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American Studies, Volume 53, Number 3, 2014, pp. 53-64 (Article)

Published by Mid-American Studies Association  
DOI: [10.1353/ams.2014.0119](https://doi.org/10.1353/ams.2014.0119)

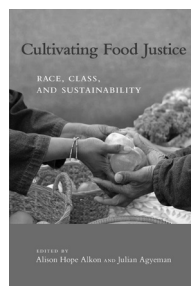
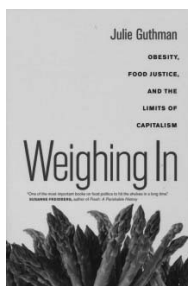
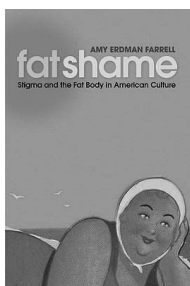


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*Review Essay*

## **Food, Diet Reform, and Obesity Politics in the American Imagination**

**Rachel A. Vaughn**



EATING RIGHT IN AMERICA: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health. By Charlotte Biltekoff. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2013.

FAT SHAME: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture. By Amy Erdman Farrell. New York: New York University Press. 2011.

WEIGHING IN: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism. By Julie Guthman. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2011.

CULTIVATING FOOD JUSTICE: Race, Class, and Sustainability. Edited by Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press. 2011.

During a 2008 interview with journalist Amy Goodman, University of California, Berkeley, journalism professor Michael Pollan argued, “There’s an enormous amount of wisdom [. . . and] cultural authority contained in a cuisine.”<sup>1</sup> Here, Pollan implies that valuing the localized cultural knowledge embedded in cuisine is one way of rethinking the authority surrounding food in the most intimate ways; that is, through understanding food sources, growers, growing locations, farmer practices, and values about the food consumers might buy or even grow. However, the interdisciplinary scholarship included in this review essay critically examines the “cultural authority” embedded in cuisine from entirely different perspectives, engaging the ways in which food, nutritional science, body politics, and dietary health pursuits are constructed within specific social, historical, and economic contexts. This is not to say that the authors do not consider themselves food activists. Each firmly situates themselves within an array of environmental and food activist work. Yet, using diet, body size, and nutritional health as lenses, and working across fields such as food studies, fat studies, critical nutrition studies, and political ecology, each of the texts reveals intersectional identity politics and diverse histories of naturalized social hierarchy.

This is a moment of heightened awareness, anxiety, and political engagement with the far-reaching social implications of food, diet, and body politics. In the 2009 documentary *Food, Inc.*, Stoneybrooke Farm CEO Gary Hirshberg notes, “When we run an item past the supermarket scanner, we’re voting for local or not, organic or not.”<sup>2</sup> Access to “good food is a right not a privilege” as Alice Waters suggests. Yet, some of the most prominent proposals and widely recognized “faces” of food tend to push “voting with the wallet” and lifestyle shifts—just buy organic grapes at the farmers’ market rather than Nike shoes, Alice Waters argues on *60 Minutes*; return to the land, eat locally, can your own tomatoes, as Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (2008) suggests; cook and prioritize whole foods rather than processed, as Jamie Oliver argues in *Jamie’s Food Revolution* (2011). While these may prove excellent options for some, food politics will remain within privileged, predominantly white, and firmly middle-class frameworks without increased intersectional scholarship and coalition-building to provide counter perspectives, and critically examine the social constructedness of key presumptions embedded in common understandings about food, health, and the body.<sup>3</sup> I do not here situate myself *against* criticisms of industrialized food systems or food movements writ large, nor do I suggest the scholarship included in this review essay claims such a stance. Research by the authors included in this review, Charlotte Biltekoff, Amy Farrell, Julie Guthman, and Alison Alkon and Julian Agyeman, pushes for more: from food systems, from dietary reform, from environmental movements, and from cultural presumptions about health and body politics.

Amidst continued interdisciplinary scholarly interest in the burgeoning fields of food studies and fat studies, very little cultural studies scholarship has engaged the systemic dimensions of food, health, nutrition, and body politics through a critical lens. Likewise, there is a gap in scholarship addressing food

and environmental research together. Even fewer scholars have included critical intersectional analyses of the racial, ethnic, class, national, or gender dynamics of food systems, food access, and food reform. Additionally, there is need for scholarship that intersects food, nutrition, environment, and body politics from the perspectives of disability, gender, and sexuality studies. While the four texts here reviewed do not address all of these gaps in the literature, each proves path breaking in grappling with the socially constructed dimensions of food, nutrition, and body politics.

