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***Neighborhood in Constant Flux:  
An Ethnographic Analysis of Food Access in Fort Greene, Brooklyn***

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In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Sciences Degree

Rubenstein School of Natural Resources

University of Vermont 2014



Submitted to Advisors:  
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**Abstract**

Since the industrial revolution, the technological innovations of human society have created a rapidly growing separation between humans and the natural world. Nowhere is this separation so poignant as in the food system. The current industrialized model of global food production has effectively transformed access to fresh food into a privilege awarded to elite, rather than a right for all humans. The conjunction of a growing inequity in access to food resources worldwide and an industrial production system that disconnects the human psyche from the origins of food, leads to the systematic discrimination toward certain communities of people both in the United States and globally. This undergraduate environmental studies research thesis seeks to explore this inequity in the community of Fort Greene in Brooklyn, New York. It suggests the importance of understanding and increasing equity on a community level to help bridge the gap between socioeconomic status and race. Cooperation at all levels of food access, from production to distribution to consumption, is imperative in order to stray away from the industrial linear model of development. Using in-depth ethnographic interviews in conjunction with data and mapping analysis of consumption patterns within Fort Greene, this thesis will explore attitudes and preferences toward food distribution from a diverse group of residents in order to gain an understanding of how perceptions differ across socioeconomic and racial lines.

**Keywords:** Food Justice    Community Food Access    Demographic change  
Food security    Neighborhood migration

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## **Introduction:**

The growing divide between alternative and conventional food production and consumption systems is a popular topic in academic discourse. While the debate between the social and environmental benefits and shortcomings of each system dominates the public discourse, little credence is given to the social schism that the two divergent systems create in the lives of everyday people. This thesis aims to give a voice to everyday people interacting in the food landscape of Fort Greene, Brooklyn. The central question of this project is how do residents of Fort Greene, Brooklyn define the changes in their access to food in relation to changing neighborhood dynamics.

I have lived with my family in Fort Greene for 14 years and have witnessed the neighborhood change in countless ways. Access to food plays a paramount role as a litmus test through which to observe all different types of community migration and inequity. This project primarily explores how residents define their own access to food across a temporal scale from when they first came to Fort Greene. Results are organized around the concept of “food centered life histories” which gauge varying perceptions on the distribution and consumption of food. The research is centered around semi-structured interviews that allow for a breadth of perception on neighborhood change.

The secondary intention of this research is to present the breadth of opinion of how individuals define their own access to food, as a call for rethinking and redefining what true food security means and how resources can be allocated equitably. The USDA

has identified over 6,500 “food deserts” in America, which counts places that have limited access to affordable and nutritious food where at least one-fifth of the population lives under the poverty line, and there is no supermarket within a one-mile radius (Ver Ploeg et al, 2009). This highly specific criteria does not directly apply to the high population density and accessibility of New York City and therefore does not consider Fort Greene as a food desert. The information presented through this research shows first-hand evidence for creating alternative indicators of food inequity other than “food desert” locators. Rather than simply consulting USDA or census bureau data on food access, this research suggests that gaining small-scale community perspective is a crucial step in assessing whether the true needs of the community are met. Ultimately, this thesis is aimed at unpacking the systemic nature of food access issues and utilizes my case study in Fort Greene as part of a larger discussion on bridging the gap between affordability and quality in the American food system. I intend on sharing this project with the residents who took part and members of the Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project, a non-profit organization working to increase food equity in Fort Greene. I hope it can be used as a consolidation of a wide variety of perception to not only exemplify the diversity of Fort Greene but also serve as a stepping stone to leveraging the social gaps apparent in the community.

## **Literature Review:**

### **U.S. Food Security Issues: A Primer**

#### *Current Food Distribution Patterns*

Food choice is a daily process in the lives of everyone on Earth. While there is extreme variability on climatic and cultural scales, the choices consumers make on food are loosely influenced by six major categories. Such factors that influence food choice include availability, advertising, habit, cost, life stage, and health (Contento et al, 1999). Consumption patterns of the urban communities of the Global North (Miller, 2013) are most focused on cost and availability when making food choices (Eertmans et al, 2006). While cost is a high priority in American food choices, only 6% of the average U.S. total net household income of \$32,051 is spent on food resources (World Bank, 2009).

Food production and distribution processes within the industrialized world is much more complex compared to that of an agrarian society. Approximately 50% of the world's population lives in urban areas and that number is expected to increase to 70% by 2050. (Miller, 2013). This global shift to more urbanized lifestyles will mark a change in consumer choice to one that relies on complex supply chains and heavy processing. Issues of access and availability of food are known as food security issues (De Castro, 2013).

The concept of food security has many different interpretations based on the scale of its application. On a national level, food security is promoted by the United States Department of Agriculture through building surplus. A study performed in 2011 by the USDA concluded that 85.1% of American households were food secure meaning that

they had access at all times to enough food (Coleman-Kassysen et al, 2012). On a community level however, the definition becomes far more focused and nuanced. Food security is defined as the combination of an emphasis on local and sustainable food production, with a model of hunger prevention. (Community Food Security Coalition n.d). The Community Food Security Coalition asserts that true community food security is achieved when all communities have access to “Safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate, and sustainably produced diets” (Alkon, 2011; Mares, 2011). Mares and Alkon further assert that examining access on a community scale allows for greater visibility of the structural connections and leverage points between individual behavior and systemic food distribution. (Alkon, 2011; Mares, 2011). The unfortunate reality of this seemingly high percentage of food security is that food security for low-income communities in densely populated urban areas often relies on the industrial production of low quality, highly processed foods (Holt-Gimenez, 2011).

The USDA defines an urban food desert as an area that has limited access to affordable and nutritious food, where at least one-fifth of the population lives under the poverty line, and where there is no supermarket within a one-mile radius (Ver Ploeg et al, 2009). Due to these strict criteria, many neighborhoods in New York City are not considered food deserts but still have much of the resource inequity that is seen in urban food desert areas. The USDA identified over 6,500 food deserts in the United States based on census data in conjunction with location of supermarkets and health food stores. Of the 6,529 food desert tracts outlined by the USDA in 2011, 4,175 were located in densely populated urban areas. Two of the main conclusions of the study were that areas

with high poverty rates are more likely to be food deserts, and the higher the percentage of minority population, the more likely the area will be a food desert (Dutko, 2012).

Twenty-three and a half million people live in low-income areas that are further than a mile away from a grocery store (Ver Ploeg et al, 2009).

The development of suburban lifestyle in post-war America during the 1940s, catalyzed the creation of wholesale supermarket culture. As more individuals moved to suburban areas, supermarket chains closed their smaller stores in the urban-retail sectors and relied on the creation of “superstores” for their profit. (De Castro, 2013). The family-owned and operated establishments that used to be the cornerstones of neighborhood identity in many urban centers were becoming phased out by the homogeneous growth of corporate supermarkets. The departure of the white middle and upper class to newly formed suburbs led to a dramatic decrease in average household income of urban areas and a demographic shift to large minority communities (Holt-Gimenez, 2011). This rapid shift to centralized suburban food suppliers, in conjunction with a mass exodus of the middle-upper class to suburban areas, created a vast inequitable distribution of resources to low-income urban communities. Issues of food access today are an indication of much broader systemic issues that have been happening since the creation of suburbia over 60 years ago (De Castro, 2013). It is clear that current nationwide conditions of food security in which over 400 communities without grocery stores are mostly communities of minorities, is a result of racism in policy and corporate control (Holt-Gimenez, 2011).

There are many proposed solutions to dealing with issues of food deserts that range from large-scale systemic efforts to grassroots organizing. On a federal level, the

Obama administration is devoting large amounts of funding to a health food financing initiative that seeks to increase the volume of supermarkets in areas designated as food deserts. As a result of increased government funding for food access reform projects, the corporate retail industry has taken a new interest in urban areas for expansion using federal funds (Holt-Gimenez, 2011). The alternative to this trajectory would be a community-based, grassroots effort to inspire neighborhoods that are impacted by issues of food access to self-organize. As a response to increasing consumer resistance to corporate control of the food industry, various social movements organized around alternative food networks are beginning in urban areas (Atkins, 2001). The all-encompassing food justice movement is a global trend fortified by grassroots efforts that seeks to eliminate inequity and disparity within the food system (Gottlieb, 2010). Such efforts to create a pragmatic alternative to the industrial food system include, farmers markets, community supported agriculture projects, food cooperatives, and community gardens (Pimbert, 2009).

