

Shouldering Responsibility for the Delivery of Human Rights: A Case Study of the D-Town Farmers of Detroit

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The literature on who is responsible for the delivery of human rights has produced two divergent perspectives. One view suggests that appropriate units for the delivery of human rights are entities external to individuals such as nation-states or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Another is that individuals themselves are responsible. The issue of race complicates the delivery issue even further. Discourses that assign responsibility to governments typically fail to acknowledge that those governments often have constructed some races as subordinate. Discourses that assign responsibility to individuals, however, sometimes fail to acknowledge that racially marginalized groups often have been so colonized that they see themselves as inherently inferior and thus lacking the capacity to act. This case study of the D-Town farmers of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network provides an examination of a group that responds to the issue of delivery of human rights by enacting an agentic perspective. D-Town farmers challenge the government's capacity to provide a safe and clean food supply and provide it themselves, challenge the government's capacity to provide culturally relevant information about healthy food, and offer that information to their community, assuming control of their food-security movement.

Introduction

Much of the literature on human rights focuses on defining and legitimating such rights. While this effort is certainly necessary and important, also key is assignment of responsibility for the actual delivery of human rights. Identification of the entities responsible for implementing human rights is, as Norberto Bobbio (1996, 12) suggests, crucial in "preventing their continuing violation." Among those who advocate for an

increased focus on identification of responsibility for human rights is Arjun Sengupta (2007, 64), who suggests not only that the “one-duty bearer” for human rights should be identified but also that the potential exists for multiple duty bearers, raising issues of their complementary duties and, if necessary, of how their responsibilities and duties are coordinated. Charles Beitz’s (2001, 43) focus in the conversation is on assignment of economic responsibility for the delivery of human rights. He suggests that key issues that need to be addressed are “where the resources should come from to satisfy the right and why anyone has the duty to provide them.”

My purpose in this paper is to enter the discussion concerning responsibility for the delivery of human rights. My particular focus will be the impact of race on the implementation of human rights and the options available to races defined as subordinate within dominant cultures. I will study a case in which a racially marginalized group adopts and enacts a particular view of responsibility for human rights and thus demonstrates that members of a group traditionally defined as subordinate and lacking in agency can enact human rights for themselves. In doing so, they operate as alternative human rights guarantors.

Responsibility for the Delivery of Human Rights

The conventional view of responsibility for the delivery of human rights is to implement “human rights from the outside” (Ingram 2008, 413), with entities or agents external to individuals most often assumed to be the appropriate units for the protection and promotion of human rights. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “humanitarian and human rights organizations must speak with one voice in calling attention to the duty of states . . . to promote and protect human rights” (FAO 1998a).

In most cases, the entity assigned responsibility for providing human rights is the nation-state, which is accorded this responsibility by international human rights agreements negotiated between nation-states and the United Nations (Kent 2005). Because internal human rights agreements bestow on nation-states “the obligation under international law to represent the interests of the society of all inhabitants within its boundaries” (McCorquodale 1994, 874–75), international law thereby protects the interests of human beings vis-à-vis a corporate entity—namely, the State (Dinstein 1976). International human rights law thus serves as the sanctioning agent for the implementation of human rights, setting out “standards and norms to . . . describe the institutional mechanism and procedures for ensuring that the rights are realized” (Kent 2005, 75).

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Adherence to international human rights laws is monitored internally by nation-states. When they ratify and sign international agreements, nation-states commit to assuming the responsibility to use available resources toward the realization of human rights: "states today bind themselves to an international regime designed to protect the fundamental rights of virtually every child, woman, and man through law" (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005, 1374). Under the UN Charter, nation-states are held accountable to international structures for the delivery of human rights through monitoring procedures and oversight by authorities such as special rapporteurs as determined by the UN Charter (UN Development Programme 2000).

Three primary mechanisms are used to realize human rights at the nation-state level. The legal or judicial systems within nation-states deal with violations of human rights. Under conditions where rights have been violated, these systems are to "provide the channels for redress for individuals whose rights have been violated" (Gruskin, Mills, and Tarantola 2007, 452). Legislation is a second means by which human rights are realized within nation-states. Institutions such as national assemblies, parliaments, and congresses may choose to pass legislation that implements and guarantees human rights to citizens in various arenas. A third means for the realization for human rights is advocacy by "individuals whose rights have been violated" (*ibid.*). Advocacy is a necessary component to "move obligations to practice" (*ibid.*).

Entities other than nation-states are sometimes held responsible for the delivery of human rights. Because human rights discourse typically originates in international human rights agreements, transnational or international organizations are sometimes cited as responsible for the implementation of human rights. Entities within the UN Charter such as the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Center for Human Rights, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, for example, are all formally committed to the implementation of human rights (Kent 2005, 37). The United Nations Secretary-General, in fact, has encouraged both the humanitarian and human rights communities to discuss and reform the ways in which human rights are pursued in their respective organizations (FAO 1998a). Other international organizations charged with duties under international human rights laws include the Interecclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace, and the World Bank (Kent 2005, 117).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are other entities that sometimes are assigned responsibility for advancing human rights. While some of these public interest advocacy organizations are specifically concerned with implementing and monitoring rights within individual countries, global NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and organizations broader in scope such as OXFAM, Médecins Sans

Frontières, the Red Cross, Save the Children, and Action Aid also are seen to play a significant role in implementing human rights (Sen 2004, 344).