American Studies and Food Science & Technology scholar Charlotte Biltekoff's *Eating Right in America* is a chronological examination of dietary reform efforts from nineteenth-century America through the post-9/11 moment. In focusing on the "cultural politics of dietary reform at the turn of the century," Biltekoff traces how classed, gendered, and racially imbued attempts to reform diet continue into the contemporary moment by way of efforts such as MyPlate, body mass index (BMI), and eating locally (14). American and Gender Studies author Amy Erdman Farrell's *Fat Shame* directs attention onto bodies. She explores historical linkages between body size and citizenship, exposing "fatness [as a] marker of social status" and the endurance of fat stigma as an intersectional dimension of other forms of contextualized discrimination (2). Food Studies scholar Julie Guthman's *Weighing In* positions a much-needed, much-expanded food systems perspective on obesity, calling for intersectional understandings of "social inequalities and environmental exposures [that contribute] to disparate health outcomes" (19). Building upon previous critical work on organic agriculture, whiteness, and alternative foods, and pushing back against common obesity narratives, Guthman suggests *Weighing In* is about the limits of capitalism, through examination of food systems' explanations of obesity, alongside critical insights into alternative food movements and lifestyle framings.<sup>4</sup> Using political ecology, food, and science studies frameworks, Guthman argues "the problem of obesity is an artifact of particular ways of measuring, studying, and redressing the phenomenon so that existing assumptions about its causes, consequences and solutions are built into existing efforts to assess it [as] problem" (23). Propelling beyond body politics, obesity, and dietary reform, Alkon and Agyeman's edited volume *Cultivating Food Justice* showcases a range of interdisciplinary food- and environmental justice-centered scholarship, ranging from the historical to the contemporary by way of four central themes: socioeconomic factors effecting unequal access to food; political ecology and foodways inequity; case study analyses of specific food justice work; and critiques for future directions in contemporary food justice. Given its depth and range of analyses, *Cultivating Food Justice* covers important ground previously lacking in food studies and movements, particularly with regard to critical theorizing about race, class, ethnicity, sustainability, and food access, thereby expanding understandings of food justice as both a field of scholarly inquiry and fruitful activism.

Expanding upon Laura Shapiro's classic 1986 text *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century*—a gendered and classed historical ex-

ploration of domestic science and dietary reform as a means of modernizing the American diet during early 1900s industrialization—Charlotte Biltekoff’s *Eating Right in America: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health* casts a critical eye on the many shapes of dietary reform over time.<sup>5</sup> From turn-of-the-century nutritional science with its “overt intermingling of nutritional knowledge and moral concern,” to WWII-era vitamin discovery and overt national linkages of productive wartime citizenship with good nutrition habits; to the alternative food and environmental reform movements of the 1980s; to contemporary moralized constructions of thinness as self-control and good citizenship in the midst of anti-obesity campaigns, Biltekoff outlines a long historical construction of ideal citizenship linked to shifting dietary reforms and nutritional knowledge. As Biltekoff argues in chapter two, “Scientific Moralization and the Beginning of Modern Dietary Reform,” the work of early nutritionists Wilbur Atwater, Ellen Richards, and other domestic scientists conveys “that nutrition is more than just assessing food value, or even delimiting what counts as food value. It’s an ideology not just how we think about food, but also how we think about ourselves and other people” (44).

The author importantly highlights the connections between diet and social-class constructions. Biltekoff argues that “nutrition and the American middle class emerged together [through] a mutually constitutive process that depended on the construction of a dangerously ‘unhealthy other’” (44). Arguing that rapid urbanization and industrialization represented a constant threat of the “intermingling of classes,” she suggests that middle-class identity formation quickly claimed the importance of “proper” dietary health as a means of resisting such intermingling. Through discourse analysis of Atwater’s calorimeter and Richards’ dietary advice to eat according to one’s employment and social role, the author frames the social constructedness of nutritional science and its incredible influence through the contemporary moment of wide-ranging alternative food movements and dietary focus. Biltekoff’s work thus greatly expands understandings of food science from a cultural studies perspective through critical emphasis on the ways in which this knowledge reflected, and even proved a tool for, maintaining socioeconomic differences along nutritional lines.