While the ethic of alternative food movements is a clear opposite from the industrial food system, the efficacy of some alternative methods falls short due to a variety of factors. In a study entitled “Eating Right Now: Tasting Alternative Food Systems”, author Laura Hughes concludes that alternative agriculture initiatives fail to address the power and privilege relationships that are inherent in food access and therefore often magnify these inequities (Hughes, 2010). Some scholars assert that alternative food networks reproduce the sociopolitical inequity that they seek to dismantle in the first place, while others like Edmund Harris, argue that alternative

systems deal with inequity in an entirely different manner and assertions otherwise are simply being critical for arguments sake (Hughes, 2010)(Harris, 2009). Harris argues that the majority of alternative food networks are more deeply embedded in the communities they service and therefore only reflect the social and economic climate in each microsystem (Harris, 2009). Hughes' critique of alternative foodways as potential points of further division is akin to Patricia Allen's critique of Community Food Security discourse around alternative food product, as presented in Mares and Alkon's piece "Mapping the Food Movement" (2011). Allen urged those engaged in the discourse of Community Food Security to consider the economic stratification inherent in alternative food movements. Mares and Alkon present that Allen stresses considering the "class inequities and material realities" of people who are unable to fully benefit from the economic status of the alternative food movement (Mares, 2011; Alkon, 2011).

### **New York City Food System**

With a population exceeding 8 million people and a density of over 27,000 people per square mile, New York City is the most populous city in the United States and one of the most populous urban areas in the world (Wendell Cox Consultancy, 2008). Creating a food system that effectively meets the needs of this extremely large population is therefore an extremely complex task. An organization called the Food Systems Network NYC is actively working to address issues of inequity in the food system from a grassroots and community-oriented framework. In a report entitled "Recipe for the Future of Food in New York City" the organization succinctly summarizes current efforts and paths for progress in stating "City and grassroots efforts have made positive change, but

hunger, lack of physical and economic access to ample, healthy food, lack of fairness to food system workers, loss of farmland, and inefficient waste management remain challenges to be met” (FSNYC, 2013). While grassroots level community organizing has taken hold as a response to a lack of innovation on the part of city government, insecurity remains a major issue. Newly released data from the USDA suggests that between 2009 and 2011, over 13% of state residents were food insecure, a 2% increase over the prior four-year period (FRAC, 2012).

The extremely high population density and public transportation accessibility of New York City makes for a unique set of criteria when trying to analyze food security levels. New York City has more grocery stores per square mile than anywhere else in the country but also has much smaller and less per capita outlets due to inflated rent and lower profit margin (Marx, 2012). The national ratios of supermarket square footage to people as derived by the USDA are based on a suburban shopping center organization of food retail. Whereas the national ratio for supermarket square footage to people is 50,000-100,000 square ft/ 10,000 people within a 10-minute drive, the existing average citywide ratio for grocery stores to people is just 15,000 square ft/ 10,000 people in the neighborhood (NYC Dept. of City Planning, 2013). This much smaller ratio leads to issues of resource competition in the more residential and densely populated neighborhoods of New York City and leaves many residents to turn to smaller local corner stores for daily or weekly purchases. Corner stores are therefore important vehicles for increasing access to healthy foods in the urban landscape (Dannfer et al, 2012). Local corner stores restock much more frequently and cater to the surrounding

community, which allows for a great opportunity of integrating more diverse and healthy foods into the framework. A national study in 2009 found that low-income areas in the U.S. had 75% as many supermarkets as did middle-income areas, and predominantly African American neighborhoods had almost half as many as White neighborhoods did (Larson et al, 2009). Low-income, minority neighborhoods are instead dependent on smaller convenience and corner stores for food access (Beaulac et al, 2009). In much of North and Central Brooklyn, corner stores can make up more than 80% of food retail outlets (Graham et al, 2006). Introducing healthy and quality foods into a corner store culture that is culturally engrained in residential NYC neighborhoods is imperative. The cost of food within the New York Metropolitan area increased by 28% between 2002 and 2010 (MARP, 2012).

### **Fort Greene**

Like most amorphous neighborhoods within New York City, the boundaries of Fort Greene are not officially defined but rather constructed by the residents within the region. The neighborhood is predominantly comprised of 3-5 story brownstone row houses that are 1-2 family homes (NYC GOV, 2013). In the late 1990s Fort Green began to experience the first wave of new residents and businesses to the area. Since then, the influx has increased exponentially but the neighborhood remains one of the most racially and socioeconomically diverse in the entire city (Newman, 2001). The 2001 census data revealed that White residency in the center of the neighborhood has increase 47% since 1980 while Black populations have decreased by 8 percent (Newman, 2001). The neighborhood as a whole however experienced an increase from 23 to 25% White

populations from 1980-2001 and a decrease from 63 to 59% Black residents (Newman, 2001). From 2001 to today, the racial composition of Fort Greene has remained relatively unchanged yet the range in average household income has drastically broadened.

Considering fluctuations in average household income between 1999-2012, in three different census tracts within Fort Greene, it becomes increasingly apparent that socioeconomic disparity is a driving force in the neighborhood. The average household incomes in 1999 of census tracts 181, 185.01, and 29.01, were \$62,584, \$22,249, and \$18,933 respectively (Social Explorer, 2013). See figure 2 for map. The average household incomes in 2012 of the same three census tracts were \$126,529, \$31,879, and \$16,959 respectively (Social Explorer, 2013). The average household income in tract 181 increased \$63,945 over ten years, while that of tract 185.01 only increased \$9,630 and tract 29.01 actually decreased by \$1,974 (Social Explorer, 2013). See figure 3 for map. The rate of economic development is extremely uneven within a few block radius.

In an attempt to leverage the concerns of low-income families that had been living in Fort Greene for generations with the new wave of middle-upper class families, the Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project Local Development Corporation was created in 1999 (MARP, 2012). This organization applied an extensive food access profile of Fort Greene/Clinton Hill that sought to explore the increased food insecurity as a result of the 2006 demolition of a 15,000 square foot Associated Supermarket. As a result of the destruction of this key market in the Fort Greene food system, “The number of residents receiving food stamp benefits in Community District 2 [Fort Greene/Clinton Hill] increased by over 52% between 2007 and 2010” (MARP, 2012). As a response to this

drastic increase in food stamp involvement, MARP concluded that the food retail environment in Fort Greene was not meeting the needs of many of the community members. As a result an open community forum was hosted at which residents expressed that high quality, affordable foods were of utmost importance in replacing the supermarket. The major catalyst in all of this research is encapsulated in the following quote that sums up the core of the issue of food access in the context of Fort Greene.

“According to the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP), Brooklyn Community District 2 (which includes Fort Greene and Clinton Hill) meets neither the city average ratio for local grocery stores to people (15,000 square feet per 10,000 people), nor the city planning standard ratio for grocery stores to people (30,000 square feet per 10,000 people). This shortage of neighborhood grocery stores throughout New York City forces residents to seek other alternatives including fast food restaurants and small bodegas as their main sources of food” (MARP, 2012).

### **Role of Narrative**

Storytelling is a unique data source in investigation of demographic trends. It serves as an organic and stripped down methods for gauging public opinion and beginning to observe intersectionality within dominant and passive narratives. Prompting storytelling to plot similarities in public opinion is a unique manner of interview and requires guiding and open-ended questions. Professor of Education at Barnard University Lee Anne Bell stressed the exemplified the power of storytelling in tracking social progress through her work entitled “Telling Tales: What stories can teach us about racism”. The article itself tracks 106 different narratives about how individuals perceive

racism in their everyday lives and respondents often responded with stories to express their perceptions. (Bell, 2010). A section of the report is further dedicated to the thematic representation of counter-narratives and narratives that are otherwise suppressed in public discourse, by presenting responses from interviewees of color (Bell, 2010). Narratives that are either actively or passively omitted from public discourse, are strong indicators of inequity or social migration. Author of “Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements” Joseph E. Davis emphasizes the paramount importance of incorporating narrative into any study of social dynamics. “Combining theoretical analysis with empirical studies of narrative in specific movements, this volume argues that narrative is both a vital form of movement discourse and a crucial analytical concept” (Davis, 2002). While Davis praises the incorporation of narrative into empirical study, professor Margaret Somers outlines the potential pitfalls of thinking about narrative in the context of social movements as alienating. A recurring problem that she recognizes is a tendency by academics to situate identities and narratives to singular categories and world views, rather than fully representing their complexity (Somers, 1994). She suggests that a formulation of “narrative identity” that is bounded by certain time periods and geographic boundaries, rather than misconstrued as representative of a larger social movement. (Somers, 1994).

