

FEASTS OF OZ: CLASS, FOOD, AND THE RISE OF GLOBAL CAPITALISM

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I. INTRODUCTION

In many ways, the Land of Oz in L. Frank Baum's books is a utopian world apart and unencumbered by the unfulfilled wants and desires of capitalism, a world in which:

Every one worked half the time and played half the time, and the people enjoyed the work as much as they did the play, because it is good to be occupied and to have something to do. There were no cruel overseers set to watch them, and no one to rebuke them or to find fault with them. So each one was proud to do all he could for his friends and neighbors, and was glad when they would accept the things he produced.¹

The books, however, also reflect Baum's personal struggle to repudiate the capitalist system even as he lived within it himself. Baum's treatment of food and feasts reflects his struggle to imagine a utopian world so different from our own and provides a rich lens through which to view the role that food plays in policing hierarchy within utopian Oz as well as within contemporary capitalist United States.

II. FOOD IN OZ

Food is a recurring theme in Oz. Sometimes it serves as a unifier—bringing characters together in the communal act of sharing food. The books are filled with references to feasts and celebrations, as travelers and locals come together to celebrate military victories, birthdays, and visitors.² At other moments, food reflects and creates rifts amongst species in Oz and reveals power imbalances between groups and individuals.³ Food in Oz is often a source of conflict, as different species wrestle to negotiate and establish hierarchies in a world in which friendships cross traditional

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¹ L. FRANK BAUM, *THE EMERALD CITY OF OZ* 13 (Ballantine Books 1979).

² See *infra* text accompanying notes 15-17.

³ See *infra* text accompanying notes 10-13.

species boundaries and in which traditional hierarchies between humans and animals are complicated by talking animals and other magical creatures whose human characteristics push the boundaries between human and animal.

In *Ozma of Oz*, Dorothy and the reader are introduced to Billina, the talking hen.⁴ Billina and Dorothy are shipwrecked together after falling off the deck of a ship headed to Australia with Dorothy's uncle.⁵ While Oz itself is filled with talking animals and fantastic creatures, Billina and Dorothy are not in Oz when they fall off the ship bound for Australia. Dorothy accepts Billina's ability to speak despite the strangeness of encountering talking animals outside of the land of Oz.⁶ After Dorothy's initial skepticism, their conversation quickly turns to Dorothy's wish for breakfast.⁷ Billina offers Dorothy the fresh egg she has just laid, but Dorothy refuses to eat it, exclaiming, "Oh, I couldn't poss'bly eat it, unless it was cooked"⁸

Dorothy's emphatic rejection of Billina's offer reflects the importance of food in establishing hierarchy in Oz—no amount of hunger could justify Dorothy's consumption of food inappropriate for human consumption. Though Dorothy would not dream of eating a raw egg, no matter how severe her hunger, she suggests that Billina eat the egg and is surprised when Billina refuses.⁹ The egg then, is not appropriate for human consumption, but is acceptable food for a hen in Dorothy's eyes. For Dorothy, some food is acceptable for animals, even talking animals, to eat but inappropriate for a human girl, even a very hungry human girl, to eat. Billina in turn is offended that Dorothy would suggest she eat the egg, showing that she is both aware and offended by the implication that she would be as unrefined—or inhuman—as to eat her own young.¹⁰ The exchange over the egg reveals how food choices are used to police interspecies hierarchy in Oz. Some characters (in this case a human girl) are too refined or too human to eat raw egg, while others (in this case an animal with decidedly human characteristics) are not, according to Dorothy.

A few moments after the exchange over the egg, when the intrepid pair finally reach shore, Dorothy is "shocked" to discover that Billina is eating "fat red ants, and some sand-bugs, and once in a while a tiny crab" for breakfast.¹¹ Dorothy is disgusted by Billina's meal, exclaiming "[h]ow dreadful!" on hearing Billina describe the menu.¹² According to Dorothy, "eating live things, and horrid bugs, and crawly ants," is shameful, and she informs Billina that she "ought to be 'shamed of [her]self!" for eating such

⁴ L. Frank Baum, *Ozma of Oz* 25 (1907).

⁵ Baum, *supra* note 4, at 15, 18–19.

⁶ Baum, *supra* note 4, at 26.

⁷ Baum, *supra* note 4, at 27.

