

Power & Benefit on the Plate

The History of Food in Durham, North Carolina



Author: Melissa Norton
June 2020

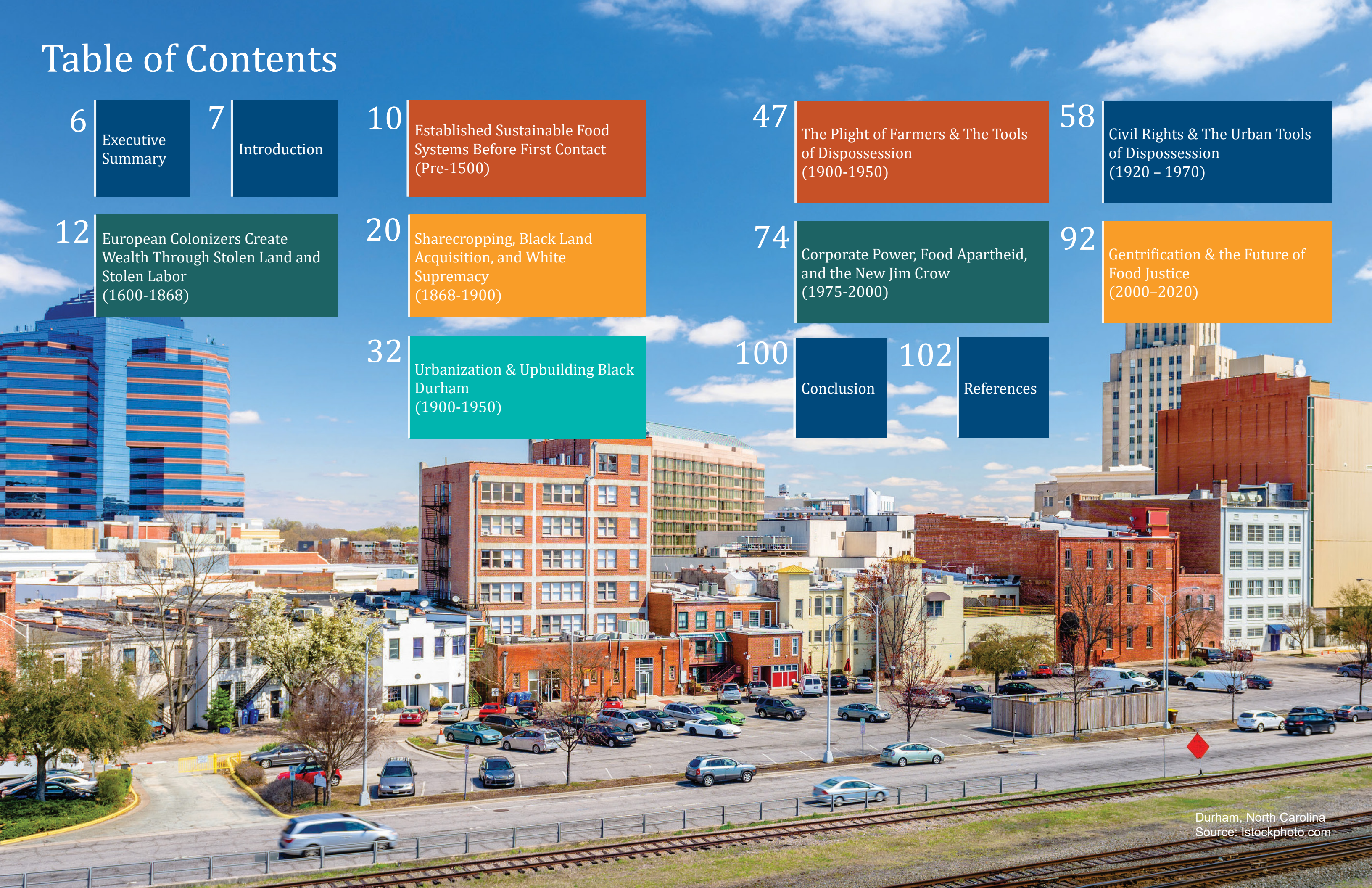
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About the World Food Policy Center

Duke University’s World Food Policy Center (WFPC), located in the Sanford School of Public Policy, develops coordinated and inclusive food policy and practice. Our approach bridges key areas of the food system to improve human wellbeing, environmental health, and equity.

Acknowledgements

Kamal Bell, Traci Bruckner, Bull City 150, Vera Cecelski, Michael Dupree, David Harris, Savi Horne, Vivette Jeffries Logan, Tia Hall, Kimber Heinz, Chukwuemeka “Chuck” Manning, Adrian Miller, Justin Robinson, Mary Grace Stoneking, Stagville Historic Site, Joe Schultz, Camryn Smith, Tim Stallmann, Jennifer Zuckerman, Deborah Hill, Gizem Templeton

Disclaimer

Errors of fact or interpretation remain exclusively with the author.

List of Abbreviations

AFSCME	American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees
ASCS	Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service
BSC	Black Solidarity Committee
CAFOs	Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations
CATT	Crime Area Target Teams
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Administration
FES	Federal Extension Services
FHA	Federal Housing Administration
FmHA	Farmers Home Administration
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
HOLC	Home Owners’ Loan Corporation
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
M&F	Mechanics and Farmers Bank
MXU	Malcolm X University
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
UOCI	United Organization for Community Improvement
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WIC	Women Infants and Children
WPA	Works Progress Administration

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Executive Summary

This report is an exploration of the history of Durham, North Carolina through the lens of food, agriculture and land. The goal of this research was to understand the inequities in Durham's food landscape today through analysis of the impact of social policies on Durham's various communities over time. This research identified compelling evidence of systemic inequity in policy and policy implementation that helps to explain the lived realities of Durham's communities today.

The author presents Durham's food history through the following six themes:

Power & Benefit

The story of food in Durham is fundamentally a story of power. This report explores the historical regulation of food and agricultural resources, as well as social policy and practice as mechanisms of benefit, control, and exclusion. For example, in the 1500-1600s, Europeans imposed private land ownership on this continent through colonization. Private land ownership had not previously existed in what is now the Americas and became a driver of generational wealth, privilege, and power. People from agrarian societies in West Africa were brought by force to North America to support large-scale agriculture as enslaved labor. This stolen labor helped to create wealth and the economy for white people in the United States. Although slavery was abolished after the Civil War, Black people could not vote or acquire land until 1866. State and local governments also legalized racial segregation through Jim Crow laws that prevailed from 1892-1964. Social policies, procedures, and legal processes have and continue to serve those in power and fail to provide equity and protection to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities.

Land & Ownership

The struggle to buy and retain land both within families and across generations is a persistent theme in Durham's history. For example, in the aftermath of the Civil War, many states passed restrictive 'Black Codes' laws designed to keep Black people as cheap labor source to work the land. One of the labor control mechanisms affecting both Black people and poor white people was a practice called sharecropping. By 1920, Black farmers owned 26% of farmland in Durham—a peak in ownership that has never been regained. However, multiple private property law mechanisms made it possible to force Black families off the land. In 1935, the Federal Housing Authority established a redlining practice that targeted BIPOC communities as too risky for mortgage support. Redlining prevented BIPOC people from purchasing homes at the same pace and lending price as white people. And, it prevented BIPOC communities from improving their homes—contributing to neighborhood decline. The effects of this policy are still evident today.

Access to Capital & Resources

The racial wealth gap in the United States is the disparity in median wealth across the different races. White households have significantly more wealth than Black, Latino, and Native-American households. This report identifies consistent patterns of intent to prevent Black and Native people's

social mobility in national, state, and local public policies. For example, a 1964 study found evidence of racial discrimination in every US Department of Agriculture program in regard to funding, employment/promotion, and decision-making. Discriminatory practices continued even after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that legally ended racial discrimination in federal programs. In another example, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill, made mortgages available to millions of WWII veterans with little-to-no down payment and very low-interest government-insured loans. However, with discriminatory lending guidelines and restrictive covenants excluded Black and Native veteran buyers. Between 1935 and 1968, less than two percent of federally insured home loans were for Black people. As a result of such policies, BIPOC people were systematically denied the same crucial opportunity to build wealth and stability through homeownership as white people. The persistent racial discrimination in lending (to this day), less access to family wealth and well-resourced peer networks for seed money, and the high price of real estate are barriers to entry for food entrepreneurs of color. Out of the ninety food businesses in downtown Durham, less than one fifth are owned by people of color, less than ten percent by Black proprietors, despite that Durham is a 'minority-majority' city.

Worker Rights and Compensation

The abolishment of slavery did not create employment opportunities, fair wages, or equitable working conditions for Black people. For example, although Durham was known as Black middle-class epicenter in the early 1900s—the vast majority of Durham's Black residents were low wage working class. Industrialization and factory job opportunities slowly drew people from rural communities towards city living from the late 1800s on. The shift from farming to wage labor, a cash economy, and urban living was difficult for Black and poor white migrant communities alike. Historically, people working in agriculture, food processing, and food service have not benefitted equally from social safety net programs. During the Great Depression, the U.S. passed legislation known as the New Deal. Such programs included: social security benefits and unemployment insurance (Social Security Act, 1935), new labor protection laws regarding the minimum wage (Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938), and the right to organize (National Labor Relations Act, 1935). Pressure from white southern legislators ensured that these new social programs excluded agricultural and domestic workers, which employed almost 75% of Black workers in the southern states in the 1930's. Today, 94% of migrant farmworkers in North Carolina are native Spanish speakers. The H2A guest worker program of 1986 allowed agricultural employers to hire seasonal foreign workers, but such workers do not have the same labor protections as U.S. citizens.

Globalization & Consolidation of Food Systems

From 1900-1950, the U.S. food system became increasingly industrialized. Shifting policy priorities in the Farm Bill since 1975 have also steadily increased corporate control and consolidation within the food system. In the early 2000s, more than 70% of food advertising was for convenience foods, candy and snacks, alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, and desserts. Health research documents a strong association between increased advertising for non-nutritious foods and rates of childhood obesity and diabetes. Companies often target Black and Hispanic consumers with marketing for their least nutritious products, contributing to diet-related health disparities affecting communities of color. People of color and poor people in Durham experience a disproportionately high incidence of diabetes.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic of the Food System

The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted the food system in countless ways and highlights weaknesses and inequities in the system. Lockdowns and government-ordered business closures disproportionately affect communities already in poverty. Across the country, grocery, food processing, and agricultural workers were deemed "essential" workers and are experiencing disproportionate exposure and death from the virus as a result. As of 2020, the federal government is now investing millions into SNAP, food banks, and unemployment benefits, and philanthropic organizations are investing deeply in the country's extensive charitable food network.

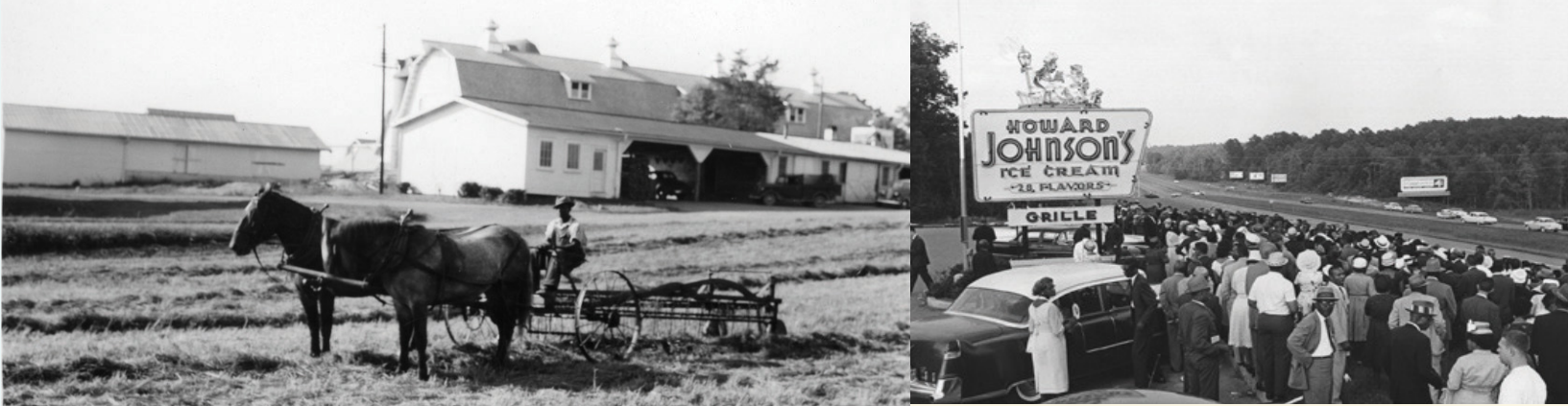
The inequities that exist in Durham's food system today are the direct result of social policy and practice that has, since the first contact between Indigenous people and European colonizers, placed the welfare of white citizenry over Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities. In some cases, discrimination was the intent of the policy when it was created. In other cases, local implementation decisions impacted the potential equity of progressive policies. Understanding how these systems have been built over time is a critical first step in understanding how we might create new and equitable systems.

Methods

To get at the root causes of the food inequities today, this report starts at the very beginning, with the established sustainable food systems prior to first contact (between Indigenous Nations and Europeans) and spans to the present. While this is a history about food, it is also a broader story about land, ownership, workers' rights, access to capital, the ability to participate in democratic decision making - and the ways in which people systematically denied these things have organized, resisted, and innovated. Historic images, maps, and oral history quotes are used extensively throughout this narrative bring this history alive.¹⁻⁴ Additionally, throughout the report, critical policies and practices are bolded to to note the policies and practices that have shaped our culture and our food environments

The research process began in January 2019 with determining key themes in the national and regional history of food inequity. The author then identified primary and secondary sources specific to Durham such as oral histories, deeds, biographies, photo archives, newspaper articles, and scholarly history books to interpret the unique local story of food inequity around these core themes. Interviews with long-time Durham residents helped to clarify local historical timelines, identify key actors and events, and support the analysis of food inequity at the intersections of race and class. Local memoirs and personal accounts were important to bring key themes to the level of personal experience. Quotes throughout the report convey larger historical themes through the lens of memory and individual storytelling. New oral histories were completed to help fill in some of the gaps of local recorded memory.

Research also included community-based input that occurred through a series of presentations and gallery walks. Community stakeholders reacted to themes and content and provided feedback on how to most accurately represent Durham's food history. The top recommendation from the gallery-walk was a strong desire for first-person accounts which were incorporated throughout the narrative. To help contextualize the narrative and data, original maps and charts were created from sources such as census records, city directories, archival maps, wage and employment statistics, and secondary sources. This project concluded in June 2020. The language utilized throughout this report was carefully considered and vetted through a community feedback process. **‘Indigenous Nations’** and **‘Native Peoples’** are used interchangeably to describe the original peoples of this land. **‘Enslaved people’** and **‘enslavers’** are used to describe the relationship of people during the time of slavery. Throughout the report, Black, white, and Latino are adjectives used to describe people, not as nouns, and **‘white’** is not capitalized to invert historic hierarchies.



Introduction

There are deep racial and economic food disparities in every community in this country. Yet, with all the many ways communities come together to try to address these disparities, we usually miss a fundamental component. Inequity is by its very nature, historic, and flows from generations of policies, institutional actions, and individual decisions that have privileged some people at the expense of others. Although there is excellent scholarship on structural inequality and the inequities that result from it, as well as powerful oral traditions and lived testimony of its impacts, most of this history is hidden and largely absent from public dialogues. Critical histories, the ones that highlight stories of oppression and resistance, of privilege and power, do not live in our history textbooks (or if they do, they are far too simplified and sanitized to provide real complexity and meaning). Nor are they prominent in the mainstream media or in our public monuments or commemorations. In their absence, we do not collectively develop the references and critical thinking skills needed to make sense of the deep inequality in our community and to develop the new institutional forms and power relationships necessary to come together and work towards a more equitable future. In so many ways, our collective *not-knowing* has consequences.

Creating new histories is the first step in a process of truth and reconciliation that is needed in every place in America, and at every level of governance and community life. New public narratives and counter-narratives need to be sought out, unveiled, and discussed. To share these histories is both a process of reckoning with the past and of reorienting how we think about change. As we seek true food justice and more equitable food systems, it is necessary to tell different stories about how we got here, and to wrestle deeply with the legacy of colonialism, white supremacy, and a food system that relies on the exploitation of workers, animals, and the earth. In this endeavor, it is important to recognize that inequality is a relationship, whereby some people are systemically advantaged and others disadvantaged over the course of generations. However, a person or a community cannot be defined solely in terms of victimhood or deprivation, and so this narrative highlights the acts of individual and collective resistance, contribution, and humanity of groups that have been historically marginalized.

With that in mind, the values of a *local* critical history are worth acknowledging. While we are all influenced by broad political, economic, and cultural systems, we all live locally. Hence, a local history has the ability to highlight the significance of individual and institutional actors as well as key moments of agency. A local history also illustrates how macro-level forces are both shaped and reshaped by community-level factors, such as community-based organizations, individual networks, and interpersonal connections. Further, putting this history into a local context builds a new set of resonant shared narratives. When history is grounded in the land, neighborhoods, institutions, and people we know, it deepens our attention and emotional response.

While this is a story about Durham, most places in the U.S. will have similar experiences of the core themes shared within. We intend this history to travel widely across Durham, but also want it to spark conversations and commitments for other communities to follow suit and do their own critical investigations of how we got here. We also recognize that no historical account is ever complete, and hope that this work will be expanded upon and added to in the years to come. Lastly, we ask all who may read this, who are we as history makers? And what legacy are we leaving for the next generation? There are no easy answers, but there is power in the asking.

Established Sustainable Food Systems Before First Contact (Pre-1500)



Established Sustainable Food Systems Before First Contact (Pre-1500)

For thousands of years, diverse Indigenous Nations of what we now call the Americas lived free on the land. Hundreds of clan and tribal nations and cultures permeated the landscape from coast to coast - from the far northern lands to the tip of the southern lands. Native society governed election of leaders; inheritance of property; ceremonies celebrating birth, marriage and death; and reciprocal obligations of help and defense. The land itself was astonishing in its abundance, with the earliest written accounts marveling at such sights as “pigeons, which were so numerous that you might see millions in a flock...and as they pass by, in great measure, obstruct the light of the day.” But despite contemporary dominant narratives, the land was far from an untamed wilderness. A complex network of civilized peoples already lived on and managed the land. Fish, fowl, animals, and the land were consciously managed through controlled fires to clear land, habitat maintenance in hunting and fishing areas, complex irrigation systems, skilled farming, and an intricate network of roads for trade and exchange. There was no private ownership of land. Rather, land was viewed as the source of all life and an entity to be in active relationship with, guided by ethics including moderation, reciprocity, restraint, celebration and gratitude.⁵⁻⁷

The majority of Indigenous Nations practiced a communal form of economic organization in farming and hunter-gatherer communities of various sizes. Over 200 native foods were domesticated on this land including: beans, potatoes, pumpkins, squash, cocoa, sunflowers—and most importantly, corn, which served as the basis for Indigenous agriculture. Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz describes the Native Peoples of this land as people of the corn. Corn was originally domesticated more than 10,000 years ago in what is now central Mexico and migrated along with Native Peoples’ across North and South America. Unlike most plants, it does not grow wild, and requires human cultivation. Corn was so central to the diet of Native Peoples that it was honored as the source of life through ceremonial dances and played a central role in myths and creation stories.⁹

The area between the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River was one of the most fertile agricultural belts in the world and was the home of multiple agricultural Indigenous Nations. The land that today comprises Durham County is the ancestral home of the Occaneechi, Eno, Adshusheer, and Shocco. These agrarian peoples grew corn, beans, and vegetables, and hunted game large and small such as bear, deer, wild turkeys, and possums. In the settlements around the Eno River, three corn harvests were reaped each year through staggered plantings and stored in communal granaries. Fruit and nut trees were plentiful and deep insights held about the healing properties of local plants and minerals. For these peoples, land was not a commodity to own and extract from, but earth to be in relationship with. And so, there were rituals associated with eating animal flesh and ceremonial thanks and reverence routinely offered for the harvest.¹⁰⁻¹³

“To our people land was everything - identity, our connection to our ancestors, the home of our non-human kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted. Sacred ground, it belonged to itself. It was a gift not a commodity - so it could never be bought or sold.”

Robin Kimmerer, Potawatomi Nation⁸

European Colonizers Create Wealth Through Stolen Land and Stolen Labor (1600-1868)

The colonization of what is now called the Americas was a specific type called **settler colonialism**. In this form, colonists seek to replace the original population of the territory with a new society of settlers. English colonists first came to what is now North Carolina to start the failed Roanoke colony in 1585, but permanent settlement did not begin until the late 1600s. By teaching colonists how to forage, clear land, what seeds to plant, and how to select and care for crops, Native Peoples contributed to colonists' early survival. However, the culture of welcome clashed sharply with the culture of conquest, theft, and subjugation. The sovereignty and autonomy of Native Peoples and the land on which they lived was immediately threatened. Over the next 300 years, European settler-colonialists used systemic violence, terror, false promises, and a foreign legal system to claim Native homelands.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

Much of the non-European world was colonized under the guise of the **Doctrine of Discovery** - a unilateral decree of international law issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493. The decree categorized Indigenous Peoples as subhuman because they were not Christian, and treated their land as unoccupied and available for the taking. In the early colonial period, there were sometimes treaties entered into or token payments made for use or purchase of Native People's land. But predominantly, outright theft enforced by violence was the primary method of colonial land control. In 1663 a decree from King Charles II authorized the colonial British Empire to seize all the land of Native Peoples between 31 and 36 degrees latitude (an area extending from the today's southern Georgia border to North Carolina's northern border), from the east to the west coasts. In Figure 2, the motto on the seal of the Lord Proprietors North Carolina echoes the colonial ethos of the Doctrine of Discovery.

Eighty years later, King George II of England awarded the Earl of Granville the upper half of what is now North Carolina. This area, which contained what is now Durham County, included 26,000 square miles stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to an indefinite western boundary. In the Carolina colony, Granville's agents carved up stolen Native People's land into parcels which were sold to English settlers. Ownership of these parcels was bestowed through land grants. With this legal document, the land and all its resources became private property, from the minerals below the soil to the birds in the sky above. **Private land ownership** as it exists today had not previously existed in the Americas; but it became the cornerstone of the law, and the necessary prerequisite for generational wealth, privilege, and power.¹⁸⁻²³

In the early 1700s, an English expedition passed through the land near what is now Durham, North Carolina and remarked that *"They had never seen 20 miles of such extraordinary rich Land, laying all together, like that betwixt the Haw River and the Occoneechee Town."* The gently rolling land had plentiful streams and rivers and old-growth forests with hardwood trees along the waterways and conifers on the ridges. Far more varieties

[The Indians] are really better to us than we are to them; they always give us victuals at their quarters, and take care we are armed against hunger and thirst. We do not do so by them (generally speaking), but let them walk by our doors hungry, and do not often relieve them. We look upon them with scorn and disdain, and think them little better than beasts in humane shape. Though if well examined, we shall find that, for all our religion and education, we possess more moral deformities and evils than these savages do not.

John Lawson, English settler-colonist in North Carolina, 1709¹⁷



and numbers of wildlife and plants lived in the forests than are found today.

One of the most important north-south trading routes of Indigenous Nations ran right through what is now Durham County (approximately the route of I-85), and many communities of Native Peoples located in convenient proximity to it. The sparse surviving accounts indicate that until the 1740s, the Native Peoples of this area traded with European settlers from the north and east and occasionally hosted small groups of travelers. But by the time permanent European settlers encroached upon the area in the 1750s, most of the Native Peoples of this area had left to join other tribes in the north and west with whom they had alliances. However, some members of the Occaneechi stayed and established a farming community near what is now called Hillsborough, though their food systems were profoundly disrupted by the privatization of tribal hunting and fishing grounds. Figure 3 shows a map of the names and property boundaries of land grand recipients in what is now Durham County.



Figure 2. Great Seal of the Lords Proprietors of Carolina

The Great Seal of the Lords Proprietors of Carolina reflects the worldview of the colonizers. The Latin translates: “to dominate and conquer the world.”

Source: Florida Institute for Instructional Technology

One contemporary member of the Occaneechi described their existence over the next 200 years as hiding in plain sight. This phrase acknowledges that despite maintaining Indigenous identity and cultural practices, the continued presence of Native Peoples was not acknowledged in census records and other official historical accounts. This process has been described as **administrative genocide**. Native Peoples also experienced attempted erasure through removal from the land and forced assimilation in boarding schools, where they were forced to speak English, practice Christianity, and wear European clothes.²⁴⁻³⁰

The settlers in the area that is now Durham hailed primarily from England, Scotland, and Germany. Figure 4 shows a photograph of the original Duke homestead in Durham. Upon arrival, settlers cleared land and started farming in the rich but unfamiliar terrain. Soil was the primary asset of this land and the settlers mined the natural fertility of the soil without a skillset or cultural framework of sustainable stewardship. The majority of settlers were small-scale or yeoman farmers who grew food and commodities for subsistence, barter, and limited market opportunities. The primary reason for the lack of market opportunities was a lack of roads by which to transport surplus crops. The crops grown included corn, wheat, cotton, an assortment of fruits and vegetables, and tobacco. Farms were diversified enterprises where livestock played an integral role. Sheep were raised for their wool and meat; cattle for their milk, leather, and meat; mules and horses for pulling plows and wagons; hogs for pork, ham, bacon, lard, and leather; and all the animals for the valuable manure they supplied.³¹⁻³²

In the early phase of settlement the land was rich and productive, but due to the dense and rocky soils of the Triassic Basin, the majority of Durham lands lacked natural fertility after the original deep layer of topsoil eroded. By the mid-1800s, the constant reuse of the soils without rest, replenishment, fertilization, crop rotation, or erosion prevention resulted in diminished yields. When no new land was left to clear, the average farmer's income began to decline and it was more difficult to live off the land.³³⁻³⁵

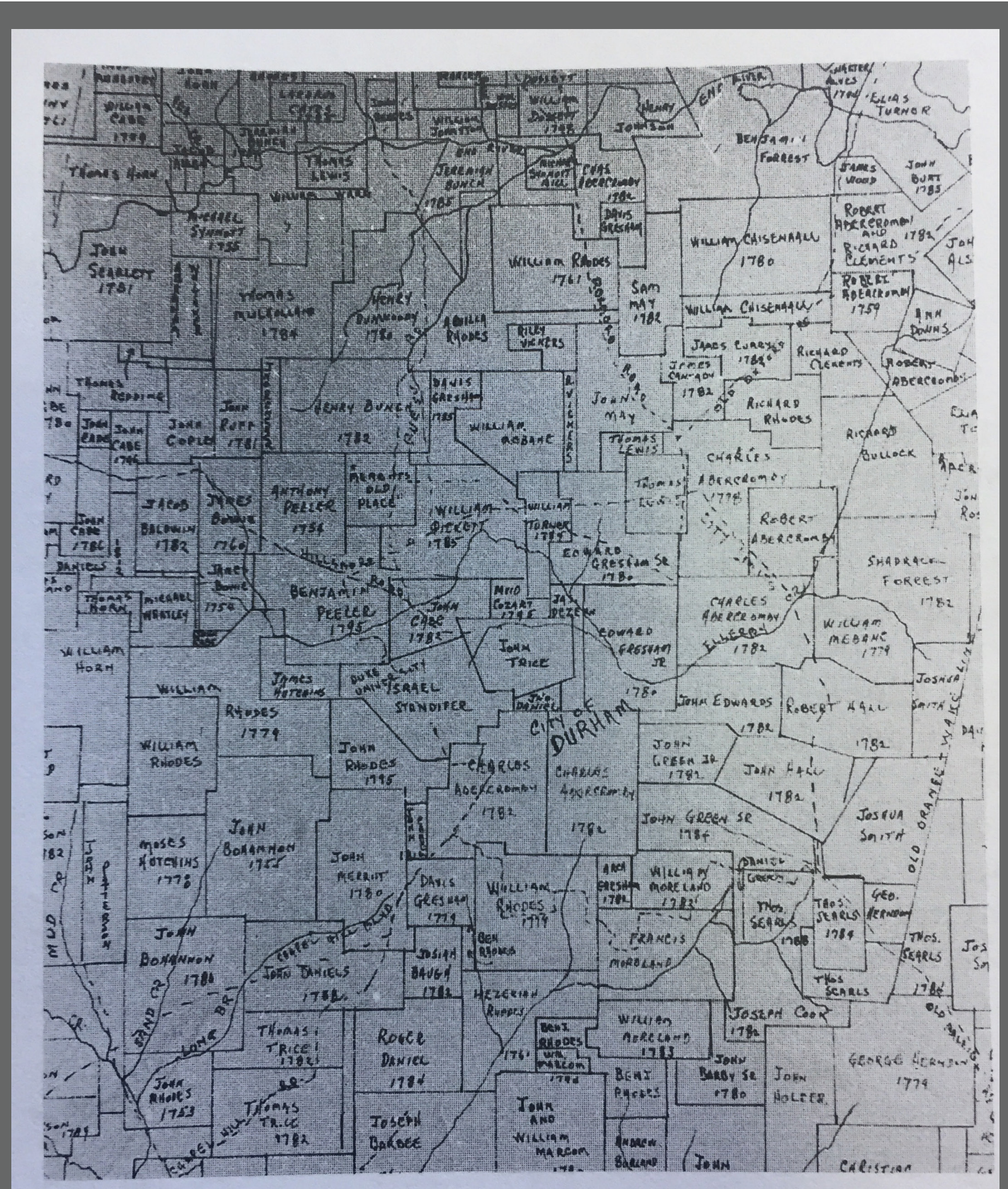


Figure 3. Map of the names and property boundaries of land grant recipients in a section of what is now Durham County.