### **Food Ethnography**

The semi-structured interview process allows for narrative to permeate most naturally due to the level of interpretation the questions garner. “Food centered life histories” are a concept coined by Professor of Sociology Carole Counihan. In

Counihan's words food centered life histories are "semi-structured interviews that investigate beliefs and behaviors surrounding the production, distribution, preparation, and consumption of food (Counihan, 2010). Their main leverage point allows researchers to portray emotional memories as well as analytical perceptions to portray public opinion rooted in specific time and place. The semi-structured nature of interviews helps to circumvent the potential pitfalls that Somers outlines, of incorporating personal narrative in larger social commentary.

## **Methods:**

### **The Concept:**

The original conception of my research goal and topic came from a place of simplicity rather than complexity. I knew that I wanted my topic to center around community based food security and incorporate elements of ethnographic fieldwork. I strongly believe that food can be used as a lens and litmus test from which one can view changing neighborhood dynamics and society inequity. I knew from the beginning that analyzing community change through access to food was something that had to be paramount to my thesis. Initially I was hoping to pair an experience abroad with the methods and topic I had laid out but soon after realized that I was unable to go abroad for various logistical reasons. At this point in my transition from an idea to a concrete and tangible topic, my mind was racing in search of a community or organization that could catalyze and help maintain the in-depth analysis I aimed to conduct. After deliberating for about a week, sudden and extreme clarity struck me and I realized that the only focus that could sustain me throughout this long process would be focusing on the place where I had spent most of my life, Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

My family and I moved to the neighborhood in 1999 and within the first year began to experience an influx of families just like us that left Manhattan in search of more affordable rents and more space to raise young children. Within the first two years living in Fort Greene, my family and I witnessed extremely rapid changes in the demographic and business climate from the seemingly isolated and working class environment we had initially moved into. As the faces we were used to seeing around us

began to fade and become replaced by others, the food retail market remained unchanged. My mom would frequent both the Associated and Pathmark superstores because those were the only options close enough to walk from home. Almost 15 years later it is hard to see any evidence of our old patterns. Through my own personal experience I have witnessed my neighborhood change in so many ways in less than two decades. I knew that this widespread change was not just a feasible topic to explore through my thesis process, but a call to action and obligation to my family and my community. Figuring out exactly how was the tricky part.

In my initial stages of crafting a topic, I wanted to create a list of suggestions rooted around public policy and intended for the city council geared toward increasing food accessibility and nutrition education for lower-income communities within the neighborhood. I had no statistical information to substantiate the extent of food insecurity but had first hand, observational experience with income disparity within the housing market. My family had purchased a refurbished brownstone that had been converted from a three family to a one family house. The overwhelming majority of houses on our block were of comparable size but were maintained as multiple family homes. I quickly realized that while I had seen signs of economic disparity in my childhood, I had never really experienced how others felt about the food landscape of Fort Greene. My parents did all of the food shopping growing up and while I noticed sacrifices within my family, my perception stopped there. I talked to both Kit Anderson, my professor in my Research Methods course, and Teresa Mares, a food anthropologist at UVM who would subsequently become one of my academic advisors in this process. The confluence of

Professor Anderson's advice to incorporate storytelling and ethnographic methods within my research, and Professor Mares' advice to gauge people's perceptions on food access rather than my own, brought me to revamping the focus of my study completely. Whereas initially I felt as though a statistical analysis of average household incomes paired with existing data on food accessibility in Fort Greene would suffice for creating policy suggestions, I decided to switch to a focus on gathering in depth perspectives of a diverse group of individuals who have interacted with the neighborhood for different lengths of time and in different capacities. Statistical and census data can only show a fraction of the economic and social well being of a community. Comparing individual experiences and stories from residents of the neighborhood with numerical data, provides a much more complete approach to even consider suggesting changes.

### **Crafting Methodology:**

After realizing that I wanted to focus primarily on conveying the story of people in the neighborhood rather than my own personal perceptions, interviews seemed to be the best way to represent the broad range of perceptions that I intended on gathering. I expressed the desire to do some form of interviews to Kit Anderson and she outlined three potential types of interviews I could conduct depending on what results I was trying to achieve. The three types were structured, semi-structured, and unstructured depending on the types of questions I intended on asking. In an effort to get the most organic and conversational responses out of people while simultaneously creating types of questions

that were similar but not identical for each interviewee, I decided that semi-structured interviewing was the appropriate method.

The external benefit of semi-structured interviewing technique is that it allows for conversation to stray and therefore generate alternative questions and topics naturally that I may not have considered. It also allowed me to omit certain topics that had already been answered in conversation and really personalize each interview. For example, one of the most driving pieces of information that helped shape my probes for individual experience was the year in which each individual moved to Fort Greene. Once I ascertained this information I was able to cater questions about certain business prevalence and historical events, to the time period in which an individual lived in the neighborhood.

Generating a person to person connection allowed me to transcend the role of researcher, and relate my own personal experience to others. I think this was extremely crucial to the comfort level and depth of responses that each of my subjects provided. Once I established commonalities with my interviewees, they were much more comfortable responding to my prompts because they knew that I would understand the majority of references they were making. I hoped to create questions that touched on the differences of shopping routine and experience from when subjects first moved to the neighborhood compared to what they were experiencing today, and gauged a wide range of sentiments about how they perceive the changing landscape and the catalysts for that change. I created three lists of questions, one that remained constant for each subject and the other two that were employed depending on the amount of time a subject had lived in the neighborhood. As mentioned prior, the semi-structured format of the actual interview

process allowed me to draw concepts from the question lists but did not bind me to a rigid structure as a survey or more structured process would have. This did allow for the organic flow of ideas but created much more variety and disparity between responses. Part of generating the “snapshot in time” ethos of my results was the wide variety of responses and tangents that interviewees expressed and therefore the disparity in results was beneficial.

### **Interview Questions:**

I crafted three sets of interview questions for my participants, one including general information questions, one set for residents living in the neighborhood for fewer than 10 years and another for people that have lived in Fort Greene for more than 10 years. I chose 10 year residency as a dividing line between my subjects because much of the influx and major changes began around a decade ago. While thematically, the questions between the two groups both focused on changes in personal food purchasing patterns and values, the key difference was a focus on highlighting pivotal turning points in Fort Greene’s history in the group that had lived here longer. I figured it may be harder for residents who had only lived in Fort Greene for a short period of time to gain a perspective of the overall trajectory of the neighborhood due to their relatively new presence. The most challenging part was creating questions that were provocative enough to spark a narrative of opinion and experience while at the same time keeping the questions objective and without the bias of my personal experience and assumptions about change in the neighborhood. In order to do this I considered the natural progression

of a casual conversation through practice with my dad. I performed a test interview on him with multiple different phrasing and iterations of similar questions and observed his responses. The more he was provoked to think and subsequently speak about in depth, the better the questions became. The format of interviews became very apparent after this test and I began to foresee how to maintain the conversation.

I began each interview with general information questions to ease subjects into a conversational format. Each interview began with a question about when they moved to the neighborhood to establish the wide variety of viewpoints. Initially, I had considered the idea of asking questions that would prompt interviewees to identify themselves racially and socioeconomically. I ended up omitting all questions pertaining to that type of sensitive information because I wanted the audience to focus on their stories rather than their identities. Despite the differences in question format and subject, the progression of each interview went from an initial background information inquiry, to questions about what they were experiencing now, questions asking them to refer back to their first encounters with the Fort Greene landscape, to questions about their sentiments toward the change and how they would like to see the future. The questions are detailed in figure 4.

### **Interview Participants:**

\*Note: I have changed all of the names of interviewees for identity protection purposes

Actually finding participants willing to engage in such in-depth interviews with me proved to be one of the hardest parts of the data collection process. I began my search

by compiling a list of the top 4 organizations that kept coming up in my literature review and research. Figure 5 shows those contacts.

I ended up contacting an organization called the Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project (MARP). The Fort Greene/ Clinton Hill Community Food assessment that MARP had released played a pivotal role in the construction of my literature review and was an organization that specialized on food access issues in the neighborhood. Due to the small size and field based nature of the organization it was difficult to pinpoint a representative to whom I could reach out. Finally I found a woman who served as the director of the food access wing of the organization and sent her an email. My intent in reaching out to her was not only to conduct an interview with her but also to see if she could point me in the direction of other potential subjects. While I awaited her reply, I began a very grassroots effort to gather subjects. I figured I could start with a community member that I had known for many years and was comfortable with because I knew that they would be willing to open up to me and provide a familiar face to try different questions and techniques out on. I contacted Marie in early September and she immediately responded agreeing to an interview. In many ways my interview with Marie set the tone for the remaining interviews. It was twice as long as any others because it was a lot of trying different phrasing and sequencing questions out. After the interview Marie suggested that I create an email template to send out to all potential interviewees. The template for the email can be seen in the appendix under Figure 1.