By the author’s own admission in the introduction, “The Cultural Politics of Dietary Health,” the focus of the text remains “the discourse of reformers,” rather than how and if reform efforts influenced the ways in which people consumed, or what those targeted by reformist discourse felt and how they might have responded to nutritional and dietary targeting (11). Class, gender, and racial dynamics of dietary reform play a role in Biltekoff’s analysis, including, for instance, the ways in which Ellen Richards’ early reform efforts drew upon eugenics to construct eugenics—the science of “better living,” highlighting the role that food played in early understandings of race. Biltekoff also includes analysis of the centrality of traditional gender roles for women as familial models for kitchen-front ideals during wartime dietary efforts. In chapter five, “Thinness as Health, Self-Control, and Citizenship,” the author also critically engages a

growing body of literature on racialized discourses, presumptions, and conflation of obesity with self-control, from medical research, fitness routines, weight loss guides, and even discussion of Eddie Murphy's role as Sherman Klump in *The Nutty Professor* (1996). In this way, Biltekoff elucidates the ways in which body size is understood in extremely classed terms linked to racial-ethnic privilege.

It is important to emphasize that the central focus of this text is particularly how the "[harnessing of] the calculative power of nutritional science for social aims" and moral reform reveals emergent middle-class constructions of good citizenship through diet and nutrition, which carry into the present moment of alternative food movements and obesity-centered policy expansion. The core strength of Charlotte Biltekoff's *Eating Right in America* is its emphasis on the social constructedness of dietary advice as social class discourse, without undermining the significance of thinking more expansively about eating as an "agricultural, ethical and political act" (153). However, I see a need for further historical and contemporary critical racial-ethnic analysis on the subject, and broader cultural constructions of types of dietary reform. Finally, I see a need for expanded engagement of the *intersectional* dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexuality identity politics in histories of dietary reform. These are only sparsely included in Biltekoff's *Eating Right in America*. For instance, what of the role of dietary reform in early settlement houses and domestic violence work with poor and immigrant communities in the US? What further insights into dietary reform and domestic science might bringing early black women's reform work to the conversation reveal? What of counter narratives in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century socialist and anarchist feminist anti-kitchen literature, or engaging the ways in which dietary reform was utilized as a tool of cultural and racial genocide in boarding schools for native children? Finally, how is dietary reform being presently harnessed as a site for cultural survival or revival against imperialism, genocide, or racism in specific communities? Thus, I underscore this work as a fruitful site for future scholarship expanding upon Shapiro and Biltekoff's foundational historical illuminations. Moreover, I second the author's important suggestion that there is much work to be done in food and critical nutritional studies to elucidate the ways in which individuals and communities on the receiving end of dietary targeting of "healthy" lifestyle, "right" diet, "good" food, or even "real" food, both historically and contemporarily respond, resist, or make counter use of such discourse.

With a focus on illuminating politics of size in the United States, Amy Erdman Farrell's *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* historically analyzes the stigma and discrimination specifically associated with fat, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Farrell examines the connections between body size and social constructions of acceptable citizenship using an extensive range of source materials including advertisements, dietary advice, political cartoons, postcards, and contemporary popular culture. Farrell suggests that fat stigma develops as a result of cultural anxieties associated with "consumer excess and [with] prevailing ideas about race, civilization, and

evolution,” thereby yoking this form of discrimination to gender and racial hierarchies and “the historical development of whiteness” (5). The author traces and complicates the use of fat denigration in a variety of ways: as a rhetorical device of the early women’s movement; as a racialized narrative of primitive versus civilized; and as exemplary of cultural anxiety over the dangers of modernity warping masculinity and appropriate femininity. Farrell also underscores the ways in which fat stigma is still salient in the contemporary moment. That said, Farrell does not construct fat denigration as “monolithic” in its cultural capital, using chapter six, “Refusing to Apologize,” to engage multiple perspectives; from fat activism and resistance to fat discrimination through her analysis of counter literature, the Health at Every Size Movement, Fat Underground, radical lesbian fat activism zines, and the National Association to Aid Fat Americans, among other media and material culture (5).