Source: Alan Markham

Figure 4. Image of original Duke Homestead, 19th century



The original Duke Homestead, pictured here, was fairly typical of the small yeoman farms of the 19th century.
Source: North Carolina Collection, Durham County Libraries.

The transformation and cultivation of the land in North Carolina could not have taken place without the farm labor of enslaved West African people, who were taken by force from their homeland from the 1500s through the 1800s. Working from dawn to dusk, enslaved people provided the free farm labor on stolen land that was the basis of the economy and the foundation of the wealth of this nation.

When the Civil War began in 1861, nearly one out of three people in what is now Durham County were enslaved, and about a quarter of white farmers legally owned enslaved people. The Cameron Plantation, located largely in Durham County, was the largest in the state.³⁶

Figure 5 shows a map of the

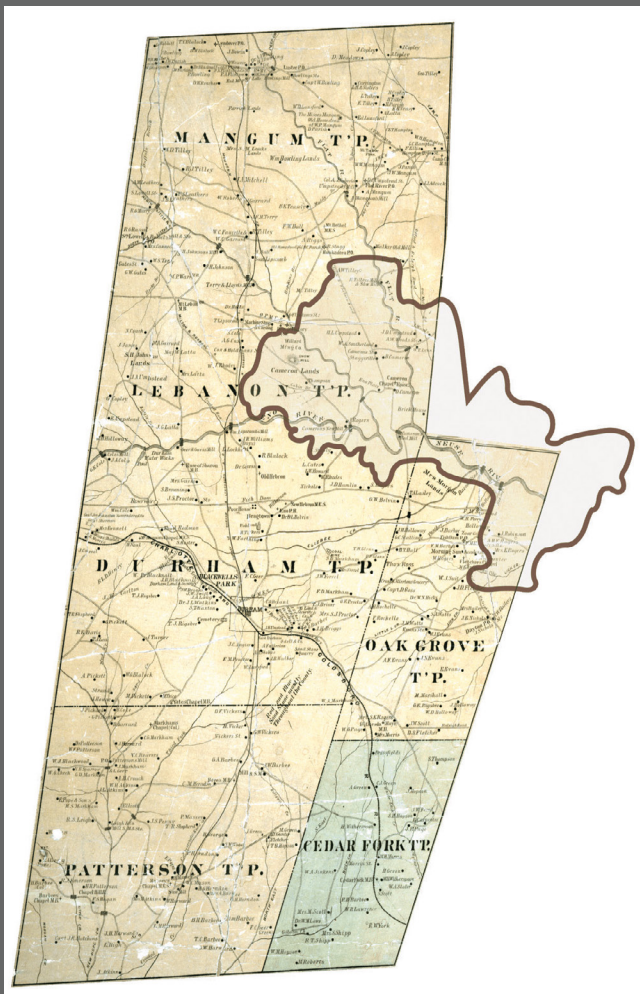
Cameron Plantation boundaries.

Context played an important role in the enslaved person's food, including size of farm, quality of land, and values of the enslaver. On the Cameron Plantation, food for enslaved people was distributed as a weekly allotment - usually on a Saturday after work ended - and likely included meat (pork), corn meal, a sweetener such as molasses, potatoes and other vegetables when in season. Allotments were augmented through fishing and hunting game like deer, squirrels, possums, and rabbits. The fruit available was mostly apples, pears, wild berries, and different varieties of grapes.³⁷⁻³⁸

As enslaved people endured the profound injustices of slavery, food became a connection to home and land, and a focal point of community. The seeds of West African foods, like yams, arrowroot, bananas, various types of beans, cow peas, guinea squash, hibiscus, millet, okra, pigeon peas, plantains, purslane, rice, sesame, sorghum, sweet potatoes, tamarind, taro, and watermelon traveled to this land along with enslaved West African people. Stories have been passed down about how women braided

The Cameron Plantation, shown here in relation to Durham County, was the largest in the state. The Cameron family owned approximately 30,000 acres of land and 900 enslaved people.
Source: Bull City 150

Figure 5. Image of Cameron Plantation in relation to Durham County



[My name is Alex Woods. I was born May 15, 1858. In slavery time, I belonged to Jim Woods of Orange County. The plantation was between Durham and Hillsboro near the edge of Granville County. My missus name was Polly Woods. They treated us tolerable fair. Our food was well cooked. We were fed from the kitchen of the great house. We called master's house the 'great house' in them times. We called the porch the piazza. We were fed from the kitchen of his house during the week. We cooked and ate at our homes Saturday nights and Sundays. We wove our clothes; children had only one piece, a long shirt. We went barefooted, and in our shirt tails, we youngins' did... They allowed my father to hunt with a gun. He was a good hunter and brought a lot of game to the plantation. They cooked it at the great house and divided it up. My father killed deer and turkey. All had plenty of rabbits, possums, coons, and squirrels... Missus chewed our food for us, when we was small. The babies was fed with sugar tits, and the food missus chewed. Their suckled mothers suckled them at dinner, and then stayed in the field till night. I remember missus chewin' for me, an the first whipping I got..

Alex Woods, formerly enslaved person from Orange County³⁹

My mammy belonged to Tom Edward Gaskin and she wasn't half fed. The cook nursed the babies while she cooked, so that the mammies could work in the fields, and all the mammies done was stick the babies in the kitchen on their way to the fields. I heard mammy say that they went to work without breakfast, and that when she put her baby in the kitchen she'd go by the slop bucket and drink the slops from a long-handled gourd.

Martha Allen, formerly enslaved person from Craven County, who later lived in Raleigh⁴⁰

treasured seeds into their hair before being forced onto transatlantic slave ships. Many of these African foods became a permanent part of food culture in the South.

There were other through-lines of West African food culture. In the fields, the West African food tradition of serving a grain covered with a vegetable stew was adopted. This thick gruel could be easily eaten with the fingers, which was necessary as utensils were seldom made available. A measure of some food autonomy for enslaved people took the form of gardens, where various types of greens, beans, fruits and other vegetables were raised for personal and communal use. However, it was common practice for overseers to limit enslaved people's ability to sell extra food or even trade beyond the immediate community.⁴¹⁻⁴²

An intimate relationship with the land and contact with Native Peoples yielded knowledge held by enslaved people about wild herbs and edible foods to forage. Many of these plants had medicinal qualities. For example, the use of sassafras tea as a health tonic, sugared horehound as a lozenge for bad colds, and asafetida root or nettle for teething babies are commonly recounted. Native Peoples also influenced Black food preparation, especially various ways to prepare corn and meat. This includes the culinary art of barbecue, which is often attributed to the intermeshing of food traditions of Native and African Peoples. Although it is left out of dominant historical narratives, there was both physical contact and cultural exchange between Indigenous Peoples and enslaved African Peoples over time. In the early period of colonization, African and Native Peoples were jointly enslaved, whereby they intermarried and lived through the same struggles. Later on, it was not uncommon for Native communities to take in Black people running away to escape enslavement. In certain parts of the state, free Black people lived in close proximity to Native communities by which further exchange could occur.⁴³⁻⁴⁸

The tradition of the communal Sunday dinner after worship services developed among enslaved people and was interwoven with deep religious, social, and cultural meaning. As described by a contemporary observer in Adrian Miller's history of soul food, *"It [Sunday dinner] has to do with communion. Communion was a meal, a feast of love. It is a kind of extension of our Africanness."*⁴⁹

After the Civil War ended in 1865, Union soldiers rode across the South notifying enslaved people that they were now free. On the Cameron lands, the first act of freedom for many was to feast. Livestock were killed and eaten, smokehouses emptied, and storehouse wares cooked up in exuberant jubilee.⁵¹⁻⁵²

We worked in the day and had the nights to play games and have singings. We never cooked on a Sunday. Everything we ate on that day was cooked on Saturday. They wasn't lighted in the cook stoves or fire places in the big house or cabins neither. Everybody rested on Sunday.

The tables was set and the food put on to eat, but nobody cut any wood and they wasn't no other work on that day.

Tempe Herndon, formerly enslaved woman from Chatham County who made her home in Durham⁵⁰



Image from Istockphoto.com

Sharecropping, Black Land Acquisition, and White Supremacy (1868-1900)

The Civil War effectively ended in April 1865, when Confederate Joseph E. Johnston surrendered to William T. Sherman at Bennett Place in Durham County. The Union's defeat of the Confederacy resulted in massive societal change and opened up a brief time of tremendous potential for reform. During the period known as Reconstruction (1865-1877), the Federal Government maintained a military presence in the South and went about setting the conditions by which southern states could return to the Union. Among a host of political, social, and economic exigencies, was the question of what to do with the nearly four million formerly enslaved people who were freed with no land, jobs, money, or rights of citizenship.

In the first year of Reconstruction, an unprecedented event took place: formerly enslaved people were asked by the government what they wanted for themselves. A gathering took place in Savannah, Georgia in 1865 where the question was debated by Black leaders from across the south. Their spokesperson was Garrison Frazier, a Baptist minister from Granville County, located just north of Durham. Land was their number one demand: *"The way we can best take care of ourselves, is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor ... and we can soon maintain ourselves and have something to spare ... We want to be placed on land until we are able to buy it and make it our own."*

In the days that followed, the government, Union General William T. Sherman's **Special Field Order No. 15**, ordered the redistribution of 400,000 acres of land along the South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida coast. However, Lincoln's successor Andrew Johnson rescinded the order in late 1865, and the promise of reparations through land redistribution was never fulfilled. Economist Sandy Darity and writer and folklorist Kirsten Mullen contend that had this order been carried out, it *"would have dramatically reversed black asset poverty and reduced black's economic vulnerability across generations."*⁵³⁻⁵⁴

Throughout Reconstruction and its aftermath, hunger was rampant across the South and the agricultural system was in chaos. Over the course of the war, critical infrastructure was ruined, farm buildings and machinery were destroyed, livestock ravaged, and agricultural fields laid fallow. The Freedman's Bureau was the federal agency assigned to provide food, housing, medical aid, schools, and other support services to freed people. However, the U.S. government was preoccupied with the political and economic questions of Reconstruction and categorically failed to take responsibility for the health and welfare of freed people. Among the reasonings employed was a concern not to have freed people become dependent on the government. Although it is difficult to quantify, historian Jim Downs estimates that during Reconstruction, more than a million Black people became sick from malnutrition, disease, and near starvation, and tens of thousands died.⁵⁵⁻⁵⁶

After the failure to redistribute land in the immediate aftermath of the war, most people, Black or white, did not own land. In the area that is now Durham County, only 28% of white people owned land in 1875. As cash was scarce, the system of **sharecropping** arose to meet the need of white landowners for land cultivation labor, and the needs of poor farmers of all races for physical and economic survival. With a sharecropping contract, poor farmers were granted access to farm small plots of land. Instead of paying rent in cash, they were required to give a portion of the crop yield, called shares, back to the landowner. Depending on the contract, sharecropping farmers received anywhere between one-fourth and three-fourths of the actual returns on their labor. An alternative (and preferable) arrangement was tenant farming. If a farmer could accumulate enough of his own equipment and money, he would pay a landowner rent for farmland and a house out of the money brought in from the harvest. The tenant farmer kept all of the proceeds from the crop.⁵⁸⁻⁵⁹

The **North Carolina Landlord Tenant Acts of 1868 and 1877** codified a fundamental power imbalance between landowners and sharecropping farmers. The laws entitled property owners to set the worth of a crop at harvest time and did not obligate landlords to put contracts in writing or require tenants to have access to ledgers or records. Beyond that, poor farmers without money to buy the fertilizer, tools, animals, and machinery

“I was never hungry til we was free and the Yankees fed us. We didn’t have nothing to eat except hard tack and middlin’ meat. I never seen such meat. It was thin and tough with a thick skin. You could boil it all day and all night and it wouldn’t cook, I wouldn’t eat it. I thought it was mule meat; mules that done been shot on the battle field then dried. I still believe it was mule meat... Dem was bad days.

I was hungry most the time and had to keep fighting off them Yankee mens.

Martha Allen, formerly enslaved person from Craven County, who later lived in Raleigh⁵⁷

“...we lived all over the area because we were tenant farmers--very poor, living on the land of the owner, who was, of course, white. We used his mules, and he paid for the seed and the tobacco and the stuff that we planted. Of course, as I look back now, I know how they cheated us, because we never had anything.

Theresa Cameron Lyons, on growing up in a Black tenant farming family in Durham County⁶³

necessary to farm had to borrow from landowners or merchants on credit, often at exorbitant interest rates. The result of this power imbalance, combined with the unpredictability of nature, was that most sharecropping and tenant farmers were barely able to make ends meet and many became indebted to their landlords. Through a crop lien system sharecroppers and tenant farmers who did not own the land they worked obtained supplies and food on credit from local merchants. However, there were also ecological consequences to the system. Trying to get ahead, these farmers would plant commodity crops intensively year after year, depleting nutrients from the soil. An 1887 report of the state’s Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that the crop lien system had proven “a worse curse to North Carolina than droughts, floods, cyclones, storms, rust, caterpillars, and every other evil that attends the farmer.”⁶⁰⁻⁶²

For newly freed people, many of whom worked the same land, lived in the same housing, and worked under close supervision of the same overseers, sharecropping was like slavery under another name. A sharecropping contract on Cameron lands, the largest plantation in Durham, reveals the inherent injustice of the sharecropping arrangement. Sharecroppers’ behavior was monitored by white superintendents who were paid from crop yields before settling (cutting into sharecropper’s earnings). Undefined ‘gross misconduct’ could result in tenants being made to leave and completely forfeit their share of crops. Further, sharecropping farmers were prohibited from selling crops on their own, without notifying the landowner and having a superintendent present. No large gatherings of Black people other than for Sunday worship were allowed on the land.⁶⁴

Reconstruction officially ended with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877, having failed to fundamentally alter economic and power relationships between Black and white people. Even before this date, North Carolina’s white power brokers had started to roll away civil rights for Black people by passing what are now known as the **Black Codes**. The Black Codes were a series of laws enacted throughout the South in

1866 that denied Black people the right to vote, serve on juries, or testify against white people in court. The Codes outlawed interracial marriage and established capital punishment for Black people convicted of raping white women. They also prohibited Black people from owning or carrying firearms or other weapons unless they obtained a license one year before the purchase. Two years later, the traditional white elite, rankled by the progressive reforms of the Republican legislature and the new state constitution created in 1868, moved to regain power. They used a campaign of terror carried out by secret organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and stoked white fear to win control of the state legislature in 1870 and the governorship in 1876.⁶⁶⁻⁶⁷

During this time of political and economic flux, the agricultural economy of the Piedmont region, which included the land that is now Durham, began to undergo a significant change. This change was marked by a shift from a mixed subsistence and market agriculture economy to one dominated by cash crops – especially tobacco. The rise of the cash crop economy was enabled by the arrival of the North Carolina Railroad in 1854, which expanded the region’s agricultural markets. The politically well-connected Cameron family had lobbied the state for a local railroad stop to expand the market reach for their plantation’s products. This stop became the Durham Station and the center of the future city.⁶⁸⁻⁷⁰

From the 1860s onward, sharecroppers and tenant farmers in Durham primarily grew cash crops of tobacco, cotton, or wheat, while scratching out a subsistence living for their families. Families tended to be large, as many hands were required to work the land. On the farm, women carried out the exhausting work that transformed raw provisions into food and clothing for the whole family. In addition to all the household chores, they also gardened and tended the domestic animals. However, despite having many bellies to feed, hunger on farms was uncommon, even if the provisions were simple. As Ila Blue recounts of growing up in a sharecropping family in Durham County: “We ate, but we didn’t have any money, that was our problem.”⁷¹⁻⁷²

Despite nearly a third of people in Durham County working as sharecroppers in the late 1800s, Black people started to acquire land. Land ownership for the period of 1880-1930 is shown in Table 1. Land prices were remarkably cheap during this time. Moreover, Piedmont land became available as some white landowning farmers left to settle more productive land in the South and West - a new ownership opportunity from which Black people were largely excluded. This opportunity was created by the **Homestead Act of 1862**, which granted 160 acres of stolen Native People’s land in the West to any American who applied and worked the land for 5 years. Over the course of the next 60 years, 246 million acres of western land were given to individuals for free. About 1.5 million families were given this crucial economic foundation, but only about 5,000 of those were Black families.⁷⁴

Table 1. Like most places across the South, Black land ownership in Durham rose in the last quarter of the 19th century, peaking in approximately 1920

Percentage of Farmers Owning Their Farms and Average Farm Size for Durham County, 1880-1930					
	1880*	1900	1910	1920	1930
Average Farm Size (acres)	115	96	85	76	71
Black Farm Ownership	N/A	9%	21%	26%	20%
White Farm Ownership	N/A	50%	54%	53%	53%

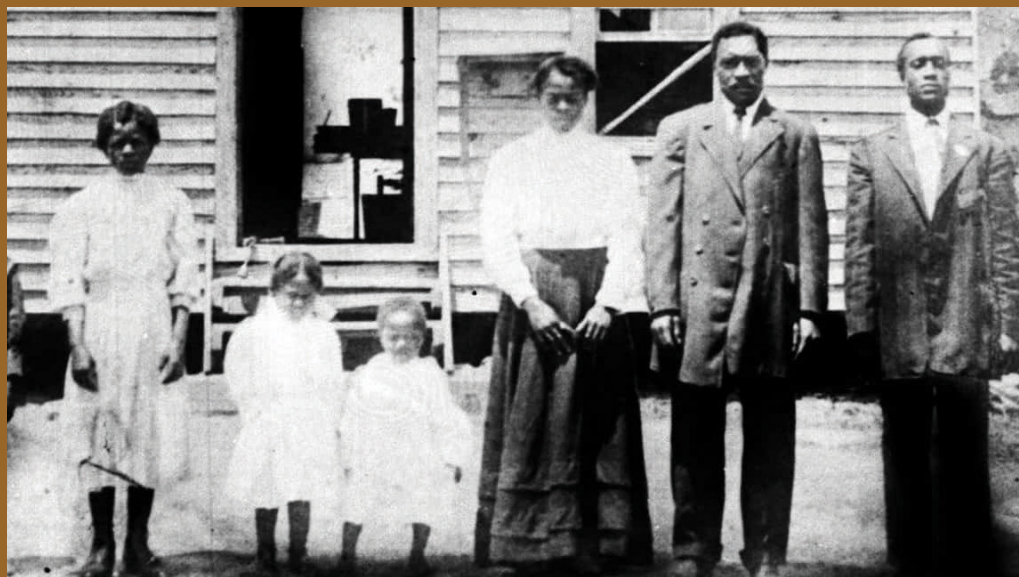
Source: Chart recreated from Janiewski, Dolores, *Sisterhood Denied*, 25. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 10th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th Census for Agriculture
Note: *1880 figures are for Orange County, from which Durham County was formed in 1881

The Negroes to have as their compensation a share of the crops that shall be raised one third part of the wheat, corn, cotton, tobacco, syrup, peas, sweet potatoes, & pork. But the seed wheat is to be first pas'd back to the said Cameron. The hogs to be killed or pork shall be fattened out of the corn crop before division. The said Cameron is to have the other two thirds of said crops.
Cameron sharecropping contract, 1866⁶⁵

Farm folks don't often go hungry. I never had a child or grandchild cry for food. Mister, it might not always been the best kind of food but they always got something in their stomachs and quit crying at you. The Bible says, "I never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed beggin' bread. I wonder if that means that farmers are good people... Thank the Lord that I never seen a hungry person in all my life - I mean somebody that was hungry day after day. I couldn't stand to be hungry nor cold. That's one reason I likes the farm. The wind blows hard every winter on these open hills, but the Lord gave us plenty of wood and every family I knows has enough old quilts to keep them warm at night.

Amos Mitchell, Black tenant farmer in Durham County⁷³

Figure 6. Keith family, Black sharecroppers in Wake County, 1911



Source: State Archives of North Carolina

My granddaddy had fifty-two acres of land. They said he was working for this white family and the man took a liking to him, and back then land was cheap. And that man told him, Robert, what you ought to do is buy you an acre of land every month. He give him \$12 a month, so he bought an acre of land a month, a dollar a month, for a year. And he bought that farm with 52 acres of land in it, and he built his house out of logs. I remember that log house just as good, I can.

Arthur Brodie, Black man born in Franklin County, who made his home in Durham⁷⁷

My daddy went to New York and worked for \$1.00 a day, and they raised him to a \$1.25 a day—not an hour, but a day! And saved money—I think he said he gettin' about \$1.50 then in the later years—he stayed up there three or four years. The people didn't come back like they do now. And stayed up there all that time, and when he came back, he bought a farm and married my mother.

Dora Scott Miller, Black tobacco worker in Durham, born in Apex, North Carolina⁷⁸

My daddy was just a very smart man. He was the second child in the family and he was just always very ambitious and always worked very hard, and went as far in school as schooling was offered in his time. He was a very progressive sort of man. And got married. He was about 21 when he got married. And lived as a tenant farmer for a few years. But farmed with the idea of buying his own land. So pretty soon in his marriage he bought a very little farm, we still own that little farm. And worked it as an independent farmer until he saved up enough money to buy the land that I refer to as the land that I grew up on.

Mildred Oakley Page, on growing up in a Black farm family just north of Durham County in Berea, North Carolina⁷⁹

For Black families, farmland ownership represented more than just a material asset or a source of income. It was also a means of self-determination, self-sufficiency, and a foundation for economic and political power. Figure 6 is a photograph of the Keith Family, circa 1911. With these strong motivations, Black farmers and laborers worked both inside and outside of the system to acquire land. They leveraged relationships with white landowners, squatted on unused land, and saved hard earned Sunday money (extra wage labor done on the weekends) for a piece of land to call their own. In Durham and across the South, Black land ownership grew dramatically, peaking between 1910-1920. Figure 7 shows a Black farm family, circa 1942. Although Black farms were generally smaller and on less productive land than their white counterparts, land became many family's primary asset and intricately entwined with heritage and home.⁷⁵⁻⁷⁶

In the last decades of the 19th century a white Farmers' Alliance chapter formed in Durham to encourage farmers to aid and support one another, and weld themselves into an effective political group. Among their local accomplishments were a cooperative food store, a cooperative tobacco warehouse, and a tobacco manufacturing company. Cooperative buying resulted in cheaper prices for food and supplies that could not be produced on the farm. Despite the popularized image of farmers as rugged individualists, the value of cooperation was deeply steeped in farming culture. Figure 8 shows Black farmers waiting to receive a share of cooperatively purchased seeds. Throughout the year, farmers would come together to help each other in communal endeavors like corn shucking, wheat thrashing, pig killing, and barn raising. It was not uncommon for these gatherings to occur across race, although evidence indicates that meals were taken separately.

Figure 7. Image of Black farm family dinner in Wake County, 1942



Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USW3-000401

Figure 9 shows a picture of Black and white farmers cooperating in a corn harvest. There was also a Colored Farmers' Alliance in North Carolina, but it is unknown to what extent the organization was active in Durham. However, a more radical farmer's organization called the Knights of Labor did attract a local contingent of Black farmers.⁷⁸

But cooperation could only take them so far. Farmers of all races, who comprised 75% of the North Carolina population in 1887, had a mounting set of political and economic grievances. The low cost of products produced on the farm meant that many farmers could barely break even after harvest. Chronic debt to merchants and larger landowners was common. Railroad shipping prices were high and interest rates were unregulated. Across the state, many white farmers broke with the Democratic Party and joined the Populist Party, a progressive third party deeply rooted in the Farmers Alliance and agrarian interests. Leading up to

“One other memory of childhood that I do remember, farmers would have corn shuckings and wheat thrashings. And the corn shuckings were mostly black folks... And those were good days because there was always a good dinner. Somebody had the job of fixing the dinner so the men would shuck the corn. And of course, they would shuck all the corn. The corn would be shucked and put into the cribs, and then everybody would go home. And this sort of thing went around from family to family. So you paid back for that sort of thing. And with the wheat thrashing, that was all blacks and whites because the thresh mill I guess it was called, would come through the community, and stop at each farm, and the men would follow it from one farm to the next to help with the thresher, would cut the wheat, and they'd bind it up and tie it up, so it took a lot of people to do it. So whatever year the thresher got to your house at dinnertime, you had to feed the men. (laughter) So occasionally through the years, the thresher was at our house for dinner. So that was an integrated activity. And it's funny how with some things, well, the white neighbors were very good people, very good people, very good Christian people. And thought nothing of it, just considered this their duty to include our farm in with them, because most of the black people were not home owners. They just considered it their duty to be a part of that thrashing. And when it was at their house, black folks would eat at their house. I don't know whether or not they ate at the dining table or not (laughter) because I wasn't out with them. But it was a good community spirit.”

Mildred Oakley Page, on growing up in a Black farm family just north of Durham County in Berea, North Carolina⁸³

Figure 8. Row of Black farmers in Eastern NC waiting in line for cooperatively bought seeds and farms supplies, 1938



Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USF34-008315

Figure 9. A group of Black and white farmers working together on corn shucking day in Granville County, northeast of Durham, 1939



The photographer also captured how after the corn shucking, three separate meals were prepared, one for white men, one for Black men, and one for the women and children on the farm.

Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USF33-030692-M2

the election of 1894, Populists allied with the Republican Party (to which nearly all Black people belonged) in order to wield enough political power to win the election. This cooperation became known as **Fusion Politics**. In Durham there was both a local Republican Party and a contingent of Populist refugees from the Democratic Party and the Farmers' Alliance. Black people participated in the Fusion collaboration because it provided them with their best chance for a role in North Carolina politics that decade.⁸⁴⁻⁸⁵

The eight years of Fusionist rule in North Carolina between 1894 and 1900 are a powerful anecdote of what was possible when Black and white people unite in their shared economic and political interests, even in the absence of warm personal relationships. Reformers elected on the Fusion ticket made significant social and political progress during this time. They greatly expanded voter participation by ensuring that election judges represented all political parties at the polls. They also required designated colors and party insignias on ballots so that the illiterate had a political voice. Economic reforms included limiting interest rates, a major win for farmers of both races. Reformers also made significant investments in public education, which benefited all poor people across the state. By opening up the political process, Black people were elected to local, state, and national offices. This was especially so in the eastern part of the state where there had always been a higher proportion of Black residents.⁸⁶

These political reforms were met with a fierce white supremacist backlash leading up to the state elections of 1898. Escalating racial rhetoric and violence across the state culminated in a massacre in Wilmington, North Carolina in November 1898. The massacre was the vehicle for a political and economic coup, whereby a mob of white vigilantes destroyed Black-owned businesses and disposed of Fusion-elected officials, both Black and white. Historical accounts are unclear about the exact number murdered, but estimates range from 60 up to 300. Many of the city's Black residents fled for their lives or were run out of town. The same week as the horrific events in Wilmington, a Durham County mob lynched a Black man, Manly McCauley, accused of eloping with a white woman. These events and countless other acts of violence across the state resulted in severe Black voter intimidation and a massive electoral victory for the white supremacy campaign.⁸⁷⁻⁸⁸

By 1900, Democrats (then the party of white supremacy in the South) were in full control the North Carolina Senate, House, and governorship. Intending to keep it that way, Charles Aycock, the newly elected governor, immediately went about ensuring Black voter disenfranchisement by putting forth an amendment to the North Carolina state constitution that drastically restricted Black voter eligibility. The amendment had three main parts. The first was a literacy requirement that voters must be able to read and write a section of the state constitution in the English language in order to be eligible to vote. The second was the introduction of a fee known as a **poll tax** that people were required to pay before casting a ballot. The third was a legal loophole known as the **grandfather clause**, that was included in order not to disenfranchise illiterate white people. The grandfather clause created an exception to the literacy requirement if a person or their direct ancestor could vote on January 1, 1867, a date that preceded federal laws against racial discrimination in voting.