I sent the email out to a number of people that I had known from the past or met at various points throughout the process. I managed to get four more interviews from the

process of reaching out to a wide audience through email. Finally the contact from MARP agreed to meet and I was able to gain a more administrative point of view from an individual that was both a resident of the neighborhood and working toward reaching some leverage over food equity issues from a professional stance. My interview with Kassy from MARP proved to come at a pivotal moment in my research process. Having done four previous interviews with long time community residents, capturing a unique professional perspective on the economic and social climate of the neighborhood provided clarity and legitimacy to the personal narratives. Prior to speaking with Kassy, the majority of my interviewees were residents with whom I had a relationship before the thesis process. At that point in my research process I had interviewed, Marie, Rena, Montez, and Fredrik, all of whom I had previous interactions with. Kassy broadened the scope of my research pool by suggesting two residents that she had engaged in her community work and thought would be good contacts for my study. I reached out to both of these individuals with a similar email, but only got a response from one of them. In the end unfortunately, our schedules were not in sync and we were not able to schedule an interview. Geographic and scheduling conflicts seemed to be the major limiting factors in gaining participation throughout my interview process. I realized that gaining the level of depth that I wanted in my interviews in the short windows of opportunity when I visited home, was not possible given the amount of remaining time I had for the project. I expanded my methods to include over the phone recorded interviews with the remainder of my interviewees to save time and help ease scheduling issues. While phone interviews certainly diminish the personal relationship and organic narrative elements of the

conversation, scheduling seemed too large of a roadblock to overcome and I therefore had to sacrifice some of the authenticity.

When it seemed as though the momentum of my interview process was waning, one of my original interviewees Fredrik contacted me with a name and number of a longtime resident of Fort Greene. At that point I had gained perspectives from only one longtime resident Rena who had lived in the Fort Greene since the 1950s. The rest of my subjects had all come to the neighborhood in the mid to late 1990s and therefore my main focus was to find residents that had moved earlier than 1990 for added perspective. Fredrik suggested that I contact Rita who he said had moved to the neighborhood in the early 1980s and had worked closely on issues of neighborhood dynamics through her many roles on community council committees. I contacted Rita and she immediately responded agreeing to a phone interview. The issues of food access and changing community dynamics turned out to be very close to Rita's heart and she had a lot of information to convey on how her own own experience and perception in the neighborhood has changed overtime. The quality of the interview was not really compromised at all without the face to face interaction. Rita then suggested that I seek out a family that own a number of organic markets and restaurants in the neighborhood and had been very influential in changing the face of food retail in Fort Greene. It turned out that the family she had mentioned owned Greene Farm, a bodega-style organic market that my family had been frequenting for many years. I was excited to gain a unique perspective from residents who were both well established food business owners, as well as consumers themselves. Unfortunately Rita did not have contact information for

any member of the family so I enlisted the help of my mom, a long time customer of their market. Within a day I had an interview with the son of the Middle-Aged Korean couple that owned the Greene Farm business.

Dan was the final interview that I conducted and provided a crucial perspective that had been missing in my data. He was a first-generation American that had moved to Fort Greene with his family 30 years prior. He not only offered the perspective of a child growing up in the neighborhood, which was very akin to my own personal experience, but also offered the most clear narrative of the challenges from both a business and consumer perspective of shopping for organic food in the neighborhood. In total I formally interviewed 7 individuals all of whom were current residents of Fort Greene. The list of interviewees followed by the year they moved to the neighborhood is as follows: Dan moved in 1994, Marie moved in 2000, Montez moved in early 1990s, Fredrik moved in 1998, Rena moved in mid 1950s, Kassy moved in 2008, and Rita moved in 1982. I did most of my interviews in person during frequent trips down to Brooklyn on weekends with the exception of Rita and Kassy who I spoke to during recorded phone interviews.

### **Transcription/Coding Interviews:**

I used a standard recording application on my cell phone to record five in person interviews and an application called “TapeACall” for my two phone interviews. I made sure to gain verbal consent from both subjects to record our phone conversations.

Transcribing the dense interviews proved to be the most time consuming and challenging pieces of my entire process. Due to the wide variety of voices that I had captured, I opted

not to use any sort of dictation software to aid in my transcription of the data. This decision certainly made the process twice as long but allowed me to observe my data from a removed perspective for the first time in the entire process. Listening to different sentence structures and trains of thought, I was able to piece together commonalities and connections even before beginning the process of coding. By the end of the grueling process of transcription I had a really deep connection and understanding of my data which left me in a much better position for beginning to synthesize it. My interviews were all between 30-45 minutes but due to the types of questions asked, jumped around a lot and made it difficult for interviewees to coherently present their sentiments. On average the transcription of each interview took about 2.5 times the length of each interview.

In order to synthesize the large amount of raw data that I had collected, I used a method called hand coding. The process of coding in social science is essentially an attempt to synthesize very qualitative data, like the narratives that I had gathered, to observe commonalities and divergences that contextualize personal opinions in the larger context of social mobility. I opted for hand coding instead of software coding because of my small sample size and semi-structured nature of questions. Software coding is commonly used in instances where a large number of interviews/data has to be condensed. I figured that hand coding would not only fit my sample size better but also give me a more intimate and methodical connection with my data due to the large variety of interviews and subjects. The analytic codes that I derived represent common themes and benchmarks in my data that were either points of agreement or contention. In total I

created 5 umbrella codes that represent major themes, with specific points underneath each code.

The list is as follows highlighting the major codes in bold:

**Food Purchasing: Then**

- Store preference
  - Price
  - Quality
  - Size
  - Convenience
  - Community
- Priorities
- Frequency Shopping

**Food Purchasing: Now**

- Store preference
- Quality fluctuation
- Difference in community engagement
- Change in priorities
- Change in self-perception
- Frequency Shopping

**Perceptions of Today**

- Diversity
- Crime
- Housing
- Affordability
- Accessibility
- Resident relations

**Opinions on drivers of change**

- Demographic shifts
- Business opportunism
- Housing scarcity

**Goals for future**

- Main leverage points
- Short-term improvements
- Institutional reform

These codes were crafted from a process of careful reading through all of my interviews and trying to incorporate the intent of my questions with the natural

progression of the interviews. In order to fully represent the scope of the food centered scenes of experience and perception that my subjects had shared with me, I knew that a distinction between the past and present was necessary. From that clear distinction, another division between perceptions of the food landscape and perceptions on the neighborhood change in general became very apparent. I sought to represent both responses to the more focused questions on food retail and more general responses to questions about neighborhood change in an effort to highlight either commonality or difference between these two perceptions. Hence the separation of the code “Food Purchasing: Now” from the code “Perceptions of Today”. There seemed to also be a clear past, present, and future context to the responses that my interviewees offered and I wanted to represent this in the codes that I chose. A crucial part of gauging the current state of affairs in the neighborhood was giving residents to opportunity to offer their opinion on what they think the main drivers of change are and how they would like to see the neighborhood change in the future.

The process of dividing codes came in three steps. The first was preliminary extraction of any words or phrases on interest in all of my interviews. This was a long and disorganized list of quotes, phrases, and themes that had stuck out to me in my preliminary reading. The second step was reading through the interviews again and subsequently condensing my large list of themes into a smaller list of common themes that kept coming up. Finally, I grouped together the most common themes into umbrella codes and figured out how to incorporate the breadth of opinion and experience into my sub-codes.

## **Results:**

The main focus of this research was geared toward highlighting resident's personal narratives and perceptions on changes in food access and affordability as an indicator for how neighborhood dynamics have changed in general. The purpose of this research was to provide a snapshot in time of the constantly changing landscape of Fort Greene and a breadth of personal perceptions on change in the neighborhood using food as a lens to gauge changing social and economic dynamics. Due to the semi-structured and narrative nature of these data, the driving themes of the questions were consistent but the specificity varied from subject to subject. While some questions focused specifically on where subjects shopped for food in the past as opposed to where they frequent now and why, others focused more generally on what they perceived the major agents of change to be on various temporal scales. The result of conducting 7 semi-structured ethnographic interviews was a mosaic of food centered life histories that suggest individual perceptions marked by varying socioeconomic and ethnic identities. The following data are organized into analytic and descriptive codes that coalesce around categories of perceptions of the past, present, and future implications of neighborhood dynamic change. The wide range of years that interviewees began interacting with the Fort Greene landscape provides many different snapshots in time of the influence of different food retailers throughout the years. The 7 interviews were inductively coded to create a story of how a group of very different individuals perceive the massive demographic and economic changes that Fort Greene is experiencing.

