in 2004 focused on the possible role of planning in food systems. The introduction of this issue expounded on the centrality of food systems to other areas of planning, including public health, land use, employment, environmental preservation, and economic development (Kaufman, 2004).

In addition to food planning efforts, planners and policy makers have attempted to resolve food environment disparities through the use of a number of place-based interventions such as building grocery stores in “food deserts” and promoting community gardening. However, outcomes of food interventions vary in their levels of success, with many of them having no statistically significant successful outcomes (Cummins, Flint, & Matthews, 2014; Ebel et al., 2015; Farley et al., 2015; Hillier, 2015; Sadler, Gilliland, & Arku, 2013). This provides further evidence for the fact that food consumption behavior in these neighborhoods is more complex than simply individual choice or food environment; rather, there are a number of nuanced causal mechanisms at play (Hill et al., 2003; Odoms-Young, Zenk, & Mason, 2009).

Both Eisenhauer (2001) and Kwate (2008) reveal a foundational piece of this issue: the structural influences through urban histories which have fostered development (and under-development) effective of disparate food environments have not yet been thoroughly acknowledged. Without addressing these structural factors in food environments, attempted interventions will arguably fall short of making sustainable, foundational changes in the setting of spatially-concentrated food insecurity. “Without
understanding the context that leads to risks,” Kwate (2008, p. 41) argues, “efforts to change diet by education and exhortation are likely to be singularly ineffective.”

Taking a Critical Approach

Given the depth to which race has been a factor in the development of food systems over the last century, it has been said that food systems are racial projects, or political or economic projects which perpetuate and legitimize racial hierarchies (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Omi & Winant, 1994). What this looks like in practice is a disproportionate burden of costs and a lack of procedural justice in decision-making processes for People of Color (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Billings & Cabbil, 2011).

Given the complexity of food systems—particularly the roles that race and power play in food systems—food planning must address not only the visible problems in food systems but also the structural mechanisms which have created and fostered these problems (Deener, 2017). In order to do this, food planning must recognize the institutional racism and power dynamics present in food systems: “An examination of food security…requires both an historical analysis and one that factors in the impact of the structural racism embedded within the food system” (Billings & Cabbil, 2011, p. 103).

One obstacle which planners must address is the preference for post-racial planning and policy making. Post-racial planning refers to a planning context in which discussions of race and racism are considered unnecessary. A fundamental component of post-racial planning is the framework that the nature of contemporary racism is not
something that planning can address. The argument for this is that since the Civil Rights Movement orchestrated the turning over of explicitly racist public policies as well as the institution of race-positive public policies, there are no longer racially-oriented issues that need to or can be addressed through policy and planning (Saito, 2015). Additionally, because discussions of race and racism are often tense and divisive, policy makers and planners often strategically avoid such discussions in order to avoid potential conflict.

Critics of this approach to planning argue that the nature of racism is such that even if planners do not intend to be racist, planning can still have racially-oriented effects. These critics argue that this is due to systemic rather than incidental racism; that is, racism has become so embedded in the systems which influence and are influenced by planning that it is self-perpetuating (Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Saito, 2015).
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will explain four key concepts necessary to a methodology which takes into account appropriate epistemological frameworks and offers a method suitable for the research question. First, it will outline how the research question is situated in the framework of critical race theory. Second, it will describe how a broad methodological approach, critical discourse analysis, is appropriate for the theoretical framework and the research question. Third, it will explain the method of inquiry by detailing the process for sampling and stratifying units of analysis as case studies. Finally, it will outline how a race-conscious coding rubric will be used as a specific method of analysis. Figure 1 illustrates how each of these concepts relates to one another.

Figure 1: Methodology Framework
Theoretical Framework

Post-racial planning can be problematized using critical race theory, a field of thought which was first conceptualized in critical legal studies soon after the Civil Rights era (Peller, 1990). It can provide a theoretical framework with which we can interpret the empirical research showing the complex, nuanced phenomena of racially-oriented food environment disparities. A critical race theory framework asserts that the problem that needs to be addressed is not simply disparate food environments. Rather, these disparities are merely microcosmic of institutional and systemic racism in the food system.