To drum up local support for the public referendum on the amendment changes, a white supremacy parade took place Durham, with a procession including a *“white supremacy banner, followed by a band and a white float with sixteen young ladies all attired in white carrying small white flags. Streamers on each side of the float proclaimed, ‘Protect us with your vote.’*” The state referendum passed overwhelmingly.⁸⁹⁻⁹¹

The result of these disenfranchisement policies, combined with ongoing violence, intimidation, and whites-only Democratic primaries, was systemic political exclusion of Black people across the state. As striking evidence, the number of Black registered voters in North Carolina plummeted from 126,000 in 1896 to 6,100 in 1902. Around the same time, in 1896, the Supreme Court heard the landmark **Plessy v. Ferguson** case, and decided that **separate but equal** was legally permissible. These events ushered in a new era of racial apartheid known as **Jim Crow**.⁹²



Figure 10. Durham County Democratic ribbon and pamphlet

A Durham County Democratic ribbon and pamphlet celebrating the white supremacist victory in 1898. In the center of the ribbon is a portrait of Julian Carr, a Durham textile and tobacco entrepreneur and leader of the local Democratic Party and white supremacy movement.

Source: Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

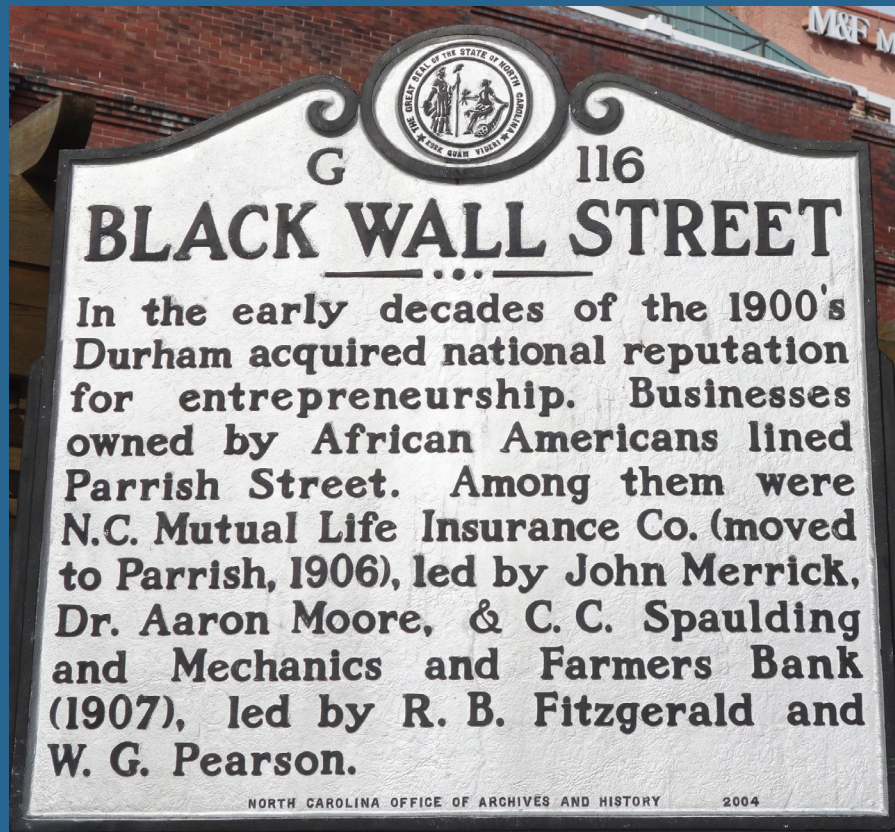


Figure 11. Plaque commemorating Black Wall Street in Durham.

Source: IStockphoto.com

Figure 12. Farmers Cafe in downtown Durham, 1939, with Jim Crow signage in the top left corner indicating the white entrance.

Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USF33-030700



Urbanization & Upbuilding Black Durham (1900-1950)

While Durham County was still largely farmland, the first decades of the 1900s saw incredible urban growth as the city's population swelled from less than 7,000 in 1900 to more than 60,000 in 1940. The rapidly expanding city came of age during the **Jim Crow era** (1896-1964), a time defined by a racial caste system shaped by both laws and social customs. The term Jim Crow comes from a popularized caricature of Black people performed by white actors in blackface in the 1800s. In North Carolina, a series of laws were adopted that dictated racial segregation of nearly all sites of life, including schools, transportation, and public facilities. Interracial marriage was outlawed. Figure 12 shows an image of Farmers Cafe in Durham, with the words White on the window designating segregation. In addition to legal segregation, complex rituals developed that guided all social interactions between white and Black people, from forms of address to movements on sidewalks. As a body of law, Jim Crow institutionalized economic, educational, and social disadvantages for Black People and Native Peoples living in the South. As a body of ritual, Jim Crow reinforced a physical and psychological racial hierarchy that placed whites at the top and all other racial groups in positions of deference and subordination.⁹³⁻⁹⁵

The city's growth was driven overwhelmingly by rural migration, primarily from nearby counties in North Carolina. Pushed primarily by economic hardship, rural migrants came seeking new opportunities in the city. Each year, thousands of farmers traded in their ties to the land for a steady paycheck working in Durham's rapidly growing tobacco and textile industries. The textile industry was only open to white workers, but the tobacco industry provided jobs for both Black and white rural migrants - although Black workers were relegated to the lowest paying, most backbreaking jobs within the factories. In the city, people who had grown up farming and living off the land had to adjust to a new way of life characterized by wage labor, a cash economy, and dense urban living.⁹⁷

For Durham's rural migrants, the shift to urban living fundamentally changed how people ate and their relationship to food. Before home refrigeration was widespread in the 1940s, most households bought

Our seedy run-down school told us that if we had any place at all in the scheme of things it was a separate place, marked off, proscribed and unwanted by the white people. We were bottled up and labeled and set aside - sent to the Jim Crow car, the back of the bus, the side door of the theater, the side window of a restaurant. We came to know that whatever we had was always inferior. We came to understand that no matter how neat and clean, how law abiding, submissive, and polite, how studious in school, how churchgoing and moral, how scrupulous in paying our bills and takes we were, it made no essential difference in our place.

Pauli Murray, reflecting on growing up as a Black child in Jim Crow Durham⁹⁶

Figure 13. Black female students baking cakes in a home economics class in Durham City Schools, circa 1930s



Source: North Carolina Collection, Durham County Libraries

groceries or had perishable groceries such as meat and milk delivered daily. There were extensive neighborhood-based grocers, and much of the food such as milk, eggs, meat, and produce was still sourced locally and regionally. Since many households were first generation urbanites, they maintained knowledge learned on the farm about food production and keeping animals.⁹⁸

Womens' unpaid labor in the home was the backbone of *urban foodways* - a term that refers to cultural, social, and economic practices relating to the production and consumption of food. Such labor was often in addition to paid work outside of the home. Black women were more likely to experience this double burden, as many worked in the tobacco factories or as domestic laborers for low wages. White families, except for the very poor, and the small Black middle class hired domestic workers to do much of the food shopping, preparation, and cooking. Both Black (Figure 13) and white city and county schools taught girls practical education about gardening, cooking,

and food preservation in home economics classes.⁹⁹⁻¹⁰⁰

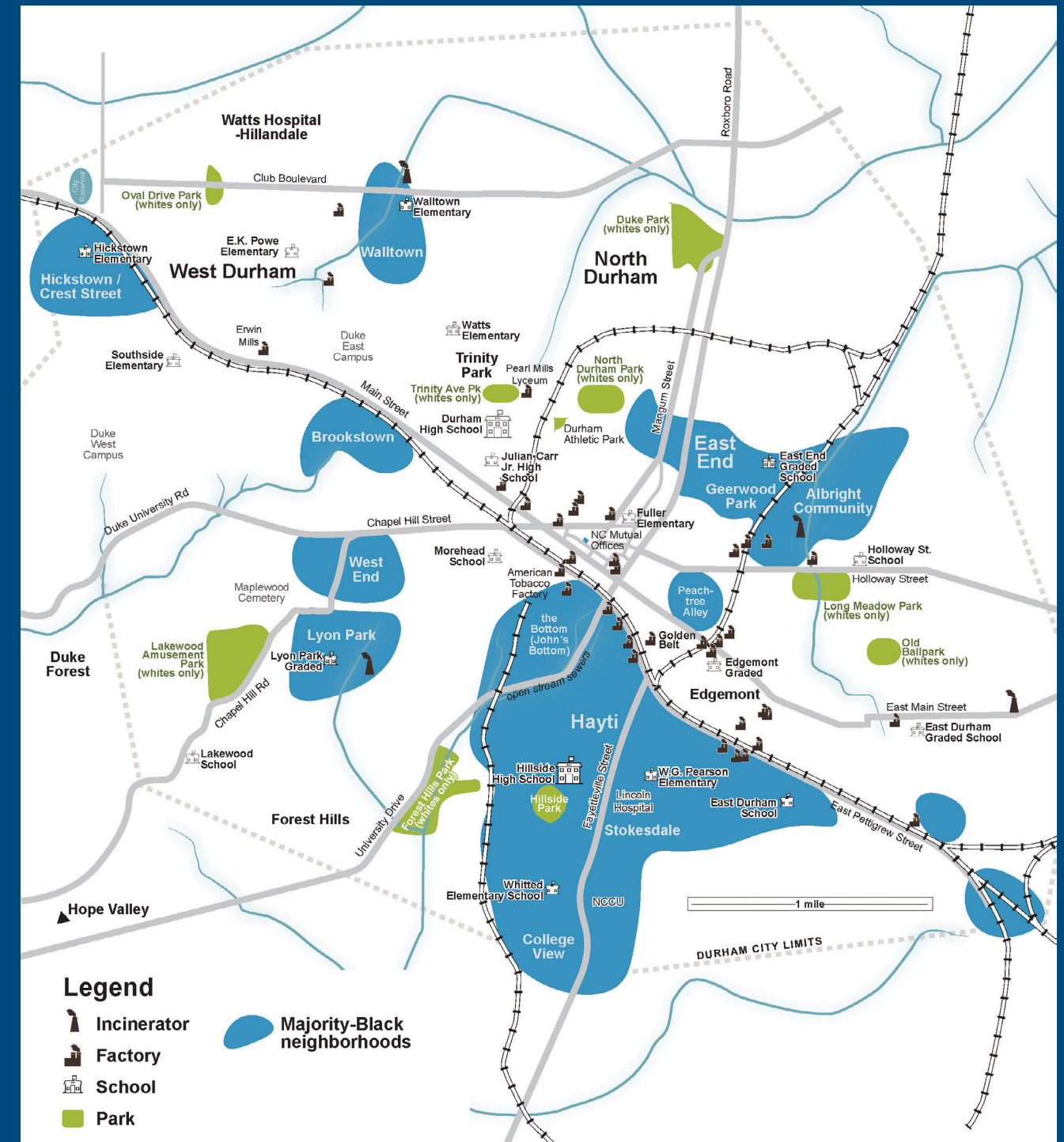
In the city of Durham, neighborhoods segregated by both race and class sprouted up around the factories that dotted the urban landscape. Figure 14 shows a map of Durham's social geography in 1930. Durham's white working class neighborhoods of East Durham, Edgemont, and West Durham were located near textile mills on the east and west flanks of the city. There were six Black neighborhoods. Hayti, the largest neighborhood, was located just south of downtown and actually contained a number of smaller geographic communities. The other Black neighborhoods were the West End/Lyon Park, Brookstown, Hickstown, Walltown, and the East End. Before the introduction of water, sewer, and drainage systems, the prime urban real estate was located in the high and dry areas. The less desirable land, where most of the Black neighborhoods were located, fell in the bottoms, which were low-laying areas easily prone to flooding. This housing pattern is known as **segregation by elevation**. Initially, prestigious white homes were located in the heart of the city, in neighborhoods such as Trinity Park and Morehead Hill. With the advent of the streetcar system and more widespread automobile ownership, new high-status white neighborhoods formed the first ring of suburbs, including Forest Hills, Hope Valley, Watts Hospital Hillandale, and Duke Forest.¹⁰¹

In the early 1900s, textile mill owners in East Durham, Edgemont, and West Durham built subsidized homes in close proximity to the factories for white workers called mill villages. Each mill village contained its own churches, schools, recreation centers, and stores. Though wages were low, mill village families supported each other through hard times, and treated their neighbors like family. Many textile workers had grown up on farms and continued to maintain gardens and keep livestock such as chickens, pigs, or even cows in their yards. It was common to preserve extra garden produce and meats by canning for the winter. Canning became popular in the first few decades of the 1900s, and increased greatly during both of the World Wars when food shortages resulted in the rationing of canned food. Government programs urged people to rely on produce grown in their own gardens - dubbed Victory gardens - and to share resources with neighbors. In the West Durham mill village around Erwin Mill there was a company store where nearly all the workers would put in their grocery orders. The company store eventually became replaced by neighborhood grocers in the 1930s.¹⁰²⁻

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For many white textile workers, especially during the Great Depression in the 1930s, it was extremely hard to make ends meet. The textile industry was hit hard by the recession and its workers experienced economic hardship and emotional stress. Most families survived on basic staples of fatback (a cheap cut of meat), flour,

Figure 14. Map of the social geography of Durham in 1930



Source: Tim Stallman, Research Action Design

Yea, it [the company store] was a complete store. They'd have very few wives work in the mills (around the 1930s). They would have a man who went out in the morning and they called it 'taking orders.' He'd go to all the houses and the woman of the house would tell him what she wanted and he'd bring it back in time to be cooked and served up for what they called dinner, which is of course lunch. And he'd go do the same thing in the afternoon and have it back in time for a good supper.

Zeb Stone, white business owner from West Durham¹⁰⁷

The young Jacksons and Mrs. Jackson occupy the two bedrooms and Clarence sleeps on a cot in the room which is used as a combination of kitchen and dining room. This 3-purpose room has in it no space for storing the canned fruits and vegetables which the elder Mrs. Jackson prepared during the summer. Consequently, the jars have been arranged in neat rows across the corner near the fireplace in the living room and just opposite the upright piano. There are 200 jars of beans, tomatoes, corn, peaches, pickles, and preserves.

All the vegetables were gathered from the Jackson garden just back of the house...

The Jackson Family, white textile workers in West Durham, 1938¹⁰⁸

beans, and homegrown produce. But in periods of unemployment or underemployment, hunger was never far off. For acute hard times, food relief programs run by the **Federal Emergency Relief Administration** (created in 1933) followed by the **Works Progress Administration** (created in 1935) distributed surplus food through a community relief store. While these supplies staved off hunger, both Black and white recipients complained that these foods did not always match with local food customs and practices. The Durham community also came together to support those in need. When the Durham Hosiery Mill closed in 1935 and 450 people were put out of work, churches stepped in and raised nearly \$100,000 (in 2020 dollars) for food and clothing for impacted families.¹⁰⁹⁻¹¹⁰

Looking to improve their lives through organizing and collective action, white union membership swelled and there were a series of textile strikes in the 1930s and 1940s. As one labor union leader described Erwin Mills (Figures 15 and 16.) in West Durham, *"His mill villages are better than most other companies...but he preaches baths, swimming pools and that kind of thing, and then won't pay a wage that is anything near even a living wage."* Neighborhood grocers often had deep relationships with the workers and would distribute food on credit to workers during strikes.¹¹²⁻¹¹³

Figure 15. Erwin mill village homes shown with extensive garden plots behind the houses, circa 1920



Source: Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce papers, oversize, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University

Figure 16. Image of Erwin Mill Store, circa 1930s



The Erwin Mill store closed sometime in the 1930s. However, local mill owners led some of the first national food distribution efforts developed during the New Deal. This picture shows a commodity distribution center near the white mill village in 1946.

I go around to the place that the WPA distributes commodities, and this last time they give me four packs of powdered skim milk, five pounds of country butter, three pounds of navy beans, 24 pounds of flour. That was graham flour and it makes awful bread. I've tried every way I could think of to cook it, and I ain't been able to do anything with it yet. That stuff just ain't fitten for a dog to eat, but I have to use everything I can get...One of the boys gets up early every morning and goes out and picks berries for breakfast. They, with butter, do make that flour eat a lot better. He wants to pick some for preserves, but we can hardly get sugar for our needs right now. But there is something about us that keeps us hoping that in some way the future will take care of itself.

unemployed white textile worker in East Durham¹¹¹

In the first half of the twentieth century, Black people streamed into the city from rural areas searching “for work and each other” as historian Leslie Brown described. Together, Black Durhamites engaged in a collective process of **Upbuilding**, a term coined by the eminent sociologist and historian W.E.B. Du Bois to describe the social and economic development of Black communities after slavery. Six Black neighborhoods formed in the city, and along with them came Black churches, schools, and businesses. Each of these neighborhoods sustained close relationships, bolstered by shared workplaces and places of worship. The largest among them was the Hayti, named after the first independent Black republic in the western hemisphere. Pettigrew and Fayetteville Streets in Hayti became the epicenter of Black businesses in town.¹¹⁴

During this time of Upbuilding, patronizing Black businesses amounted to investing in the whole community, and community leaders preached how each dollar spent would flow in a wheel of progress throughout Black Durham. In this vein of racial solidarity, a wave of Black-owned businesses rose up, most notably the city's flagship Black institution, the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. As a result, from the early 1900s through the 1950s nearly everything needed in life could be purchased from a Black business in Hayti, an area that functioned in many ways as a city within a city.¹¹⁵

Recognizing that access to capital on reasonable terms was essential for the growth of businesses and new housing development, Black business leaders founded Mechanics & Farmers Bank in 1909. Figure 17 is a photograph of the inside of the Mechanics & Farmers Bank in the 1930s. The bank soon became an important source of financing for Black entrepreneurs, homeowners, and farmers. It was also patronized by white people who thought it the best way to keep their financial affairs confidential. One of only a few Black-owned banks in the country to survive the Great Depression, it is credited with saving more than 500 Black-owned farms and residences from foreclosure. The bank's policy stated its intent to provide “no large loans . . . to a few profiteers, but rather conservative sums to needy farmers and laborers.”¹¹⁷⁻¹¹⁸

Figure 17. Interior of Mechanics & Farmers Bank 1930s



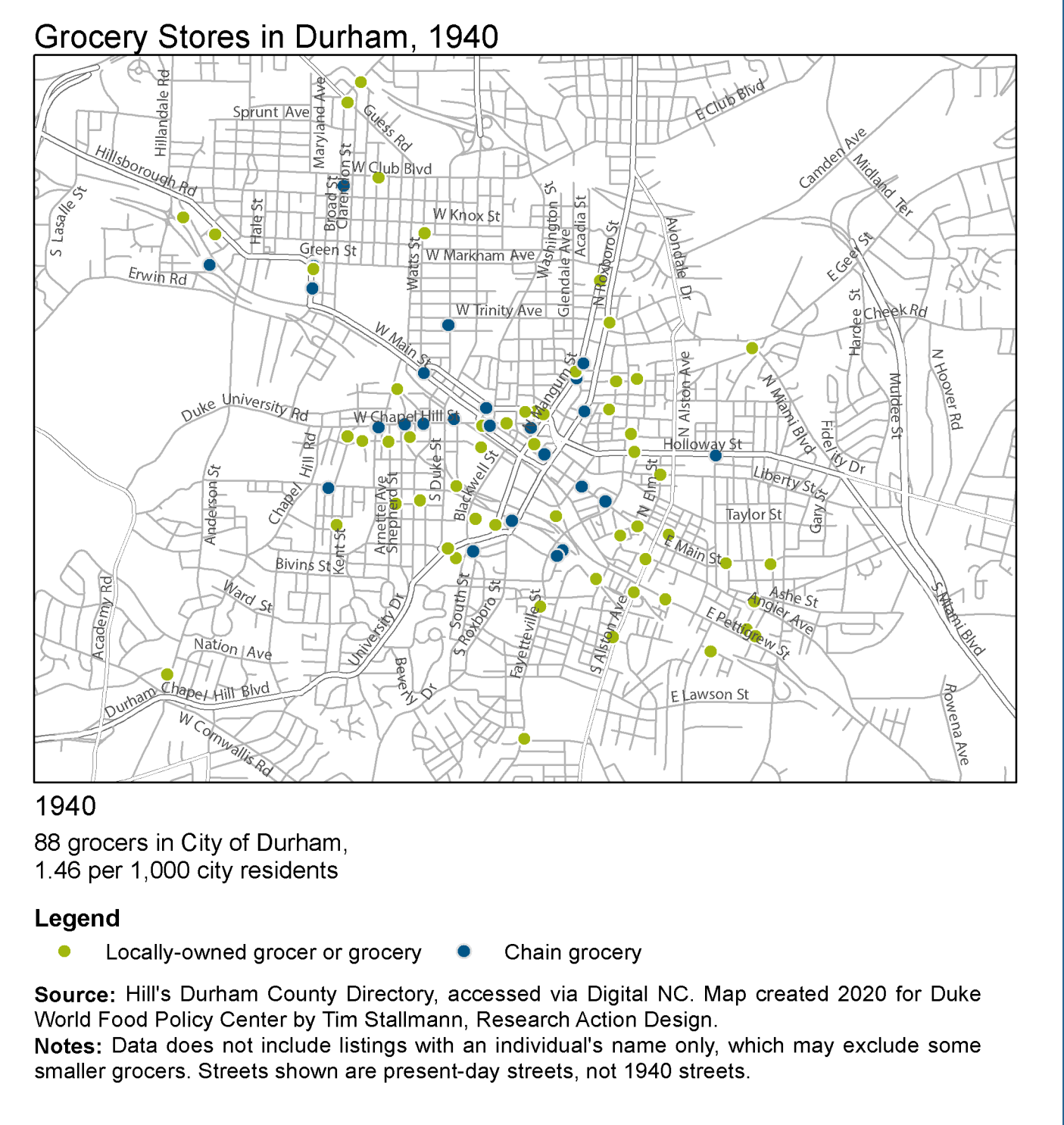
Notice the presence and distinctive clothing of Black farmers, laborers, domestic workers, and the middle-class professionals.

Source: North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company Archives, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, and University Archives, Records and History Center, North Carolina Central University

Everybody used Mechanics & Farmers. Even in elementary school, they taught us to bank at Mechanics & Farmers. I don't know what happened to all those accounts, but everyone who went to my school had an account at Mechanics & Farmers.

David Harris, on growing up in a Black farm family in Northern Durham County¹¹⁹

Figure 18. Map showing the distribution and ownership status, either locally-owned or chains, of grocery stores in the city in 1940



Neighborhood grocers owned by Black people (and by Jewish and white proprietors in some limited cases) such as Katz Grocery, Superior Market, the Progressive Stores, Smith's Grocery, and JL Page and Sons served Black neighborhoods. Figure 18 shows the distribution and ownership status of grocery stores in Durham in 1940. Figure 19 shows Black women in a grocery store in 1951. In the early days, neighborhood grocers would do deliveries and some would take their wares directly to the people in what were essentially mobile grocery stands. As Benjamin Page, whose family owned JL Page and Sons recounts: *“My father would go out on the streets, as what we called “street peddlers,” and take vegetables and things and sell them off his wagon... and my mother would stay and take care of the store.”* Farmers of all races from the county would come into the urban areas and select street corners to sell fresh produce, creating pop-up farm stands throughout the city. One account recalls a meat man who would drive in from the county and sell live chickens and cuts of pork and chitterlings throughout Hayti. Even though yards were often small, many Black people maintained gardens and kept chickens, until the local government banned livestock in the city limits in the 1940s. A 1930 survey indicated that nearly 75% of Black middle class homes and approximately 50% of working class homes had gardens.¹²⁰⁻¹²⁴

Throughout the first half of the 1900s, Black people consistently comprised roughly a third of Durham's population, and nearly a quarter of Durham restaurants were designated as colored in the City Directory of 1945. These included 21 restaurants operated by and for Black people in Hayti, and five others in Walltown, the East End, and the West End/Lyon Park. Black-owned restaurants ran the gamut from soul food to seafood, from diners to banquet halls, and provided community gathering spaces both for everyday life and for special occasions.¹²⁵

The Hayti area—which contained Lincoln Hospital, the North Carolina College for Negroes (now North Carolina Central University), and many other Black civic institutions—became an essential stop for Black activists, entertainers, and academics traveling the country. These visitors connected Black Durham to broader cultural and political movements, often sharing news and stories over food. Azona Allen, proprietor of Hayti restaurant the Green Candle, recalled how *“singers like Ike and Tina Turner would come spend weeks at the Biltmore Hotel and I used to feed them.”*¹²⁶

Although Durham was known across the country for being a center of the Black middle class, the vast majority of Durham's Black residents were working class who labored for low wages. To justify low wages, white employers employed racist arguments that Black workers were accustomed to living on less, were inefficient, and that equal pay would result in racial tensions that would disrupt the workplace. In the hot and dusty tobacco factories, both women and men worked 9-hour shifts, with a half-hour lunch break. Workers would leave early in the morning after a simple breakfast - typically along the lines of biscuits, molasses, and coffee. In the early years, there were no cafeteria facilities provided for Black workers, and so people *“ate everywhere, in cars, on the street, anywhere you could get a seat.”* Eventually, through pressure from the local Black labor union, there was a cafeteria on site at American Tobacco and Liggett Myers where many Black workers ate together - albeit, separate from white workers. For these hard-working people, the long-held tradition of Sunday meals and outings after church allowed time for rest, connection, and communion.¹²⁷

“We didn't have to go across the tracks to get anything done. We had our own savings and loans bank, our own insurance company, our own furniture store, our own tailors, barbershops, grocery stores –the whole nine yards.

Henry M. “Mickey” Michaux, longtime Durham state representative on growing up in Hayti¹¹⁶

Figure 19. Black shoppers at Dillard's Grocery in Hayti, 1951



Source: Carolina Times, North Carolina Collection, Durham County Libraries

From 1900-1930, Black women outnumbered men by as much as 15% in the City of Durham, as women left their families in rural areas, either seasonally or permanently, to find ways to increase family incomes. As W.E.B. Du Bois observed at the time, *"the Negroes are put in a peculiarly difficult position, because the wage of the male breadwinner is below the standard, while the openings for colored women in certain lines of domestic work, and now in industries, are many. Thus while toil holds the father and the brother in the country and town at low wages, the sisters and mothers are called to the city."* Some of the jobs available to Black women were seasonal, particularly in the tobacco green season where Black women were in high demand in the tobacco factory's stemmeries (work considered too difficult and grimy for white women). In addition to tobacco factory work, many women became domestic workers, who cooked, cleaned, laundered, and provided childcare for white families. Their meager wages were sometimes supplemented by food and hand-me-down clothes, which helped make ends meet. Nonetheless, families became incredibly resourceful on how to stretch a meal over the course of several days when resources ran thin.¹³⁵⁻¹³⁷

For Durham's Black working class, who occupied the bottom rung of the economic ladder, poverty and food insecurity increased acutely during the Great Depression. This was apparent in the rise of pellagra, a disease stemming from nutrient deficiency and poor quality food. While the disease impacted poor people across race, Black Durhamites were more than six times more likely to experience pellagra than whites in 1930. After tuberculosis, it was the leading cause of death in the city. Public health nurses would try and counsel urban migrants on the value of green vegetables and fresh milk, but would often hear that it was economics, not lack of knowledge that was the source of poor eating habits. As one Black patient remarked, *"we would like to do everything you say but we just haven't got the money."*¹³⁹⁻¹⁴⁰

On Saturday we'd be getting ready for going to church, cooking and figuring what we were going to wear. We'd shine up those shoes and get everything in place and be ready to dress up and go to church, because we knew we were going to have a good time that Sunday. We would get out and go to places, maybe an ice cream place, a drugstore. We would go and get us an ice cream soda and get with the group on Sunday, the girls and the boys, and we would have a good time. Then we had another place called the Donut Shop on Pettigrew Street, and we'd get a chance to go in there at a wedding or something, or maybe some Sunday afternoon we'd go down and sit at the grill.