The strength of this text is the fascinating range of intersectional perspective it provides concerning the historical linkages between hierarchies of citizenship and fat stigma, thereby extending the contemporary work on fatness.<sup>6</sup> Farrell illuminates the role of industrialization in shifting social understandings of fat as once a signifier of prosperity, wealth, and high social status, then used as a cultural metaphor for greed, gluttony, and unbridled capitalism conveyed in political cartoons, media, and advertising of the day (30). The author likewise exposes numerous vivid historical connections between gender, sexuality, and body size; for instance, through her analysis of the rise of the nineteenth-century Muscular Christianity movement, in which the fear of “corpulence” becomes a marker of civilization that “endangers white middle-class men” by way of the threat of “neurasthenia” and of becoming “an invert, the term used at the time for homosexuals” (46). This signified a presumptive cultural anxiety that modernity brought with it the threat of “unsexing” both men and women—men by way of excessive comforts turning them soft, and women by way of exposure to modern freedoms that “warped their bodies, their minds, and their sexualities” (48).

In chapter three, “Fat and the Un-civilized Body,” Farrell importantly underscores nineteenth-century constructions of evolution and naturalized social hierarchies stemming from imperialist, racist, and sexist understandings of the so-called primitive versus civilized bodies, exemplified by her critical analysis of such exhibits as the 1893 Columbian Exposition, the public abuse of indigenous Khoikhoi woman Sara Baartman, among analyses of other scientific documentation, medical experimentation, and visual culture of the time period. Chapter four, “Feminism, Citizenship and Fat Stigma,” elucidates important connections between fat stigma and early feminist rhetoric both for *and* against the movement. This provides insight into cultural pushback against suffrage through political “portrayals of fat white women suffragists as an affront to the gendered order of higher levels of civilization,” but also insight into the ways in which anti-fat was then historically usurped as a suffragist tactic to inspire public support (90, 95). This chapter complicates the fraught dynamics of body size in contemporary feminist scholarship and activism, while also leaving room to question the role



that feminists have played in undermining fat stigma through counter narratives critically engaged in her aforementioned chapter “Refusing to Apologize.”

Amy Farrell’s important work to expose the “cultural baggage that has fueled a fat-hating perspective” generates an intriguing historical intersectional framework from which to better understand scholars like Biltekoff or Julie Guthman, who each take the topic in differing socio-historical and theoretical directions. Farrell’s concluding suggestion is that fat discrimination need be critiqued not least because of its cultural and public health effects on the targets of such stereotyping, but also because of its influence on contemporary constructions of “health” and “fitness” harkening back to earlier constructions of “un/civilized” citizenship dichotomies. Farrell argues these contemporary versions of fat stigma “exacerbate racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia” (176). This text is expressly focused on “the meaning of fat” by historically tracing cultural constructions of shame and stigma surrounding fat as it is linked to ideals of citizenship (5). Farrell’s work does not include discussion of positive cultural valuations or reverence for fat, beyond critical engagement with the work of fat activists resisting stigma and declaring body acceptance. Furthermore, beyond introductory discussion of the author’s position as both food and fat activist, or inclusion of historical diets noted in chapter one, “Considering Fat Shame,” this text does not expressly engage the material culture of fat as physiological substance or consumable product with a variety of relative meanings and associations. This is an important absence that Julie Guthman’s work addresses from intriguing social, medical, and epidemiological angles. However, Farrell’s scholarship embeds contemporary cultural understandings of fat within a long intersectional history of discrimination. By begging the question of why, when, and how fatness came to be socially stigmatized and viewed as synonymous with problematic citizenship, Amy Farrell’s *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* illuminates a troubling, discriminatory social landscape framing American body politics and industry with far reaching influences, including present day food movements.

Taking the social construct of obesity as a site for critical analysis, and deconstructing its most common constructions—as epidemic, as point of dietary reform, and as so-called ecological threat influencing global warming—geographer and cultural studies scholar Julie Guthman argues for a political ecology of obesity in her path-blazing book, *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice and the Limits of Capitalism*. Guthman frames her critique through the lens of the very limits of capitalism, positing that “neoliberal governmentality encourages subjects to make few demands on the state but rather acts through the market or like the market,” which has tended to reinforce the notion that “health is a personal responsibility more than a social one.” Guthman posits that this has resulted in “intensified social scolding of the obese” (18). While examined in depth in chapter three, “Whose Problem is Obesity?,” the author shifts away from obesity as solely a form of bio-power in this book, to center attention on a broader understanding of obesity as an ecological condition reflecting entire economies



“[producing] the social inequalities and environmental exposures [contributing] to disparate health outcomes, whether or not they manifest as obesity” (19). This framework permits a much more expansive engagement of policies, industries, environmental regulation, and scientific and agricultural research, among many other possibilities extending beyond lifestyle and consumerism (19).