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Although most discussions of human rights make international and national bodies the entities responsible for implementing human rights, some human rights scholars identify the individual as the starting point for their delivery. Those who make this argument see individuals as active subjects rather than objects of human rights discourse. Proponents of this point of view focus on the right to self-determination and on the capacity of individuals to satisfy their own needs. Ingram (2008), for example, suggests that human rights are an expression of autonomy and that the most “efficacious understanding of human rights is one that is convincing, and motivating to their bearers” (ibid., 414). Isaac (1996) argues that freedom, dignity, and control over individuals’ own lives comes not from international human rights laws or from the nation-state but “from the praxis of citizens who insist upon these rights and who are prepared to back up this insistence through political means” (ibid., 70).

Those who hold an individualistic perspective argue that human rights interventions by external agencies often have the opposite effect from what is intended. As Ignatieff (2001) argues, “the very purpose of rights language is to protect and enhance individual agency” (ibid., 18), but the act of attributing responsibility to entities for delivering human rights sometimes takes away the very agency those rights are designed to protect. Chandler (2005) extends the argument, suggesting that the delivery of human rights by external agencies continues to locate agency and power in the already powerful and creates dependency instead of empowerment. Mihr and Schmitz (2007) also see human rights as a strategy of individual empowerment, while Balibar (1994) asserts that “no one can be liberated or emancipated by others from ‘above’” (ibid., 212).

Those who assign to individuals the responsibility for implementing human rights see that responsibility as assuming many forms. Public discussion is one mechanism by which individuals realize human rights in that such discussions generate “ideational and normal pressure through the spread of convergent shared expectations and discourses” (Uvin 2007, 604). Indigenous and grassroots organizations offer another mechanism for individuals for the delivery of human rights. These organizations “use economic, social, and cultural rights as a reference point from which to monitor their states’ conduct” (Windfuhr 1998). They mobilize grassroots and citizen power in favor of certain rights and create “complaint mechanisms to promote human rights” (Uvin 2007, 604).

Some who hold the individual responsible for guaranteeing human rights adopt a more limited view of individuals’ responsibility. They see individuals as having the obligation

to meet their own needs under normal circumstances. The government, however, operates as a safety net for individuals when certain categories of people are involved or under conditions of disaster or emergency. Representative of this stance is the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's perspective that "a government's responsibility is not to interfere with individuals' efforts to provide for themselves, but to seek to ensure an enabling environment for such efforts" (FAO 1998b). In disaster situations, or under conditions when providing for oneself becomes unfeasible, there is an obligation for the government to provide for people's food needs directly: "The government is the provider of last resort, but only for certain categories of people in certain kinds of extreme conditions" (Kent 2005, 108). Under these conditions, the Food and Agricultural Organization recommends that states create safety mechanisms and legislation that will identify and delegate the role of authorities to meet the needs of those who are less fortunate (FAO 1998b).

Assignment of responsibility for the implementation of human rights—external or internal—becomes more complex with the addition of the variable of race. Most of the literature on human rights simply assumes that race is insignificant in the delivery of human rights and that human rights discourse applies equally to all races. Certainly, human rights discourse is designed to reach all peoples, regardless of race, but what that discourse often fails to consider is how race intersects with the assignment of responsibility for realizing human rights. Discourses that assign that responsibility to government agencies typically fail to acknowledge that the nation-states that are supposed to deliver human rights often have constructed some races as subordinate and less-deserving recipients of rights than other races. In some cases, laws prevent access to rights by people of certain races. In other cases, laws do not explicitly deny rights to particular racial groups but inadvertently do so, as is the case with laws barring prisoners from voting, arguably a fundamental right of citizenship. A disproportionate number of African Americans and Hispanics are consequently disenfranchised as a result simply because they are imprisoned in greater numbers than whites. Human rights discourses are often applied to these races by representatives of the dominant culture that denied them human rights initially. To entrust them to provide human rights to citizens of all races, then, is unrealistic.

By the same token, discourses that assign responsibility to individuals often fail to acknowledge not only that formal structures may keep them from assuming responsibility for rights but that racial minorities often have been colonized; their "minds and habits" (hooks 1994, 5) have been conquered by

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the dominant culture so that they themselves internalize and accept their “inherent inferiority” (hooks 1995, 110). Thus, for them to take the steps on their own behalf that would be required for them to assume responsibility for the delivery of human rights often would be very difficult and thus equally unfeasible.