Critical race theory has two key characteristics relevant to this research. First, it asserts that racism is institutional and that institutions such as courts, banks, schools, and government perpetuate racism even if those in charge of them do not intend to. Second, it claims that in order for institutional racism to be uprooted, it must be deliberately acknowledged and addressed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In an introductory text on critical race theory, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) write the following:

“if racism is embedded in our thought processes and social structures as deeply as many critics believe, then the ‘ordinary business’ of society—the routines, practices, and institutions that we rely on to do the word’s work—will keep minorities in subordinate positions. Only aggressive, color-conscious efforts to change the way things are will do much to ameliorate misery” (p. 27).

What the authors mean by this is that institutional racism is subtly entrenched in our everyday lives. In food systems, this translates broadly to food retail trends that correlate
closely with racial segregation, and a racial disparity in diet-related health outcomes (as demonstrated in the literature review). Moreover, as the authors suggest, it is only through acknowledging and deliberately combatting racism embedded in food systems that these wrongs can be righted.

Methodological Approach

Critical discourse analysis, or CDA, is a method of inquiry which deconstructs assumptions and reveals patterns of power in discourse. Although there are many definitions of CDA, this thesis will use a specific definition from Teun van Dijk (2012). According to him, CDA is a way to explore the relationships between social power and discourse. Text and talk, van Dijk argues, can be a meaningful tool for maintaining, formalizing, or subverting structures of power (p. 352). Planning documents exist in complex social, economic, and political contexts, and CDA is an appropriate tool to further explore the ways planning documents uphold or subvert these larger contexts.

Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary research method grounded in Habermasian sociolinguistic theories exploring the connections among language, meaning, and power. It is a specific way to approach discourse analysis, which is a tool for analyzing how people communicate and interpret meaning through text and speech (Widdowson, 2007). This is an appropriate methodology for this project because the food plans are presented textually in the form of planning documents. According to Siegfried Jager (2001), because discourses act as agents of knowledge, “they contribute to the
structuring of power relations in a society.” Further, discourse is not discreet or isolated; rather, it “embodies social context” (van Dijk, 1988).

Plans represent a deliberate, strategic method for disseminating ideas and interests central to their respective dominant stakeholders through the use of written text. According to CDA researchers (van Dijk, 1993; Widdowson, 2007), language and discourse produce and reproduce structures of power and ideology. Additionally, discourse can reveal deep meaning and history through interpretation of their position in larger social, economic, and political contexts (Sheyholislami, 2011). Van Dijk (1988) emphasizes that “text and talk are at the heart of polity, society, and culture, and hence also in their mechanisms of continuity and reproduction” (p. 95).

Critical discourse analysis can be specifically useful for revealing racially-oriented biases in texts. According to van Dijk (1988), analyzing discourse can uncover dominant social and cognitive models about race by revealing the inferences and assumptions that a dominant social group has about a marginalized group. Van Dijk (1993) also argues that these social cognitions are the necessary interface between power and discourse. He asserts that it is through discourse that powerful parties are able to proliferate social cognitive models that can delegitimize the experiences and interests of disempowered parties. These models provide the schema required for communicating ideas against the background of political interests. However, these schema “can impose a preconceived pattern of things and impede us from recognizing any alternative concept of reality.” (Widdowson, 2007, p. 33)
Using critical discourse analysis to analyze food plans allows us to reveal the social cognitive models which contain the problems with and solutions to existing food systems as perceived by the plans’ stakeholders. Doing so can make room for considering alternate conceptions of such problems and solutions, particularly conceptions held by those whose interests may not be represented in the plans.

Method of Inquiry

There are two key steps to the method of inquiry: sample selection and organizing plans into case study groups. This section will explain how food action plans were chosen to be included in the study and how they were stratified according to racial demographics.

The first step in conducting this inquiry was to gather a sample of food plans. I decided to focus on a sample frame of county-level food action plans. While food plans are published at multiple scales, county plans represent a regional approach and have the benefit of including urban, suburban, and rural areas. Counties also have a generally more demographically diverse population than smaller scales, and county-level plans address more specific problems than larger scale plans. Additionally, while many counties include food system issues in comprehensive plans, sustainability plans, and health action plans, only food action plans were included in the analysis as their focus is solely on county food systems; sections on food-related issues in other types plans may not be as exhaustive or comprehensive as plans that concentrate only on food systems.
In order to select plans from the sample frame, I used a non-probabilistic sampling method. I first constructed a list of the top 150 most populated counties in the United States from which county food action plans were pulled. Population was determined using data from the 2010 U.S. Census. This step is justified by my observation that areas with higher populations are more likely than low population areas to have food action plans. Thus, using a non-probabilistic sampling method to draw from a list of the most populated counties offered a more appropriate method for finding food action plans than would have using a random sampling method.