Margaret Turner, Black tobacco worker¹³³

Dinner on the church grounds was a very special occasion. Every family brought a basket, with enough to share with others. During the latter part of the service, the ladies would quietly "tip" out of the auditorium to go to their cars, where they had left the baskets. The men had constructed makeshift tables under the trees, which were covered with sparkling white table cloths. Then the great baskets were opened: huge stacks of fried chicken, dark and crispy brown, nestling next to hills of potato salad, yellow and with green bits of pickles; beef roast already sliced and in its own gravy; giant pink ham slices with a brown-sugar crust; bowls of string beans with a ham slice in them; English peas and freshly sliced country tomatoes; pound cake; sweet-potato pie; blackberry pie; corn bread, biscuits, and light bread. When the service was over and dinner was served, men and women took plates and moved from dish to dish, taking a piece of chicken from this sister and another specialty from the next. The women encouraged them by saying, 'Try a piece of mine,' And another would say, 'Have a piece of this.' By the time they had moved down the length of the table, their plates were piled three or four layers deep- and still there was something left that they had not had a chance to try. They piled their plates and stood around on the grounds eating and exchanging news of the crops, the weather, the war, President Roosevelt, and what the prospects were for the coming year. I marvel that people who would now be considered below the poverty level on any statistical chart still had enough sense of self of human worth to enjoy sharing what they had with others. The meal was the tie that binds.

Mary Mebane, on the importance of Sunday meals at the church she attended in Wildwood, a Black farming community in North Durham County¹³⁴

... Trying to live and pay my bills with that \$57 a month, we would eat like rice and maybe I'd take fried fatback and take the flour and make gravy, and we'd have rice and gravy and fatback like today and tomorrow. I'd probably cook a cabbage and then Wednesday I would have the rice, cabbage, whatever was left over we ate, that's the way I fed the children. And I used cloth bags, flour bags and rice bags, to make their clothes, to make the slips and the dresses and things out of. At that time, the bags had little designs on them and I thought they were right pretty, and so I made them on my hand, and I thought the children were right cute.

Ann Atwater, on life as a single mom and Black domestic worker in the 1950s and 60s¹³⁸

Food relief came from federal programs like the Works Progress Administration and charities such as the Red Cross, but it was never enough to address the sustained needs of people facing chronic unemployment caused by the Great Depression. As aid efforts from federal, state, and local government shifted from direct aid towards employment and training programs, race and gender dictated what opportunities were available to Black Durhamites. For example, WPA funds financed a job training program focused on domestic services for Black women on relief rolls. Employment discrimination during the Great Depression increased resolve in the Black community to fight for better economic opportunities. In 1936, Louis Alston, editor of Durham's Black newspaper *The Carolina Times*, helped organize a boycott of grocers that served Black people, but would not hire them. Picketers carried signs that read "Don't Buy Where We Can't Work". Quickly feeling the economic pinch, both A&P and Kroger grocery stores soon began hiring Black workers.¹⁴¹⁻¹⁴²

Through good times and bad, **mutual aid** in Black Durham held communities together and helped keep people fed. In systems of mutual aid, communities take on the responsibility for caring for one another, rather than forcing individuals to fend for themselves. Mutual aid is not the same as charity, whereby a centralized organization is the intermediate of aid and giving occurs in one direction. Rather, mutual aid fosters symbiotic relationships where people offer material goods or assistance to one another. In Durham, Black women's church groups and clubs were at the forefront of mutual aid efforts. Groups such as Jack & Jill, Daughters of Dorcas, The Links, and various missionary circles made and collected food, clothes, and fuel as expressions of morality and faith. In oral histories, people would commonly reflect that even though they were poor, they didn't feel poor, because their basic needs were met, and they noted the ways that communities would share and take care.¹⁴³⁻¹⁴⁴

... people would share with each other... Used to be if you found out a family was hungry, didn't have nothing to eat, they'd scrap up a little bit here, a little bit there and they would give it to them. You don't find that now. People used to have what they call in your community, your church, what they call a 'pounding.' It didn't have to be a pound but that's what they called it. You'd take a little bit of flour over here, a couple of cups of flour, somebody else would take a couple of cups and put it in a bag or a few beans or a little piece of fatback meat. They call it salt pork now, they don't call it fatback no more. And they would carry it to the church and would distribute to these families.

Horace Mims, Black American Tobacco worker¹⁴⁵

Looking back, I can see that we had a real sense of security. We had so many people watching out for us, no matter what we did. You were known, your family was known, the families relied on one another. Looking back it was wonderful... No matter if I didn't have a lot of money, I could still bring my kids up and not give up.

Emma Johnson, on growing up in Hayti¹⁴⁶

The Plight of Farmers & The Tools of Dispossession (1900-1950)

At the turn of the 20th century, more than half of the US population were farmers or lived in rural communities. In 1920, farmers comprised 50% of the population in Durham County outside the city core. Nearly half of those were tenant farmers. Of Black farmers, approximately 25% owned their own farms. At this time, farms were diversified enterprises, producing crops and animals together on the same farm in complementary ways. Animals were typically raised with access to the outdoors and fed from the farm where their manure provided valuable natural fertilizer, and most of the farm work was done by human and animal labor.¹⁴⁷

Over the next 50 years, profound changes occurred to the food system as it became increasingly industrialized. Industrial agriculture is characterized by specialization (monocultures, selective breeding, factory-style practices for raising animals); mechanization (work by machines, expansion of irrigation and transportation systems); dramatic increases in the usage of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides; and consolidation (agricultural production shifting to larger farms). This shift allowed for greater production of lower-cost food, on which growing cities like Durham depended. However, productivity gains came at considerable environmental, cultural, and public health costs. In Durham, one-crop farming had long dominated the agricultural landscape. Seventy-five percent of cultivated acreage was planted in the cash crops of tobacco, cotton, and corn. While county farmers grew enough food for their own families, they contributed less and less to the local food supply chain. As a result, Durham residents were increasingly dependent on food sourced from outside of Durham. This was a situation that worried local leaders.¹⁴⁸

During this time of transition to more industrialized farming, small-scale farming (which predominated in Durham) became an increasingly difficult enterprise due to a depressed economy, exhausted soils, antiquated farming tools, and the overreliance of cash crops. Underscoring these factors for small farmers of all races was the ongoing issue of lack of access to fair credit and chronic indebtedness. As described in a pamphlet called *Negro Credit Unions of North Carolina* in 1920: *"Perhaps the greatest drawback to the average poor farmer, struggling for a foothold on the soil and trying to make a home for himself and family in the community, is the lack of capital. If he buys fertilizer on time, borrows money, or contracts to be carried over the cropping season, it is usually at such a ruinous rate of interest that few ever get out from under its baneful influence. The man who owns a small farm, as well as he who rents one, has long been victimized by the credit system."*¹⁴⁹

Responding to the dire need for rural credit on fair terms, white Durham business leader John Sprunt Hill led the effort to get the **enabling legislation for credit unions** passed in North Carolina. Working with the families of the Lowe's Grove Farm School, Hill helped establish the Lowe's Grove Credit Union in 1916 (see Figure 20). This was the first in a wave of credit unions across the state. A credit union is a type of bank that receives deposits from its members, and which in turn provides loans to members at low interest rates. Members often belonged to the same farm organization, school district, or church, and these early credit unions frequently engaged in cooperative buying programs for their members at reduced bulk rates. The credit union was embraced by Black farmers and workers, particularly in the eastern part of the state, and by the 1940s, North Carolina had more Black credit unions than nearly all other states combined. There is no record of a Black credit union in Durham in this time period, perhaps due to the widespread usage of Mechanics & Farmers Bank.¹⁵⁰⁻¹⁵²



Figure 20. Lowe's Grove Credit Union, formed in Durham County, 1916

White patrons line up in front of Lowe's Grove Credit Union, formed in Durham County, 1916.
Source: "Documents of Durham," North Carolina Collection, Durham County Libraries

Beyond the financial uncertainties, farm life was hard work that followed the rhythms of seasonal and agricultural cycles. There were few material luxuries. The farm family functioned as an economic unit wherein each person had jobs to fulfill. Men did the heaviest and most public work of plowing the fields, settling up, and taking the product to the market. Women and children performed lighter tasks such as making seedbeds, weeding, and transplanting. Women also did the household work, including laundry, food preparation, and child care. All family members did their part to feed, milk, and slaughter animals. In Durham, there were special times of year for communal rituals such as berry picking, corn shucking, and peach canning. A connection to the land and the presence of close-knit families and communities provided a sense of grounding and joy for many, but was stifling and monotonous for others. For both personal and economic reasons, the draw of perceived opportunities in the city or 'up North' were strong for many, and a steady stream of migrants left the land. Black Durhamites that left for cities in the northern and western parts of the country were a part of a migration flow that included six million Black people from across the South between 1917 and 1970. This massive domestic population movement is known as the Great Migration. Those who stayed on the land found themselves caught between traditional farming culture and an increasingly modernized urban world.¹⁵³⁻¹⁵⁴

The early development of industrialized agriculture corresponded with the **Progressive Movement**, which spanned the turn of the century through the 1920s. In the agricultural realm, Progressive Movement leaders promoted an ideology of modern progress that prized technology and book learning over the common sense and real world experience on which most farmers relied on. New support services and education programs arose to promote modernization and the agricultural sciences, with the intent to help farm families sustain

Berry-picking was a ritual, a part of the rhythm of summer life. I went to bed, excited...We didn't know whose berries they were; nobody had heard about the idea of private property. Besides, the berries grew wild- free for everybody...The grown people picked up high and the children picked low...The berries were long and cylindrical; and the blacker why were the sweeter they were. Some that had started drying up were almost as sweet as candy. We children ate them on the spot, putting purple-stained fingers into our mouths, creating purple-stained tongues while the grown people wiped sweat and dodged bumblebees.

Mary Mebane, on growing up in a Black farming community in Northern Durham County¹⁵⁶

In the spring and summer after work, my mother would plant in her garden: tomatoes, string beans, okra, and she'd sow a turnip patch. Then every day after work, she'd go over to the garden on the hill to see how it was doing. On Saturday's she'd get her buckets if it was time for us to go berry-picking. And on hot summer evenings, if the peaches man had been around, she'd can them after work because they wouldn't keep until Saturday, the day she did most of her canning. This was her routine- fixed, without change, unvarying. And she accepted it. She more than accepted it, she embraced it; it gave meaning to her life, it was what she had been put here on this earth to do. It was not to be questioned.

Mary Mebane, on growing up in a Black farming community in Northern Durham County¹⁵⁵

themselves in this new era. The federal **Smith-Lever Act of 1914** established a system of cooperative extension services in each state (connected to the land-grant universities) to inform farmers about current developments in agriculture, home economics, public policy, and economic development. In North Carolina, the original land grant university was North Carolina State University, created through the **Morrill Act of 1862**. However, NC State only admitted white students, so in 1891 a second land grant university, North Carolina A&T University, was established for Black students. These universities were never funded at equal levels and the state's extension services flowed primarily out of NC State.¹⁵⁷⁻¹⁵⁹

The state extension program operated through county offices. Durham County Commissioners hired the first white home demonstration agent in 1915, followed by a Black home demonstration agent two years later in 1917. Female agents traveled across the rural parts of Durham developing home demonstration

Figure 21. White Durham County Demonstration Agent doing a canning workshop, 1930

Source: NCSU Libraries' Digital Collections: Rare and Unique Materials, Agricultural Extension and Research services (UA023.007)

clubs for women and teaching skills like food preservation and home economics. Figure 21 shows a Durham County canning demonstration, circa 1930. Male extension agents educated farmers about nutrient and soil management and techniques such as terracing to reduce erosion. The Durham Cooperative Exchange also ran agricultural education programs to promote youth entrepreneurial and leadership development at Durham public schools in the city and county. Segregated schools had separate programs; Future Farmers of America served white students and New Farmers of America served Black students.¹⁶⁰

In Black county schools, extension work was augmented by Durham's Jeanes teachers, named for the northern Quaker philanthropist Anna Jeanes who funded the program. Beginning in 1915, these women served as tireless community organizers in the county, helping to raise money to build schools, improve public health, and foster various educational opportunities. They were officially tasked with implementing industrial education - practical skills that had the stamp of approval from white funders and the school superintendent. In the Jim Crow era, local white school administrators and the northern philanthropists that supported southern Black education held racist assumptions about what type of education Black people needed. They believed that there was a lack of civilization among Black people, and assumed that after leaving school, women

would be doing primarily domestic work and men unskilled or semi-skilled labor. However, Durham Jeanes teacher Carrie Jordan reframed teaching subjects such as cooking, gardening, and canning food as measures of individual and community self-sufficiency *"that could help Black students improve their lives—rather than simply learning to be cooks and maids for white people."*¹⁶¹

Across the country, and especially in the South, the extension programs were rife with racial inequities. Black extension agents received lower salaries than white agents, with far fewer opportunities for promotion and/or advancement. Black agents had inferior offices and fewer staff, demonstration materials, and supplies—despite the fact that they often had higher client caseloads than their white counterparts. These factors ensured that white farmers received greater access to information and higher levels of individual attention regarding the increasingly difficult-to-navigate system of government agricultural supports.¹⁶²

Electricity is here and I'm saving every penny I can. I hope to get a Frigidaire and washing machine. And I will. My husband lets me have what I make at the curb market in Durham. We pay a very little rent for our market space, about 10 cents a yard, I believe. I take in butter, eggs, cottage cheese, cream, and anything I have time to bake. Some of the women have made several hundred dollars off of their cakes during a season. Others bring in flowers; seems like they sell better than vegetables. I forgot to say, we also take in canned vegetables and fruit. I canned over 300 quarts for the family last summer on our old place. But now we've moved up here with all this fruit, I'll have a chance to put up a heap. Mrs. Tom Hearst, a white farmwife from Durham County¹⁶⁵

As Durham's urban population grew exponentially, the city established the first curb market in the state in 1911. Located in the heart of the city, the primary goal was to connect county farmers with urban consumers. Figure 22 shows a picture of the curb market circa 1947. Throughout the next several decades, curb exchange attracted over 1,000 customers month and was the highest grossing market in the state. Women usually worked the stalls, and many used money generated for home improvements and modern appliances. The historical record is sparse on the curb market, but archival photographs indicate that the market was an outlet for both Black and white farmers, although clientele appears overwhelmingly white. During Depression in the 1930s, the curb market helped sustain farm families through sales farm produce, eggs, dairy products, baked goods, canned food, flowers, and specialty items.¹⁶³⁻¹⁶⁴

Figure 22. Durham County Curb Market, opening day, 1947

Source: NCSU Libraries' Digital Collections: Rare and Unique Materials, Agricultural Extension and Research services (UA023.007)

A Poultry Plant to process and market large amounts of poultry was one of the first operations started by the Exchange to give local farmers a source of income other than tobacco. When the Department began operating in 1931, there was very little poultry being grown in this section - not much more than what it took to feed the farmers.

However, farmers were quick to see what mass production and wholesale marketing of poultry could do for them. Today, Central Carolina is known for its production of broilers, which provides the second largest farm income in the State.

“This is Central Carolina Farmers Exchange,”
promotional pamphlet from 1956¹⁷⁰

In the 1930s and 1940s food supply chains began to expand geographically with the rise of refrigeration, mass production, better transportation infrastructure, and improvements to preservation techniques. These trends were reflected locally in a new cooperative endeavor called the Farmers Exchange, which opened in 1930 at a large campus just east of downtown Durham. Plans for the cooperative included arrangements for the local sale of chickens, eggs, hogs, sweet potatoes, and other farm produce as well as the infrastructure to ship surpluses to places where prices might be better, thus increasing the market reach for local producers. The Farmers Exchange campus included a cold storage and freezer locker plant for the processing and storage

The federal government started paying farmers to put their soil in what they called the soil bank. At that time the US was producing more grain than they needed, so they asked farmers- in order to preserve the land and soil- if they would just let the soil rest. And if you did that for 10 years, the people like me growing up who got public jobs, it was difficult to go back to the farm, because you get accustomed to getting paid every month, and to go back to once a year is very difficult, almost impossible. And then the farmers equipment gets obsolete and the facilities get obsolete, and there is no help. So I see that as a turning point. Because you’ve lost all your resources: your equipment, your facilities, and your workforce. And the farmers are 10-12 years older. So a lot of the farmers had to get public jobs so they could get enough credit to draw social security.

David Harris, reflecting on changes in the Black farming community where he grew up in Northern Durham County¹⁷⁵

of meat, a poultry plant and hatchery to process and market large amounts of poultry and eggs, and a maintenance garage to service farm equipment. Although the early years are unclear, the Farmers Exchange appears to have served and employed people across all races by the 1950s.¹⁶⁶⁻¹⁷⁰

Despite expanded agricultural support programs and market outlets, the Great Depression of the 1930s hit farmers hard. In North Carolina, farm incomes—which were already operating on narrow margins—dropped by more than a third. The national economic crisis corresponded with an ecological one, as sustained drought and soil erosion forced an exodus of farm families off the land. Moreover, commodity prices were lower than the cost of living for farm families, which contributed to an overproduction problem. At the urging of farm groups

from across the county, President Franklin Roosevelt passed the **Agriculture Adjustment Act in 1933**. This act became commonly referred to as the **Farm Bill**. The first Farm Bill contained core legislative elements that would stay in place for decades. For example, acreage reduction programs paid farmers to keep part or all of their land out of production in order to reduce excess supply, raise market prices, and rest the land. The Farm Bill also contained provisions for **nonrecourse loans** whereby grain could be used as collateral in the case of loan default. This created a government-owned surplus of grain to be sold abroad or used for early domestic anti-hunger programs.⁹⁰ In Durham, where small farmers were already struggling to survive, one of the unintended consequences of the acreage reduction program was to reinforce the decline in farming. Between the years of 1936-1942, Black farm families in Durham County decreased by a third, dropping from 515 to 344.¹⁷²⁻¹⁷⁴ Figure 23 shows a Black farmer harvesting hay in 1939.

During the Depression, widespread unemployment led to broad labor unrest across the country. Diligent organizing and protests by labor unions pressured President Franklin Roosevelt to initiate a host of reforms that made for the most extensive expansion of the social safety net ever seen in this country. These reforms, passed between 1933 and 1939, are commonly known as the **New Deal**. However, the benefits of these new programs were not shared equitably across race. Pressure from white southern legislators ensured that agricultural and domestic workers were excluded from new social programs. This included social security benefits and unemployment insurance (**Social Security Act, 1935**), new labor protection laws regarding the minimum wage (**Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938**), and the right to organize (**National Labor Relations Act, 1935**). To put this into perspective, domestic and agricultural occupations employed almost 75% of Black workers in the southern states in the 1930s. The exclusion of these workers was intentional and racially motivated. As explained by historian Ira Katznelson: “Southern legislators understood that their region’s agrarian interests and racial arrangements were inextricably entwined.... By excluding these persons from New Deal legislation, it remained possible to maintain racial inequality in southern labor markets by dictating the terms and conditions of African American labor.”¹⁷⁶⁻¹⁷⁷

Figure 23. Black farmer harvesting hay in Rougemont, 1939



Source: NCSU Libraries' Digital Collections: Rare and Unique Materials, Agricultural Extension and Research services (UA023.007)

Figure 24. Image of a Black farmer repaying a rehabilitation loan from the Department of Agriculture, in Smithfield, NC, 1936



A Black farmer accompanied by his young son shown repaying a rehabilitation loan, which was an emergency relief program administered by the Department of Agriculture, in Smithfield, NC, 1936.

Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USF34-005513

The federal agencies set up to support farmers also expanded greatly during the New Deal. However, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and programs such as the **Federal Extension Services** (FES) and the **Farmers Home Administration** (FmHA) each advanced practices and policies of institutional racism. A **1964 study by the Johnson administration** found evidence of racial discrimination in every program of the USDA in regards to funding, employment/promotion, and decision-making. The report confirmed that while small farmers were losing out everywhere, Black farmers were segregated and consistently outside all decision-making processes. In the federal office in Washington D.C., the FmHA employed only one Black professional and a single Black agent worked in the federal Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation (ASCS) office. The ASCS is a USDA agency that granted loans to farmers, purchased farm products from farmers, administered land allotment programs, and shared the cost of conservation and environmental protection measures with farmers. ASCS discrimination permeated down to the local elected county committees. These committees were dominated by white elite farmers who shorted black farmers on allotments (federal money meant to directly augment farmers' incomes). The report also verified what many had known for decades, that the Black extension services were distinctly inferior and provided entirely on a segregated basis, and that despite its funding and oversight role, the USDA completely disowns responsibility for the way in which the Extension Service is operated.¹⁷⁸⁻¹⁷⁹

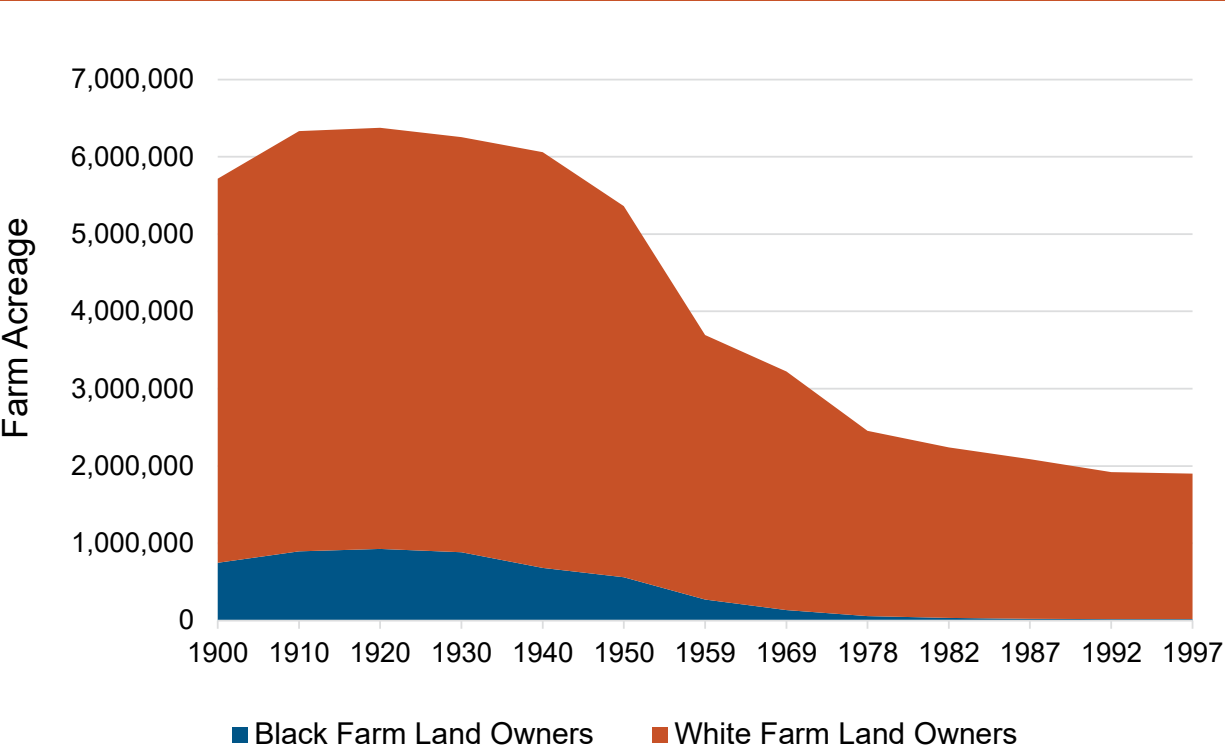
Discriminatory practices by the USDA continued long after the passage of the **Civil Rights Act in 1964**, which legally ended racial discrimination in federal programs. In 1980, the North Carolina Black Farmers organization filed a lawsuit against the FmHA charging racial discrimination in farm aid. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission investigated the complaint and found that Black farmers received fewer loans for smaller amounts, were less likely to get deferred loan payment schedules, and more likely to have to agree to liquidation of their property if they defaulted. Figure 24 shows a Black farmer making a loan payment. A subsequent USDA investigation found that Black farmers typically waited 134 days longer for loan decisions and were nearly 30% less likely to get loans approved than white applicants. Cumulatively, decades of discrimination through these programs prevented Black farmers from accessing the capital needed to sustain, adapt, and grow their farming enterprises. The result was massive transfers of both financial resources and land from Black to white farmers.¹⁸⁰⁻¹⁸²

Private property laws caused further troubles for Black landowners. Historically, due to issues of both trust with institutions and access, Black families were far less likely to have a will than white families. If a property owner dies without a legal will, their property passed to their direct heirs as partial shares. This form of ownership transfer is called **heirs property**. Over several generations, property ownership can become unclear as dozens or even hundreds of heirs may come to own a small share.¹⁸³

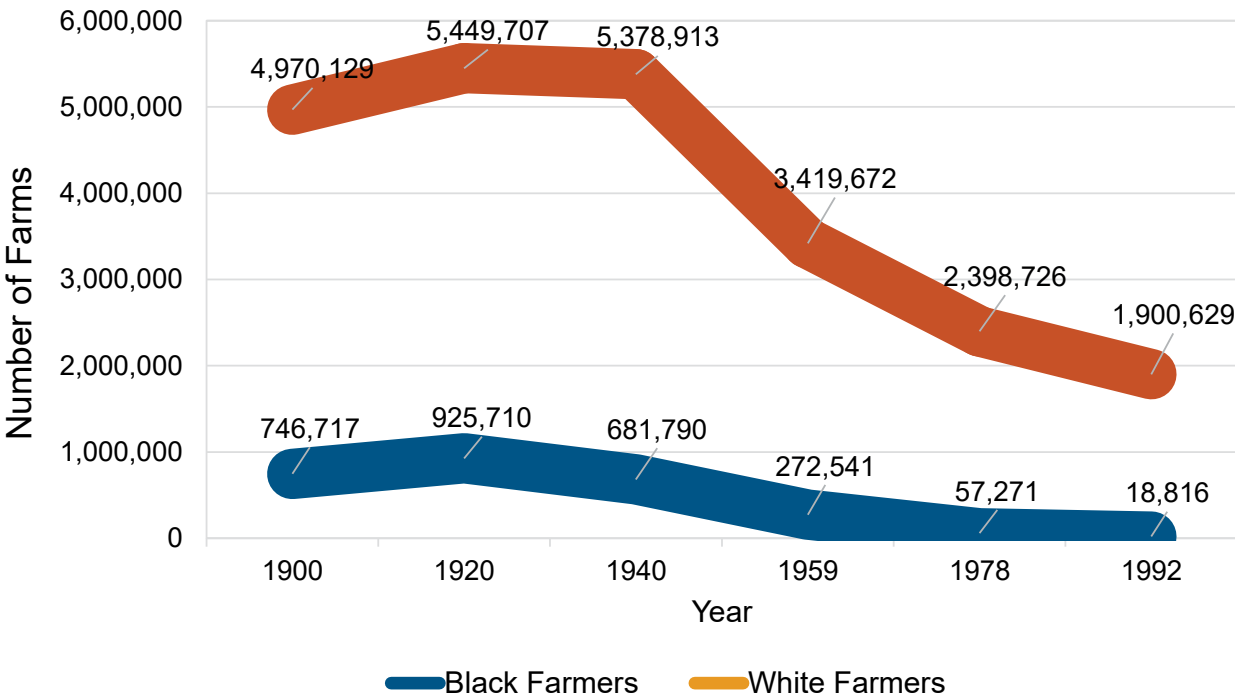
The consequences of heirs property are often devastating to Black families. Individual heirs do not qualify for certain Department of Agriculture loans to purchase livestock or cover the cost of planting. They are generally not eligible for disaster relief through agencies like FEMA. Further, they cannot use their land as collateral with banks, and so are denied private financing and home improvement loans. Heirs are also more vulnerable to land speculators and developers through a legal process called **partition action**. Speculators can buy off the interest of a single heir, and just one heir, no matter how small their share, can force the sale of an entire plot of land through the courts. This allows developers to exploit divisions within families to force a partition action, whereby sales are usually significantly below market rate. Even today in North Carolina, hundreds of partition actions are filed every year. North Carolina is one of the few states across the country that has not adopted legislation to protect heirs from exploitation and dispossession.¹⁸⁴

In addition to institutional channels of discrimination and exclusion, many Black farmers and land owners experienced racial intimidation in rural areas. The underlying motivation for such intimidation was often desire for their land. This forced targeted Black families to weigh the consequences of staying on their land under continued harassment and/or threat of violence versus opting to sell their property and pursuing a different life path.¹⁸⁵

Tables 2 & 3. In the year 2000, Black land ownership was below 1875 levels
Black farmers lost their farms at 2.5 – 5 times the rate of white farmers.