*Weighing In* is especially important scholarship in food and critical nutritional science studies because it provides complex insights into the role that obesity plays in food and environmental discourse by way of lifestyle and moral panic anxieties. For instance, the chapter “How Do We Know Obesity Is a Problem?” posits that the term itself reflects a pathologizing “medicalization of fatness,” and the notion of fatness as epidemic is “an artifact of particular measures, statistical conventions, epidemiological associations, and rhetorical moves” (25). The author analyzes conceptualizations and pitfalls of BMI; the specific contexts of “seeing” or observing disease; Center for Disease Control (CDC) research on thinness *and* fatness in type 2 diabetes; as well as analysis of the rhetoric of pathologized, “at risk” bodies. In this way, Guthman proposes three crucial points to argue obesity as a construct and to destabilize the science of obesity through critical cultural studies analysis: A.) Health risk factors are multidirectional and include a range of behaviors, conditions, inheritances, and social and genetic factors working in tandem (39); B.) Disease risk factors are often separate from ultimate “manifestations of a pathological condition”; C.) Size does not indicate health, nor can it be separated from cultural contexts in which thinness is normative. On this last point, Guthman calls for “embracing human variation” (43).

This text is particularly strong in its deconstruction of specific presumptions that remain at the forefront of food politics and nutritional science. The author accomplishes this through deconstruction of key concepts like obesity, BMI, healthism, obesogenic environment, and alternative foods, as well as by way of core questions guiding each chapter. These questions are: How do we know obesity is a problem? Whose problem is obesity? Does your neighborhood make you fat? Does eating (too much) make you fat? Does farm policy make you fat? And, will fresh, local, organic food make you thin? Framing the text around these, among other questions, re-frames the analysis away from cultural presumptions built into scientific, environmental, epidemiological, and political discourses constantly swirling around food activism, policy, and consumption norms. This reviewer finds the text’s critical analysis of obesogenic environmental discourse, of specific farm industry policies, and inclusion of food labor practices especially salient scholarship. Furthermore, Guthman’s examination of endocrine-disrupting chemicals is an important breakthrough in cultural studies analyses of foodways. The author argues that the “upward trajectory in BMI values appears to be a consequence of exposures to a set of barely regulated chemicals and food substances,” focusing on the effects such chemical exposures have on “the way obesogens affect fat cell regulation” (111). The implications of this research for future cultural and science studies scholarship in epigenetics as well as environ-

mental justice work will no doubt prove generative. I would argue that such a cultural studies presence in burgeoning research on genetics and EDC (ethylene dichloride) toxicity is essential; yet, I would also caution against the potential implications of such data to re-construct essentializing racialized and gendered genetic discourse. I would have liked to see greater balancing of the biological and material culture of obesogenics with the sociocultural implications of such data. Overall though, these multiple topics together force the dialogue away from individual bodies or consumer “choices” and onto industry, economy, and the myriad environmental, cultural, political, and behavioral phenomena working at once to effect human health and body size.

An examination of complex topics within the neoliberal imaginary of food politics, Guthman’s *Weighing In* offers searing analysis of an incredible range of linkages to health and obesity. For instance, deconstruction of the obesogenic environmental debate raises crucial presumptions embedded in the theory, including: the fact that this framework often reinforces the moralizing body politics of healthism; that it frequently works from presumptions about what causes obesity; and that it reveals classed and raced presumptions of idealized, often gentrified built environments based upon lifestyle norms. Guthman acknowledges that “deemphasizing individual behaviors [could] diminish moral scrutiny [and] personal responsibility” blaming in obesity rhetoric. Likewise, a “focus on the built environment” brings awareness to industry, regional planning, and urban design (67). That said, the author draws upon quantitative and qualitative data to underscore the constraints and research biases of such a framework. In much the same way that fat studies scholar Anna Kirkland has critiqued the “environmental account of obesity,” Guthman resists the notion that “problem features of the built environment are independent of who lives [in a given neighborhood],” along with the simplified conclusion that “more grocery stores will reduce obesity” (69, 75).<sup>7</sup> Citing both American studies scholar George Lipsitz’s insights into racist housing policy in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1998) and environmental studies scholar Andrew Szasz’s work on green consumer trends as exemplary of the double-edged gentrification narrative embedded in lifestyle and food desert rhetoric, Guthman argues for a critical intersectional approach that considers behavioral tendencies, gives attention to how “economic development strategies to attract capital [often] displac[e] those with fewer means,” and grants greater attention to gentrification and class cultures that effect food access (88).