⁸ Baum, *supra* note 4, at 27 (emphasis removed).

⁹ *Id.* at 30.

¹⁰ Baum, *supra* note 4, at 30.

¹¹ *Id.* at 34.

¹² *Id.*

grubby fare.¹³ Inappropriate food is a source of shame and hierarchy in Oz; Dorothy's response to Billina's meal polices the border between human and animal in a world in which many of the traditional marks between the species—such as the ability to speak, form friendships, think, and reason—have been stripped away.

In *Rinkitink in Oz*, the beautiful Princess Ozma hosts a banquet for King Rinkitink after the goat Bilbil is returned to his proper form as the handsome Prince Bobo.¹⁴ Both humans and animals are invited to the banquet, but are seated separately.¹⁵ The animals “talked and chatted together as people do but were served the sort of food their natures required.”¹⁶ Though the animals were afforded the privilege of joining the humans for the banquet, their separate menu denies them a place at the human table—in turn denying their full humanity, despite otherwise human characteristics. Distinctions between diets and serving styles serve to police the otherwise loosened boundaries between species in Oz. Certain foods, like raw eggs and bugs, are not appropriate for human consumption but are appropriate for talking, thinking animals because, despite their human characteristics, they are not afforded all of the privileges of full humanity in Oz. This tension in turn reflects Baum's own difficulties in imagining a world in which all hierarchy has been stripped away—a true utopia.

III. FOOD IN CAPITALISM

Outside of Oz, in the capitalist, twenty-first century United States, food is used in much the same way as it is in Oz: to police hierarchies. In the United States, where traditional marks of race and class are disappearing and a black man is able to become president, new fault lines and marks are emerging to police hierarchy and dispossession. As in Oz, one of those marks is food. We live in a world in which “the amount of fat you eat and the form in which you eat it say[s] more about who you are than the car you drive, the clothes you wear or the neighborhood where you live.”¹⁷ The quality of one's diet in the twenty-first century United States is determined by one's race and class.¹⁸ In turn that diet also has become a mark of race and class. Like Dorothy, those whose privilege affords them the ability to eat diets rich with locally grown produce, organic and grass-fed lean beef, and artisan cheeses, would not dream of letting a highly processed Twinkie pass their lips. The disgust that the high-fat, highly-processed diets of the dispossessed elicit from the privileged in the United States mirrors Dorothy's disgust over Billina's lusty consumption of the “fat red ants” in Oz.¹⁹

¹³ *Id.* (emphasis removed).

¹⁴ L. FRANK BAUM, *RINKITINK IN OZ* 297 (1916).

¹⁵ BAUM, *supra* note 14, at 298.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Molly O'Neil, *The Morality of Fat*, N.Y. TIMES MAG. (Mar. 10, 1996), www.nytimes.com/1996/03/10/magazine/the-morality-of-fat.html.

¹⁸ See Tom Philpott, *Food and Class*, GRIST MAG. (Oct. 12, 2005), www.grist.org/article/food-and-class.

¹⁹ Baum, *supra* note 4, at 34.

IV. ACCESS TO FOOD IS RACED AND CLASSSED

In the United States, access to healthy food—fresh, organic produce, lean protein, and whole grains—is determined by race and class.²⁰ Wealthy people living in affluent neighborhoods have access to a variety of healthy food choices while poor people have very little choice about the food they eat.²¹ In turn, due to decades of racist housing and land use policy, white people tend to live in wealthier areas and people of color tend to live in less affluent areas.²² Thus, access to healthy food reinforces hierarchies amongst races and between classes.²³

Wealthy whites' access to more food choices is not merely a product of their wealth and their increased ability to buy more expensive health food; more significantly, it is a product of the distribution of grocery stores, restaurants, and markets within and between neighborhoods by race and class.²⁴ Supermarkets are more reliable suppliers of good quality, healthy food than other types of stores and restaurants.²⁵ Low income urban neighborhoods, however, have thirty percent fewer supermarkets per capita than wealthier areas.²⁶ When they are located in poor urban neighborhoods, supermarkets tend to offer inferior quality food (limp lettuce and mushy apples) as well as a reduced variety of other healthy choices for consumers (whole grains and minimally processed foods).²⁷ While a Whole Foods Market in the suburbs is likely to stock three different varieties of kale and Swiss chard, an urban supermarket likely offers none of these nutritional powerhouses, instead stocking iceberg lettuce and celery—both of which are nutritionally inferior to the kale and chard, and in fact have very little nutritional value.²⁸