Source: Color of Wealth (2006) and Black Farmers in America (2002)



Source: 1900-1978: US Commission on Civil Rights, 1982: 1982-1992: 1992 Census of Agriculture

Black landownership peaked between 1910 and 1920, but the numbers of Black farms dropped precipitously in the following decades due to a changing farm economy, institutional discrimination, and coercive means. Tables 2 and 3 shows the decline of Black farming, and Black farm ownership. While the number of farms in Durham declined dramatically overall during this period, Black farmers lost their land at more than twice the rate of white farmers.

This is a significant contributor to the country's racial wealth gap, defined as the difference in average wealth holdings among populations by race or ethnicity. In a study on the wealth impacts of Black land loss, Darrick Hamilton and Dania Francis estimate that *"The dispossession of Black agricultural land resulted in the loss of hundreds of billions of dollars of Black wealth. We must emphasize that this estimate is conservative.... Depending on multiplier effects, rates of return, and other factors, it could reach into the trillions."* Beyond the acute financial implications, land loss has resulted in immeasurable impacts on Black rural and agricultural heritage that many seek to reclaim.¹⁸⁷⁻¹⁸⁹

We's got some mean neighbors around here. They hates us 'cause we own and won't sell. They want to buy it for nothing. They don't like for colored people to own land. So they got a white lady, Mrs. Jones, on the next farm to say that I attacked her. I hope to be struck down by Jesus Christ if I said or did anything she could kick on... Mary can tell you I've never been too friendly with any white woman. "That's right," Mary agreed; It's all prejudice against a colored family that's trying to catch up with the whites. They hated my father because he owned land and my mother because she taught school and now they are trying to run us off. But we are going to stay on.

Willie Roberts, Black Durham County mechanic and farmer,
and Mary Roberts, interviewed in the 1930s¹⁸⁶

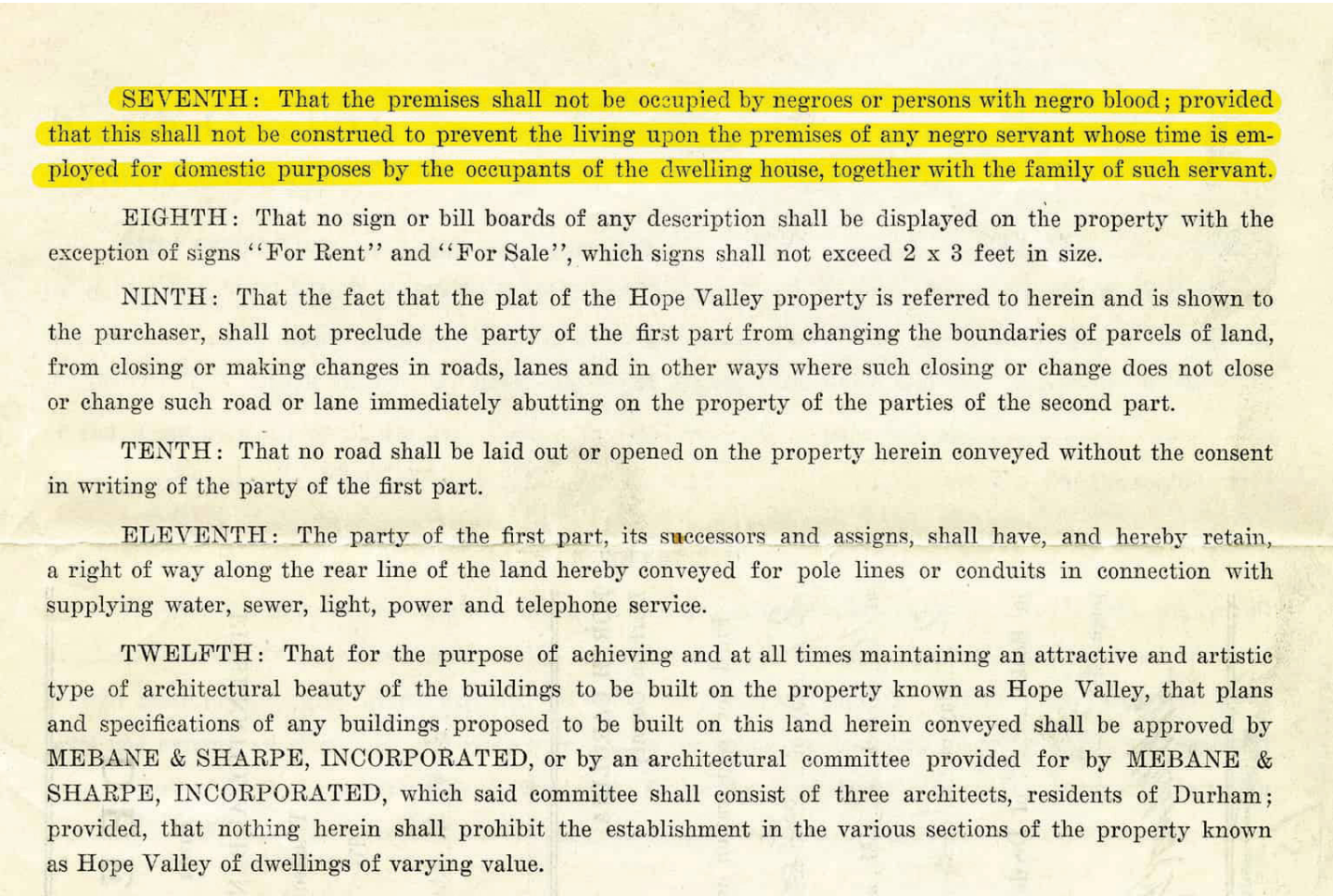
Civil Rights & The Urban Tools of Dispossession (1920 – 1970)

The patterns of dispossession and exclusion in Durham’s rural areas had their urban counterparts. Racial discrimination by institutions at the federal, state, and local level—combined with individual prejudice—ensured that homeownership, access to capital, and neighborhood-level investments in the city would favor white people throughout the 20th century. These policies and practices had deep implications for food security.

From 1900-1964, social relations in Durham were rigidly shaped by **Jim Crow laws** and customs, which dictated segregation of schools, transportation, eateries, and public facilities, and outlawed interracial marriage. Although North Carolina did not legislate housing segregation, other tools of discrimination developed to ensure the neighborhood color line in Durham and in cities across the country was maintained.

As early as the 1920s, new suburban developments in Durham required white buyers to agree to a list of conditions attached to the deed of the land and home. These **deed restrictions** included an explicit prohibition against Black ownership or residence in the homes, except as domestic servants. Called **racial covenants**, this practice was legal until 1948, and existed in Durham neighborhoods such as Forest Hills, Hope Valley, Duke Forest, Watts Hospital Hillandale, Glendale Heights, and more. Figure 25 shows Hope Valley neighborhood deed restrictions in 1926. Some deed restrictions also dictated a minimum size of housing and lots and prohibited multifamily housing, ensuing class segregation as well.¹⁹⁰⁻¹⁹¹

Figure 25. Racial Covenant from the Hope Valley deed restrictions, 1926

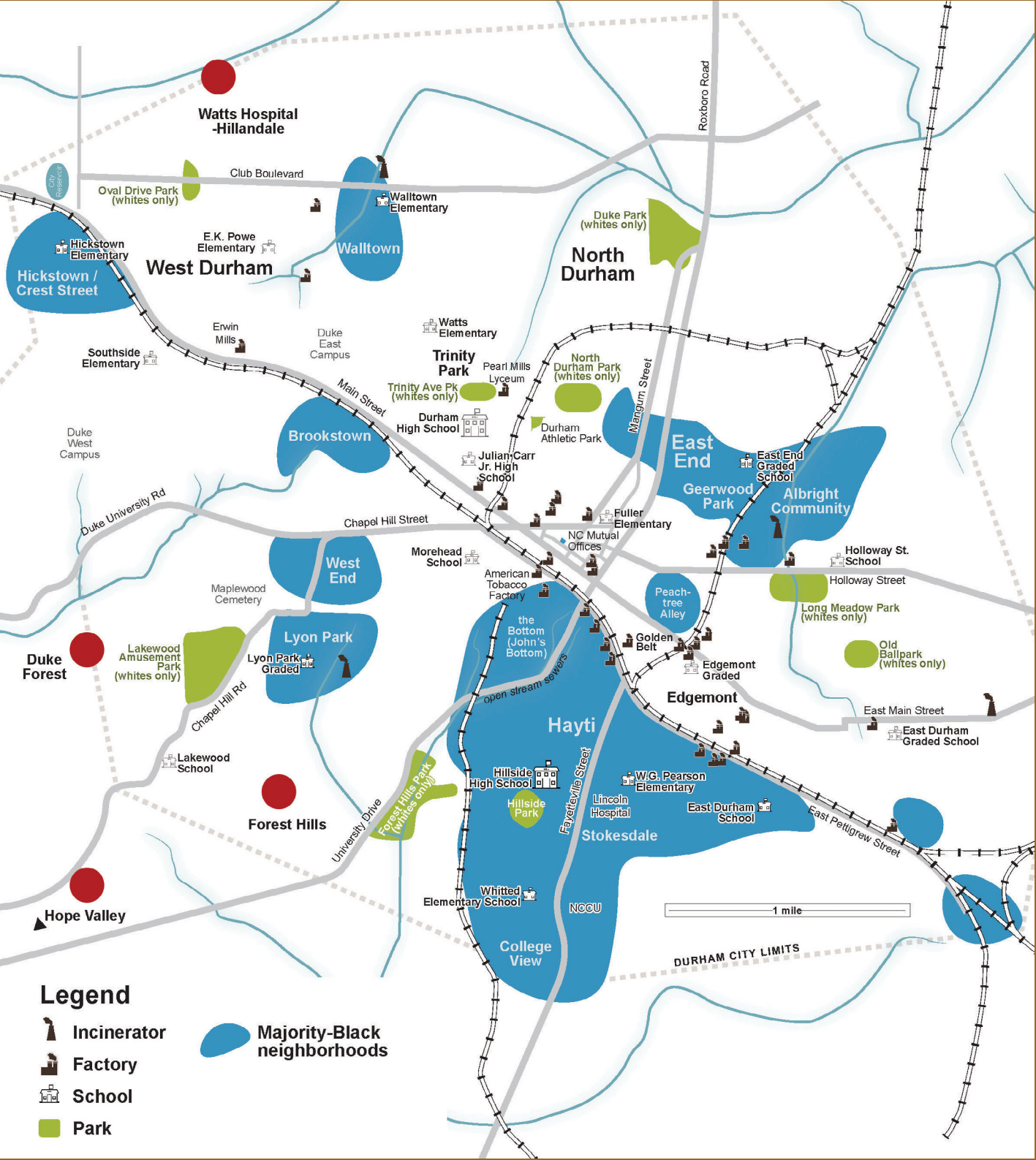


Source: North Carolina Collection, Durham County Libraries.



Image from Istockphoto.com

Figure 26. Map showing distribution of public amenities and nuisances in Durham
Black neighborhoods are closer to incinerators and factories and have fewer parks and schools. The red circles indicate neighborhoods with racial deed restrictions.



Source: Hill's 1937 City Directory, Durham Public Works Department 1937 city map, and Open Durham. Courtesy Tim Stallmann, Research Action Design

Local real estate agents adopted the ideology that racial and economic homogeneity were necessary to maintain neighborhood property values and stability. As a result, they directed clients only to neighborhoods that matched their racial and economic background. This was an industry practice known as **steering**.

The **National Association of Real Estate Boards Code of Ethics** was explicit about the role of real estate agents in maintaining segregation, stating that: “A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing in a neighborhood...members of any race or nationality...whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in the neighborhood.” This industry guidance remained in effect until 1950.¹⁹¹⁻¹⁹³

Although Black people represented a steady third of the population in Durham between 1900-1950, Black Durhamites had no elected political representation in local city government until the late 1950s. This lack of representation contributed to racial discrimination in the distribution of public amenities and nuisances. For example, white neighborhoods had far more amenities like public parks and received public infrastructure such as water, sewer, and paved roads much earlier than Black neighborhoods. Public nuisances like trash incinerators (used to burn the city’s trash before the use of landfills) were all located in Black neighborhoods. Figure 26 is a map of public amenities and nuisances in Durham, circa 1937. This impacted the quality of life, property values, and incentives for investment in Black neighborhoods.¹⁹⁴

In all licensed restaurants, public eating places, and ‘weenie shops’ where persons of the white and colored races are permitted to be served with and eat food, and are allowed to congregate, there shall be provided separate rooms for the separate accommodation of each race. The partition between such rooms shall be constructed of wood, plaster, or brick or like material, and shall reach from the floor to the ceiling. Any person violating this section shall, upon conviction, pay a fine of ten dollars, and each day’s violation thereof shall constitute a separate and distinct offense.
The Code of the City of Durham, NC, 1947, C.13, Sec 42²⁰²

Local patterns of discrimination were institutionalized on a national scale as the federal government created a host of new housing programs in the mid-20th century. It began during the Great Depression in the 1930s, when the federal government assessed that growing homeownership opportunities was one of the best ways to expand the middle class and help stabilize the economy. To prepare the government to enter the housing industry, federal agents from the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) were dispatched to 228 cities across the country, including Durham, to work with local real estate agents on ‘neighborhood securities maps’. These maps used a color-coded system to rate neighborhoods according to levels of risk for lending. Green areas were considered the most stable, then blue, yellow, and the areas deemed unsuitable for lending were colored red - which is the origins of the term **redlining**. Figure 27 shows the redlining map for the City of Durham in the 1930s. In Durham—and in every city the country—the redlined areas were home to people of color and the poorest white neighborhoods. The reasoning deployed in the ratings was explicitly racially discriminatory. Black neighborhoods, mixed-race neighborhoods, and those at threat of ‘invading’ white neighborhoods were all redlined. The area descriptions for each map also noted the local presence—or lack

thereof—of public amenities and the quality of housing.¹⁹⁵⁻¹⁹⁶

The HOLC securities maps served as a model for both private and public lenders from the 1930s onward. On the private side, HOLC maps were widely distributed amongst banks, where they were used to inform lending decisions and as a template for locally-generated discriminatory securities maps. On the public side, the HOLC rating system shaped the lending practices of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), created in the **Housing Act of 1937**, and a major new housing program from Veterans Administration, authorized by the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944.

These two programs completely reshaped the residential housing market in the United States. The **Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944**, commonly known as the GI Bill, made mortgages available to millions of WWII veterans with little-to-no down payment and very low interest terms because the loan was insured by the government. The majority of these homes were located in the new suburban developments occurring across the country, which were also largely financed through the federal government. However,

with discriminatory lending guidelines and restrictive covenants against potential Black buyers, these homeownership pathways largely excluded the one million plus Black World War II veterans. Moreover, the GI Bill did not issue home loans on the reservations of Native Peoples, which excluded many Native veterans from homeownership opportunities. The same patterns of discrimination were true of the FHA. Between 1935 and 1968, less than two percent of federally insured home loans were for Black people. As a result of these policies, people of color were systematically denied the same crucial opportunity to build wealth and stability through homeownership as white people.¹⁹⁷⁻²⁰⁰

All of these layers of housing discrimination occurred during the Jim Crow era, where one of the most entrenched racial taboos was the prohibition on interracial dining. Although most white people in Durham regularly ate and celebrated food prepared by Black cooks and chefs, *"eating with Negroes...means to most white Durhamites 'social equality,' which they contend must not be permitted."* Figures 28 and 29 show segregated dining at Duke University. Figure 29 shows a Black cook on an advertisement at a segregated restaurant.

Although most Jim Crow laws were passed in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Durham adopted an **official city ordinance banning interracial dining in 1947**. The impetus for this ordinance is unknown. However, as Black soldiers returned from fighting abroad for their country in World War II, many felt emboldened to defy Jim Crow

Figure 27. HOLC Securities Map of the City of Durham, 1930s

The redlined areas include all five historically Black neighborhoods, and the poorest historically white neighborhood of Edgemont. Source: Mapping Inequality Redlining in New Deal America, University of Richmond

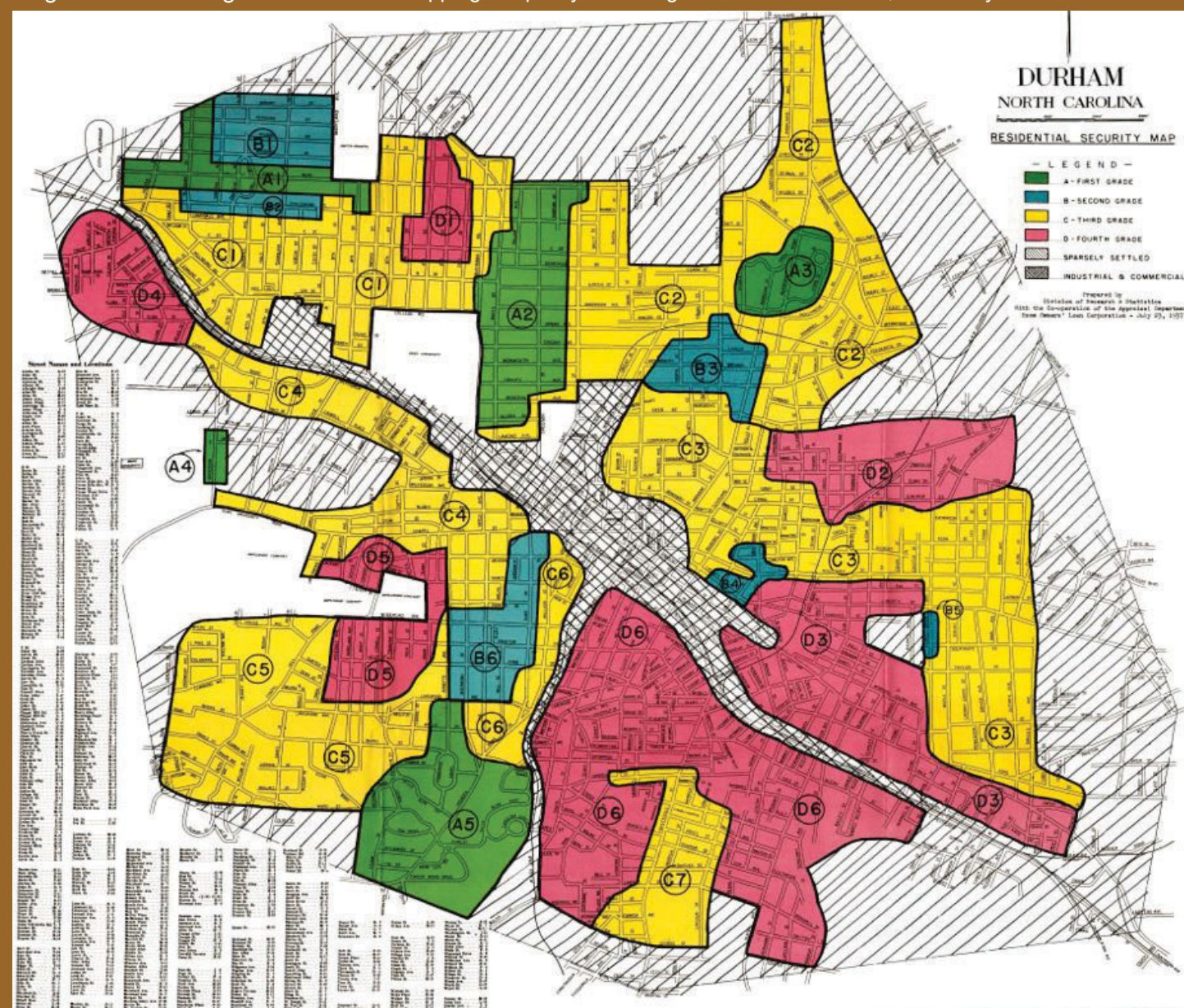


Figure 28. Image of holiday party for Duke dining staff in the 1950s.

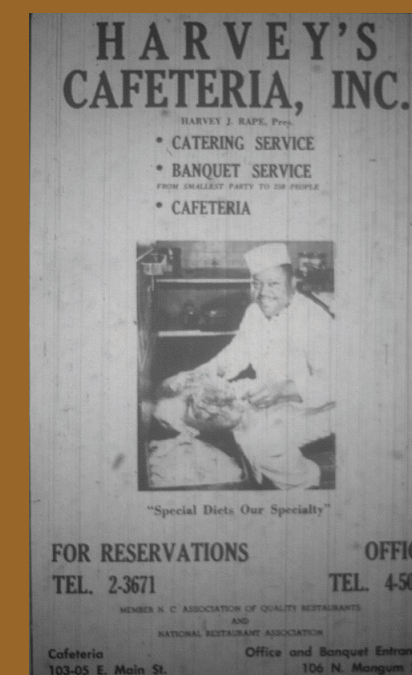
At the holiday party for Duke dining staff in the 1950s, the room was segregated down the middle by race.



Source: Theodore W. "Ted" Minah Records and Papers, Duke University Archives, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University

Figure 29. Newspaper advertisement for Harvey's Cafeteria in downtown

Although the owner, Harvey Rape, vehemently opposed restaurant integration, he employed Black chefs and food prep staff, and used their images to promote the restaurant.



Source: Durham Herald Co. Newspaper, North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

“There is a place here on Pettigrew St called the Do-Nut Shoppe where whites and Negroes eat together a good bit. It's the Jade Room...We have some interracial meetings there, too. The owner of that place is what we call a 'new era Negro,' who doesn't hold to this segregation business. He's a fine fellow too.”

Louis Alston, Black editor of the Carolina Times, 1950²⁰³

“We [the Interracial Committee] meet at the Washington Duke Hotel freely. The other day I was even invited to a luncheon there, but I didn't go. I told them I was busy. Sometimes, I get awfully busy. That's the reasons we don't have more Negroes on boards and things. If they have their meetings in public places without meals, it would be better.”

I'm kinda' particular about who I eat with too. I lose my appetite pretty quickly around some people.

C.C. Spaulding, Black business leader of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, 1950²⁰⁴

“When I was a child, the Durham Dairy was a weekly stop on Sunday evenings as part of our family 'drive.' We would park, go in to the counter and then return to the car with our ice cream. After my Father finished his, we would then drive around Durham while the rest of us finished our ice cream. I had no idea as a young child that the reason we took that ice cream to the car was because the Durham Dairy was segregated and being an African American family, we were not allowed to eat our ice cream on the premises. I was shocked to learn as an adult how my parents had been so artful in sparing this ugly truth from me and my younger siblings.”

Open Durham commenter²⁰⁵

customs at home. This dynamic may have prompted new segregation laws.²⁰⁰⁻²⁰¹

Oral histories and other historical accounts reveal how Black Durhamites resisted, sidestepped, and protected each other against these prohibitions in various ways. Some independent Black businesses—those not reliant on white patronage—ignored interracial dining laws. Unwilling to be treated as second class citizens, Black community leaders shunned invitations to interracial events or meetings that involved food. These leaders noted the impact of interracial eating taboos on Black political and civic engagement. Black parents tried to shield their children as long as possible from the indignities of Jim Crow dining rules.

People who did not fit into the Black/white racial paradigm found themselves in the crosshairs of Jim Crow contradictions. In her memoir, *Hot Dogs on the Road*, Lena Epps Brooker (Lumbee, Saponi, and Cherokee) shares one such story. Her family stopped at a drive-in cafe in Durham's Braggtown neighborhood on a drive to visit her father's family in Person County. With a dismissive racial slur, the waiters initially refused to serve the family. Upon hearing that they were Native American, not Black People, there was some conference and confusion, but the family eventually got their food. After the incident, Lena and her two younger siblings all refused to eat, and she reflected that “*Durham hot dogs were not appealing to us. They were seasoned with meanness and color poison.*”²⁰⁶

In Durham, lunch counters and restaurants became a key site of struggle during the Civil Rights movement. The civil disobedience at Durham's Royal Ice Cream restaurant in 1957 was the first North Carolina sit-in and ignited an era of organizing and direct action. Five years later, a protest to desegregate the Howard Johnsons on Highway 15-501 attracted more than 4,000 people. Figure 30 shows a photograph of the protest. It was the largest protest in Durham's history, with protesters chanting “*We're going to eat those 28 flavors*” in a defiant reframing of a popular Howard Johnson's advertising campaign at the time. The struggle to desegregate



Figure 30. Thousands gather to protest segregation at Howard Johnson's restaurant, 1962

Source: Durham Herald Co. Newspaper, North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

None of it made any sense [Jim Crow], but that had been the way of life, and that's the way the older folk had accepted it. And so, I guess I was one of them who thought, if not us, who? If not now, when? ...So the police officers came, and they asked us to leave. I remember one of them asked me to leave, and I asked for ice cream. And he said, if you were my daughter I would spank you and make you leave. And I said, if I was your daughter I wouldn't be here, sitting here, being asked to leave.

Virginia Williams, member of Royal Ice-Cream ²⁰⁹

Durham eateries intensified in 1963 when protesters engaged in sit-ins at six downtown restaurants on the eve of the municipal elections. More than 100 people were arrested and hundreds more surrounded the jail in solidarity. In the weeks that followed, 700+ Durhamites, both Black and white, ran a full-page ad in the Durham Herald pledging support to restaurants and other businesses that adopted **equal treatment to all without regard to race**. The mounting public pressure resulted in mass desegregation of Durham eateries by the end of the year – in advance of the 1964 federal Civil Rights Act that legally ended segregation.²⁰⁷⁻²⁰⁸

Black-owned businesses helped support the **Civil Rights Movement** by providing food to protesters. As Hayti neighborhood restaurateur Peggy Tapp of the Chicken Hut recalls: *"We had a lot to do with the sit ins. Fed the CORE folks. Had dealings with all of them. Took food to the jailhouse, and out at Duke University during the sit-ins."* Black women in Durham also played a special role in the Civil Rights Movement. Women showed up in greater numbers to demonstrations, raised money, advised youth groups, coordinated activities, and fed protesters in a show of love and solidarity. This included Mrs. Humely and Mother McLaurin, two cafeteria workers at North Carolina College who made sandwiches for jailed student protesters. As described by historian Christina Greene, *"they [Humely and McLaurin] were not simply doing 'women's work' but were literally nurturing the freedom movement."*²¹⁰⁻²¹¹

The struggle was, at that particular time, the type of people we depended on that supported our business throughout the years, the low income, the poverty stricken, the welfare- these people were the ones who really supported us. It was even a worse time when integration set in. We found out that we as Blacks could go to the hotels and restaurants and sit any place- this set us a little bit behind.