After populating a list of the 150 most populated counties, I used Google’s search engine to attempt to find food plans for each county. I searched for the following strings for each county on the list:

- [county, state] + “food system plan”
- [county, state] + “food action plan”

If these searches did not yield relevant results, I then searched for a county or regional planning website and attempted to locate a food action plan. If no plan existed on the website, I then contacted the county or regional planning office by phone and asked the office’s representative if such a plan exists. As I collected PDF copies of these plans, I organized them in a computer file. This process ended after the list of 150 counties had been exhausted. Figure 2 illustrates this process.
Once I had a sample of food action plans, I then stratified them according to high and low percentage of Black residents in their respective counties with data from the 2010 U.S. Census. I defined high as greater than the national Black population percentage and low as less than the national Black population percentage. As of the 2010 Census, the national Black population percentage was 13.2%. The reasoning behind this stratification was to create two separate groups of plans based on a single characteristic (in this case, percentage of Black residents) in order to compare plan scores across groups.

**Method of Analysis**

Once the plans have been collected, I will then code them according to a rubric adopted from Julian Agyeman’s Just Sustainability Index (2005). Agyeman describes the Index as a synthesis of discourse analysis, interpretive analysis, and content/relational analysis. It was designed to assess the degree to which sustainability-oriented organizations talk about justice in their guiding documents and statements. This Index
was adopted by Shrock, Basset, and Green (2015) for a study in which they analyzed how city-level sustainability and climate action plans addressed equity. Both Agyeman’s (Table 1) and Shrock, Basset, and Green’s (Table 2) rubrics are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Agyeman’s Just Sustainability Index (2005, p. 108)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Shrock, Basset, and Green’s Equity Index (2015, p. 294)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I used these two rubrics as a guide to construct the race-conscious coding rubric (Table 3) which was used to analyze the food action plans in this study:

Table 3: Race-Conscious Coding Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The plan does not address race at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The plan only addresses race descriptively (i.e., demographic data or simple descriptive facts).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The plan addresses race in a way that explicitly notes racially-oriented sociospatial food disparities, but does not translate into actionable steps or goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The plan addresses race in a way that explicitly notes racially-oriented food environment disparities, and also translates it into actionable steps or goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I applied this rubric by reading and scoring each plan in turn. While reading each plan, I noted all mentions of race in a separate document. Once I finished this annotation of a plan, I then compared the notes against the rubric, and assigned the plan one of the scores. I organized the scores in a spreadsheet.

**Validity and Reliability**

In this study, reliability—or the repeatability of the outcome—is satisfied by using specific criteria for each code (Fowler, 2012). Each code builds on its
predecessor by a single descriptive factor, safeguarding against the possibility that a plan lies between or overlaps two code categories. Therefore, if this coding rubric were used multiple times on the same documents, the results ought to be reliably predictable.

Based on this study design, there are two key measures of validity which should be addressed: content validity and construct validity. Content validity refers to the capacity of the instrument to account for all aspects of the phenomenon it measures (Fowler, 2012). Due to the fact that the rubric is designed to measure very specific things with relatively few possible coding outcomes, the likelihood of poor content validity is low. Construct validity is founded when an instrument accurately measures the construct it purports to (Fowler, 2012). This rubric specifically measures the concept of “race-consciousness” by placing on a discreet scale each plan according to the degree it acknowledges the importance of race, with the measures on the scale justified by the theoretical framework. Other types of validity concerns—such as internal and external validity—do not need to be addressed as this study is not experimental.

**Ethical Considerations**

Because human subjects are not being used for this study, ethical considerations are minimal and Institutional Review Board approval was not required. I recognize the ethical implications of conducting critical analysis of this nature in an academic context as a relatively privileged, White, food secure individual and am deliberately self-reflective given this positionality (Straubhaar, 2015). Being reflexive in regard to one’s
positionality is important when conducting research as an outsider. Operating according to the assumptions of standpoint epistemology, I acknowledge that the way I am situated socially grants me certain privileges and biases which inherently affect my academic research. This standpoint necessarily colors the relationship between me as a knower and the things to be known (Sprague, 2016). As such, any analysis I conduct regarding issues surrounding food insecurity and Blackness will always be inhibited by my positionality. Nevertheless, I attempted in good faith to contribute something of purpose to the fields of planning, critical race theory, and food security.
Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will detail the study sample, the plan scores, and the justifications for each score. It will also describe the stratified groups based on percentage of Black residents. Analysis of these results will be reserved for the discussion chapter. After implementing the sample selection procedures described in the methodology section, I collected a sample of 10 county food action plans.