Instead of having well-stocked supermarkets, which provide suburban and affluent consumers with a variety of healthy food choices, poor urban neighborhoods are home to bodegas, corner stores, and convenience stores. Last week while recovering from the flu, I felt too exhausted to walk to the south end of downtown Burlington, Vermont where the beautifully stocked coop market is located (the coop has three kinds of kale and chard and I do not think it even sells iceberg lettuce), but I was craving a piece of fruit and some cheese. I dragged myself out to the corner store a block from my house in my neighborhood to see if it had the basket of bananas and mushy apples that it sometimes has out on the counter.

²⁰ See Nareissa Smith, *Eatin' Good? Not in this Neighborhood: A Legal Analysis of Disparities in Food Availability and Quality at Chain Supermarkets in Poverty-Stricken Areas*, 14 MICH. J. RACE & L. 197, 207 (2009).

²¹ See Andrea Freeman, *Fast Food: Oppression Through Poor Nutrition*, 95 CALIF. L. REV. 2221, 2258 (2007); Smith, *supra* note 20, at 207.

²² See *infra* note 66.

²³ See Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2227–28 (“Due to entrenched patterns of segregation and pervasive, institutionalized racism that affect housing, employment, and educational opportunities, low-income, urban neighborhoods are often populated by African Americans and Latinos.”).

²⁴ See *id.* at 2226; Smith, *supra* note 20, at 201.

²⁵ See Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2240.

²⁶ See *id.*

²⁷ See Smith, *supra* note 20, at 208.

²⁸ See *id.*, at 203, 214.

I live in Burlington's poorest neighborhood—the Old North End. It is also the state's most racially diverse neighborhood, home to the highest concentration of individuals who rely on public transportation to get around and has the highest concentration of renters.²⁹ There was no fruit at the corner store that day and the block of cheese I finally decided to buy was twice the price it would have been at the coop. I went with the cheese because it was a more appealing choice for someone craving fruit than anything else I could find. The selection at my neighborhood corner store is typical of bodegas, convenience stores, and corner stores in poor urban neighborhoods across the United States. Most of these types of stores carry mostly “processed, pre-packaged” foods rather than fresh fruits and vegetables.³⁰ These types of stores are the only stores that carry groceries of any kind within walking distance of many residents of low income urban neighborhoods like mine.³¹ Many poor urban neighborhoods populated predominately by people of color do not have a single grocery store within walking distance.³²

While poor urban neighborhoods, particularly neighborhoods of color, are home to few supermarkets, they are disproportionately more likely than wealthier neighborhoods to be home to a wide variety of fast food restaurants.³³ In “an average-sized neighborhood shopping area, predominantly black neighborhoods were exposed to six more fast food restaurants than predominantly white neighborhoods.”³⁴ Indeed in many poor, urban, and predominantly minority neighborhoods, “[f]ast food has become a major source of nutrition”³⁵ Fast food restaurants do not offer healthy food options. There is no kale on the menu at Burger King, but there is a lot of iceberg lettuce and fried food.³⁶ The food available at fast food restaurants is highly processed, high in fat, and features little, if any, fresh produce.³⁷

An over-concentration of fast food restaurants, combined with a lack of access to supermarkets with a variety of fresh produce and healthy food create nutritional wastelands in poor urban neighborhoods. These nutritional wastelands have a direct impact on the diets and healthiness of people living in poor urban neighborhoods. People living in poor, urban

²⁹ Burlington's Old North End is the city's poorest neighborhood and its most diverse. See 2008 Consolidated Plan for Housing & Community Development, CITY OF BURLINGTON, http://www.cedoburlington.org/cdbg/2008_con_plan/2_1.htm (last visited Nov. 8, 2010) (describing income and poverty rates for areas of Burlington). Homeownership rates are lower in the Old North End than in other areas of the city—fewer than forty percent of residents own their homes as compared to rates between forty and seventy percent in the rest of the city. See *id.* (explaining detailed information on homeownership rates by neighborhood).

³⁰ Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2240.