Peggy Tapp, Chicken Hut restaurateur²¹⁴

Although civil rights wins brought about new political, economic, and social opportunities for Black people, desegregation was not a boon to Black businesses. **Segregation**, with all its indignities, had fostered a strong sense of racial solidarity and a parallel Black economy. This was reduced as a broader set of options became available to Black consumers. As Andrea Harris from The Institute, a Durham-based nonprofit focused on minority economic development reflected: *"With integration, the marketplace was opened. [Before that], a lot of black businesses operated in what I call a sheltered market environment - because you are meeting the*

needs of people who could not buy these products or services in the larger marketplace. With integration, that marketplace was opened." Moreover, whereas Black consumers started patronizing white businesses after desegregation, white consumers did not seek out Black businesses in the same way. As a result, the bottom line of Durham's Black food businesses were negatively impacted.²¹³

Both nationally and locally, the Civil Rights movement was always clear to link the issue of racial equality with economic opportunity. At the time of his assassination, Martin Luther King was working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference on a Poor People's Campaign, to elevate the intersection of these two issues. Civil Rights advocacy, as well as books about living in poverty such as *The Other America* by Michael Harrington, led President John F. Kennedy and then Lyndon Johnson to declare a **war on poverty**, in the early 1960s. This war entailed a host of new social welfare policies and programs that became known as **The Great Society**. Reforms included the expansion of healthcare through the creation of Medicaid and Medicare (Social Security Act 1965), adoption of the Title I program that provided additional funding to high-poverty school districts (Elementary and Secondary Education Act 1965), and the passage of the **Food Stamp Act of 1964**. The food stamp program was implemented in Durham County in 1966, and a decade later, the program was in every county in the country. Researchers heralded *"no program does more to lengthen and strengthen the lives of our people than the Food Stamp Program."* Until the early 1980s, the food stamp program received broad bipartisan support.²¹⁵

[There was] always a bunch of church women who would be there for us, hugging us and feeding us and making sure everything was just so. Sometimes you knew 'em and sometimes you didn't, but you knew somebody was going to take you in their arms when you walked off that picket line... there's no way you can match that kind of contribution.

Civil Rights activist Joycelyn McKissick²¹²

Also concurrent to the Civil Rights Movement, was a new slate of federal housing policies that would fundamentally reshape the urban landscape in Durham. Key among them was the **Housing Act of 1949**, passed during the presidency of Harry Truman with the goal of providing a suitable home and living environment for every American family. To accomplish this bold goal, the act included three key provisions. **Title I** provided funding for clearance of slums and blighted areas in cities, in what became known as **urban renewal**. However, a clear definition of what constituted a slum was never provided. Title II of the act expanded the authorization of the Federal Housing Administration's mortgage insurance program. Title III was a vast enlargement of public housing funding for 800,000 new units nation-wide.²¹⁶⁻²¹⁷

In the late 1950s, Durham applied for a large sum of federal money for a local urban renewal program. There was to be complete local discretion regarding how and where this money was to be used. The city formed a **Redevelopment Commission in 1958** (see Figure 32) and created an urban renewal plan in consultation with the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's City and Regional Planning Department. In the plan, a large section of the Hayti area, the largest Black neighborhood and home to the majority of Black-owned businesses, was slated for total demolition and redevelopment. Figure 31 is a communication from the Durham Redevelopment Commission to residents and business areas in the urban renewal area. This decision occurred in close conjunction with the building of a new state-funded highway, NC 147. The reasons given to focus on Hayti were the presence of rundown buildings, stagnant property values, and public health concerns. Durham planners, city officials, and newspapers used language such as "blighted eyesore" and "economic

and aesthetic drag” to describe Hayti and predicted that if something was not done its “tangle of pathologies” would spread to other parts of the city like a virus. This language reflected racist assumptions about Black communities and completely ignored the long history of disinvestment and racial discrimination they had endured. By only focusing on the physical conditions of the area, they disregarded the experiences of its residents and the ways in which place-based community was integral to their survival and well-being.²¹⁸⁻²²⁰

During the urban renewal planning stage, the City of Durham was the most powerful decision-maker at the table. In addition to the demolition and clearance of so-called blighted areas, they were also keenly interested in the redevelopment of downtown and clearing the way for the building of Highway 147. White business interests were enthusiastic about building a freeway to relieve congestion downtown and connect to the newly planned Research Triangle Park. They also saw opportunities for private development in the clearance areas and projected an increase in the city’s tax base. To gain support for the project, city officials made three big promises to the Black community: new housing, new commercial development, and major infrastructure improvements in Black neighborhoods. With these commitments made, Black political leaders advocated for the program. Most working-class Black people knew little about urban renewal or how it would impact their lives, but voted in a bloc with the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs. Thus, when urban renewal went to public vote in a bond referendum, over 90% of Black people voted in support. The most vocal opposition to the project came from Durham’s white working class communities, who saw no benefits to their own communities

Figure 31. Newsletter from the Durham Redevelopment Commission sent to residents and business owners in the urban renewal area

January 1970 ... NEWS VIEWS TRENDS ... Vol. 1 Page 2

THE REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION SAYS -----,
"LET'S GET ACQUAINTED ".....

Hello!!! We have waited quite a long time to get acquainted with you and become your trusted friend. It is quite obvious that you and I are partners. You see, we share a common dream, a common hope, and a common faith in the future of your neighborhood and our city. Now we join in a common struggle in an effort to rid Durham of filth, rats, and ugliness ... the products of slums and blight. We welcome you as an ally as we do battle with the substandard conditions of housing in our city and strive to rework our urban surroundings into an object of creative beauty and abundant health.

Source: Jack Preiss Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University

in the proposed plan. In 1962, the referendum passed by a narrow margin.²²¹⁻²²³

Across the country, 2,500 neighborhoods in 993 American cities were dismantled through urban renewal. A million people, disproportionately people of color, were displaced by the program. Locally, the urban renewal program from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s was slow and incredibly disruptive. In the end, the program destroyed much and replaced little. Over 4,000 families and 500 businesses were displaced. Figure 33 shows aerial photographs of the Hayti area before and after urban renewal. This destruction and displacement included a significant part of the area’s food infrastructure, such as grocery stores and restaurants. But the promise of a renewed Hayti and adequate replacements for lost housing and businesses never came. Black leaders and the Hayti community were left stung by a sense of betrayal, and many incurred devastating economic losses. When redevelopment did eventually come, it consisted primarily of public housing projects and strip malls.²²⁴⁻²²⁵

Where did displaced Hayti residents go? Some moved to adjacent poor white neighborhoods like Edgemont and East Durham which experienced rapid racial turnover. Many others ended up in new public housing projects. Durham’s first projects in the 1950s were segregated, with Few Gardens for white people and

Figure 32. Durham Urban Renewal Commission Members, 1960.



All commission members were white men except for John Wheeler, President of Mechanics and Farmers Bank. Source: Durham Herald Co. Newspaper, North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

McDougald Terrace for Black people. By the late 1960s public housing had been racialized and was a program almost exclusively for Black people. In the severe housing crunch at the time, public housing was initially a big improvement in residents’ lives, but the promise of public housing as safe, decent, and affordable housing did not last long. Like most places around the country, Durham’s public housing was cheaply constructed, poorly maintained, and quickly deteriorated from normal use. Today, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has more than \$35 billion in repair backlogs and deferred maintenance for the nation’s public housing stock. Although the federal government funded public housing construction, the local government made all the decisions about building design and project location. Rather than distributing public housing throughout the city, nearly all public housing projects were clustered in existing Black neighborhoods in southeast Durham. This cut off public housing residents’ access to other parts of the city and reinforced patterns of racial residential segregation.²²⁹⁻²³⁰

In reality, the federal government had a two-tiered housing policy for most of the 20th century. On one hand, white people were given unprecedented homeownership opportunities, through long-term, low-interest mortgages backed by the Federal Government, and moved to the suburbs - which were subsidized by the government on nearly every level. On the other, Black people and people of color got public housing that provided no wealth building for its residents. Moreover, Black people were dispossessed of substantial real estate and business holdings through urban renewal and highway projects. The effects of these policy decisions are critical in Durham, and elsewhere, because food insecurity is a result of poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth and power.

Amidst the ravages of urban renewal, a host of new community organizing endeavors took form in Black Durham in the mid to late 1960s. **The Carolina Fund**, an anti-poverty program started by Governor Terry Sanford, brought paid organizers to Durham’s poor neighborhoods. They knocked on doors, listened to the

Figure 33. Aerial photographs of a section of Hayti before (top) and after urban renewal (bottom).
Only one building, St. Joseph's AME church, from this area is still standing. The original streets are shown for reference. Source: Open Durham.



Well, I think we got something like \$32,000 for our business. As I look back on it now— if you're going to drive a freeway right through my building, the only fair thing to do is to be able to replace that building. In other words, I ought to be able to move my equipment and everything into a building. If they do it like that, you will be able to stand the damage. Now, the Highway Department has a replacement clause in their building but the Urban Renewal had what they call "fair market value" and that won't replace it. And that's where the handicap comes...just say you give him \$32,000. That probably would have maybe have bought the land or whatever, but it wouldn't put the building back and everything like that.

Nathaniel White, former Hayti business owner²²⁶

The so-called Urban Renewal program in Durham is not only the biggest farce ever concocted in the mind of mortal man...but is just another scheme to relieve Negroes of property.

Louis Alston, Carolina Times Editor, 1965²²⁷

Once upon a time some people of Durham were shown beautiful pictures and miniature layouts of a renewed city. These people were led to believe that if they voted in favor of the proposals being offered, they would see new and attractive rebuilding where slums and old second-hand buildings were standing. They were led to believe that they would be justly compensated for their properties and aided in many ways with rebuilding. So, they went to the polls in droves and had a lot to do with voting the proposals into law. Those people didn't all live happily ever after. Most were unable to survive the trauma of being betrayed, misled, robbed, unjustly treated. Too strong words, you say? Some died, some lost their minds. Some were foreclosed on. Some just went out of business. Some got sick and are still sick. A few, and only a few, got richer. The story is about to end. Promises haven't been kept yet. Compare, if you will, the appearance of downtown Durham with that of what used to be Hayti, the Black business district. Draw your own conclusions. It must have been a fairy tale.

Carolina Times editorial, 1977²²⁸

Figure 34. List of demands at a Black Democratic rally held in Durham in 1938

"What does the Negro want?"
 "1. He wants a chance to work at fair wages and under decent living conditions (2) He wants equal educational opportunity for all children (3) He wants justice in the courts, and adequate police protection of his property and person (4) He wants the section in which he lives improved (5) He wants the social security laws broadened to include domestic and agricultural workers (7) He wants to be able to maintain his self-respect and (8) He wants above

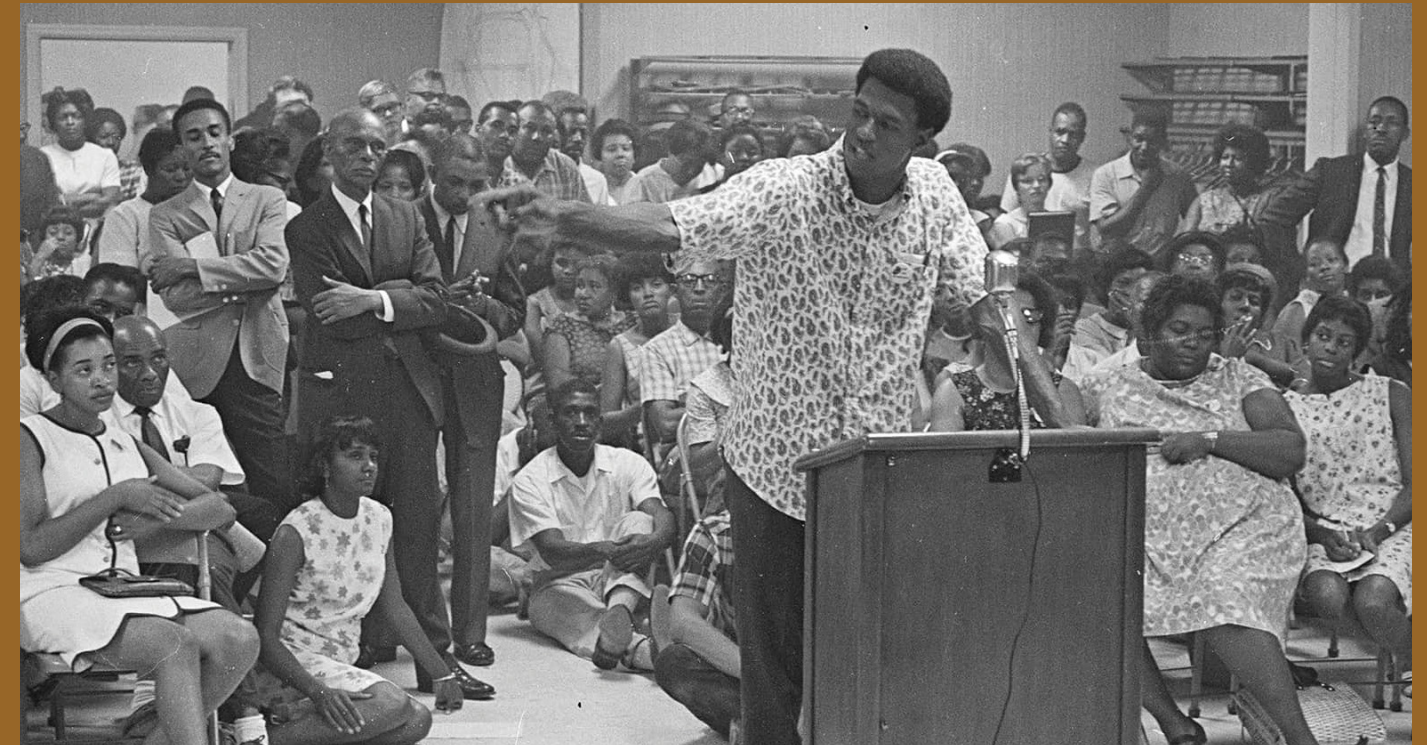
The list of demands at a Black Democratic rally held in Durham in 1938, included wanting social security laws broadened to include domestic and agricultural workers. Source: Carolina Times, North Carolina Collection, Durham County Libraries

issues facing poor residents, and created a politically powerful federation of neighborhood councils called the **United Organization for Community Improvement** (UOCI). These neighborhood councils convened over food and organized neighborhood cleanups. They protested against urban renewal and advocated for impacted residents. They took on slumlords exploiting the housing crisis in Black Durham with rent strikes and public shaming. In 1967, housekeepers and cafeteria workers at Duke, primarily Black women, organized under AFSCME's Local 77 union and created demands for higher wages and better working conditions. The next year, Durham's Black community, responding to the firing of 31 Black employees from Watt's Hospital, formed the **Black Solidarity Committee** (BSC). The BSC submitted a list of 88 demands to the Durham Chamber of Commerce and Merchants Association related to employment, education, political representation, and police conduct in the Black community. Figure 34 shows a partial listing of the demands. They organized and sustained a boycott of white businesses for over nine months and ultimately won some of their demands. Historian Christina Greene called this boycott the longest, most successful, broadest-based protest ever waged by Durham Blacks.²³¹⁻²³²

During the same time period in the late 1960s, the **Black Power Movement** took root in Durham. Perceiving limited tangible gains for Black people

in the civil rights desegregation victories, its leaders called for Black self-determination and autonomy. One expression of this movement locally was the formation of Malcolm X University (MXU), an independent higher-learning institution that opened in the heart of Hayti in 1969. (Figures 35 and 36 show images of community organizing during the 1960s.) Its mission was to provide an ideological and practical methodology for meeting the physical, social, psychological, economic and cultural needs of Black people. The curriculum called for African language study and travel abroad to Africa. Students were required to concentrate studies in one of the fields deemed most needed to sustain a Black nation, one of which was food science. After a year of operation in Durham, MXU moved to Greensboro. One of the attractions of the Greensboro site was that it afforded students space to operate a farm where they grew vegetables, raised chickens, and learned about various African foodways. The university subsequently closed in 1973, but planted many seeds that would come to

Figure 35. Community organizer Howard Fuller is pictured here speaking at a City Council meeting



In 1967, the City decided to build a new public housing project on Bacon Street in majority-Black southeast Durham. The decision sparked an outcry and residents demanded that the City also construct public housing in white areas of town. The City soon canceled the Bacon Street project. Source: Durham Herald Co. Newspaper, North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Figure 36. Howard Fuller and an unidentified person at the opening celebration of Malcolm X Liberation.

Source: Durham Herald Co. Newspaper, North Carolina Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



“Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality.”

Malcolm X, Black activist and minister²³⁵

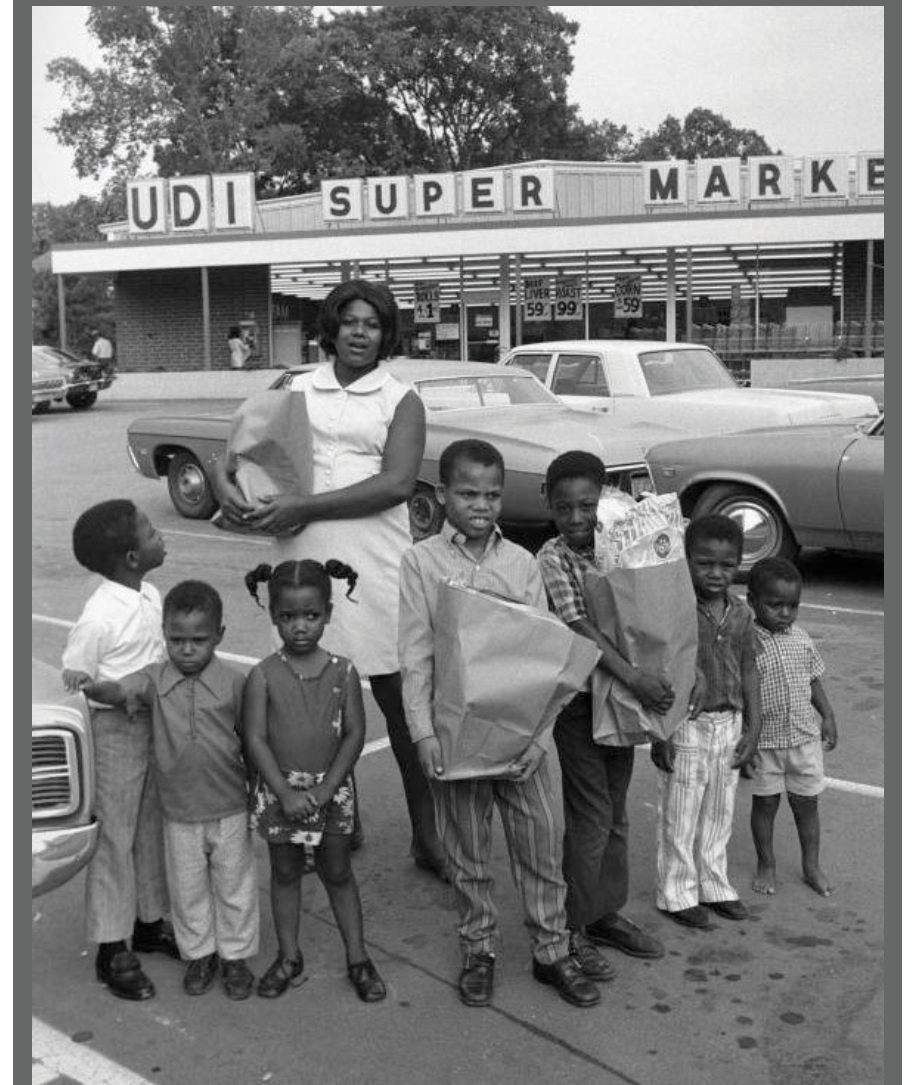
Corporate Power, Food Apartheid, and the New Jim Crow (1975-2000)

In the wake of urban renewal and the building of NC Highway 147, a continued cycle of disinvestment afflicted the central city from the 1970s through the 1990s. Many people who could leave, did. The result was a pattern of both white flight and substantial Black middle-class flight to the quickly expanding suburbs. In their wake, community institutions and businesses such as banks and grocery stores also disappeared. These closures left significant parts of the city underbanked (insufficient banks to meet market demand, and insufficient bank underwriting) and lacking access to food (see figure 38 comparing the number of grocery stores in 1940 to 1980.). At the same time, a huge economic shift was taking place in Durham, whereby the unionized, well-paying factory jobs that had employed Durham's working class for generations began to leave town for good. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Erwin Mill (J.P. Stevens), American Tobacco, Golden Belt, and Liggett & Myers all shuttered their doors, leaving millions of square feet of empty factory space and thousands in need of new jobs. In a few short years, 1,000 jobs were lost at American Tobacco, 650 at Erwin Mill, and 1,500 at Liggett & Myers. Hourly wages at these factories (in 2020 dollars) ranged from \$15 an hour at Erwin Mill to \$33 an hour at American Tobacco. Upon hearing of American Tobacco's plans to close their Durham plant in 1986, machinist Melvin Alston remarked, *"It's just like dropping a bomb in Durham and clearing everyone out."* These transitions of homes, institutions, and workplaces disrupted much of the infrastructure of community life.²³⁶⁻²³⁸

Uneven investment across the growing urbanized landscape—along with increasing industrialization and corporate control of the food system—greatly impacted how people accessed their food, the types of food people ate, and public health. Across Durham, and across the United States, neighborhood grocers gave way to progressively larger, consolidated corporate grocery stores with big parking lots for shopper's vehicles. Figure 37 shows the UDI Super Market in 1971. The majority of these stores were located in the new suburban growth areas. Home refrigeration—on the rise since the end of WWII—was now nearly universal, allowing households to extend the time periods between shopping. Home microwaves, almost nonexistent at the beginning of the 1970s, were in more than a quarter of homes by 1980 and kept growing in

Figure 37. UDI Supermarket, built on North Roxboro St in 1971

The UDI Supermarket, built on North Roxboro St in 1971, was a community development project in response to the flight of full-service grocery stores from Black neighborhoods in the central city. Source: UNC, Billy Barnes Collection



Grocery Stores in Durham, 1940 and 1980



1940

88 grocers in City of Durham,
1.46 per 1,000 city residents

Legend

● Locally-owned grocer or grocery ● Chain grocery

Source: 1940 grocery listings come from Hill's Durham County Directory, accessed via Digital NC. 1980 listings from Groceteria.com and 1980 GTE Phone Book for Durham, Butner and Creedmoor. Map created 2020 for Duke World Food Policy Center by Tim Stallmann, Research Action Design.

Notes: 1940 data does not include listings with an individual's name only, which may exclude some smaller grocers. Some listings in the 1980 data were excluded because it was impossible

1980

47 grocery stores in Durham County,
0.31 per 1,000 residents

Figure 38. Durham grocery store locations and ownership in 1940 and 1980

These maps show the differences in grocery store locations and ownership in 1940 and 1980. While there is a dramatic reduction of grocery stores across the city, Hayti and the urban renewal area are strikingly void of grocery stores.

Source: Tim Stallmann, Research Action Design, with research by Taylor Woollen

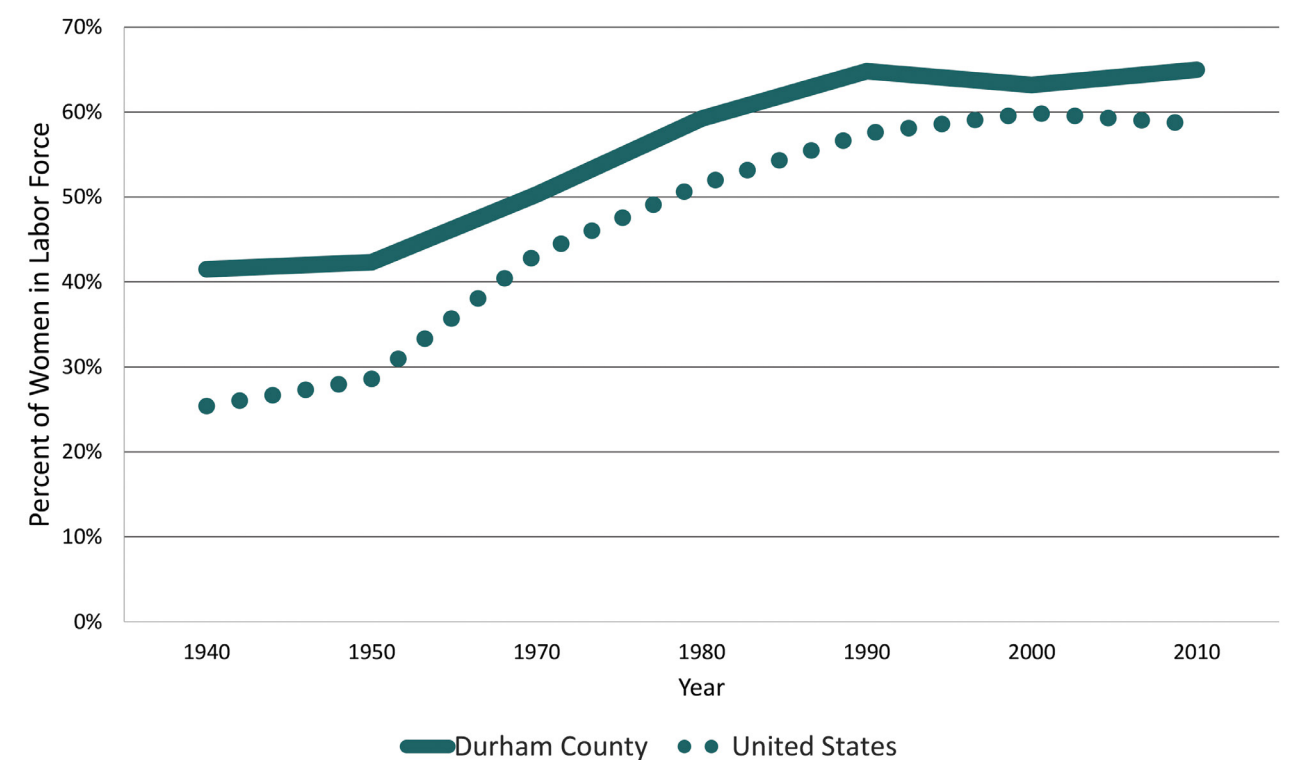
popularity. Changes in how food was stored and cooked were accompanied by increasing numbers of women working outside the home and a rise in single parent households. Table 4 shows the number of working women in Durham compared to the broader US population of women. This transition encouraged a demand for convenience foods, food from restaurants, prepared meals at grocery stores, or microwavable from the freezer.²³⁹⁻²⁴¹

Many of the new convenience foods were processed, meaning mechanical or chemical operations were performed to change or preserve them. Processed foods are typically found in a box or a bag in the inner aisles of the grocery store and at fast food outlets and convenience stores. These foods became a central part of the American diet, with some estimates claiming that they now make up as much as 70% of our calories. Processed foods were seen as a beneficial way to keep raw material costs low and extend the shelf life of food. However, they are often lower in nutritional value than unprocessed foods and are high in sugar, fat and empty calories. Such foods may contain unhealthy food additives. Consuming significant amounts of processed foods has been linked to increased risk of health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, cancer, and depression. Processed foods are also cheaper, more accessible, and more heavily marketed to food-insecure households than whole, unprocessed foods. Eating processing foods have been linked to the racial and economic disparities in diet-related illnesses.²⁴²⁻²⁴⁶

Since the 1960s Durham County has become increasingly less agricultural, and now is one of the least agricultural counties in the state. Today, only a small fraction of our food is produced locally. Instead, like most U.S. cities, Durham's food comes from all around the world. Industrial agriculture is now the dominant food production system in the United States. It is characterized by large-scale monoculture, heavy use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and meat and milk production in confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). Under this model, farms have "inputs" such as pesticides, feed, fertilizer, and fuel, and "outputs" such as soybeans, pork, etc. Yet, the goals to increase yields and decrease costs of production through economies of scale have

Table 4. Labor force participation of women in Durham County and the United States, 1940-2010

Durham women's employment outside of the home had always outpaced the national average and continued to grow steadily from the 1970s through the 1990s.