The breadth of political ecological examination in this text is impressive, and remains its core strength. A testament to the range of this book, I would add on a more anecdotal note that since the text’s release in 2011, I have used it in my own curriculum during three separate semesters in Gender Studies, Food Studies, and American Studies courses. Inclusion of Guthman’s own student responses to course materials in a Politics of Obesity class at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in chapter three, “Whose Problem is Obesity?,” provides excellent insight into normative constructions of thinness and healthism that many of us teaching body politics in Food Studies and Gender Studies courses

face in the classroom on a regular basis. Yet, the fact of the text's topical and theoretical range also proves the most overwhelming dimension of the scholarship, though the author's point is to drive home the sheer multi-dimensionality and complexity of obesity, which has long been over-simplified. This work is nonetheless far reaching, from medical research, food studies, critical nutritional studies, genetics, as well as scholarship in environmental justice ranging from labor studies to toxicity research—all could benefit from Guthman's research. By positing a critique of capitalism's many initiatives, and "the systemic production of inequality" as a deep-rooted structural dimension of food and foodways, this book ventures where others have not often tread (195). Julie Guthman's critique directly addresses alternative food movements for failure to face industry and regulatory environs *and* radical food justice movements for addressing food access while often failing to attack class disparities, labor politics, or neoliberal, capitalist-centric food systems. She pushes back on medical pathologization of body size *and* the social constructedness of medical as well as nutritional information. Julie Guthman's *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice and the Limits of Capitalism* ultimately argues for putting capitalism itself "on the table," a daunting yet crucial task indeed (196).

Alison Alkon and Julian Agyeman's edited volume *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, published as part of MIT Press' *Food, Health and the Environment* series (edited by food justice scholar Robert Gottlieb), takes up the persistence of predominantly white, middle-class participation in popular food movement trends towards fresh, local, and organic foods purchased as a means of "[voting] with your fork" (2). This text utilizes the feminist social science concept of positionality as its core, pushing back against the all-too-often privileged perspectives reflected in mainstream food movements. For instance, the editors question the presumptions in Michael Pollan's list of food rules, such as "not eating anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food." They respond through the suggestion that "our great-grandmothers come from a wide variety of social and economic contexts that may have informed their perceptions of food quite differently. Some were enslaved . . . forcibly sent to state-mandated boarding schools [or] saw the foods they recognized demeaned or even forbidden" (3).

Addressing the gap Charlotte Biltekoff underscored in *Eating Right in America*, at the heart of this edited volume are the voices, stories, and resistances not often featured within the dominant food movement narrative, ranging from histories of black nationalism, to food security dynamics in rural communities, to veganism within communities of color, and to land ownership and market development amongst Southern farmers of color, among so many more. The editors and authors suggest this serves to expand food movement coalitions to generate a "deeper critique of industrialized agriculture" that is inclusive of injustices (4). The authors included in this collection convey the food system itself as a racial project, underscoring the importance of food *and* environmental justice by way of two key concerns: food access and food sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Kari Marie

Norgaard, Ron Reed, and Carolina Van Horn's "A Continuing Legacy" takes up the effects of colonial legacy on Karuk tribal lands in what is now California. The authors suggest that hunger and poverty experienced presently within the community results from being denied food sovereignty in traditional food practices (26). Arguing that the racial projects of genocide, assimilation, and tribal land management policies ultimately produce food insecurity among the Karuk, the authors convey an integrated analysis of the ways in which race expressly informs environmental justice concerns in Karuk communities as a direct lineage of these three examples of discriminatory practices (28).