I have had the opportunity to analyze a case study that allows for an exploration of the intersection of race and the delivery of human rights. It is a case of African Americans in the United States who explicitly engage the issue in human rights discourse of who has the responsibility for delivering human rights. As a subordinate, oppressed group in American culture, they deal with the challenge I noted above—how to achieve human rights in a system that constructs them as not deserving of human rights, when they may not see themselves as possessing the agency required to claim those rights for themselves. The case study involves African American urban farmers in Detroit, Michigan, who claim the human right to safe and healthy food. Race prevents them from accessing the human right to food, fosters a warranted skepticism on their part about the willingness of whites to provide them with that right, and involves their development of a racially based solution to securing their human rights on their own.

Food as a Human Right

Because the human right that the urban farmers address is the right to adequate food, and because access to food has not always been considered a human right, I turn now to a brief review of the development of this conception of food and food access. Some scholars and activists are now arguing that access to food is one of those “fundamental moral rights of the person that are necessary for a life with human dignity” (Forsythe 2006, 3). The right to access to food fits into what are often considered to be second-generation rights or socioeconomic rights such as those articulated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. It is an important human right not only on its own but also because it is inseparable from many other basic human rights.

Discussions of food as a human right have taken place at several international conferences that concluded with official resolutions and international declarations in an attempt to arrive at international consensus on the subject of the human right to adequate food (Kent 2005). In this section, I reference a few key documents and actions to provide a brief history of the topic. The first official mention of the human right to food occurred on March 14, 1963, when the special assembly on Man’s Right to Freedom from Hunger met in Rome. The manifesto issued from the conference asserted that freedom from hunger is a fundamental right.

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Subsequent debates about access to food occurred within the broader context of other human rights provisions, such as those that assert the right to quality of life and health. For example, the original Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 stated as follows:

Everyone has a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (UN 1948).

In 1966, with ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the perspective was articulated that everyone should have the right to an “adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions” (Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights 1999).

The committee extended the definition of food as a right to include physical and economic access at all times “to adequate food or means for its procurement” (General Comments #12, paragraph 6, 1999). It also included the concept of dignity in the definition of access to food, arguing that all individuals should have the right to feed themselves in dignity. The definition of dignity included

land, small-scale irrigation and seeds, credit, technology and local and regional markets, especially in rural areas and for vulnerable and discriminated groups, traditional fishing areas, a sufficient income to enable one to live in dignity, including for rural and industrial workers, and access to social security and social assistance for the most deprived. (Zeigler 2001) (see also A/56/210 and E/cn.4/2003/54)

Not all statements that address food as a human right describe food in terms of its accessibility or its adequacy. Some declarations describe the right to food in terms of striving for the comfort of its citizens. In 1974, the World Food Conference issued a universal declaration on the eradication of hunger and malnutrition as endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 3348. This document stated that every “man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop fully and maintain their physical and mental faculties” (OHCHR 1974).

In 1996, the World Food Security Summit in Rome created mapping systems that measured food insecurity and vulnerability that were used to assess “national efforts to reach food security goals” (Baro and Deubel 2006). The Summit concluded with agreement on the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit plan of action (Food and Agricultural Organization 1998b). This declaration reaffirmed the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food,

consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger. The declaration set a lofty goal for all countries to achieve:

We pledge our political will and our common and national commitment to achieving food security for all and to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015. (Kent 2005, 53)

The Millennium Summit of United Nations held in 2000 developed seven development goals, which were endorsed by all 189 nations in attendance (*ibid.*, 2005). According to Kent, its overall goal, related to the human right to adequate food, was to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Further, the summit placed a greater responsibility on developed countries for providing food, stating that more affluent countries “should contribute more generously to development in poor countries with no legal obligation to do so” (*ibid.*, 53).

The human right to adequate food, as demonstrated by these historical documents, addresses the provision of food. They also pay considerable attention to special and protected populations such as children, prisoners, refugees, and citizens in wartime. For example, in September 1990, at the World Summit for Children held at the United Nations in New York, the representative heads of state signed a plan of action for implementing the world declaration on the survival, protection, and development of children. The major objectives, identified in the plan, were to achieve “between 1990 and 2000, reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition among under-5 children by half” (UNICEF 1990). International humanitarian law also protects the rights of citizens when nations are at war. These laws prohibit starvation and the deprivation of food sources and supplies as a method of combat (Kent 2005).

D-Town Farmers: History and Context

The previous section was intended to establish that the conception of food as a basic human right has a long history of development and has gained acceptance in the human rights community. This is the right featured in the case that I suggested earlier would allow for an examination of the intersection of race and the discourse on human rights concerning responsibility for delivery of rights. D-Town Farm in Detroit, Michigan, began in the planting season of 2006 and “utilizes sustainable, earth-friendly food production techniques to produce thousands of pounds of high-quality fresh produce each year” (DBCFSN 2006, 1). The D-Town Farm was developed as a critical project of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), a nonprofit grassroots community organization. DBCFSN was founded by Malik Yakini, a longtime black liberation activist, bookstore owner, and school administrator who called together a group of people who were

interested in engaging in urban agriculture to “grasp larger control over the food system and to build self-reliance in our community” (personal communication). It is located on city-owned land that has been leased to the group for ten years. Since its inception, DBCFSN also initiated the U-Jamaa Food Buying Club, was instrumental in engineering a comprehensive food-security policy that was adopted by the Detroit City Council, created the Detroit Food Policy Council, and acquired a two-acre plot of city-owned land in Rouge Park to use for the D-Town Farm for ten years.