\*Note: I have changed all of the names of interviewees for identity protection purposes

**Codes:**

**Food Purchasing: Then**

- Store preference
  - Price
  - Quality
  - Size
  - Convenience
  - Community
- Priorities
- Frequency Shopping

**Food Purchasing: Now**

- Store preference
- Quality fluctuation
- Difference in community engagement
- Change in priorities
- Change in self-perception
- Frequency Shopping

**Perceptions of Today**

- Diversity
- Crime
- Housing
- Affordability
- Accessibility
- Resident relations

**Opinions on drivers of change**

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- Housing scarcity

**Goals for future**

- Main leverage points
- Short-term improvements
- Institutional reform

## **Food Purchasing: Then**

### *Store Preference*

Beginning with the code Store Preference seems all too representative of the entire project because it truly exemplifies the breadth of perception and narrative between all of the interviewees. The code does not just stand for which store(s) the participants used to frequent but also the quality of food sold in those stores, the sense of community cultivated in the stores, the affordability of food, and the size and variety of the food sold in the stores. With the exception of one interview that was from the perspective of an organization working with food access issues in Fort Greene, six interviews included opinions on where residents used to shop.

While the change in major markets in Fort Greene did not happen on a decade by decade scale, the 1990s seemed to be a turning point in the food retail landscape. Four out of seven interviewees moved to Fort Greene during this decade and three of four of them included extensive reference to the influence of the Pathmark supermarket on their shopping habits. The outlier, Montez, mentioned Pathmark's influence today but said that it did not exist when she moved to the neighborhood in 1992. She said that when she first moved to the neighborhood it was a very isolated and small neighborhood with no large supermarket options. "...this place was so small you couldn't find any vegetables, it was very scarce the food... there was no Pathmark over there, there was no Key Food on Fourth Street." She explained that if she wanted to get fresh fruit or vegetables, she would undoubtedly have to go into Manhattan or New Jersey. Dan however, who moved to the neighborhood in 1994 explained that while there were not many options for food

shopping, Pathmark was one of the only outlets when he and his family moved to Fort Greene.

The persistent sentiment and summary of Pathmark was that it was the primary resource for food but that the quality was low and was primarily frequented for bulk food. This was echoed by Marie, who moved to the neighborhood in 2000 who explained “When we first moved here, I was still shopping at Pathmark, which is a nightmare... That was it, the only show in town...” Fredrik paralleled his experience having moved to the neighborhood two years prior in 1998. He said that Pathmark was the only option but implied that he would only shop there for canned goods, not produce due to quality concerns. He revealed that produce was the major limiting factor in his food purchasing when he first came to the neighborhood but praised Pathmark as providing at least a base layer of food security. While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact date that Pathmark began to make an impact on the food landscape, Montez who moved to Fort Greene the earliest out of the four, explained the impact of the construction of a supermarket in the early 1990s. “This neighborhood is now supported by many stores, before like I said, you did not have anything... They [the stores] were small, and you had a huge neighborhood that lived off of that small grocery store. And then Pathmark opened up... It was the largest grocery store in the neighborhood, everybody went there from far away, and you still had a shortage of food.” Mark, a 30 year resident of Fort Greene and a prominent food business owner further supported Montez’s depiction of scarcity and explained the unique business opportunity it presented for he and his family. When asked where he and his family shopped when they immigrated to the community from South Korea, Dan

explained “Really nowhere besides Pathmark... I think that is one of the reasons that my parents decided to make an organic market because for them they felt that it was a better way to go, seeing as there were no options around here at the time, they saw the benefits... Back then you couldn’t find anything here.”

Looking father back in time it becomes more apparent that the food market in Fort Greene used to be marked by a larger diversity of small specialty stores and local groceries. The longest standing resident interview, Rena, has lived in Fort Greene since she was a child in the 1950s. She portrayed the food landscape when she was growing up in the neighborhood to be much more small scale and catering to just the local population. “Years ago as a kid, my parents shopped at the local grocery stores, we had one A&P not far from here and they had a series of bodegas.” She further explained the multitude of different markets that her parents frequented both for the goods that they purchased and a shared sense of community with other shoppers. “They got their meats from an Italian butcher which was two blocks away and it was an excellent cut of meat... They often bought local produce. Like right now we have so many farmers markets everywhere, in those days they bought their produce from the local stores.” In reference to the decrease in small, specialty stores in the neighborhood Rena mentioned, “We had one or two on every corner and now you have restaurants on every corner, you don’t have a local store.” The shift from the large variety of specialty markets to the more homogenized and larger supermarket culture began before the emergence of Pathmark in the early 1990s. Rita, a resident of Fort Greene since 1982, echoed a response more akin to the responses of residents from the 90s when she mentioned to prevalence of just one

or two major food retailers. “The only place to shop [in 1982] was Perry’s which was on Dekalb and Carlton and it was so-so, you really couldn’t get your meals there, you would get canned goods there. So we had to go over to Park Slope... I went to the Stop & Shop on 5th avenue, and that’s where I had to do my food shopping.” Rita expressed the obligation to seek another food retailer outside of the neighborhood when she first moved due to quality concerns. The depiction of the food landscape in the early 1980s as underserved seems a far cry away from the description that Rena offered of the neighborhood only 25 years prior. Slightly different than the description of the food retail market in the 1990s however, Rita mentioned the presence of a meat market in the neighborhood upon her first arrival: “Years ago when I moved in, all of the area where Target is, that was a meat market. It was a meat packing district and so it was rows and rows of beef producers... You could go in there and buy meat at great prices.”

### *Food Quality*

The code of “Food Quality” in the context of the history of the food landscape in Fort Greene, does not cover people’s current preferences and perceptions of food quality but rather how they described the quality of food offered when they first moved to Fort Greene. The responses differ based on the subjectivity of quality judgment and are inextricably tied to the purchasing patterns of the individual. That being said, the general trend was that previous markets lacked the same quality as today’s due to a drastically diminished presence of organic items. Three out of the seven interviewees directly acknowledged that there was a severe lack of produce when they first came to the neighborhood. Montez spoke to her own experience and observations on the types of

clientele and products that the small markets she frequented were catering to. “I remember they used to have that grocery store right on Myrtle, right near Fort Greene Park on the end of that block... you couldn’t even go over there it was so bad. You went in there and the type of food that they had was not desirable to someone who wanted a healthy meal. They would advertise specifically for low-income families and people that were on the system, what they were able to afford.” She further mentioned her observations on the advertisements outside of the local supermarket and what type of clientele they were attempting to attract. “Back in the day all you saw was outside advertisements for “Oodles of Noodles” type things, chicken and pork chops, that was the only type of advertising. There was no advertising about produce or organic milk and so on, nothing like that.” A lack of sufficient quality produce was further echoed by Rena’s portrayal of her parents’ shopping experience more than 30 years before Montez’s observations. “The quality of fresh produce that I find to be in the supermarkets when we were growing up were not the best and we often complained that we were not getting the freshest foods.” Fredrik agreed that reliable fresh produce was the limiting factor when he first came to the neighborhood in the mid 90s. “It’s the produce, you know. Canned tuna you can buy that anywhere, but produce is the most important.”

### *Price*

The code “price” in this context refers to the price of certain items when residents first moved to Fort Greene and how they have fluctuated overtime. Attitudes and sentiments surrounding the price of food were difficult to track and compare because of the different financial situations and time periods that interviewees referred to. Due to the

relative nature of prices to markets fixed in certain time periods, questions were tailored more toward the cost of certain staple items and how they have fluctuated, rather than overall sentiments to the cost of food shopping. Regardless of the more specified nature of the questions pertaining to price, most interviewees offered a sentiment that the price of food in general was cheaper when they first moved to the neighborhood, due to less disparity between organic and non-organic products. Despite the large variety of perspectives on what matter most when shopping for food, two main commonalities aRita. When asked what products have changed dramatically in price from when residents first moved to the neighborhood, dairy products and fresh produce seemed to be the two areas of highest price inflation.