Table 4. County Food Action Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Plan Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles County, California</td>
<td>The Good Food for All Agenda: Creating a New Regional Food System</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for Los Angeles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook County, Illinois</td>
<td>Cook County Food Access Plan</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King County, Washington</td>
<td>King County Local Food Initiative</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Eating Here: Greater Philadelphia’s Food System Plan</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento County, California</td>
<td>Sacramento Region Food System Action Plan</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 4. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Plan Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palm Beach County, Florida</td>
<td>Hunger Relief Plan: Palm Beach County</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin County, Ohio</td>
<td>Local Food Action Plan</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multnomah County, Oregon</td>
<td>Multnomah Food Action Plan</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo County, California</td>
<td>San Mateo County Food System Assessment</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma County, California</td>
<td>Sonoma County Healthy and Sustainable Food Action Plan</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While eight states are represented in this sample, California is overrepresented with four of the 10 plans. This is due in part to the selection method and the fact that California has a high number of densely populated counties. This sample is also biased to large metropolitan and urban areas due to the selection method. 21 counties in the sample frame had health action plans which contained sections on food security and food systems, but those plans were not selected as per the inclusion criteria. Additionally, there is very little representation in this sample from mid-west and southern states. Figure 1 (following page) is a map showing the locations of each of these counties for reference, and Table 5 outlines pertinent demographic information for each county.
Table 5. Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles County</td>
<td>9,818,605</td>
<td>9.66%</td>
<td>$56,196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook County</td>
<td>5,194,675</td>
<td>25.62%</td>
<td>$55,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King County</td>
<td>1,931,249</td>
<td>7.66%</td>
<td>$75,302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia County</td>
<td>4,526,006</td>
<td>45.01%</td>
<td>$38,253</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Map of County Locations

Continued
Table 5. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>Median Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento County</td>
<td>1,418,788</td>
<td>12.59%</td>
<td>$55,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Beach County</td>
<td>1,320,134</td>
<td>18.27%</td>
<td>$53,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin County</td>
<td>1,163,414</td>
<td>23.07%</td>
<td>$52,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multnomah County</td>
<td>735,334</td>
<td>7.08%</td>
<td>$54,102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo County</td>
<td>718,451</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
<td>$93,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma County</td>
<td>483,878</td>
<td>2.41%</td>
<td>$64,240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After gathering the sample, the scoring rubric was applied to each plan. Table 6 reports these scores and Table 7 reports basic descriptive statistics:

Table 6. Plan Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles County</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook County</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 6. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King County</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia County</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento County</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Beach County</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin County</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multnomah County</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo County</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma County</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Los Angeles County, California

The Los Angeles County plan received the highest possible score, meaning that it discusses race in a meaningful way and translates that discussion into action steps. Early in the executive summary, the plan states the following:

Good food is not available in many low-income areas and neighborhoods of color. Retailers have been reluctant to locate in these neighborhoods making it even more difficult for residents to obtain good food. Moreover, our food retail environment continues to be largely segregated by race. Predominantly white neighborhoods have three times as many supermarkets as black neighborhoods and nearly twice as many markets at Latino neighborhoods (p. 10).

This section shows an explicit awareness of the ways in which food environments are racially oriented.

Additionally, the plan includes as one of its six priority action areas, “ensure equal access to good food in underserved communities” (p. 70). This action area outlines specific steps effective of decreasing inequalities in race in Los Angeles County food environments while also improving food quality in neighborhoods of Color.

Cook County, Illinois

Cook County received a score of one due to a single descriptive acknowledgement of race. The only mention of race in the plan is in a description of residents who are clients of a major regional food assistance organization, the Greater Chicago Food Depository:
39% of the Food Depository’s client households include at least one child and 36% have at least one older adult aged 60 and up. 64% of clients identify as Black Non-Hispanic, 18% Hispanic, 11% White, and 7% Other (p. 13).