³¹ See *id.* (“Low-income, often single-parent, families rely on these establishments as sources of fast, convenient food. As a result, small local convenience stores exert significant market control in poor, urban neighborhoods.”).

³² See *id.*

³³ Jason P. Block, Richard A. Scribner & Karen B. DeSalvo, *Fast Food, Race/Ethnicity, and Income: A Geographic Analysis*, 27 AM. J. PREVENTATIVE MED. 211, 214 (2004).

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2221.

³⁶ See BURGER KING, MENU & NUTRITION, <http://www.bk.com/en/us/menu-nutrition/index.html> (last visited Sept. 3, 2010).

³⁷ See *id.*; MCDONALD'S, NUTRITION, http://www.mcdonalds.com/us/en/food/food_quality/nutrition_choices.html (last visited Sept. 3, 2010).

areas without access to a supermarket are “25 percent less likely to have a healthy diet” than those who live within walking distance to a supermarket.³⁸ Indeed, the more supermarkets there are in a neighborhood, the more likely the residents are to have a healthy diet.³⁹ Because poor people, particularly poor people of color, are less likely to live in neighborhoods with many supermarkets, they are less likely than wealthier whites to have a healthy diet.⁴⁰ This inequitable distribution of supermarkets across neighborhoods means that poor people are less likely than wealthy to meet the federal government’s recommendations for two or more servings of fruit a day.⁴¹ As a result, people of color in poor urban neighborhoods “have [a] reduced intake of vitamins and minerals . . . essential . . . [to] healthy development.”⁴²

V. THE RAMIFICATIONS OF LACK OF ACCESS TO HEALTHY DIETS

A poor diet leads to lack of adequate vitamins and minerals, which is linked to a variety of health problems in both adults and children. Because poor people, particularly poor people of color, disproportionately consume poor diets, as a result of lack of access to healthy food, they have disproportionately higher rates of diet-related health problems than do wealthy whites.⁴³ Poor people, predominantly of color, suffer from higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer than those who live in more affluent, predominately white neighborhoods.⁴⁴ Blacks and Latinos are more likely than whites to be obese—40 percent of blacks and 36.8 percent of Latinos are obese while only 30.6 percent of whites are obese.⁴⁵ Obesity is a risk factor for a variety of illnesses including heart disease, stroke, and diabetes and is correlated with race and poverty.⁴⁶ Blacks have a 40 percent higher rate of death from heart disease than whites; and Latinos are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, obesity, and diabetes than affluent whites.⁴⁷

Like adults, poor children of color suffer from ill health as a result of lack of access to healthy food.⁴⁸ Because their bodies are still developing, the adverse health impacts of poor diets are extreme, affecting not only young people’s physical health, but also their emotional and neurological development.⁴⁹ The effects of ill health on poor urban children, particularly

³⁸ Latetia V. Moore et al., *Associations of the Local Food Environment with Diet Quality—A Comparison of Assessments Based on Surveys and Geographic Information Systems*, 167 AM. J. EPIDEMIOLOGY 917, 920–21 (2008).

³⁹ *See id.* at 921.

⁴⁰ *See* Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2227–28.

⁴¹ Smith, *supra* note 20, at 212.

⁴² *See id.* (citation omitted).

⁴³ *See* Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2228.

⁴⁴ *See id.*

⁴⁵ Regina Austin, *Super Size Me and the Conundrum of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Class for the Contemporary Law-Genre Documentary Filmmaker*, 40 LOY. L.A. L. REV. 687, 699 (2007).

⁴⁶ Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2229.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *See* Berthold Koletzko, Irene Cetin & J. Thomas Brenna, *Dietary Fat Intakes for Pregnant and Lactating Women*, 98 BRIT. J. NUTRITION 873, 874–76 (2007).