Detroit is a particularly appropriate geographic region for studying citizens’ efforts to secure control over their own food because lack of accessibility to adequate food has been well documented there (Zenk et al. 2005; Baker et al. 2006). Although the United States began experiencing an economic downturn in 2008, Detroit—and Michigan more generally—had been experiencing a depression for several years (Kaza 2006). This depression has exacerbated Detroit’s high unemployment, crime, and poverty levels as well as other socioeconomic ills. But there is another less publicized but equally significant marker of Detroit’s depression. In 2007, Farmer Jack became the last major grocery-store chain to close its doors on the citizens of the city (Smith and Hurst 2007). Even before then, Detroit’s residents had suffered from insufficient access to grocery stores and major supermarkets; in fact, many areas within Detroit are designated as “food deserts” (Gallagher 2007, 2). Food deserts are geographical locations where both economic and physical barriers stand between people and their access to healthy and affordable foods. The places where healthy food is found tend to be financially inaccessible and, where such food is plentiful, those areas are geographically out of reach for local residents, many of whom have limited access to reliable transportation.

Detroit fits the profile of a food desert on all key variables. The city is approximately 82 percent African American, and almost 30 percent of its residents live below the poverty line (U.S. Census 2000). In addition, one-fifth of the city’s population is without transportation (Gallagher 2007, 4). Gallagher and her colleagues are especially troubled that “any major city located in a state with a rich tradition of agriculture can have such a high degree of food imbalance” (ibid., 6). Even more disturbing is the existence of a food desert such as Detroit in a nation that is “the world’s largest producer and exporter of food” (Ahn 2004, 1) and where seven out of ten of the world’s top producers of food are U.S. companies (Hunkar 2008).

The consequences for public health of food deserts, where large numbers of people lack access to healthy foods, are enormous. The consequences become even more pronounced when

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race and class are taken into account. African Americans are more likely to experience food-related illnesses that are directly related to their inaccessibility to healthy foods (Cummings and Macintyre 2006; Baker et al. 2006). Among these are debilitating and chronic illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease (Moreland, Roux, and Wing 2001, 2006; Zenk et al. 2005).

For this case study, I interviewed ten D-Town farmers who had been highly involved in the organization during the previous farming season, determined by volunteer rolls maintained by the organization's farm manager. I discovered that much of what the members of the organization had to say in the interviews was about control and power. Much of what they discussed, regardless of the questions I asked, concerned their efforts to be the agents of their own transformation and the transformation of the city of Detroit, through their claim to the human right to food. Certainly they were interested in issues such as neighborhood beautification and food safety, but they were equally interested in taking and maintaining control of their own efforts to produce and secure healthy food. For this study, then, I chose to code the interviewees' responses for themes related to power, control, agency, and responsibility and to focus on these urban farmers' perspectives on the delivery of food as a human right.

Challenges to Conventional Delivery Systems of Food

Strategically, D-Town activists challenge the social structure that is supposed to provide the human right to access to healthy food. They demonstrate agency by interrogating the structures that others hold responsible for delivering food access. They do so in three ways: (1) they challenge the government's capacity to provide a safe and clean supply of food; (2) they challenge the government's capacity to provide culturally relevant information about healthy food; and (3) they demand control of their local food-security movement. They thus challenge the structure that is considered responsible for providing the human right to food and step in to fill the vacuum that their challenge generates.

Control of Food Supply

Scholars and activists who regard access to food as a human right are likely to believe that right includes granting control over the food supply to an entity that has sufficient monitoring and enforcement power. The D-Town farmers, however, eschew the idea that someone or something else has or must have control over their food supply and see themselves as holding sufficient power to control it themselves.

The starting point for the D-Town farmers' argument concerning control of the food supply is that they reject the govern-

ment's efforts to control food because of its ineptitude and its lack of care about the black community. They assert that recent events reinforce the notion that the government is incapable of providing or unwilling to supply citizens with safe, clean, and affordable food. Representative of this claim is Kwamena's statement:

We are dealing with genetically modified foods, pesticides, carcinogens in the food supply. The recent situation with the salmonella in the peanut factory, we are finding out that the government is unable to adequately protect the food supply. Either there is no will or a lack of funds or whatever, so there is a need to control your own [food] supply.

Malik similarly argues that many have "abdicated the responsibility over their lives and have given that away to forces that we perceive as more competent, more equipped to have a greater capacity and we've done that in terms of food systems." Government agencies, then, are considered to be lax about food safety issues and, as a result, fail to protect citizens from the use of genetically modified foods and pesticides.