The plan does not expound on how this demographic breakdown relates to the county’s food environment.

*King County, Washington*

King County scores a two as it states only two observable facts about the connection between race and the county’s food environment without operationalizing them into a meaningful analysis or action step: “In King County, consumption of fruits and vegetables is linked to race and income” (p. 23) and “African Americans/Blacks and Hispanics/ Latinos are more likely to run out of food than whites or Asians and multiple race individuals are less likely to run out of food than Hispanics” (p. 24). The plan includes improving access to healthy and affordable foods to residents as one of its two key objectives, but does not specify racial minorities as a target population.

*Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania*

Philadelphia County scored a zero as a result of its non-acknowledgement of race as an indicator for food insecurity. While one of its six stated core values is “fairness,” it does not address the racially-oriented unfairness in food systems. Additionally, in its discussions of food insecurity issues, the plan uses income as the sole indicator of food access disparities.
Sacramento County, California

The Sacramento County plan received a zero. While it notes the importance of increasing food access and security in “underserved” areas, it does not specify where underserved areas are, who lives in them, or why they came to be underserved. While the plan does briefly discuss justice and issues surrounding undocumented farm workers, it does not connect disparate food environments to race.

Palm Beach County, Florida

Palm Beach County’s plan focused heavily on hunger, food insecurity, and poverty. It made multiple clear connections between poverty and hunger; it frequently argues that economic inequalities are the foundation of hunger. However, it has little discussion on race and food insecurity. The plan has a section on “race and ethnicity” within a chapter on hunger and demography, but the section only gives descriptive information: “Nationally, disparities in food insecurity exist among racial and economic groups. Rates of food insecurity were higher than the national average for households headed by Black, non-Hispanics (26.1 percent) and Hispanics (23.7 percent)” (p. 17). The plan does not, however, expound on the implications of these facts. Because of this, the plan scored a two.
Franklin County, Ohio

Franklin County’s food action plan scored a three as a result of its deliberate, action-oriented discussion of race. In the introduction, the plan explicitly states an understanding of the systemic race-oriented issues present in food systems:

There are differences in health based on race, ethnicity, sex, neighborhood, income, education, sexual orientation and other factors. Health inequities are differences in health status and death rates across population groups that are systematic, avoidable, unfair and unjust. These differences are sustained over time and are beyond the control of individuals (p. 7).

Similarly, the plan also details the food justice model as a “promising practice” due to its privileging of “dismantling racism” as a fundamental element of food system work (p. 48).

The plan also includes a specific goal targeting the engagement of racial and ethnic minorities in “developing and implementing culturally appropriate food assistance, education, nutrition, gardening and cooking programs” (p. 48) on the understanding that racial identity offers fundamentally important contributions to food systems work.
**Multnomah County, Oregon**

Multnomah County’s plan talks extensively about the importance of equity in the county’s food system, but never explicitly discusses what the actual existing inequities are. While the plan claims that social equity “focuses on systemic social equality and explores the root causes of hunger and food insecurity,” (p. 22), it does not explain what these root causes are. The plan also discusses the importance of engagement underrepresented communities, but it does not say who belongs to these communities. For these reasons, the plan earned a score of zero.

**San Mateo County, California**

The San Mateo County plan, while relatively short, includes an acknowledgement of race in reporting survey data on resident perceptions of access to fruits and vegetables: Women, young adults, people with a high school education or less, those living below 200% of the federal poverty level, blacks, Hispanics/Latinos, and residents living in the South County region rated access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables as “fair” or “poor” more frequently than other respondents (p. 9). However, the plan does not go on to connect this data with any further discussion or action steps. Therefore, it scores a one.

**Sonoma County, California**

Sonoma County’s plan, because of its non-acknowledgement of race, scored a zero. The plan discusses disparities in food access and diet-related health outcomes and
has social equity as one of four key target areas, but doesn’t connect these issues to race. Additionally, while one of the goals of the social equity target area is to reach “underserved communities,” it does not specify who is underserved, nor does it offer any kind of indicator to track progress on this goal.