⁴⁹ *See id.*

on children of color, begin while the children are still developing in their mothers' wombs. Maternal diets low in the essential fatty acids, which are found in produce, whole grains, and lean protein, including DHA, which is found mostly in fish, are associated with reduced neurological development in developing fetuses.⁵⁰ Diets like the ones in poor urban neighborhoods, which are high in processed and packaged foods, are less likely to provide adequate levels of DHA to pregnant mothers.⁵¹ Studies have found that increased DHA consumption by mothers results in increased DHA concentrations in their babies as they develop in the womb. Increased DHA concentrations are associated with enhanced cognitive function and attention, as well as improved motor activity and visual acuity after birth.⁵²

Studies also suggest that it is not simply a lack of adequate nutrition that harms developing infants whose mothers do not have access to healthy food choices—the highly processed diets may themselves cause developmental and emotional problems in children. Mothers who consume diets high in the types of processed fats found in packaged foods, such as soybean oil and corn oil, may be likely to have babies who are more aggressive and hyper-active later in life, than do mothers who do not consume highly processed diets while pregnant.⁵³ Preliminary studies of mice suggest that this is true regardless of whether the diets outside the womb are high in processed foods.⁵⁴ A variety of studies have documented increased aggressiveness and hyperactivity in mice who were exposed to diets high in soy and corn oil in utero, regardless of the fat content of their diets later in life. The aggressive behavior and hyper-activity stayed with the mice for life regardless of whether the mice continued to eat highly processed diets later in life or not.⁵⁵

In less affluent neighborhoods, poor diets affect children's development even after they have left the womb because children have reduced access to healthy foods. Children who do not eat healthy diets rich in fresh produce, lean protein, and whole grains do not perform as well academically as their peers who do eat diets rich in healthy foods. A variety of studies have shown that a diet high in fruit and vegetable intake, combined with a moderate intake of dietary fat is linked to academic success in children.⁵⁶ Children whose diets have those healthy characteristics are more likely to succeed academically, even when other factors are controlled.⁵⁷ Students

⁵⁰ *See id.*

⁵¹ *See id.*

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ Studies of non-human primates show that male babies exposed to high levels of fat in the womb demonstrate more aggressive behavior and female babies exposed to high levels of fat exhibit more anxious behavior than their counterparts who were not exposed to such high levels. *See* Elinor Sullivan et al., *Chronic Consumption of a High-Fat Diet During Pregnancy Causes Perturbations in the Serotonergic System and Increased Anxiety-Like Behavior in Nonhuman Primate Offspring*, 30 *J. NEUROSCIENCE* 3826, 3826–30 (2010).

⁵⁴ Margarita Raygada, Elizabeth Cho, & Leena Hilakivi-Clarke, *High Maternal Intake of Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids During Pregnancy in Mice Alters Offsprings' Aggressive Behavior, Immobility in the Swim Test, Locomotor Activity and Brain Protein Kinase C Activity*, 128 *J. NUTRITION*, 2505, 2505–10, (1998).

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *See infra* note 57, 59.

⁵⁷ Michelle D. Florence, Mark Asbridge & Paul J. Veugelers, *Diet Quality and Academic Performance*, 78 *J. SCH. HEALTH*, 209, 213–14 (2008).

who eat healthy diets perform better on tests⁵⁸ and are more likely to get good grades than students who do not eat healthy diets even after controlling for other factors.⁵⁹

As children grow older, diets deficient in the essential nutrients and minerals found in healthy diets are linked to violent and anti-social behavior in young adults. In a double blind test, researchers found that supplementing diets with vitamins, minerals, and essential fatty acids caused a reduction in violent and anti-social behavior.⁶⁰ Violent incidents decreased in the group given the supplements by 37 percent while the control group saw violent incidents decrease only by 10 percent.⁶¹

Lack of access to healthy food choices in poor, urban neighborhoods, which are populated predominantly by people of color, has created a race based and class based discrepancy in health outcomes and academic performance in the United States. Poor children of color in urban areas are more likely to have inadequate access to a healthy diet and as a result are more likely to experience deficiencies in essential nutrients resulting in decreased academic performance, increased potential for anti-social and violent behavior, and an increased likelihood of having a debilitating illnesses like diabetes, heart disease, or stroke later in life.⁶²

As a result, there is a growing segment of the population in the United States that is set up for academic failure, increased likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system, and poor physical health, making it difficult to secure and maintain employment. This segment of the population is overwhelmingly poor, urban, and disproportionately made up of people of color.