Members of the D-Town farm also argue that they cannot count on others to provide them with healthy foods because availability to such food is based on race and class privilege. They note that those who live in more affluent communities have mechanisms to monitor available food. They also have easy access to safe and clean food and a wider range of healthy food options. Those who live in wealthy, predominantly white neighborhoods have the financial means to make choices about conventional versus organically grown fruits and vegetables. NeferRa comments on the difference in access to such food depending on location: "In the suburbs, there's a fruit market on every other corner. There's someplace to get fresh produce—to get fruit and vegetables." Kwamena agrees: "They [whites] have better access to fruits and veggies in their own neighborhood. People in the suburbs make the choice to engage in urban farming. For D-Town farmers, it's a necessity."

The designation of Detroit as a food desert means that its citizens are forced to obtain a considerable portion of their food from fringe retailers such as "liquor stores, gas stations, and convenience stores, party stores, dollar stores, bakeries, pharmacies, convenience stores and other venues" (Gallagher 2007, 5). Either from sheer neglect or from decisions based on profit, these inner-city stores often sell inadequate products to the city's most vulnerable residents. Many of these markets specialize in the sale of alcohol; tobacco; lottery tickets; and a small selection of prepackaged and canned food products high in salt, fat, and sugar. Kwamena argues that food retailers intentionally make decisions for profit over health and nutrition when dealing with black Detroiters: "The only access [to food] in Detroit is through party stores or gas stations or grocery stores that have inferior quality fruits and veggies, meat and

poultry that is outdated, and they don't care about switching the labels to continue selling them."

While the argument could be made that access to food is provided through fringe markets, the D-Town farmers suggest that the conception of access to food supplied by these stores is unacceptable. Aba's involvement in community gardening came in response to what she describes as a sense of abandonment by regular grocery stores: "Particularly in Detroit, our grocery stores have been woefully inadequate in terms of clean food. The major grocery store chains have all left our city, and a lot of people felt very abandoned and almost helpless." Linda also describes lack of accessibility as the exigency for becoming involved in urban gardening:

There are no markets in our area; therefore, people are not able to shop in their immediate area for healthy food, for fresh vegetables, as opposed to canned foods or fast-food restaurants, so the need is what directed me to towards going out and helping out in community garden.

NeferRa also was drawn to the urban-gardening movement as a way to assist the community in obtaining healthy food not available in local stores: "I joined the community gardening movement out of a need for fresh fruits and vegetables in Detroit."

Instead of petitioning the government or local merchants to control their food supply in more effective ways, the D-Town farmers reject governmental and market involvement and assume control of their own food supply. In the process of controlling this supply, the farmers see themselves as developing self-reliance. Through farming, they argue, they can produce their own food, invest in their communities, and encourage community members to learn much-needed survival skills. Aba's participation in gardening, she observes, is a way to develop self-determination and empowerment:

Community gardening lets you decide the kinds of food you want to eat and grow, and the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network lets you have some input as to what is grown. You get to help in the entire process of growing the food. That addresses the problem of self-reliance.

She continues:

I feel more empowered by growing my own. I have experienced not having it, and I felt powerless. They [grocery stores] can come and go. . . . If I grow it myself, I know what's going to happen. I get more peace of mind knowing that I can grow it, freeze it, dry it. Even if there were a grocery store that consistently provided fresh produce [in my neighborhood], I would still participate because I need to be able to control it myself.

Others suggest that a general sense of self-determination is generated through the gardens. Ebony cites this as her reason for involvement in community gardening:

The reason I'm engaged in farming is self-determination. It is important for us to create for ourselves and define our own realities, and the reasons that we should be doing anything when it comes to businesses, housing, anything, we should be in control of that. Being in Detroit, a predominantly black city, it's important for us to determine, for those of us who know, to be in control of the food system in Detroit because there are a lot of us who don't know.

Ebony also constructs the gardens as essential to survival skills when she describes what can happen when citizens rely on others to meet their needs:

The reality that at any moment on any given day the folks who control the grocery stores can say, "You know what? We tired of y'all. We are going to make our money somewhere else, or we are not going to sell what you want us to sell." You need to be able to feed yourself rather than waiting, you need to know how to grow it yourself instead of waiting on somebody down the street to sell it to you or choose not to.

Some of the farmers see self-reliance as having greater consequence than control over the food supply. Kwamena suggests that gardening also provides control over health. He notes that gardening reduces the need to engage in traditional medical care:

We don't seem to have access to medical care that other communities have on an ongoing basis due to employment status. . . . We need to learn how to go back to basics of what our parents did down South—cook food locally, cook nutritiously, understand why our parents lived to [the ages of] 80s and 90s.

Malik argues that community gardening is a means to gain control of the community:

I've been involved in efforts to build greater degrees of self-sufficiency or self-reliance in the black community and control of our communities. A logical extension of that work is to grasp larger control over the food system as it impacts us in our communities. That, in turn, led to gardening.