*Stratified by Racial Composition*

After scoring the plans, I then organized them into two strata: counties with a high Black population and counties with a low Black population. As described in the methodology chapter, low versus high Black resident population is based on the national Black population percentage. Using this method, six counties (Sonoma, San Mateo, Multnomah, King, Los Angeles, and Sacramento) are in the low Black population group, and four counties (Palm Beach, Franklin, Cook, and Philadelphia) are in the high Black population group. Table 8 shows these strata with their respective demographic and scoring data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8. Race Strata</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Low Black Population</strong></th>
<th><strong>% Black</strong></th>
<th><strong>Score</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sonoma County</td>
<td>2.41%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Mateo County</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Continued*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>% Black</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multnomah County</td>
<td>7.08%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King County</td>
<td>7.66%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles County</td>
<td>9.66%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacramento County</td>
<td>12.59%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Black Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Beach County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to study how food action plans discuss race. Through a framework of critical race theory which posits that “colorblind” discourse fosters systemic racism rather than eliminates it, this research specifically addresses the degree to which ten county-level food action plans effectively operationalize race-conscious theories and practices. The results of this study show a general lack of race-conscious food action planning. This chapter will expound further on these results, ground them in critical race theory, and provide recommendations for policy and planning practice. Additionally, it will explain limitations to this study and propose future research.

Discussion of Results

The results of this project reveal that, within the framework of critical race theory, most of the food action plans studied do not adequately address the salience of race in food system disparity. Half of the plans studied do not discuss race in any way, one plan mentioned at least descriptive characteristics, two plans stated some connection between race and food environment disparity, and two offered race-conscious recommendations. This section will go into more detail about observations from these plans and their scores.
First, many of these plans use the language of justice without endorsing racial justice. Even plans that scored low had sections on equity and fairness. For example, the Philadelphia County plan include “fairness” as one of its six core values with indicator metrics of food insecurity and food affordability. The Multnomah County plan states that social equity is one of four key plan objectives and that the plan “focuses on systemic social equality and explores the root causes of hunger and food insecurity” (p. 22). The Sonoma County plan similarly expresses an interest in addressing “root causes of hunger and food insecurity” (p. 35). However, even while using the language of systemic inequity, these plans do not acknowledge that race is a fundamentally salient factor in food insecurity. From this we can conclude that simply talking about equity in abstract terms is not enough to actually operationalize it.

Further, some of the plans use income or “food desert” status as an indicator of target areas for hunger alleviation and nutrition promotion work. Others, such as the Multnomah County and Sacramento County plans, simply talked about the need to target “underserved” or “underrepresented” neighborhoods without specifying where these neighborhoods are or who lives in them. However, given the research described in the literature review chapter of this thesis, income and “food desert” status are not appropriate proxies for race when discussing food environment disparities.

When dividing the pans into two groups according to their respective population densities of Black residents, we can compare scores across the two groups. The average score for counties with low Black populations is 0.83, and the average score for counties with high Black populations is 1.5. While the latter is greater than the former, an average
score of 1.5 does not show that the high Black population group of plans, in general, meaningfully address the role that race plays in food systems. It is also worth noting that of the only two plans that scored a three, one is in the low Black population group while the other is in the high Black population group. From this we can conclude that, at least for this sample set, racial composition does not affect if a county plan does or does not include race-conscious goals or action steps in its food action plan.

**Grounding in Theory**

Critical race theory asserts that racism is institutional, pervasive, and dynamic. It claims that for racism to be eliminated, the systems that perpetuate it must be critically examined and, potentially, dismantled. To say that racism is institutional is to say that it is woven into the fabric of the of our political, social, and economic systems (Bonilla-Silva, 2011; Delgado, Stenafcic, & Liendo, 2012). Therefore, as long as the institutions on which planning and food systems rely remain unexamined in their perpetuation of racism, attempts to make food systems more just will be unfruitful. This thesis has shown that, while many of the food action plans talk about issues such as equity and fairness, they generally do not illustrate race-conscious thought or discourse in food systems planning.

The pervasiveness of racism in the food system can be described by food systems being what Omi and Winant (1994) call “racial projects.” A racial project, according to them, is a practice in which resources, laws, or norms are constructed according to racial categories. Alkon and Agyeman (2011) argue that food systems are racial projects owing
to the fact that they are situated in markets, institutions, and physical spaces which have historically discriminated against people of color. The evidence for this claim, Alkon and Agyeman assert, can be found in the empirical observations of communities of color consistently having less access to the same food that White communities do. Again, without recognizing and acting on this point, food planning cannot adequately bring equity to food access.