VI. WHY HAS THIS HAPPENED?

Despite a wealth of evidence that demonstrates that poor health outcomes are the result of structural factors and not individual choice, and that access to a healthy diet is predicated on one's class and race, the government and the media perpetuate the myth that individuals are responsible for their own health outcomes.⁶³ poor urban residents simply choose to eat processed food, while wealthier white suburbanites simply choose to eat more kale.⁶⁴ The popular focus on individual responsibility as the cause of disparate health and educational outcomes for poor people and people of color covers up their racist causes as well as the capitalist structure that creates and requires such discrimination.⁶⁵ Decades of racist housing, land use, and transportation policies have worked to concentrate

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ Debbie MacLellen, Jennifer Taylor & Kyla Wood, *Food Intake and Academic Performance Among Adolescents*, 69 CAN. J. DIETETIC PRAC. & RES. 141, 143 (2008).

⁶⁰ C. Bernard Gesch, et al., *Influence of Supplementary Vitamins, Minerals, and Essential Fatty Acids on the Antisocial Behaviour of Young Adult Prisoners*, 181 British J. Psychiatry, 22, 26 (2002).

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.* at 22.

⁶³ See Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2246-47.

⁶⁴ *Id.* at 2245, 2247.

⁶⁵ *Id.* at 2222, 2247.

poor people and people of color in urban neighborhoods, which have suffered from systematic government-sponsored disinvestment.⁶⁶ Artificial government subsidy of private transportation, public works infrastructure, and land use regulations encouraging suburban development have incentivized and subsidized suburban development at the expense of development in urban neighborhoods for decades.⁶⁷ These racist policies have resulted in a national system of nutritional waste lands in poor urban neighborhoods as no new supermarkets have been built in these neighborhoods to replace the stores that have closed or moved to the more affluent neighborhoods in search of increased profits. In contrast, more affluent suburban neighborhoods, which have benefited from government subsidized and incentivized development for decades are home to a wide variety of supermarkets offering nutritious food. These policies have contributed directly to racial and class disparities in access to healthy food.⁶⁸

Racist and capitalist agricultural policies have added to the discrepancy in access to healthy food across race and class lines. Agriculture policy in the United States has subsidized processed and packaged food while artificially inflating the prices of healthy food, thus ensuring that healthy food is available to some people, but not others based on race and class.⁶⁹ In the past half century, the United States agricultural system has been transformed from a system of small family farms into a lucrative and highly capitalized industry controlled by a handful of agriculture oligarchs with close ties to the United States government. The groundwork for extreme consolidation and commoditization in United States agriculture was laid in the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 (which provided price supports for struggling farmers with more than one hundred crops), and continued into the post-war period under the influence of large agricultural processors like Cargill, affecting agricultural policy and increasing consolidation.⁷⁰ However, the transformation in agriculture, which has allowed food to become a mark of class, race, and dispossession, really took hold under the watchful eye of Earl Butz, secretary of agriculture under President Nixon in the 1970s.⁷¹ Under Butz, United States agricultural policy became singularly focused on turning agriculture into a highly profitable commodity for a handful of agricultural producers and processors.⁷² This focus on the mechanization, industrialization, and commoditization of agriculture required larger investments in capital than traditional farming.⁷³ The increasing need to invest heavily in equipment, fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides in order to stay competitive meant that only farmers with access to capital could remain competitive under the new

⁶⁶ See Richard Thompson Ford, *The Boundaries of Race: Political Geography in Legal Analysis*, 107 HARV. L. REV. 1843, 1845, 1848 (1994).

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ See Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2222–23, 2247.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 2242.

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 2244; Williams S. Eubanks II, *A Rotten System: Subsidizing Environmental Degradation and Poor Public Health with Our Nation's Tax Dollars*, 28 STAN. ENVTL. L.J. 213, 226 (2009).

⁷¹ *Id.* at 223.

⁷² *Id.* at 224 (2009).

⁷³ See *id.* at 217–18.

system. Smaller growers without access to capital went under—they were bought out by the larger corporations at fire sale prices.⁷⁴ The Green Revolution that Butz championed on behalf of the growing agricultural business lobby encouraged farmers to switch to monoculture agriculture and focus on producing easily processed agricultural commodities such as soybeans and corn, rather than fruits and vegetables.⁷⁵