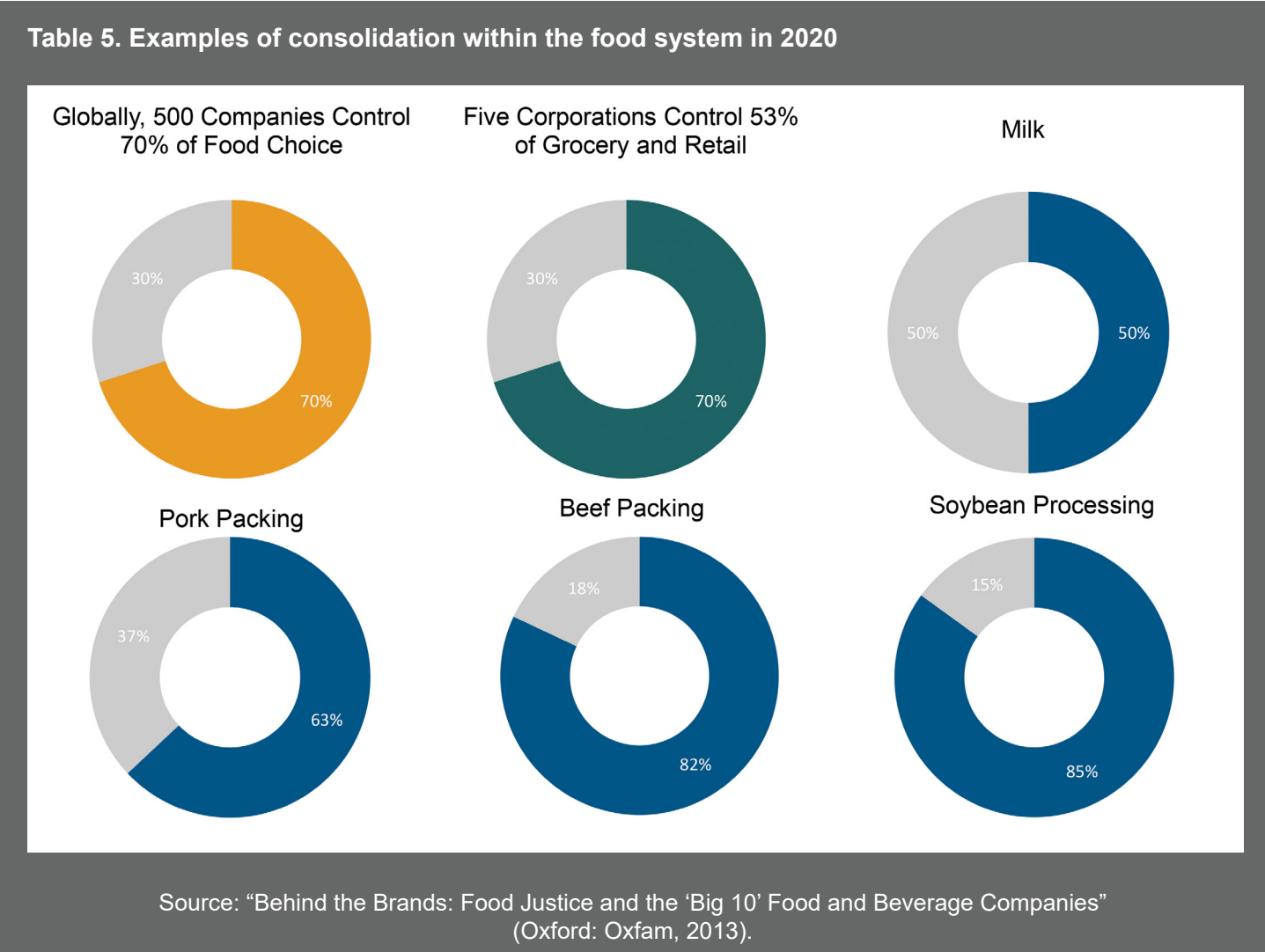


Source: US Census 1940, 1960, 1980, 2000

been incredibly successful, as world food production nearly doubled from 1961-1996, with only a 1.1 fold increase in cultivated lands.²⁴⁷⁻²⁴⁸

In nearly every way, industrial farming is far removed from the interdependence and biodiversity of natural ecosystems as possible, and is a vast departure from historically-diversified farms. Each year, billions of pounds of pesticides are applied to crops. Farmworkers and communities adjacent to industrial farming operations are often exposed to these toxic chemicals, with both short-term and chronic health impacts. These chemicals then enter the food system and are consumed by people and animals—although science is still catching up on how this affects our bodies. In the industrial agriculture model, a few crops reign supreme. In particular, some limited varieties of corn and soybeans overwhelmingly end up as animal feed, biofuels, and processed food ingredients.

Widespread monoculture reduces soil fertility and requires costly applications of chemical fertilizers and intensive irrigation. In industrial meat, milk, and egg operations, animals receive massive doses of hormones to promote fast growth and antibiotics to ward off the infections and diseases that thrive in the unsanitary and crowded conditions of CAFOs. High concentrations of confined animals also produce substantial amounts of bio-waste. While historically animal waste has been a useful fertilizer for crops, factory farms produce far more than can be assimilated by nearby land, and so this waste ends up in large treatment areas that cause water and air pollution and emit high levels of greenhouse gases. Industrialized agriculture is having cumulative global environmental repercussions, including massive deforestation, habitat loss for a wide variety of species, and a shortage of ecosystem services, such as pollination, that a more diverse landscape offers. Scientists have estimated that the industrial food system is responsible for somewhere between one-fifth to one-half of the actions that are causing climate change. This impact is driven by dependence on fossil fuels to produce



pesticides and fertilizers, to process food, and to transport it across the globe, as well by the methane released from massive livestock operations.²⁴⁹⁻²⁵²

Shifting policy priorities in the Farm Bill in the last quarter of the 20th century steadily increased corporate control and consolidation within the food system. Corporate control refers to control of political and economic systems by corporations in order to influence trade regulations, tax rates, and wealth distribution (among other measures) and to produce favorable environments for further corporate growth. Corporate consolidation refers to a concentration of corporate ownership within each part of the food system, including production, processing, and distribution. Table 5 shows how much of the global food system is currently controlled by a few corporations. Since its beginnings in 1933, the Farm Bill has been the keystone agricultural policy in the US. It is an omnibus bill enacted approximately every five years and is shaped by a variety of for-profit and nonprofit interest groups and corporations by way of lobbying, campaign donations, and other such efforts. Leading up to a new Farm Bill, a broad range of interests line up to advocate and form alliances in order to best meet the needs of their constituents. These include groups focused on farm policy, commodity and industry interests, the environment, rural development, hunger-relief, public health, and sustainable agriculture.²⁵³⁻²⁵⁴

After several decades of few major changes, the **1973 Farm Bill** opened up a new era of drastic deregulation. It was influenced by an economic recession, high fuel prices, and failed harvests abroad which all led to a worldwide grain shortage for the first time in many years. Wanting to increase agricultural production, President Nixon’s Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, called for farmers to plant “*fencerow to fencerow*” and “*get big or get out!*” These directives were reinforced by a Farm Bill that moved away from the long-held policy of farmer loans and incentives to periodically rest their land towards direct farmer subsidies. But after the recession passed and the world grain supply went back up, the intense overproduction of commodity crops, subsidized by the federal government, primarily benefited corporate buyers while farmers continued to lose their lands and income to larger consolidated operations.²⁵³⁻²⁵⁴

Beyond favorable buying conditions, corporations have increasingly come to control the food system including the manufacturing and distribution of seed, fertilizers, pesticides and machinery, as well as food processing, distribution, marketing, and retail. This control puts wealth, influence, and decision-making concerning the entire food system in the hands of very few. Figure 5 shows how much of the US food system is controlled by a few corporations. Moreover, starting in the 1980s, legal rulings extended the notion of private property beyond land and water to include the fundamental components of life itself by allowing seed genetics to be patented.²⁵⁷ Like many Americans, Durham residents have become increasingly disconnected from the land and our food production, both physically and culturally. Without a clear guide map of how to eat, food corporations use marketing and media to shape ideas and perceptions about what we should eat and why. Figure 39 shows a USDA visualization of who receives financial value from food dollars. Although public health guidance has changed very little over the past 100 years, the public health and nutrition world’s fractional budget cannot create enough counter-marketing to change narratives created by food corporations. Not all foods are



marketed equally. In the early 2000s, more than 70% of food advertising was for convenience foods, candy and snacks, alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, and desserts—whereas only a tiny fraction went toward promoting fruits, vegetables, grains, or beans. In this highly competitive food environment, no person is too young to become a consumer, and the food and beverage industry has developed savvy ways of influencing children’s product preferences, requests, and diet. There is a strong association between increases in advertising for non-nutritious foods and rates of childhood obesity and diabetes. Companies often target Black and Hispanic consumers with marketing for their least nutritious products, contributing to diet-related health disparities affecting communities of color.²⁵⁸⁻²⁶¹

Since the early 1980s, the political environment has seen a decline in the robust mid-century social movements led by labor unions and people of color that yielded the expansion of the social safety net and major civil rights legislation. These social movements and progressive political reforms resulted in a period of decreased income and wealth inequality between the New Deal in the 1930s through the War on Poverty of the 1960s to the late 1970s. In its place has been rise of a political ideology known as **neoliberalism** that emphasizes the value of free market competition and the belief that free markets are the most efficient way to allocate resources. Neoliberalism prizes low taxes, privatization, deregulation, and free trade, and the dismantling of government entitlements and social programs in favor of market-based solutions. The past 40 years of neoliberal policies has led to historic levels of inequality across the globe.²⁶²⁻²⁶⁴

Upon taking office in 1981, President Ronald Reagan championed this neoliberal ideology by simultaneously cutting taxes for the wealthy and spending for the poor: slashing welfare benefits, funding for public housing, grants for mass transit, and food assistance. As a result, food insecurity spiked during his tenure and economic inequality widened to levels not seen since the end of the 1960s. To justify these austerity policies, Reagan invoked stereotypes and caricatures of the poor as undeserving, coining the term “welfare queens”, and pathologizing people on public benefit as freeloaders and con artists whose food stamps and welfare benefits were a drain on the system and were costing undue taxpayer expenditures. Unlike the previous decades where the media’s stories of poverty had frequently included poor whites in Appalachia and other rural communities, the images promoted by Reagan focused on Black people living in urban poverty. In Durham in the 1980s, reductions in federal anti-poverty and anti-hunger programs were felt acutely. Despite the number of poor people remaining relatively constant between 1981-1987 the number of people receiving welfare benefits dropped by 20% and foodstamps by 25% due to tightening eligibility requirements. As a result, local health care providers reported a significant uptick in patients with malnutrition-related illnesses such as anemia, low-birth weight, and protein deficiency.²⁶⁵⁻²⁶⁸

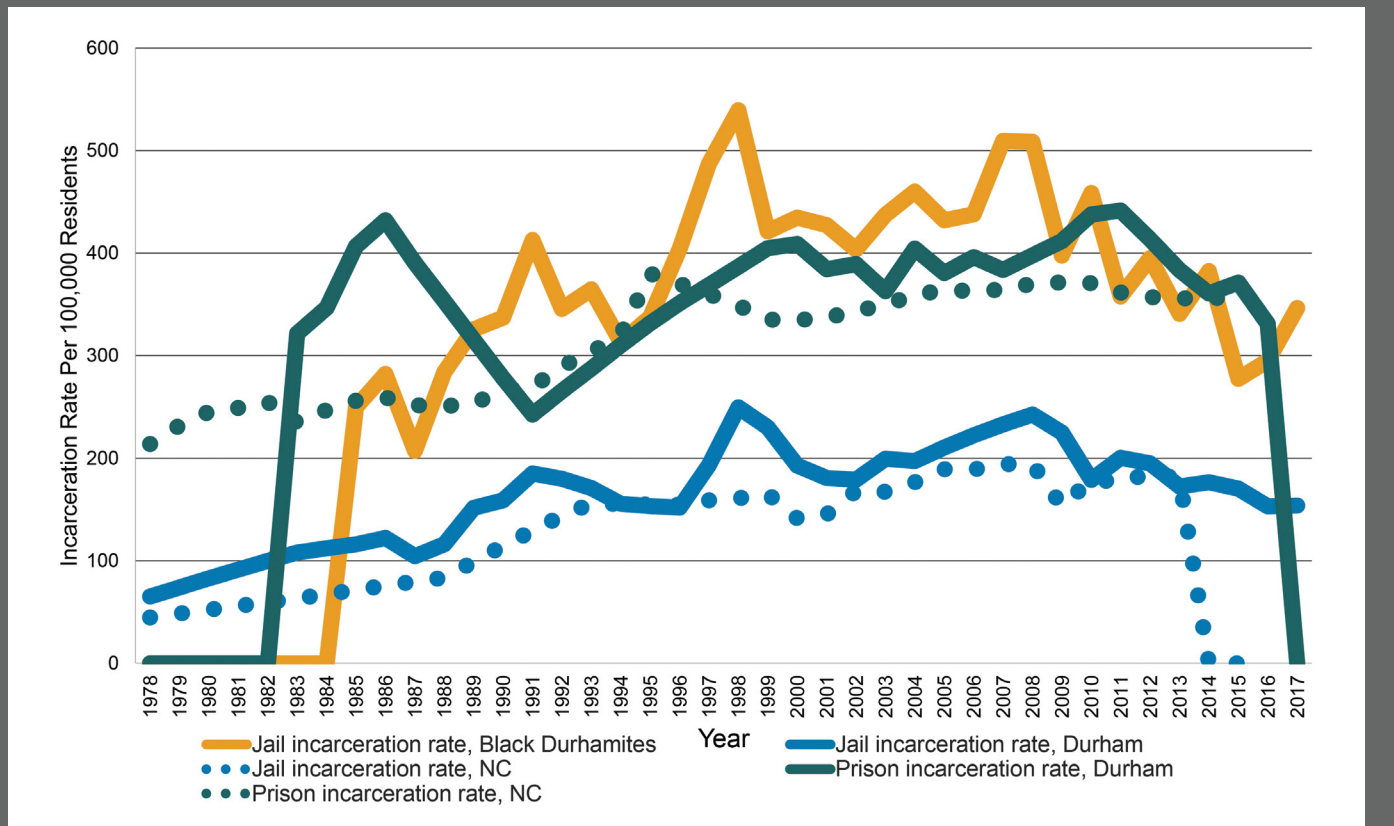
“Most of us in this business are not enamored of Reagan’s plans in the least. We see that this effort to revitalize the economy is exploiting the poor to the advantage of the rich. There is no doubt about it.
Sister Mary Wright, director of Urban Ministries²⁷⁵

With a reduction in programs striking directly at the root causes of poverty, downstream charity programs developed to help alleviate the symptoms. Creating charity programs to address the structural issues of racial and economic inequality were encouraged by President Reagan, who said: “if every church and synagogue in the United States would average adopting 10 poor families beneath the poverty level... we could eliminate all government welfare in this country”. This **focus on volunteerism and charity** continued under President George H.W. Bush in his “thousand points of light” framing where he claimed: “What government can do is

limited, but the potential of the American people knows no limits”. Nonprofits, a tiny sliver of the US economy before 1970, mushroomed into a major sector of the economy. Several of the nonprofits started in Durham during the 70s and 80s were founded to address the issues of hunger and food insecurity. Meals on Wheels started in 1975, the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina in 1980, Urban Ministries of Durham in 1983, and the Interfaith Food Shuttle in 1989. Across the country, more than 80% of pantries and soup kitchens currently operating came into existence between 1980 and 2001. In Durham and elsewhere, many of these food charities focused on reducing food waste, which was increasingly recognized as an absurd reality in the face of chronic food insecurity for so many. A 1974 national survey estimated that approximately 20% of the food manufactured in the U.S. for human consumption was being thrown out. In 2020 that percentage is as high as 30-40%.²⁶⁹⁻²⁷⁴

In the midst of major reductions to the social safety net, Reagan sensationalized the use of drugs and the crime associated with it to implement a **war on drugs**. When signing the **Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986**, Reagan declared “The American people want their government to get tough and to go on the offensive.” Despite the evidence that drug usage was highest among white people, this war disproportionately targeted low-income communities of color - and especially Black men. In 1988, under Reagan’s Anti-Drug Act, the Durham Housing Authority received federal funding for the city to pay off-duty police officers to patrol high-crime areas. Table 6 shows how incarceration rates in Durham compare to North Carolina broadly. The patrol funding was paired with a Durham program called **Crime Area Target Teams** (CATT) that increased the number of police officers stationed in public housing developments. These types of concentrated policing efforts continued into the 2000s with the Bull’s Eye Initiative, which intensified policing in two square miles consisting of predominantly poor communities of color east and south of downtown. While the introduction of drugs like crack cocaine waged a serious toll on neighborhoods in the central city, so did the decision to respond disproportionately with policing rather than public health interventions.²⁷⁶⁻²⁸¹

Table 6. Comparison of Jail and Prison Population Rates, 1978-2015 for North Carolina and Durham



Source: Prison Policy Initiative and Vera Trends

When I was growing up, it [McDougald] was a community of pride. A stepping stone for the Black community. I didn't know we were poor. We had three square meals, we had a warm bed, we had an indoor bathroom, I thought we were rich really. I didn't know or understand there was a world outside of McDougald Terrace because we were just raised as a tribe. All the women there always banded together to make sure all of the children were protected...My oldest daughter was born in 88. That was a low time for the black communities when the drug addictions started coming in... and the drugs just started ripping apart the community. That's when it actually became a project, to me.

Iris Arnette, on growing up, and then starting her own family in McDougald Terrace²⁸²

Being totally honest, high incarceration rates for people of color is very detrimental to our health. Even in the Durham County Jail, you have a canteen that's run through a private company, who only sells certain things like Oodles of Noodles- that are not healthy...And then in prisons, you don't get to eat vegetables unless its part of your dinner- and even then its often times still not healthy because of how it's cooked. But if you don't work in the kitchen, you don't get to decide- you just get it how it comes, and you pray over it and eat it... But then over time, people get institutionalized in the system, and when they return home they continue to eat the same way, because they're used to it. And the financial piece only enhances that. Because you have individuals coming home, looking for employment, trying to do something different, and there are just so many barriers- even with food stamps. So it almost feels like you are being punished twice, and its very depressing.

Chuckwumeka Manning, activist and Director of the City of Durham's Welcome Home program²⁸⁵

Hyper-policing, drug criminalization, and longer sentencing caused incarceration rates to rise steadily. As a result, there were deep financial, emotional, and health impacts on families and communities swept up in its path. On the front end of criminalization, individuals and families can go into debt from bail bonds and court fines. While in jail or prison, many lose jobs and income and endure stressful periods of separation from their friends and family. In Durham County jails, incarcerated people consistently complain about the quality of food, with a combination of soy-textured protein and potatoes served at nearly every meal described as pig slop. Others have spoken out about the injustice of working in the kitchen or laundry without receiving any compensation—although governments choose very cheap meal plans. there are nicer meal plans they could have chosen and purchased. Upon returning home, justice-involved persons face barriers to employment and securing adequate housing and are often excluded from government programs and supportive services. North Carolina is one of the states where people with felony drug convictions are still eligible for food stamps. However, they may have a temporary disqualification period when released from prison—often the time when

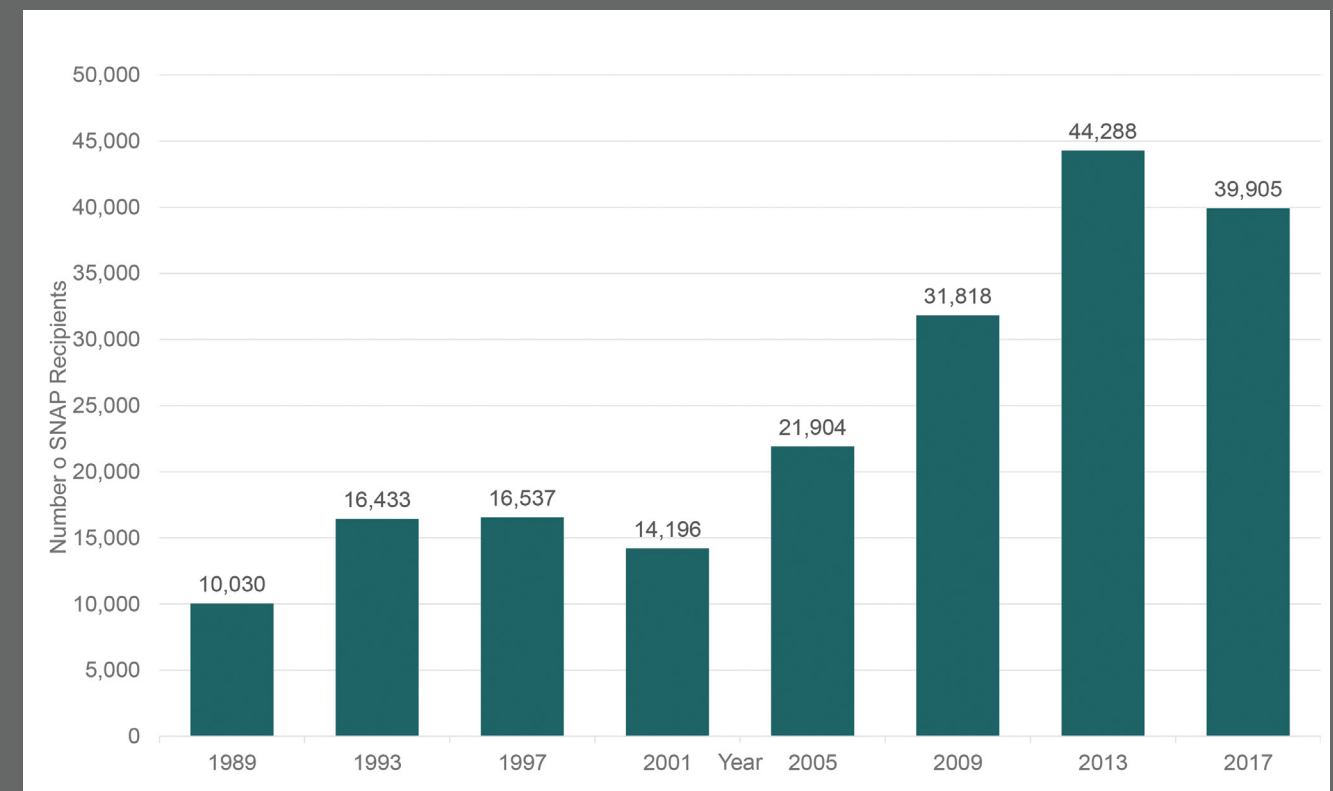
benefits are needed most acutely—and may have to join a treatment program or be drug tested. One of the consequences of mass incarceration is extremely high levels of food insecurity, which impacts 90% of people returning from prisons and jails.²⁸³⁻²⁸⁴

While food charities have expanded and have deeply dedicated staff and volunteers, the emergency food system is insufficient to meet the ongoing needs of hungry and food insecure people in Durham and elsewhere. Moreover, funders encourage food charities to measure success in ways that do not actually address the root causes of food insecurity or its nutritional impacts. Outputs such as the weight of food pounds distributed or the number of people served are heralded as signs of progress versus indicators centered on health, nutrition, and well-being.²⁸⁶⁻²⁸⁸

Notwithstanding government rollbacks, it is the public sector that plays the most critical role in hunger relief and food security. Government nutrition and hunger programs such as **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** (SNAP), **WIC** (Women Infants and Children), and school breakfast and lunch programs have been the largest recipient of Farm Bill allocations for the past 50 years. Although SNAP is technically a supplemental support program, many recipient households rely on SNAP benefits for most or all of their monthly grocery budget. Even then, the money often runs short, and benefits do not necessarily ensure access to healthier foods which are more expensive. Even then, the money often runs short, and benefits do not necessarily ensure access to healthier foods, which are more expensive. Originally allocated as booklets of food stamps, the stigma of using SNAP lessened in 2008 when benefits shifted to electronic debit cards (**EBT-Electronic Benefits Transfer**). These types of payments are also more widely accepted. Table 7 shows the number of SNAP recipients in Durham from 1989 to 2017. The impacts of SNAP and other programs like WIC and free and reduced lunch for school children are significant and lift many families out of abject poverty and acute hunger.²⁸⁹⁻²⁹⁰

Table 7. SNAP recipients in Durham County from 1989 - 2017

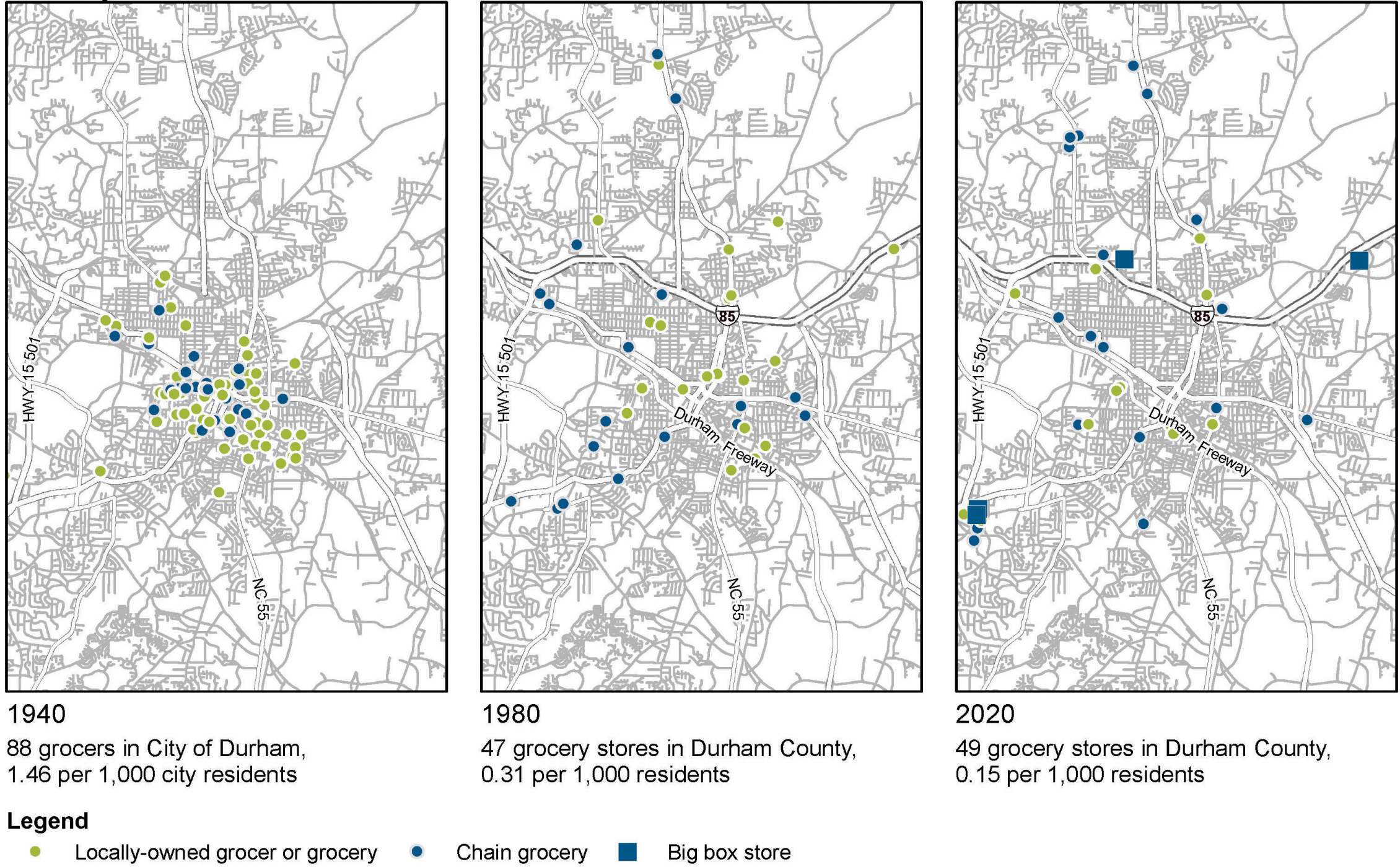
There was a decrease in the number of recipients between 1993 and 2001 despite population growth and an increase in the poverty rate. Then from 2009 – 2013, during the Great Recession, there was a sharp spike in recipients.



Source: Federal Reserve Economic Data, FRED Graph Observations, Link: <https://fred.stlouisfed.org>

Figure 40. Map of grocery stores in Durham by ownership status in 1940, 1980, and 2020

Grocery Stores in Durham, 1940 - 2020



From 1980 to 2020, there is no dramatic difference in the number of stores, but a shift in type. There are now several big box and wholesale stores across Durham as well as a number of smaller international or ethnic grocers.

Source: 1940 grocery listings come from Hill's Durham County Director, accessed via Digital NC. 1980 listings from groceries.com and 1980 GTE Phone Book for Durham, Butner, and Creedmoor. 2020 Listings form InfoUSA data, cleaned and reviewed by Dr. Gizem Templeton, Map created in 2020 for Duke World Food Policy Center for Tim Stallman, Research Action Design.

Note: 1940 data does not include listings with an individual's name only, which may exclude some smaller grocers. Some listings in the 1980 data were excluded because it was impossible to determine whether they were convenience stores or grocery stores.