Omi and Winant’s (1994) conception of racial formation can be used to explain the nature of racism in the food system as dynamic. Racial formation is the theory that race, rather than being objectively fixed, is constructed as a set of social categories in accordance with oppressive interests. Racial formation conceives of racism as being dynamic and fluid, changing in its modus operandi as social norms regarding race and racism change over time. For example, while at one time it was considered acceptable to legally prohibit Black residents from shopping at certain grocery stores, contemporary anti-discrimination laws make this unacceptable. However, the same racism that drove that kind of explicit racism in the past also drives the implicit, colorblind racism today (Delgado, Stefancic, & Liendo, 2012).

Through using the framework of critical race theory, particularly its conceptions of racism as institutional, pervasive, and dynamic, we can see that these food action plans generally do not appropriately acknowledge racism in food systems. In fact, through taking a colorblind approach in which they do not recognize race as an important variable in food system disparities, these plans arguably exacerbate the problem (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). The following section will use the Los Angeles County and Franklin County plans
to illustrate best practice models for food action plans in order for them to avoid the problems of colorblind racism.

**Recommendations for Policy and Planning Practice**

Of the six priority action areas in the Los Angeles County food action plan, one of them focuses on ensuring equal access to food across all Los Angeles Communities. This priority area has two key objectives (p. 70-73):

1. Expand healthy food access in communities of color to reduce health disparities and race and class inequities

2. Improve quality of foods offered in current neighborhood food environments

Throughout the section on this priority area, the plan authors consistently note that the disparities in food access in Los Angeles County are largely marked by race. Many of the recommendations in this section include changing market practices in order to better serve communities of color and low-income neighborhoods. Doing so, the authors argue, will not only improve health outcomes among Black and Latino residents, but will also lessen structural inequities between White and non-White residents.

In the Franklin County food action plan, one of the recommended actions under the “access and education” objectives is to “engage those most impacted by health disparities, including low-income, African American, Hispanic, New American and other underrepresented communities” (p. 48) in addressing and remedying food system disparities. The plan authors use the Growing Food and Justice for All Initiative as a
model to follow. This initiative prioritizes the goal of dismantling racism in the work towards an equitable food system.

Both of these plans offer elements which can be modeled by other counties constructing their own food action plans. First, these plans are clear that race is the primary variable across which food access is segregated. Rather than using a proxy such as income, or using only vague language such as “underserved,” they both explicitly acknowledge that race is the primary factor in food access differences. Second, the plans draw on academic research to provide evidence for their claims of racial discrimination in the food system. Including data gathered from academic sources can legitimize and provide authority for these kinds of assertions. Third, both plans, through including race-conscious goals and objectives, recognize the importance of acting on the food access data which shows the prominence of race as a key variable. While each plan approaches this issue differently—the Los Angeles County plan proposes market solutions while the Franklin County plan advises increased civic engagement—they both council food system stakeholders to prioritize racial justice in food system planning.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations in this study. First, it is difficult to generalize from a sample size of only ten plans. Rather than claim that this research is generalizable, however, it is yet meaningful in its exploratory nature. Even with a small sample, this research can act as a springboard for further ideas and theories related to the political nature of food systems planning.
Second, not all plans were constructed the same way or emphasized the same issues. Hunger, economic development, and agriculture were each paid different levels of attention within different plans based on their respective County’s characteristics. Also, there was significant variation in the plans’ lengths. The shortest plan (San Mateo County at 12 pages) cannot cover as much information in as much depth as the longest plan (Philadelphia County at 124 pages). These inconsistencies lessen the integrity of the study’s internal validity.

Finally, a limitation lies in the fact that there was only one researcher coding the plans. This leaves open a greater possibility to subjective bias on the part of the researcher that could be reduced had more individuals been involved in the coding process.

Future Research

This thesis presents several opportunities for future research. This includes both empirical and theoretical research. One key direction for empirical work includes developing and executing more robust methods to arrive at more substantial results and conclusions from the research questions explored here. For example, creating a more robust rubric to account for additional criteria would provide more information about how plans address race. These criteria could include the use of certain words, such as “justice,” “racism,” or “equity;” the involvement of people of color in the planning process; and how race-conscious recommendations are implemented.
A second area of potential empirical research is further qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of the plans, particularly of their development and implementation process. This research would require interviews with various stakeholders, including funders, local government officials, planners, business owners, and residents. This type of research has the potential to reveal what Geertz (1973) calls a “thick description.” That is, an explanation of a phenomenon that comprehensively and exhaustively explores its nuances and subtleties in a way beyond what quantitative methods alone can.