The longest standing resident in the neighborhood Rena, expressed that dairy products and in specific buying milk for a large family has always been a challenge for her. “Buying milk period is hard enough. As I have raised my family I have had to juggle that. But I’ve seen the price of milk raise, a half a gallon of milk, when my eldest child was elementary school age, was not even a dollar. Not organic, but not even a dollar... I bought a half-gallon of organic milk the other day and I paid \$5.69 for it” While Rena recognized the inflation of markets is partially to blame for the skyrocketing price, she mentioned the effect of organic branding on her daily purchases. “I’m buying it [organic milk] now because we have my grandson. Again, you want higher quality, everything is costly... The price of food is just ridiculous.” While Rena experienced a much wider spectrum of price inflation from under a dollar for a half gallon of milk when she first lived in Fort Greene during the 1950s, to over five dollars today, Fredrik who more

recently moved to the neighborhood in 1998, echoed a similar sentiment. While Fredrik recognized his financial ability to not have to focus on price as a major decision-making factor, he fully acknowledges the high cost of milk in the neighborhood. “We are just so ridiculously lucky I don’t pay attention to the prices, to be honest... It seems like the retailers are able to capitalize on the different incomes in Fort Greene by having organic things for people who live with means... this organic milk was three dollars and forty nine cents. There is something wrong with that... 3.49 for a quart of milk? That’s crazy.” Other interviewees mentioned dairy in passing but asserted that the change in price point for fruits and vegetables was the highest fluctuation they had experienced in their average purchases.

Some, like Marie and Montez, specifically mentioned that fresh produce was the largest difference they had seen in their everyday purchases. Marie offered a summary of her own experience with price inflation and followed with a summary of how the neighborhood is responding to such changes. When asked what foods she had seen change the most in price, Marie responded “Well certainly fruits and vegetables... I think what has happened is that the baseline quality of food that is available in the neighborhood has gone up and therefore the cost of food has gone up... I think what has caused the exponential rise in price for a thing of lettuce is that now it is some kind of organically, grown on a rooftop sort of thing, whereas before it was just crappy.” She outlined the disparity between organic and conventional products and markets as a main driver of price inflation for fresh product. Montez expressed a similar observation and ultimate displeasure with the disparity between markets. “Just the other day I made a

salad with lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, mushrooms, and I walked out of the grocery store that's 12 dollars... and forget organic, if you're going organic forget about it... Doesn't make sense, it's backwards."

For others, the change is less seen in specific products but more so in the overall relationship and growing distance between organic and non-organic markets. Mark, an organic market owner and resident of Fort Greene explained the major difference between organic and conventional markets from a retailer perspective. "Overall, the thing is, the all natural organic products are higher in price both on a wholesale level and retail level. A lot of people don't realize that in order for a company to get a USDA stamp on their product, it is a very expensive process. That cost is reflected in the price of the actual product." He adds his own consumer perspective later on in the interview. "You know, I would love to see that [the price] stabilize more because of the fact that there are certain products and vegetables that I will only buy organic... It is actually more expensive to eat healthier, it's totally unfair in that sense. So both as a merchant and a consumer I would love to see the price of natural and organic foods go down." There proved to be a generational difference in perceptions on how prices have changed. While those who moved to the neighborhood in the 80s and 90s focused more on fluctuations in the price of certain ingredients, Rena summarized her perceptions on price changes from when she first started frequenting the old farmers markets, to her shopping experiences today. She asserts that while the discrepancies in price were relative to the average income of the time, she felt as though produce was more expensive in the past than it is now. "I found that the prices at this [the current] farmers market different from when I

was younger and went to the market by the park. The markets back then were a little bit more expensive than what I am seeing now, in comparison to the time... It could be because prices all over have been raised, I don't feel the increase as much.”

### *Community*

Directly connected to who the dominant food retailers were at different points in Fort Greene's history is the community engagement and connection that individuals felt when doing their weekly shopping. The majority of interviewees mentioned sentiments on the changing demographics and sense of community they feel today, but did not make much distinction with the community cultivated in food shopping when they first came to Fort Greene. The exceptions were Rena and Dan, two of the longest standing residents in Fort Greene. They maintained divergent perspectives on the sense of community surrounding food retailers in the past. Rena emphasized that the shared food culture in the neighborhood was made possible by the diverse specialty shops that catered only to the local community when she was growing up. She mentioned that routines were a lot more common and therefore one would encounter the same types of people shopping each week and forge a relationship with them and with the store owners. “On the weekends, families went shopping. There were so few large chain stores that you would run into the same people, and so we knew who was going shopping Thursday, Friday, Saturday because we would see them every week. It was families but that was to teach, so that when the time came I can send you to the store and you know what I need.”

**Food Purchasing: Now**  
*Store Preference*

The code “store preference” in this context is used to describe where residents are buying their groceries in the current Fort Greene food retail landscape. New York City’s food landscape is unique in the sheer frequency of options for food retail. Unlike the majority of supermarkets in suburban areas that cater to the immediate surrounding area, food retail in the city is not specialized to certain areas. While the actual locations that each interviewee mentioned varied drastically, all residents shopped at a few different stores in different areas for different products. The proximity and accessibility of New York City makes pinpointing primary food sources a much more complex task. The overwhelming sentiment from interview participants was that there was a much larger variety of food stores now than ever before. The stores listed by interviewees were often listed by order of most visited to least and were divided into everyday small items shops and large scale bulk shopping. On average most of the everyday small shops were at local food retailers within Fort Greene or a surrounding neighborhood, while most of the large scale shopping was done externally. While there are many factors that go into choosing certain stores to purchase food from, family size directly affects the amount of food needed and the amount of time available to shop. The questions were framed to ask where residents purchase their food on a weekly basis.

Fredrik, a father of two with a husband, gave a very concrete and habitual description of his food shopping patterns. When asked where he shopped each week Fredrik responded “So we go to Fairway Market every three weeks in Red Hook, we go

to the farmers markets every week, this time of year [early Autumn] we just get everything from the farmers markets so we don't need to go to Fairway as much." He outlined a fluctuation between Fairway Markets, a large organic market with a few locations throughout NYC, and the local farmers market, as his main shopping locations based on the time of year. Fredrik makes the clear distinction between these two types of markets where he does the majority of his shopping and smaller markets where he does occasional daily shopping on a more local scale. "I shop occasionally at the Greene Grape to get last minute things... I'll go back to Smith Street Butcher to get meats because it's an old neighborhood and I go over there to get good food when I have the time." After outlining his shopping routine Fredrik explained that, "New York is interesting because we are not so supermarket based, we can still go to the butcher for meats and the fish monger for fish, which is unusual." He described the ability to go to multiple different specialty markets for things like meat and fish as a luxury of living in an urban environment and having the financial resources to do so.

Rena, shopping for a household of 5, echoed Fredrik's distinction between specialty stores and larger food retailers in the portrayal of her biweekly shopping routine. She emphatically mentioned that she shops every two weeks rather than every week due to a lack of time balancing her career with maintaining a household. While the stores that Rena outlines as her "main shops" are different from those that Fredrik visits, she maintains loyalty to certain shops for her meat and fish purchases. "I don't buy meats from Costco or fish. I buy fish from the fish market, I will buy chicken at Costco if it's the cut that I want... We go to a butcher and I have my Chinese butchers out in Flushing,

because I am in Flushing [for work].” Interestingly she mentions the lack of local stores as a factor in her turning to more bulk oriented supermarkets for her main food source. “You don’t have a local store, I actually buy things in bulk from the Costco’s and the BJ’s now, and then store that.” Meat and fish seem to be the two specialty items that both Rena and Fredrik will seek elsewhere from their primary shopping locations. Rena outlined a key distinction between her food purchasing patterns in the past and how they have transformed to today. She explained, “Before you would buy for quantity and get packaged food and let it last for the week. I buy it for the day now, for tomorrow, and I go back and get the fresh produce again.” While she did not mention the exact location where she gets her fresh produce, Rena did mention that Pathmark provided that quick resource for everyday small shops. “I do the grocery shopping at the local Pathmark for my milk and juice and so forth if I need to get something very quickly.” Once again, while she highlighted Pathmark as her resource for small items and Fredrik outlined Greene Grape as his resource, the trend was that local stores offer everyday goods while larger external stores offer bulk style shopping. Kassy echoed this trend in her observations from the Community Food Assessment that MARP conducted to test the efficacy of new supermarkets. “What I am understanding is that the new supermarkets are places where they might pop in to grab a few items because they didn’t get them on their main shop, but their main shop is still happening at Pathmark. No, I don’t think we have created a one-stop shop that is catered to all residents of Fort Greene.” Therefore the trend of shopping for small, last-minute items on a local scale, and main shopping elsewhere, is seemingly shared by multiple residents of Fort Greene.

Montez, living in a single household, outlined a shopping repertoire somewhat similar to both Fredrik's and Rena's. When asked where she would go grocery shopping on a given day she responded "Um, I actually do a number of things which is weird. I do Whole Foods... when I go into the city I'll go to whole Foods. I go to Fairway, and then for like canned goods, that type of stuff, I will go to Pathmark." She outlined Whole Foods and Pathmark as her main sources of food, neither of which are in the confines of Fort Greene or accessible on foot.