In the ongoing national debates over entitlements, eligibility requirements for food assistance play out in each Farm Bill legislation. As benefit amounts and eligibility requirements change frequently, it makes it difficult for participants to cope with food insecurity. The SNAP program's budget was dramatically cut by \$26 billion over six years in the **1996 Farm Bill**. These reductions to SNAP eligibility took place at the same time as President Bill Clinton's **Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)**—more commonly known as **Welfare to Work**. Together, these policies changed the landscape of food assistance by limiting eligibility and length of benefits for able-bodied adults without dependents who are not working at least 20 hours a week or participating in a work program. Currently, Durham is one of only 13 out of North Carolina's 100 counties that have such programs. Nevertheless, these policies changes had local impacts. In Durham County, SNAP benefit recipients decreased by 14% between 1997 and 2001, despite a nearly 2% increase in the poverty rate in the 1990s.²⁹¹⁻²⁹⁴

During the Great Recession of 2007-2009, job losses, wage reductions, and a foreclosure crisis all greatly increased the number of people facing food insecurity. This led to a dramatic uptick in SNAP usage. However, in the **2014 Farm Bill**, Congress reduced benefits for 48 million people, including more than 21 million children. This erosion of the SNAP program has continued under the Trump administration, which approved an administrative rule change in 2020 that will make it harder for states to waive employment requirements. In what is now a common refrain, Trump's Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said in a press release, "*We need everyone who can work, to work,*" despite the growing body of evidence that work requirements do not make it any easier for people to find work, do not align with the current work economy, and make it harder for people to feed themselves. As the COVID-19 pandemic crisis unfolds and food insecurity spreads across the country at unprecedented rates, expanding the SNAP program is currently in an intense partisan debate in Congress.²⁹⁵⁻²⁹⁷

The **2008 Farm Bill** introduced the concept of a **food desert**, which defined it as a census tract with a substantial share of residents who live in low-income areas that have low levels of access to a grocery store or healthy, affordable retail outlets. However, the imagery of a desert as a natural ecosystem where

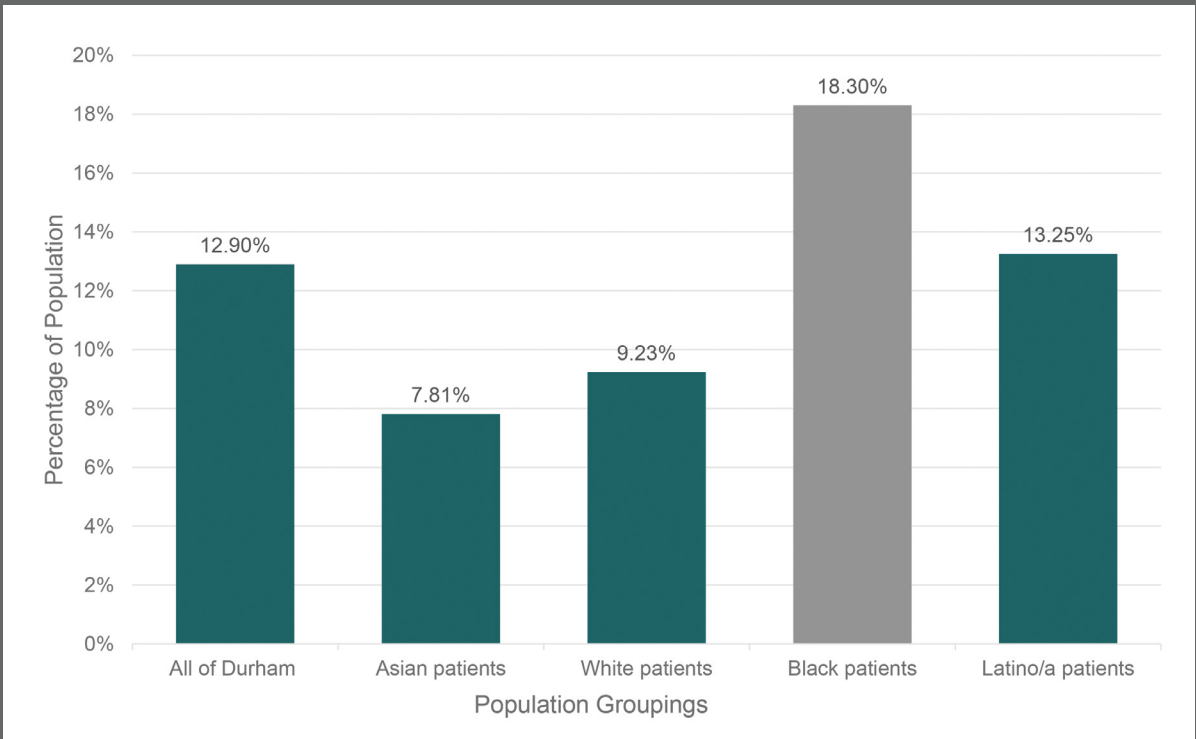
few things grow obscures the fact that these areas are a direct result of a long history of intentional divestment through discriminatory policies and institutional decisions. As such, **food apartheid** is a more accurate description of the reality that some people have food abundance and others food scarcity depending on their race, class, and zip code. Figure 40. Map of grocery stores in Durham by ownership status in 1940, 1980, and 2020. Food apartheid is more than a geographic phenomenon. It involves a broad intersection of structural factors such as: transportation/transit access, financial resources, availability of healthy food options in close geographic proximity, strength of community networks, language barriers/access, knowledge about assistance programs, and prevalence of easier food options.²⁹⁸

The cumulative effects of living under food apartheid have profound impacts on health, well-being, and life expectancy of people of color and poor people. For example, diet-related illnesses such as diabetes that barely existed 100 years ago are now among our biggest public health concerns. Figure 41 shows an anti-hunger protest in Durham. People of color and poor people have disproportionately high incidents of diabetes. In 2017, Black patients were 80% more likely than white patients to have diabetes in Durham (see Table 8). In a 2016 survey in the Piedmont region, 16% of respondents with household incomes less than \$15,000 reported having diabetes, compared to 6% of respondents with household incomes of more than \$75,000.²⁹⁹⁻³⁰⁰

I’ve suffered a lot in this body... for a lot of people its genetic, but I feel like, and this is my personal feeling based on what I’ve experienced and my whole family, is the role of food deserts and the cost of food- not being able to have a community grocery store. And what I’ll say for Northeast Central Durham or the East Durham area where I grew up, we always had corner stores that sold everything that we didn’t need and very little of what we did need. Back when I was a child growing up, potato chips cost 16 cents a bag and you could get potato chips all day long and all night long, and people could get beer and wine in the neighborhood, but you couldn’t find fruits and vegetables until my daddy started selling it on the truck. So diseases come about sometimes genetically, but its increased or enhanced through living in poor poverty-stricken neighborhoods.

L’Tanya Gilchrist, Durham County Community Health Worker³⁰¹

Table 8. Chart of Type 2 diabetes rates among adult population in Durham County across race, 2017



Source: Durham Neighborhood Compass

Figure 41. Image of Durham CROP Hunger Walk
Each year thousands of Durhamites participate in the Durham CROP Hunger Walk to raise money and awareness about hunger.



Source: News & Observer

U.S. neoliberal trade policy has also impacted Durham. In the decade following the **1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**, over 1.3 million farmers in Mexico alone were driven out of business and left the land. When NAFTA removed trade tariffs, companies exported corn and other grains to Mexico below cost, and rural Mexican farmers could not compete. This is one reason for the wave of migration from Central America to places like North Carolina- where Latinos came to fill jobs in the agriculture and construction industries. Figure 42 shows anti-NAFTA sentiments in a political cartoon and an ad. As the initial trickle of migration picked up into a steady flow, the Latino population in Durham grew from just over 2,000 people in 1990 to nearly 40,000 in 2014, including one out of three Durham Public School students. Like the migrants of previous generations, most came looking for safety, opportunity, and a better future for their children.³⁰²⁻³⁰³

Figure 42. Images of institutional boycott ads from 1970-1990s

In solidarity with farmworkers struggles for safe working conditions and decent wages, The Triangle Friends of the United Farm Workers advocated for consumer and institutional boycotts of products like Red Coach lettuce, California grapes, Mt. Olive pickles, and others from the 1970s-1990s.



Source: Theodore W. Joan Preiss Papers, Duke University Archives, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University

The first wave of Latinos in Durham came in the early 1990s, and clustered in houses and apartment buildings in existing low-income neighborhoods. With very few community resources Latinos went about learning how to navigate a host of new institutions and systems. In this period of adjustment to a new place and way of life, food was a source of identity and continuity among the changes. Culturally familiar foods were initially hard to come by, but as the numbers of Latinos grew, that eventually became a business opportunity. Figure 43 shows a photograph of So Good Pupusas food truck entrepreneur Cecelia Polanco, who donates a portion of her profits for scholarships.

The Latino Credit Union opened in 2000, at a time when three quarters of Latinos did not bank at all. The institution provided Spanish language staff and became a banking and home loan resource. Over the past twenty years, Latino owned and operated restaurants, grocery stores, and services have spread across Durham, providing the Latino population with culturally resonant food, community gathering spaces, jobs and opportunities. These food businesses, and others opened by migrants from elsewhere around the world, have dramatically impacted the ways Durhamites eat.

I remember a van would come, on Saturday mornings, and there were already people waiting in line to buy Hispanic products like fresh corn or flour tortillas because there were no tortillas at the grocery store.

Ana Santibanez³⁰⁴

At the beginning, we had a lot of needs. Where can I open an account, I need to learn how to use a debit card, I need to buy a car because I need to go to work, and then come the life changing decisions. In 2004, we started to see that folks were deciding to stay, to plant their roots.

Vicky Garcia, Senior Vice President, Latino Credit Union³⁰⁵

Figure 43. Cecelia Polanco, the founder of So Good Pupusas



Cecelia Polanco, the founder of **So Good Pupusas**, a food truck and catering company that serves traditional El Salvadoran food. Part of the proceeds go to scholarships for undocumented and DACA students to attend any higher education institution or program.

Source: Rodrigo Dorfman

For me staying connected with my culture has always been a priority: food, music, my people. I don't agree that people have to forget their roots. This has allowed me to share with other people who I am, what is my culture, who are my people. It's good to have a strong identity so you can share with other cultures and also assimilate into them. To share. And that's how Durham identifies itself: in its diversity.

Ivan Almonte, community activist³⁰⁶

It's our dream to come here, but in reality, it's not a dream... Immigrants are being exploited every day. We have the power of working, we have the hands, but we do not have a political voice to call for our rights.

Katusha Olave, Bolivian immigrant to Durham and National Farm Worker Ministry community interpreter and literacy advocate³¹³

Beyond poverty and economic resources, a number of unique factors impact food security in the Latino community. These include lack of knowledge about food assistance programs, limited program eligibility due to immigration status, and fear that participation in programs will trigger **Immigration and Customs Enforcement** (ICE) notification, detention, or deportation. Immigration status-related fears arose for many with George W. Bush's 2008 Secure Communities policy, which was expanded by President Barak Obama in 2011. **Secure Communities** is a proactive deportation program that established a partnership among federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. While meant to target immigrants accused of crimes, many others were swept into the immigration enforcement system through the program. Fears have been further exacerbated by Donald Trump's inflammatory anti-immigration rhetoric. Since 2017, eligible immigrant group participation for SNAP has declined nationwide, with only about half of those eligible participating. Language barriers are another obstacle eligible immigrants face. While Durham Social Service offices are required to provide some kind of language services, this is not always enforced.³⁰⁷⁻³⁰⁹

Although Durham produces very little of its own food, North Carolina is one of the most agricultural states in the country, and one does not have to travel far to come across major farming operations for foods such as sweet potatoes, poultry, pork, corn, soybeans, and peanuts. Even though the overall number of farmworkers in North Carolina has decreased over the past twenty years, the number of migrant farmworkers has nearly doubled. Today, 94% of migrant farmworkers in North Carolina are native Spanish speakers, and so the struggles for food justice and immigration justice are closely tied. There is a long history of exploiting immigrant labor to maintain low prices and high profits in the food system. One of the first significant pieces of legislation was the **Bracero Program** of 1942, whereby contract laborers from Mexico were allowed into the country to fill the labor gap opened up by WWII soldiers serving abroad and by Black people who entered the Great Migration to northern and western states from 1910 to 1970, or who otherwise left rural areas. Later on, the **H2A guest worker program of 1986** allowed agricultural employers to hire seasonal foreign workers. These workers come on special visas and are contracted to a particular farm, but do not have the same labor protections as US citizens. Even in case of Latino citizens, the exclusion of labor protections for agricultural workers established in the Jim Crow era are still in effect, connecting Black and Latino workers historically in struggle. Without Latino workers, the US food system would collapse. Yet the labor of these workers is consistently exploited by corporations and largely invisible to the broader public.³¹⁰⁻³¹²

Gentrification & the Future of Food Justice (2000–2020)

In the 21st century, a new set of dynamics in the increasingly urbanized Durham landscape present new challenges for food justice. What is often described as ‘**gentrification**’ is the latest in the legacy of involuntary displacement of people of color in Durham dating back to the Eno and Occoneechi. Indeed, the colonial worldview and the frontier mythology pervade how gentrification is talked about in many spaces. Words and phrases such as *urban pioneers* and *trailblazers* are used to describe the predominantly white and wealthier newcomers in historically disinvested areas. Such areas are described as burgeoning, up and coming, or even the wild wild west. This language pervades the popular press, real estate advertisements, and colloquial conversations, particularly among those with race and class privilege.³¹⁴⁻³¹⁵

The foundation of gentrification today was built through decades of chronic racialized disinvestment in the central city. These practices ultimately devalued real estate to such an extent that it became profitable for investors to come in and start making money. In the early 90s, the public sector laid the groundwork for a more favorable investment climate through a string of incentives for development projects downtown. This included the Durham Bulls Athletic Park (1995), the renovations of American Tobacco (Phase I, 2005) and West Village, Durham Central Park and the Farmers Market Pavilion (2007), the Durham Performing Arts Center (2008), and extensive streetscape and infrastructure improvements. The quickly expanding cluster of jobs and amenities resulted in a new premium for real estate in proximity to downtown. During this time, the downtown economy was undergoing dramatic changes. Instead of being comprised of factory workers, government employees, and non-profit workers, the new economy workforce is largely split between low-paying service jobs and high-paying ones in sectors such as research and technology. Unlike a generation earlier, where the middle-class fled the central city for the suburbs, high-wage earners today favor the walkability, amenities, historic character, and diversity of urban living and working environments.³¹⁶⁻³¹⁷

Further contributing to gentrification is the rapid population growth of the Triangle region, which is expected to add over a million people from 2010 to 2040. This growth is putting a strain on the housing supply and attracting an influx of investment capital. Locally, this investment shows up as house flipping, a proliferation of Airbnbs, and signs on central city neighborhood corners offering to ‘buy ugly houses.’ (See figure 44.) In the bigger picture, global hedge funds and investment companies have found they can get a better return on their investment in local real estate than in the stock market, and there has been a sharp increase in the amount of out-of-town ownership in Durham. While neighborhoods often see positive changes like reduction in crime, new public and private amenities, and fixed up houses and commercial buildings, the benefits do not accrue equitably across race and class. Rather than a tide that lifts all boats, gentrification is a process with winners and losers. Those that cannot afford the expensive new housing prices in Durham are displaced through rent increases, evictions, and foreclosures. Foreclosures spiked during the Great Recession of 2008 and were disproportionately located in historically Black neighborhoods. Owners in these neighborhoods had been targeted for high-cost sub-prime loans by lenders in a practice known as **reverse redlining**. Durham County had more than 10,000 eviction filings in 2016 and 2017, the highest rate of any large county in the state, and the average rent in Durham increased more than 35% between 2011 and 2017. To put this into perspective, in 2017 Durham was number 12 in the entire country for cities where housing prices are increasing the most.³¹⁸⁻³²³

Figure 44. Image of street sign advertising home purchasing

Mailers, phone calls, and signs such as this one for offers to buy homes are commonplace in gentrifying neighborhoods as investors seek to profit off of historically undervalued real estate.



Gentrification is affecting a lot of our community members and not just affecting the youth, but also the families. Unless we can find ways to subsidize housing or find way to make gentrification not so dramatic for some of our community members- the youth are not going to be staying in Durham if their parents can't stay.

The Latino family is very tight.

Eliazar Posada, Community Engagement & Advocacy
Manager at El Centro Hispano³²⁴

Over the years, the disinvestment in our community has been a process like a storm or a hurricane, it slowly pushed people out. When they say blight, they created the blight, and now they are cashing in on the blight...So we got people in the Southside right now who have been displaced from Hayti, they're displaced from Few Gardens, they're displaced from Fayetteville Street Projects, and you can go on and on and on. So they didn't just face one urban renewal, they've faced multiple displacements.

Brother Ray Eurqhart, long-time Southside resident,
union member, and affordable housing advocate³²⁵

Over the past 40 years, many social services involved with emergency food and shelter programs located in central Durham in order to be accessible to high-poverty neighborhoods located nearby. These include organizations such as Urban Ministries, Durham County Social Services and Public Health Departments, the Durham Housing Authority offices, and amenities such as the downtown library and the transportation hub. As these neighborhoods gentrify and long-time residents get displaced, there is an increasing spatial disconnect between the location of the services and amenities and those who utilize and need them the most. Food, housing, and retail gentrification are closely intertwined. This is especially true in a place like Durham that has developed a national reputation for a **foodie culture** (emphasizing sourcing, preparation, presentation, consumption and discussion of food) lauded in publications such as the New York Times, Bon Appetite, and Southern Living. Figure 45 shows a photograph of a food truck rodeo held in Durham. Microbreweries, fair trade coffee shops, artisanal food trucks, and other hallmarks of foodie culture often serve as gentrification's leading edge by signifying that a community is ripe for investment. Gentrification also changes what food retailers exist in the local food environment, sometimes creating **food mirages**, where high-quality food is priced out of reach of longtime residents. There is also the issue of who is able to participate in the flurry of food entrepreneurship. Persistent racial discrimination in lending, less access to family wealth and well-resourced peer networks for seed money, and the high price of real estate are all barriers to entry for food entrepreneurs of color. Out of the 90 food businesses downtown, less than a fifth are owned by people of color, less than 10% by Black proprietors, despite the fact that Durham is a 'minority-majority' city.³²⁶⁻³²⁹

Closely linked with foodie culture is the ethos of individual consumer choice as food activism, expressed in such sentiments as 'voting with your fork' or 'eating for change.' From this perspective, food choices serve as a mirror of personal values, and so a person may choose to buy foods branded as organic, natural, grass-fed, local, fair trade, etc. as an expression of their health consciousness or personal politics. In Durham today, these types of food are readily available, albeit for premium prices, but there are contradictions in this philosophy. Even if these foods are healthier and more sustainable, their higher cost makes them unattainable

Figure 45. Headline photo from newspaper article about food truck rodeo

Headline photo of newspaper article titled: *Thousands descended on Durham Central Park Sunday for a special Father's Day Food Truck Rodeo*
Source: Herald Sun, Jun 17, 2019

Table 9. Wages for Food Workers in Durham County, 2019

Occupations	Estimated Employment	Estimated Entry-Level Hourly Wage	Estimated Mean Hourly Wage	Estimated Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Entry-Level Annual Wage	Estimated Median Annual Wage
All Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	17,610	\$8.44	\$12.12	\$10.83	\$17,546	\$22,516
Fast Food Cooks	—	\$9.04	\$11.43	\$11.98	\$18,805	\$24,811
Institution and Cafeteria Cooks	430	\$10.28	\$13.31	\$13.16	\$21,389	\$27,370
Restaurant Cooks	1,760	\$10.45	\$13.35	\$13.25	\$21,735	\$27,555
Short Order Cooks	90	\$9.82	\$12.86	\$12.45	\$20,435	\$25,886
Food Preparation Workers	840	\$8.41	\$11.21	\$10.60	\$17,493	\$22,048
Bartenders	420	\$8.46	\$14.67	\$11.08	\$17,601	\$23,039
Cafeteria, Food Concession, and Coffee Shop	820	\$8.75	\$12.65	\$12.81	\$18,192	\$26,648
Waiters and Waitresses	2,980	\$8.41	\$12.76	\$9.88	\$17,493	\$20,543
Dishwashers	630	\$8.75	\$11.38	\$11.24	\$18,198	\$23,378
Hosts and Hostesses	830	\$8.28	\$9.74	\$8.94	\$17,231	\$18,593

Source: City of Durham, Department of Economic and Workforce Development

to many people. Moreover, while all sorts of green branding (identifying and marketing a product with environmental sustainability and conservation) attracts high-paying customers, differences in the treatment of workers, animal conditions, and ecological impacts are often negligible—or at the very least are unverifiable to the customer. With the growing popularity of organic food, there has been considerable corporate consolidation and control of organic products. For example, in 1995 there were 81 independent organic processing companies in the United States. A decade later, all but 15 had merged with large corporate food operations. The privilege of ‘voting with your fork’ will not make broader systemic changes in the industrial food system without more explicit connections to the social movements that address the root causes of the food inequities, such as land justice, worker justice, and immigration justice.³³⁰⁻³³²

In the United States today, seven out of the ten lowest-paying jobs are for the work involved in planting, harvesting, processing, packing, transporting, preparing, serving, and selling our food. In Durham County in 2019, the average hourly wage for food preparation and serving related occupations was \$10.83 an hour, or \$22,516 annually before taxes. See Figure 9 for 2019 wage information for food workers in Durham. Given that the fair market rent for a two bedroom housing unit in Durham County in 2018 was \$900, these wages are all but impossible to live on without government assistance. However, it is individuals, not corporations, who bear the stigma, logistical burden, and hardship of economic insecurity. In Durham, whereas many central city neighborhoods saw the average price per square foot for residential sales go up more than 400% in the past decade, the minimum wage has not changed in that time. With wage stagnation and rapid housing price escalation, households are paying more for housing now than at any time in Durham’s history relative to other costs and their wages. In addition to the threat of displacement, this means that there are fewer resources for other necessities like food and healthcare, which increases food insecurity. With few other options, low-wage workers in Durham are organizing for economic justice. Figure 46 shows a protest organized by workers of McDonald’s. **Our Walmart** and the **Fight for 15** are among the new worker movements fighting for higher wages, reliable scheduling, and workers’ rights. As Rita B. from Durham’s Fight for 15 puts it: *“For me, \$15 an hour means better living, access to healthcare, and money to feed myself and my family.”*³³³⁻³³⁶

Figure 46. Image of McDonald’s workers march in downtown Durham in 2019



McDonald’s workers march in downtown Durham in 2019 to protest low wages and sexual harassment of workers. By walking off the job and flooding city streets, the workers make themselves visible to the many residents that rely on their labor but don’t often stop to think about the injustice of their wages or working conditions.

Source: Mel Norton

In the midst of historic levels of inequality and an impending ecological crisis, new models of resistance, resilience, and innovation are needed more than ever. As one example, Kamal Bell (figure 47) founded Sankofa Farms just outside of Durham in Efland, North Carolina in 2016. Inspired to shift the focus of his life after reading Elijah Muhammad’s Message to the *Black Man in America*, Bell created Sankofa as an educational farm that aims to reclaim Black agricultural heritage by connecting youth to the power, healing, and knowledge made possible through a connection to land and the source of our food. Sankofa’s Agricultural Academy works with Black youth from the ages of 11-17 using agriculture for STEM education, earn money, build career readiness skills, and improve school performance.

Others in Durham are focusing on food at the intersections of just sourcing, living wages, and cultural heritage. For example, PIRI is a Black woman-owned and operated business based out of East Durham that makes food deeply connected to their identity and roots - utilizing Southern family recipes that have been passed down for generations in the South as well as flavors and recipes inspired by the African diaspora. PIRI enacts equitable business practices using local and organic food whenever possible, sourcing sustainable products, and paying all their employees a living wage.

Communities in Partnership (CIP) is a majority Black women-led organization working to re-envision the community in East Durham, North Carolina. CIP runs a monthly food co-op that is owned and run by community members and supplies fresh, locally grown food and protein-based whole food options. CIP has created a fund to support entrepreneurship among BIPOC individuals, and also supports an affordable housing initiative. Another Black-led organization in Durham, the Earthseed Land Collective, promotes ‘liberated land and food sovereignty’ by amplifying traditional agrarian foodways and regenerative agriculture practices rooted in agroecology as an alternative to the industrial food system.



Figure 47. Kamal Bell of Sankofa Farms, LLC
Source: Sankofa Farms, LLC

In a remarkable feat of resilience, the Occoneechi Band of the Saponi Nation was awarded official recognition by the state of North Carolina in 2002, following 20 years of organizing and sustained advocacy. Their first act was to acquire a 250-acre plot of land just outside of what is today called Durham County, and to plant an orchard of fruit-bearing trees for collective tribal use. It was the first land the tribe has collectively owned in more than 250 years.

Durham's Black Farmers Market is also a testament to building community through food. The vision for the market is to support local Black farmers and make healthy eating attainable for individuals living in some of Durham's food apartheid areas. Market organizers want to challenge social norms, classism, and racism that have created an impression that healthy living is not possible for everyone. The market uplifts Black farmers as a way to reshape the local agricultural system in ways that support BIPOC communities and farmers.



“The engine to rebuild civilization is the farm. If we look through the history of our people, we will see a common theme. The theme is that wherever people of African descent travel, we attempt to reestablish customs and values and build civilization. If we want better health, better housing, better food, better schools, etc., we have to get back to land ownership. Once we have a designated space, we can solve problems that specifically affect our people.”

Kamal Bell, owner of Sankofa Farms, LLC³³⁷

Conclusion

The final stage of this report occurred in conjunction with the COVID-19 pandemic that has opened up the existing fault lines of racial, economic, and inequities in the food system to unprecedented levels. Across the country, grocery, food processing, and agricultural workers that have long been exploited and invisibilized have been deemed “essential” workers. These workers, disproportionately immigrants and people of color, are on the front lines and are helping to keep the country running at the risk of their own lives. They are experiencing disproportionate exposure and death from the virus as a result. On the reservations of Native Peoples, there are devastatingly high rates of coronavirus infection and death. The Navajo Nation alone has lost more people to the coronavirus than 13 states combined; and the Indian Health Service (IHS) reported nearly 4,000 COVID-19 cases across the 12 regions used by the IHS system. As of the end of April 2020, 30 million people have filed for unemployment. Within the statistics, racial, class, and gender inequities are exposed: 60% of the unemployed are women, while 85% of Black and Latino workers report being unable to work from home. The pandemic has also brought a looming food crisis expected to impact millions across the globe. Across the U.S. food insecurity is skyrocketing. Poor and unemployed households are facing dire economic insecurity, which does not leave enough money for food. These reports are just the tip of the iceberg.³³⁸⁻³⁴²

The COVID-19 pandemic has already, and will continue to, shape every aspect of our social, economic and political lives moving forward. Even now, there is a growing understanding that new inequities are developing in Durham at an alarming rate. Yet in the swirl of uncertainty, isolation, fear, and trauma, there are also inspiring new expressions of community solidarity and mutual aid as people lend money, time, and other resources to make sure that everyone has access to adequate and healthy food.

History is not prescriptive, it does not tell us what needs to be done in the future. However, it can help us ask sharper questions about the challenges we face today. This history has sought to illuminate how food inequities stem from a broader set of forces, including land ownership, political power, economic resources, structural racism, gender oppression, and labor rights. In starting to imagine a different future, a 2015 article titled, “*What Does it Mean to Do Food Justice*,” Kristin Valentine Cadieux and Rachel Slocum outline four main points that have deep resonance with this history, and provide useful reflections for policymaking, investments, and community organizing. First is acknowledging and confronting historical, collective social trauma and persistent race, gender, and class inequalities. Second is designing exchange mechanisms that build communal reliance and control. Third is creating innovative ways to control, use, share, own, manage, and conceive of land, and ecologies in general, that place them outside the speculative market and the rationale of extraction. And fourth is pursuing labor relations that guarantee a minimum income and are not dependent on (unpaid) social production by women.³⁴³

In this COVID era, where so many systems are being upended, there will be critical choices at every level of governance—within philanthropy, and among political and grassroots organizations about policies, programs, and where to direct resources moving forward. Recognizing that these decisions will fundamentally shape the future of food security in Durham and across the country. We should all ask ourselves: how can we learn from the past and avoid reinforcing or recreating the structures that created the problem to begin with? Who are we as history makers?



Durham, North Carolina
Source: Istockphoto.com

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