Aba also sees gardening as a way to gain control of her life and her community in general:

I heard that if you control the food supply, you can control the people; you don't need guns, you don't need bombs. To control what my children eat is very important to me. Community gardening is very political because it puts control in my hands. We won't have to live from someone else's hands, and neither will my children when they learn how to grow their own food.

Malik is typical of the farmers in his perception that gardening is an issue of survival and agency, with food almost incidental:

It isn't just an issue of having access to fresh produce in the community. It's also an issue of who controls that fresh pro-

duce and who profits from the sale of it. So even if there are stores selling fresh produce, we still benefit from building as high degree of self-reliance as we can.

What began for the D-Town farmers as an effort to control their food supply and thus to secure the human right to food came to have significance for them beyond access to food. They chose to become the parties with the responsibility for securing that right, developing self-reliance and agency as a result and enacting these qualities in multiple areas of their lives.

Control of Access to Information about Food

What began for the D-Town farmers as an effort to control their food supply and thus to secure the human right to food came to have significance for them beyond access to food. They chose to become the parties with the responsibility for securing that right, developing self-reliance and agency as a result and enacting these qualities in multiple areas of their lives.

Typically, information about healthy food choices and exercise begins in elementary school, where many children are introduced to the food pyramid. After that initial exposure, much of what individuals learn about healthy lifestyles comes from news reports, academic studies, Web sites, public service announcements, fitness clubs, and health-food establishments. These are informational sources to which many poor black people do not have ready access. Food information is also supposed to be learned from labels on packaged foods, but many people in this demographic have difficulty comprehending and interpreting the information on these labels. As Rothman et al. (2006) has shown, comprehension of food labels is influenced by factors of education, literacy, and income. Those with higher levels of education, income, and literacy thus are better able to interpret and make healthier food choices based on their understanding of the labels.

Members of D-Town challenge the social structure's methods of information dissemination about food content. They do so through a commitment to educate the public about the importance of food choices, the dangers of unhealthy food, and the benefits of healthy food and exercise. They describe the importance of informing citizens about making healthy food decisions by providing culturally relevant and easily accessible literature directed specifically to the black community on the importance of growing food, adding healthy fruits and vegetables to the daily diet, and exercise. Ebony, for example, describes the importance of providing information about her dietary lifestyle to others in her community:

Because of my own diet, the choices that I make personally—I am vegetarian and trying to eat organic and those kinds of things—I wanted to be able to reach people outside myself who are new to eating healthy or haven't been exposed yet to it. So by being involved in community gardening, it gives us an opportunity to open up people's eyes to the importance of food. . . . We take food for granted. . . . Even those who are

struggling, we don't have the appreciation for food. If we knew how important food was, I just don't think we would make the choices that we do.

Ebony explains the kinds of information that are important to disseminate:

It's important for our people to know what they're eating so they can make sound choices when they go grocery shopping or eat out. They need to know about the dangers of pesticides/hormones, the health effects of sugar and sugar derivatives like high fructose corn syrup, etc., etc., so that they can make healthier food choices. The more educated the public is about food, the more they will demand higher quality products or seek out those options that do exist. Through simple economics, the food system will evolve to reflect those new choices/preferences.

To provide community control over access to the information on healthy dietary changes, D-Town farmers offer workshops and training sessions at the request of community organizations and church groups about healthy food choices. The organization's members also volunteer their time during the fall Harvest Festival to lead discussions and give presentations about composting, growing food in small spaces, and the importance of sustainable agriculture. At such events, the D-Town farmers work from an African American perspective to inform citizens about healthy lifestyles such as vegetarianism and encourage consideration of dietary practices such as eating raw and living foods such as sprouted beans and grains. Linda describes the D-Town farmers' role at the Harvest Festival:

It's a great success. They introduced themselves to the community, they had a health fair, you got a chance to check your blood pressure, sugar levels, things like that are important that a lot of people wouldn't have the opportunity to do. They had a doctor, a nutritionist, there to teach the importance of vegetables, what each vegetable represented and was good for in terms of how it would help the body. Those kinds of things were great.

NeferRa suggests that the D-Town farmers have been successful in achieving control over information because they "raised the awareness of the need for healthier foods and the fact that Detroit is a food desert."

By providing information to members of their community, the D-Town farmers regain control of the food choices in their community. They present information about the hazards of the foods that come to them under the control of others and provide information about health and nutrition that is culturally relevant to their community. If the food for their community is going to be healthy, they assert, it will be because they themselves have control of the process of assessing the quality and are able to distribute that information to their community members.

By exerting control over the nature and dissemination of information about food, the D-Town farmers again proclaim that they are the ones who will secure their human right to food. They refuse to cede responsibility for this job to agencies like the Food and Drug Administration that typically are seen to be responsible for this aspect of food access.