Just as Fredrik frequented the farmers markets on a seasonal basis for the majority of his shopping, Rita, a retired mother living in a single household, commented on her appreciation and allegiance to the farmers market as one of her main sources of food. "I love the farmers market, I love even just walking through it. I buy a lot of their vegetables, their kale and stuff... It's a terrific addition." She outlined her other main sources as food as primarily local establishments but mentioned transportation as one of the her main decision-making factors. "It's a combination of Greene Market, and a little bit at Greene Grape for cheese, and the co-op, and if I am driving the car and I pass a Trader Joe's or a Costco, I will shop there for the big items." Unlike Rena who habitually frequents external stores for her main food shop, Rita primarily shops locally for daily or weekly goods.

Marie, a mother living in a four-person household, outlined her weekly shopping repertoire in detail and mentioned an element that had not been touched on by any other interviewee. Unlike the majority of other respondents, Marie explained that a lack of time rather than price, was one of the major factors affecting her purchasing patterns. Marie

explained that she used to be a devout patron of the Park Slope Food Co-op but due to other time commitments to her two sons and full time job, she had to switch to a more convenient alternative. “Oh, it’s not that the price of food went up for me, it’s that I can’t take the time from work to go do my shift and shop there [the co-op]... Now I actually do Fresh Direct<sup>1</sup> mostly. I know it is a big change.” While Fresh Direct offers Marie the convenience she desires, she still frequents local stores for supplemental and everyday items. “So I do a lot of bulk stuff from Fresh Direct, and then I do a lot of shopping at Green Grape Provisions. I get meat and fish there and sometimes fruits and vegetables. I bring home some food from Whole Foods in the city, certain foods that I can’t get from anywhere else. And then the Farmer’s Market, in that order.”

### *Quality Fluctuation and Preference*

The code “Quality Fluctuation and Preference” represents resident’s current preferences and perceptions on the quality of food they are purchasing in the present. It is important to note that while some interviewees did not comment on current food quality directly, they did mention the wide variety of options of food retailers in today’s market. All interviewees mentioned the increase in diversity of food stores in the neighborhood but there was a large discrepancy on the manifestation of the increased diversity. Some likened the increase in quality of food to an increase in organic products in the neighborhood. Rita explained that the prevalence of organic food in the neighborhood is a huge indicator of progress. “What I tend to buy, I buy organic which I love. I mean we’ve never had organic in the neighborhood...it’s only in the last 2 years that you start seeing

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<sup>1</sup> Fresh Direct is an online grocery store that delivers to residences and offices in the NYC metropolitan area

gourmet restaurants and grocers, we never had those in this neighborhood it was unfathomable.”

Montez expressed similar preferences in food shopping but mentioned that price was a large factor in her decision-making processes. When asked what her main priorities were when shopping for food, Montez responded “I don’t necessarily go with trusted brands, I do tend to do more organic just for health choice... Nowadays, when I go grocery shopping, I look for the cheapest price. If you’re going to buy organic you look for the cheapest organic.” Montez likened the surge of organic food into the neighborhood, to a much larger diversity and frequency of grocery stores in general. “This neighborhood is now supported by many stores. Before like I said, you did not have anything... I find that if you have it available and accessible, more people will become health conscious and want to try it.”

Dan highlighted the change in health consciousness and priorities in the neighborhood as a major business opportunity for he and his family. He explained that his family saw a rapidly changing neighborhood collective consciousness around more health conscious and organic products without a major food retailer to provide for that need.

“My parents converted this about 20 years ago. This was before anything organic or anything. My parents took a risk doing that no question, but they felt that was the world where people were heading. When they opened the market, we were actually incredibly busy because we would have people from Manhattan come in to the store here, because they couldn’t get organic produce anywhere else even in the city... There wasn’t a market for it yet.”

Dan commented on the intimate relationship between his parents business and the needs of the neighborhood. It was a growing attraction to more high quality, all-natural and

organic goods that brought about a more diverse group of markets servicing Fort Greene. Dan summarizes that growing attraction to higher quality goods in the context of both a litmus test and a catalyst of changing paradigms within the neighborhood. “It kind of lets you know that people are placing more emphasis on what they are putting into their body, in terms of the quality of food... I think the biggest thing that I have noticed change, in terms of what people are gravitating towards, it’s really the all natural organic stuff.” From both a consumer and vendor perspective, an interest in organic markets is a sign of an increase in quality of food offered within the neighborhood.

Others however, did not articulate organic vs. conventional as part of their decision-making but did emphasize an increase in the quality of foods offered in the neighborhood. She summarized the relationship between new businesses and changing demographics of residents as based on each other. She explained the cycle of change from her perspective in the following quote. “You have more people making more money and a diverse group of people moving in and so, it demands that businesses and stores change to meet the needs of the people.” With a rapidly changing population in the neighborhood comes a business response on all levels, Rena explains. She connected the increase in the number of businesses to her perception of a change in health concerns in the general public. “I think also the fact that we, most of us are more in tune to the better quality of food and a better quality of living, and we are all concerned about health. That cause has been the driving factor. There is a demand for that type of product to be in the neighborhood and so it comes.” Whereas Rena, Dan, Montez, and Rita, all praised the increase in diversity of shops in the neighborhood and in health consciousness, Fredrik

mentioned an increase in ethical shopping and interpersonal connection that was unique to the conversation.

Fredrik explained that neither price nor organic were decision-making factors for his food purchasing, but that a connection to the ingredients he is choosing is most important. “It’s got to be the right stuff. The closer I get to the actual creation of the food, that is really important to me. If I’m buying it directly from the farmer, if he is at the farmers market, that’s my number one preference, I don’t care about organic or not.”

Montez described a connection to the food she purchases as important but maintained that trying her best to purchase all organic was of utmost concern. “I sort of like the experience of going to the actual grocery store and picking out my own stuff. I don’t want other people picking my stuff for me. I know what I’m looking for, the color of the greens and you know...” While Marie did not mention an ethical motivation in her food purchasing, she did echo some of Fredrik’s sentiment on an importance in having the ability to choose the highest quality foods. As mentioned previously, Marie switched from shopping at the food co-op to relying on Fresh Direct for her weekly food shopping. This switch, she explained, marked a clear decrease in the quality of food and loss of ability to intimately interact with the food she was purchasing for the sake on convenience. In reference to Fresh Direct, Marie explained, “If I buy all of the same food, I don’t get the same quality of food, because the food co-op just had much higher quality food. We miss that, I’m sad about that, particularly with the fruits and vegetables, that’s where you really see the decrement in quality... so it is actually incredibly privileged to be able to be a co-op member.”

### *Affordability and Access*

The umbrella term “affordability and access” proved to be a topic that garnered a wide array of opinions. Some mentioned that price above all was their number one concern when buying food while others mentioned that they did not really notice price fluctuation. Due to the deeply personal nature and large variability of how interviewees perceive affordability and access to food in the neighborhood, it is important to first set the tone from a more objective, administrative perspective. While there is inherent bias in her own professional opinions on price fluctuations in the neighborhood, Kassy expressed her findings through previous community food assessments and surveys conducted by The Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project. She began by highlighting affordability of food for certain communities as a major weak point in creating true food access. “It definitely isn’t a food desert because we actually have quite a rich abundant amount of foo to access, it’s really more of a “food apartheid” where it’s all about affordability. It’s about yes there is access but is that enough? Is what is here affordable?” She called for a redefinition of what access to culturally appropriate, fresh food really entails. “Thinking deeper on the idea of what is access, and not just a physical ability to go somewhere and pick up a banana but also like what does that banana cost, and is that person leaving the store with that banana. So that’s definitely the direction that I have been looking at things for our community.” Kassy said that the major catalyst for most of her work was the demolition of a 6500 square food shopping center in 2006 that left residents living in the nearby Ingersoll Public Housing Development, with a lack of access to basic goods and

services. As a response, three new supermarkets were planned to open in 2013 to help increase access of fresh food to those high density housing areas. Kassy explained the negative effects of too much variety in too short of a time period. “In fact there is two grocery stores down there now and i’ve heard that they are going to open up a third one soon so we are actually about to see an over saturation of grocery store options on that corner. The price competition is going to be interesting to watch”

The questions that Kassy raised surrounding access are supported by the large variety of opinion of how residents define their own access to fresh and affordable food. While none specifically addressed their personal definition of the term “access”, individual perception of the personal ability to afford food paired with previous data on decision-making criteria while food shopping, offers a wide diversity of definitions. The general trend suggested that those who frequented the local specialty markets did not reflect on price fluctuation as much as those individuals who frequented larger, external box stores for their main food shopping. Naturally those that shopped more frequently in the neighborhood focused on price changes of smaller scale stores while those who shopped more externally emphasized the general increase in price of food throughout the city.