Butz had served on the boards for the large agribusinesses he was now supporting as secretary of agriculture.⁷⁶ Butz and the agribusiness corporations that he represented, together with the philanthropic fronts of the corporations, developed the Green Revolution, a system of increased government subsidies, public policy, and public relations which further consolidated power and profits in the hands of a few agricultural producers and processors.⁷⁷ The Green Revolution was a clever way for war economy giants to transform dormant weapons technologies developed during the Second World War into peacetime profits.⁷⁸ After the war ended, corporations like Cargill, Monsanto, and Archer Daniels Midland that had supplied the government with munitions began looking for peacetime outlets for their wartime products, particularly the nitrogen they had used in munitions and weapons technology.⁷⁹ They found an outlet in a market they created for fertilizer and pesticides; this market was the Green Revolution.⁸⁰ The Green Revolution and the Farm Bills combined agricultural policy, which encouraged monoculture and commoditization of agriculture with technological and financial support for monoculture and farm consolidation.⁸¹ The Green Revolution has been incredibly successful; in the years between the passage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1933 and today, the United States has lost almost five million farms while the amount of land farmed in the United States has remained the same.⁸²

The United States government's subsidy of a decreasing number of commodity crops in the Farm Bill contributed to a sharp increase in crop yields for a limited number of crops while severely curtailing the production of many others by making them far less profitable for growers.⁸³ As a result, the Green Revolution created a huge glut of cheap corn and soy in the United States commodities market.⁸⁴ This cheap corn and soy, whose prices were kept artificially low as a result of the government subsidy through the Farm Bill, were converted into the corn syrup, cheap cattle feed, and oil.⁸⁵ These products are used to make the highly processed and nutritionally empty food that makes up the bulk of the products offered in

⁷⁴ See *id.* at 222, 225.

⁷⁵ See Jodi Soyars Windham, *Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth Is: Perverse Food Subsidies, Social Responsibility & America's 2007 Farm Bill*, 31 ENVIRONS ENVTL. L. & POL. J. 1, 9–10 (2007).

⁷⁶ Eubanks, *supra* note 70, at 224.

⁷⁷ See *id.* at 217–18.

⁷⁸ See Windham, *supra* note 75, at 7–8.

⁷⁹ See *infra* text accompanying notes 93–96.

⁸⁰ RICHARD MANNING, *AGAINST THE GRAIN: HOW AGRICULTURE HAS HIJACKED CIVILIZATION* 109 (2004). See also Windham, *supra* note 75, at 7–9.

⁸¹ See Eubanks, *supra* note 70.

⁸² *Id.* at 228–29.

⁸³ *Id.* at 226–27.

⁸⁴ See Windham, *supra* note 75, at 9.

⁸⁵ See Eubanks, *supra* note 70, at 285–86.

urban bodegas, corner stores, and fast food restaurants.⁸⁶ These highly processed foods offer corporations the opportunity to make much greater profits than do unprocessed fruits and vegetables both because they are highly subsidized and because they are commodities that can be traded on the market in a way that highly perishable fruits and vegetables cannot be.⁸⁷

Like the pesticides and fertilizers that made high yields of agricultural commodities possible, the highly processed foods that crowd the shelves of urban markets are themselves a product of war. During World War II, production of processed foods increased dramatically as the nation's men went off to fight and many of its women entered the workforce.⁸⁸ New factories sprung up to can and process the nation's food supply to send as rations to the troops and to a lesser extent to feed families left behind on the home front.⁸⁹ When the war ended, the factories remained, ready to process food that no one wanted to eat.⁹⁰ Corporations that had been profiting off the wartime food market began to devise ways to create a peacetime market for packaged and processed food.⁹¹ Slowly, the corporations succeeded in creating their own market for processed and packaged food. The artificial government subsidy of the raw materials and the low-cost production process for processed foods meant that corporations could sell products to consumers at prices far below their actual cost of production. Today, if there were an absence of government subsidies of fast food, the price a typical fast food customer would pay for a meal in a poor urban neighborhood would triple.⁹²

VII. CONCLUSION

Government subsidy of fast and processed food, combined with nutritional policies that send a message that food and food-related health outcomes are a personal choice, rather than the result of structural inequities within the capitalist system, obscures the true causes and effects of the United States food system. Though "government support of the fast food industry [and the processed food industry] severely limits dietary choices for low-income, urban African Americans and Latinos" popular rhetoric and public discourse on diet and health place the responsibility entirely on the individual.⁹³

It is no accident that processed food has become the food of the underclass, associated by the middle- and upper-classes with obesity, lack of personal responsibility, and lack of self-control. Processed food diets are

⁸⁶ See MICHELLE SIMON, *APPETITE FOR PROFIT: HOW THE FOOD INDUSTRY UNDERMINES OUR HEALTH AND HOW TO FIGHT BACK* at XVII (2006). See also Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2241.