Control over the Food-Security Movement

A third way in which D-Town farmers challenge responsibility for the right to food is in their association with the community food-security movement. While many of those who are hungry and who lack access to healthy food are poor people and people of color who live in urban areas, members of the food-security movement tend to be white, affluent suburbanites (Slocum 2006). Ebony, for example, notes the heavy involvement of whites in the movement:

The urban ag[riculture] movement [is] predominantly filled with white faces, white voices, white interests. . . . white people don't realize that there is a such thing as white privilege. So when you come into a community and you make decisions about doing good things—these are good and important things—the people that you are affecting are either not equal at the table or are just as integrally involved and invested as the people who got the money. Whites engaged in the movement often have access to philanthropic resources outside the community and are able to leverage their positions of privilege to provide food and gardening resources to the less fortunate.

“Most of the people involved in the community food-security work are young white people, and I do believe that they are well meaning. But what we have seen in Detroit and other urban areas is that they move to the city and because they are already well connected with other white people who are doing this work and have the resources; they end up having a degree of control over urban agriculture in the city of Detroit—control which is inordinate to their actual numbers in the population, and that is a problem.”

D-Town activists challenge the white privilege embedded in the food security movement and demand that they themselves lead the movement to provide food for the members of their community. Malik, for example, emphasizes the importance of representation for blacks in the conversations about food security:

Most of the people involved in the community food-security work are young white people, and I do believe that they are well meaning. But what we have seen in Detroit and other urban areas is that they move to the city and because they are already well connected with other white people who are doing this work and have the resources; they end up having a degree of control over urban agriculture in the city of Detroit—control which is inordinate to their actual numbers in the population, and that is a problem. It is an imbalance, in the city of Detroit, which is at least 80 percent black people, for them to position themselves in the forefront of this movement. I'm all for cordial, cooperative relations with anyone doing this work. I'm not for any ethnic group coming in the African American community

to control any aspect of our lives, and that includes issues of food security.

D-Town activists argue that the issues of food security are different for people who actually live in a food desert such as Detroit. For those who are economically disadvantaged and who lack transportation, issues of food access take on a much greater urgency than for those who have several options right outside their doorsteps.

A primary way in which the D-Town farmers show control of their own movement is in the name of their organization, the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network. When they were deciding what to call it, they debated whether *black* should be in the name. While some members of the organization argued that *black* would limit the resources to which they would have access, others argued that the term *black* in the name was an essential identifying aspect that would unite them with the community they represented and signal their control over the movement. NeferRa's comment illustrates the latter position:

When we say *Detroit black community*, that means that somebody from the black community from Detroit needs to reach people. In the past, it's been people who have not been the same color and they can help, but it's just so far that they can go. . . . When it's your own helping your own, it makes a difference. It sends two messages: I did it, and you can, too.

Ebony echoes this point as she articulates the political nature of the name and subsequently of the organization: "The whole process of naming the organization was political in itself . . . but because of who we are as African people, everything we do is political. . . . Everything we do is political."

Race and Responsibility for Human Rights

D-Town farmers not only demonstrate skepticism about the government's capacity to provide for them, but, in the process, they also develop methods to deliver human rights that foster a sense of self-determination and self-sufficiency. In the midst of a structural failure to provide human rights, D-Town farmers demonstrate agency by providing mechanisms to protect their food sources, to disseminate information about food, and to exercise their voice in the food-security movement. That the organization is engaged in urban farming is only part of a much larger mission to create structures that end relationships of dependency and educate people about the importance of providing for themselves.

The actions of the D-Town farmers demonstrate that those who live in economically depressed communities have a number of options for action. One is to challenge the relationship between citizens and the state and for citizens to stop relying on the state to provide them with desired human rights. In

ending a relationship that is dependent upon the whim of a supermarket chain or a politician's popularity, these farmers have decided to control their own food supply and their own movement. They are in agreement with humanitarian agencies and human rights advocates that all citizens should have access to healthy food. But they are not interested in relying on governmental or humanitarian bodies to deliver this food. Instead, they choose to provide food for themselves and their community. In providing an alternative behavioral option to dependence on the state, they prefer to act in ways that demonstrate agency and empowerment.

The way in which the D-Town farmers deal with the impact of race on the delivery of their human right to food is through enactment. The D-Town farmers do not oppose or resist those who appear to be denying them the right to healthy food. They devote themselves instead to developing alternative delivery systems for securing this right—they enact delivery of those rights. They innovate in an admittedly difficult situation to develop alternatives to external systems to provide the right to food to their own community. In this way, they need not deal with external structures that construct them as unworthy recipients of human rights.

By refusing to rely on external structures to provide them with human rights, the D-Town farmers echo the argument that Elshtain (1982) makes for such independence. She suggests that for oppressed groups "to wed themselves thereby, for better or for worse, to a public identity inseparable from the exigencies of state power and policy would be a mistake" (ibid., 46). She warns that such groups "should approach the modern bureaucratic state from a standpoint of skepticism" (ibid.) because a focus on political or other external structures means they become beholden to the state for the preservation of their rights in "a variety of dependency relationships" (ibid.). The D-Town farmers realize how dependent they could become on the state (and, in many cases, were in the past) and how threatening such dependency would be to their ultimate goal of securing access to safe food and to their own self-reliance. They no longer expect that the law, government, and corporations have the responsibility to deliver human rights to them.