Additionally, there are a few theoretical issues that can be explored in this research. First, a critical planning approach could ask if planning actually has the tools to address institutional racism in the food system. Because planning works within traditional government and market institutions, a critical researcher may argue that planning is incapable of truly addressing and remedying structural oppression. Second, an inquiry within the framework of critical Whiteness studies could, instead of exploring why Black neighborhoods have been disadvantaged, ask why White neighborhoods have been advantaged. This is what Sprague (2016) refers to as “studying up,” or asking questions about why certain groups are in the position of being oppressors.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I approached the issue of racial disparities in food environments and food access using the framework of critical race theory, which argues for the importance of race-conscious political and policy work. I studied this by selecting a sample of
county-level food action plans and coded them according to a rubric designed to measure their respective race-consciousness. I concluded that, overall, they did not address race in a way effective of remedying racism in the food system. This has larger political implications in that the non-acknowledgement of race can, according to critical race theory, actually exacerbate the problem of racially-oriented disparate food systems.

While the issue of systemic racism within and across national food institutions is complex, messy, and contested, so goes the work of justice. A progressive, inclusive, and race-conscious approach to food planning can provide one of many necessary tools for dismantling racism in the food system. However, this requires deliberate, intentional efforts among planners to pursue racial justice.
Author’s Note

“You’re not doing critical race theory if you’re not creating a tool of resistance.”

-Glenn Bracey

It has taken me more time than I care to admit to complete this project. My ambition for research, I’ve learned, is bigger than my capacity for it. But through the entire process of writing this thesis, through every conception of its questions, scopes, and methodologies, one overarching goal has remained constant: to synthesize yet one more piece of evidence demonstrating the existence of institutional racism.

However, if all this project ends up being is just evidence, I will have failed. I cannot say that I am doing critical race theory if I do not operationalize my research into political action. If I allow myself to think that academic work is enough, all I will accomplish is being yet another white, liberal, ivory tower dweller who uses the oppression of people of color to line her CV. (And God knows we have way too many of those.)

This is a fundamental, necessary tenant of doing critical race theory: rejecting neutrality in the academic analysis of oppression. If, as scholars, we want to join the work of dismantling systems of White supremacy and anti-Black bias, it isn’t enough just to write about it. We must be radical. We must be revolutionary. We must be political.
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Caspi, C., Kawachi, I., Subramanian, S., Adamkiewicz, G., & Sorensen, G. (2012). The relationship between diet and perceived and objective access to supermarkets among low-income housing residents. Social Science and Medicine, 75(7), 1254-1262.


geography of healthy equity and opportunity in Cuyahoga County. The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.


Appendix A: County Food Action Plan Details

*The Good Food for All Agenda: Creating a New Regional Food System for Los Angeles*

Los Angeles Food Policy Task Force


*Cook County Food Access Plan*

Greater Chicago Food Depository

Cook County


*King County Local Food Initiative*

King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks

King County Public Health

King County Kitchen Cabinet

Eating Here: Greater Philadelphia’s Food System Plan

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

http://www.dvrpc.org/reports/10063.pdf

Sacramento Region Food System Action Plan

Valley Vision

Sacramento Region Community Foundation


Hunger Relief Plan Palm Beach County

Food Research and Action Center

University of South Carolina

United Way of Palm Beach County

Palm Beach County

http://discover.pbcgov.org/communityservices/humanservices/PDF/News/Palm_Beach_F
RAC_100515_Edition-v2.pdf

Local Food Action Plan: City of Columbus & Franklin County, Ohio

The City of Columbus

Franklin County

Local Matters

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*Multnomah Food Action Plan*

Multnomah County

Multnomah Food Initiative Committee

https://multco.us/file/36863/download

*San Mateo County Food System Assessment*

San Mateo County Food System Alliance


*Sonoma County Healthy and Sustainable Food Action Plan*

County of Sonoma Department of Health Services

Sonoma County Food System Alliance

http://sonomacofsa.org/cm_vault/docs/FAP2_LR.pdf