This text is a crucial addition to food justice scholarship and activism because it addresses environmental justice specifically, as food politics and the "nexus between these movements" are so often not a central feature of environmental justice scholarship (9). For example, in "Race and Regulation," Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern, et al., posit that factors effecting contemporary land dispossession experienced by Hmong farmers in California work in contrast to historically racist acts of land seizure legislated against Chinese and Japanese farmers (68). Finally, the scholarship featured in *Cultivating Food Justice* draws upon Laura Pulido's work calling for greater understanding of social constructionism in the identity politics enmeshed with environmental justice work, pushing back against biological essentialisms of race and racism which often undermine the claims of environmental justice (10). As previously noted, essays included in this text work across four central themes to argue a number of important concluding re-imaginings about food and foodways, including such examples as: pushing beyond color- and class-blind food movements; broadening the constructed meanings associated with food "within and among groups" (334); emplacing laborers within food justice movement alliances; and pushing back against market-driven strategies presently dominating food movements, among others.

In this way, Alkon and Agyeman's edited collection takes up many of the same critiques that Julie Guthman's *Weighing In* calls for, particularly the importance of situating food labor and agricultural workers, deconstructing normative presumptions and embedded meanings applied to foodways, as well as revisiting the limitations of capitalist-centered food systems. Whereas Biltekoff's work centers on the rhetoric of reformers, and Farrell's work centers on historicizing moral anxieties and social constructions of size and health (with a brief inclusion of counter narratives in fat activism), the essays included in *Cultivating Food Justice* are entirely framed around the voices of resistance to dominant narrative and common normative framings in food politics and alternative food movements.

Though to varying degrees, each of these four texts reveals critical intersectional identity politics linked to the ways in which food systems, nutritional data, and body politics, particularly diet and size politics, reflect incredibly timely (if problematic) understandings of food and health. The authors draw attention to the scholarship and coalition building still left to be further pursued, by way of critical race, class, food, and environmental studies. Likewise, I suggest there is still more work needed specifically at the intersections of gender and sexuality

studies, disability studies, queer theory, and food, environment, and health politics. Nonetheless, the texts are accessible and path breaking. Students and scholars in a broad range of disciplines in the humanities and sciences will certainly benefit from this crucial work. As Alkon and Agyeman note on the importance of developing a greater dialogue instead of confrontation, “Many in the food justice movement are wary of alienating potential allies. Nonetheless we believe food justice can [push] the food movement to interrogate [how] unacknowledged race and class privilege [have shaped its agenda]” (344). Thus, food and body politics activists likewise stand to benefit from these texts as a means of developing more critical understandings of food and health for strengthened coalition building.

## Notes

1. Michael Pollan, interview with Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now!*, February 13, 2008, <http://www.democracynow.org/shows/2008/2/13> (accessed May 2, 2009).

2. Quoted in *Food, Inc.*, documentary, directed by Robert Kenner (Magnolia Home Entertainment, 2009).

3. “Alice Waters’ Crusade For Better Food: Lesley Stahl Profiles The Outspoken, And Sometimes Controversial California Food Activist,” *CBS News*, March 15, 2009, (accessed March 20, 2009). See also Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007); and Kim Severson, “Some Good News on Food Prices,” *New York Times*, April 2, 2008 (accessed May 3, 2009).

4. Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). See also Julie Guthman, “‘If Only They Knew’: The Unbearable Whiteness of Alternative Foods,” in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, eds. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2011), 263–81; and Julie Guthman, “The Food Police: Why Michael Pollan makes me want to eat Cheetos,” *The Utne Reader* (excerpted from *Gastronomica*), January/February 2008 (accessed May 3, 2009).

5. Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986; reprint 2008).

6. See for instance, Kathleen LeBesco, *Revolting Bodies: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); Anna Kirkland, *Fat Rights: Dilemmas of Difference and Personhood* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); and *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

7. Anna Kirkland, “The Environmental Account of Obesity: A Case for Feminist Skepticism,” *Signs* 36:2 (2011), 463–85. See also Anna Kirkland, *Fat Rights: Dilemmas of Difference and Personhood* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

8. Food access is the ability to produce and consume healthy foods that are culturally appropriate. Sovereignty is defined as the right for individuals and communities to define their own food systems. See for example 2<sup>nd</sup> principle “Local Food System, Community Development, and Public Investment,” *Draft Principles for Food Justice*, outlined during Food + Justice = Democracy Conference, October 18, 2012 (accessed November 15, 2012).