The type of agency enacted when the focus is on external others is what Bandura (1997) labels proxy control, where individuals "influence intermediaries who, in turn, operate as the agents of desired improvements" (ibid., 17). Bandura explains:

Rather than strive for direct control, they seek their well being and security in proxy control. In this socially mediated mode of control, people try to get those who wield influence and power to act on their behalf to effect the changes they desire. Children pressure parents to get what they want; employees work through intermediaries to alter organizational practices; and the citizenry tries to shape its social future by influencing the actions of its governmental representatives and other public officials. (17)

By putting in place a delivery system of rights of their own making, the D-Town farmers become active agents in control of their food and other aspects of their lives.

Admittedly, there are problems that can be identified with the D-Town farmers' approach to the delivery of human rights. One is that, by providing food to themselves and their own community, they essentially release other entities from their responsibilities in this arena. Governments have the resources to enact human rights on a much larger scale than individuals and groups typically do, which is why they typically are charged with the responsibility for delivery of human rights.

The D-Town farmers cannot supply food to all of Detroit or even to all poor, black communities in the city, and they recognize their limited ability to provide for large numbers of people. They undoubtedly would not object if the legislature or city hall mandated some practices that would improve access to healthy food for all and probably would applaud if their efforts encouraged governments to take such action. But their focus at the current time is on food production and education rather than on holding the government responsible for its share of rights

delivery. Even if the government stepped up to assume greater responsibility for the delivery of human rights, however, the D-Town farmers believe that they address at least one exigency that the government cannot address effectively—the provision of a culturally sensitive voice in educating the African American community on the importance of healthy food choices.

A second difficulty with the approach to human rights taken by the D-Town farmers concerns inconsistencies and incongruities in their position. One inconsistency is that the D-Town farmers appear to create exactly the kind of dependency they eschew when they adopt the authoritative role of teaching others about food and providing it for others. Some would argue that the farmers are fostering the very kinds of dependent relationships in others that they claim not to want for themselves. I suggest, however, that the ostensibly dependent relationships the D-town farmers might create with their clients is mitigated in two ways. First, the farmers model responsibility to those who benefit from their work. Those who benefit from the education or food of the D-Town farmers, simply by being exposed to D-Town, see individuals taking action on their own behalf and adopting responsibility for providing rights to themselves. They are presented with an option that they may have rarely or perhaps never seen and that they may choose to implement in their own lives in the future. Second, the D-Town farmers provide those who come into contact with them with not just food to sustain them temporarily but with information and education so they can make their own choices about food in the future. Those who benefit from the work of the D-Town farm-

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ers, then, may never grow their own food or work on the D-Town farm (although those are certainly options), but they can contribute to the delivery of their own food simply by making the less time-intensive choice to purchase food that is healthier than that which they typically purchased for themselves and their families previously.

A second charge of inconsistency that can be leveled against the D-Town farmers is that they are not actually assuming responsibility for delivery of human rights because they lease their land from the city. Although the use of city resources certainly means that D-Town farmers are not as independent of external structures as they purport to be, this partial reliance does not erase their efforts to assume greater responsibility for delivery of the human rights to food. The fact that the D-Town farmers use city land provides an opening for them to hold dialogue with government entities about the very issue of responsibility for delivery of rights. D-Town farmers' effectiveness in protecting their own human rights and reaching their local community means that they enter into dialogue with the city and other external agencies as competent experts, as individuals with a greater ethos than they would have had without their demonstrated ability to be a responsible, equal partner with the city in efforts to create a healthy community. They come to the table, then, having earned the respect of others for what they are able to achieve. As a result, the D-Town farmers ensure future dialogue and growth for all stakeholders.

Clearly, the model for delivery human rights used by the D-Town farmers is imperfect, but it represents a major step forward for the African American community in Detroit. The D-Town farmers adopt an agentic perspective that places responsibility for achieving human rights on those who seek those rights. They do indeed want clean and healthy food for themselves and their community and see this kind of food as something to which all people are entitled. But they refuse to become supplicants to an external structure to obtain this right. As such, the D-Town farmers very well could serve as a model for other groups in terms of rights to clothing, housing, medical care, and the like. One example of the potential application of the model to other human rights can be seen in Michael Moore's film *Capitalism: A Love Story*, in which a family is evicted from a house because they are unable to pay their rising mortgage payments. In response, their neighbors "repossess" the house and reclaim it for the family, who move back in and no longer are subject to harassment and prosecution from local law officials because of the community members' stand. In this case, as with the D-Town farmers, the family and their neighbors—not the government—are the ones who authorize, sanction, and empower themselves as the primary agents who will provide their community with human rights.

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