⁸⁷ See MARION NESTLE, *FOOD POLITICS: HOW THE FOOD INDUSTRY INFLUENCES NUTRITION AND HEALTH* 18 (2007).

⁸⁸ See LAURA SHAPIRO, *SOMETHING FROM THE OVEN: REINVENTING DINNER IN 1950S AMERICA* 11–12 (2004).

⁸⁹ *Id.*

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 8.

⁹¹ *Id.*

⁹² See Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2242.

⁹³ Freeman, *supra* note 21, at 2221.

discussed at locavore dinner parties and in middle-class media outlets⁹⁴ with the same type of disgust exhibited by Dorothy as she watches Billina eat bugs. Processed food is a taboo for the white middle-class just as not eating bugs or raw foods is for Dorothy. The taboo against eating unhealthy processed food is evident in the writing of Michael Pollan who infuses processed food with immorality as he pontificates on the virtues of eating morally pure simple diets, “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.”⁹⁵ This, however, is a privilege available to some based on their membership in particular classes and races. The simplicity of his prescription obscures the morality of his pronouncement and perpetuates the taboo against dirty, processed food. His writings, and the culture of the middle-class, justify the disgust that his readers feel for those who do not have the will-power to eat such simple, healthful, and virtuous diets. Diets high in processed food and low in fresh produce, whole grains, and lean protein are painted as a source of shame for those who consume them, a mark of inferiority in a capitalist system whose existence rests on the perpetuation of dispossession and class/race construction. Contemporary capitalist society has created a new set of taboos relating to processed food to police class and race. Processed food is seen as vulgar, grotesque, and undesirable. The development of this taboo in turn prevents middle-class whites from seeing their commonalities with poor, urban whites and poor people of color. Their disgust serves “as one way to separate themselves from those lower on the [class and racial] ladder.”⁹⁶

Subsidies, which have funded the consolidation, capitalization, and industrialization of monoculture in United States agricultural policy make it increasingly more difficult for the poor in urban areas to access healthy food. As a result, unhealthy food has become a mark of dispossession and the poor health outcomes and developmental and educational barriers such diets create become a life sentence in the dispossessed class for those who live without access to other dietary choices. This structure will ensure that even as traditional marks of race and class disappear in our globalizing world, new marks of dispossession emerge to take their place. The act of eating an unhealthy meal in a fast food restaurant, combined with the guarantee that such a diet carries a sentence of ill health and reduced ability to succeed academically and socially will create and police a new underclass for the twenty-first century. The marks of this class—obesity, ill health, increased violence, and diminished school performance—will be obscured under rhetoric of personal responsibility and personal choice.

⁹⁴ Weight problems and poor diets are painted as sources of personal shame and an inability to make good choices in media outlets from the ATLANTIC MONTHLY to the HUFFINGTON POST. For example, journalist Ann Hodgman, notes that “I also hate myself for liking [processed food]. It’s the same with all the convenience foods I buy. Nothing is more embarrassing in the checkout line than a neon-red bag of Ore-Ida Tater Tots or a family-size box of Stouffer’s lasagna.” Ann Hodgman, *What’s for Dinner? Convenience foods have been doing battle with old-fashioned cooking for half a century. Which side is winning?* ATLANTIC MAG. June, 2004, at 130. See also Irene Rubaum-Keller, *Why Are You Overweight?* HUFFINGTON POST (July 29, 2008 6:02 PM), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/irene-rubaumkeller-/why-are-you-overweight_b_115268.html.

⁹⁵ See MICHAEL POLLAN, IN DEFENSE OF FOOD 1 (2008).

⁹⁶ SHERRIE INNESS, SECRET INGREDIENTS: RACE, GENDER, AND CLASS AT THE DINNER TABLE 129 (2006).

By creating a new set of marks of dispossession and a new set of taboos for policing race and class, the capitalist system ensures that the socially constructed differences amongst races and between classes will maintain their salience and prevent those who do not benefit from the capitalist system from seeing their common interests and joining together against the ruling class and agricultural oligarchs.