Marie explains that access to the high-quality food that she desires comes at a price that she is willing and financially able to incur. In reference to one of her main local shopping locations Greene Grape, Marie said “I mean it’s totally overpriced and crazy but I can get really good quality meat and fish there that I couldn’t get anywhere else... Even though I can get what I want I have to pay much more for it, but I can get it.” Since

moving to the neighborhood price has become less crucial to Marie while her focus on quality has increased. In reference to her switch from shopping at Pathmark, Marie explained “I don’t know that the food prices have gone up there [Pathmark], but I just don’t have to shop there anymore.” The increase in diversity of high quality and higher priced specialty markets is a privilege that has marked Marie’s perception of her access to certain foods. “I’m more concerned with food quality... and you know sometimes I’m horrified when I get to the register and I’ve spent like 55 dollars on meat... I’m more concerned about the quality but I’m relatively privileged so I don’t have to think about everyday prices.” The shift from a focus on price to a focus on highest quality possible evident in Marie’s responses is a trend that carries through to other local shoppers. Rita, who outlined her major shopping as heavily centralized on the local stores “Green Market” and “Green Grape Provisions”, shared Marie’s ambivalence to local price fluctuation.

When asked if she had seen any significant change in price in terms of staple items at the market, Rita responded “To be honest with you, I’m pretty poor at tracking price, but I suspect that they have gone up... I tend to buy you know grass-fed or organic or specialty cheeses, so yes per item I’m spending a lot more.” Frederik maintained that price is not an influential factor in his purchasing but also provided an analysis of the level and type of access that Greene Grape Provisions provides. “I’m really lucky I don’t care about how much it costs, it’s got to be the right stuff... The Greene Grape caters to a certain type of customer, it would be nice if they could move into a bigger space to offer a wider variety of priced items, so that other people could eat there.” Fredrik is

suggesting a clear division in clientele of the Greene Grape Provisions market that has implications on the larger concept of access on a neighborhood level. Similar to Kassy's comments on how access is defined for different people, Fredrik suggested that while he feels his access to food is abundant, others who are not part of the clientele might not. "I can't ask for anything more than we have because we honestly have everything in the neighborhood... We are extremely spoiled food wise." Interestingly, he connected the longevity of the neighborhood with the stability of food and rent prices. "I used to live near Tiffany Place, and that is an old neighborhood... When I lived over there it wasn't that expensive because they had been there for such a long time. If we forget about farmers markets, every new food shop here costs an absolute fortune because the rents are so high." This assertion hints at a cycle of neighborhood change prompted by rising rents which bring in new residents which promote new opportunities for business.

Dan explains the unfortunate pitfalls of this cycle both from a merchant and consumer perspective. "It is actually more expensive to eat healthier than it is to eat crappier, it's totally unfair in that sense. So both as a merchant and a consumer, I would love to see the price of natural and organic foods go down because you want to try to be more conscious about what you are eating, but a lot of times it's tough." While he outlines the difficulty in purchasing certain high quality ingredients in Fort Greene, Dan suggests that he is still financially able to afford the specialty markets. In reference to the price of certain ingredients Dan mentioned "I would love to see that stabilize more because of the fact that there are certain products and vegetables that I will only buy organic, for more specific reasons but they are expensive, there is no question about that."

Whereas respondents that placed less importance on price relied on local specialty markets for high quality goods, those who shopped primarily out of Fort Greene focused on the general price increase of food in New York City as a whole.

Montez, who mentioned that organic food is important to her but that she frequents larger external stores like Fairway and Whole Foods more, explained that while she has the ability to buy for quality rather than affordability, it is difficult. “New York is a very tough place to buy groceries, you go into a store and get a handful of stuff and come out and you’re going to spend 50-60 dollars and that is just enough stuff to keep you for 2 or 3 days. Imagine the average family that are not able to do that, to pay that amount of money a week.” The hypothetical challenges of a large family size that Montez speculates, are embodied in Rena’s explanations of how she reconciles the high cost of food on a weekly basis. “You want higher quality, everything is costly. You just have to go with the flow and do the best you can... I’ve seen my average food bill increase to 300 dollars every 2 weeks and I still come home with just the minimum amount of food... That’s incredible. That’s more than half of my salary on food.” While Rena acknowledged that a desire for higher quality and increased health consciousness results in higher prices, she recognized her relative privilege of access situated in the greater Fort Greene landscape. “I recognize the fact that not everybody can do that, but those who can, we spend an awful lot of money. Now the prices are ridiculous because you want higher quality, fresh food.” Later on in the interview however, Rena recognized that the increase in specialty markets in Fort Greene have divided the landscape into those who can afford and those who cannot. She acknowledged that certain stores cater to certain

clientele and that she is often disclosed from these outlets due to price. “You’re a student and I’m well on my way to retirement and there are certainly markets that I can’t even go into due to price. I don’t feel I need to spend that kind of money for the stuff there. There are some people who will, and that’s why those stores are still in existence.” Sharing her own personal feelings of isolation, Rena portrayed some specialty food retailers as somewhat divisive forces.

### *Sense of Community*

The code “Sense of community” is used to encapsulate varying opinions on the sense of community that different food stores cultivate within Fort Greene. A sense of place and community engagement when shopping for food was important to all of the residents interviewed. Some however, were content with the level of community engagement they felt while others maintained that the influx of wealth compromised it. Unlike most other data, the perceptions of community did not follow a clear chronological pattern. Rena and Marie maintained that the influx of different income levels and people into Fort Greene has led to a decrease in community engagement. Marie expressed what she feels is the biggest catalyst of change and how it has effected the food market. “I think the biggest change is the wealth of the inhabitants. That is the hugest change is that there are rich people here now... The retail environment has changed but it is all driven by the increase in income.” She further explained the food shopping environment as “a totally different world.” Rena shared Marie’s sentiment but focused on highlighting the sense of community cultivated in her past, to represent how it has changed. Reminiscing on her shopping patterns growing up Rena said “You would

see similar people in the stores all of the time... That is lost, absolutely... That sense is lost. I like the fact that my butcher knows who I am, I don't have a butcher anymore though. There isn't that sense of belonging, of knowing that you're getting just what you want because you're not known, it's the price we pay for convenience." While Marie and Rena expressed a level of discontent with the lack of community cultivated in the Fort Greene food retail landscape, Rita and Fredrik argue that the community engagement is still there but requires effort to cultivate.

The relationship with employees is a vital element in choosing a trusted weekly store from a consumer standpoint. Fredrik supports this in saying, "I go to Greene Grape and I buy meat, fish, and sausage, the guys behind the counter, they all know me. At a supermarket, it's just some guy behind the counter who changes every two weeks. I don't know why it's important but I like it, it feels good." The recognition that Fredrik explains is important to him, is the sense of place that both Marie and Rena argue has diminished in recent years. Rita summarized the same reciprocity that she feels when interacting in Fort Greene food stores. "When I go into these places, even the hourly staff knows me and greets me and it gives me a sense of community. I guess it gets a little harder as we have so many people moving in and people come from different neighborhoods, but if you work at it, it's one of the things I still love about the neighborhood and is still there." Despite the difference in opinion from a consumer perspective, Dan explains the close relationship that businesses maintain with Fort Green residents. He explained that the close connection to the surrounding community was one of the reasons his parents started a business in Fort Greene in the first place. "To be honest, a lot of the reasons why my

parents opened so many businesses here is because they got so much feedback from the community. That's why we have such diverse businesses... we kind of try to keep our ear to the ground and hear what the community it really asking for.”

### **Drivers of Change**

While most of the interview questions focused heavily on individual food shopping routines, some questions were geared more generally to gauge resident's perceptions of the main catalysts of change in Fort Greene. While the responses varied greatly, an influx of higher income levels, an increase in rent cost, and a close proximity to Manhattan, were three major factors that residents outlined as forces for change in Fort Greene. Some pinpointed specific events that prompted the migration of different types of residents to the neighborhood. Montez considered the September 11th, 2001 terrorist to be a major factor influencing people's decisions to move to Fort Greene. “I think that after 9/11, that's when I really saw the change starting. After 9/11 a lot of people moved out of the city and felt that, okay here is a neighborhood that is very close to the city, one stop from the city over the bridge, has potential, real estate is reasonable. So I think that's what has sort of driven the housing market up here.” According to Montez, the neighborhood became so sought after because it provided a geographically close alternative to the chaotic life of Manhattan. In her eyes, the alternative that Fort Greene provided was a major catalyst for the influx of a higher income group of individuals who in turn increased the baseline rent in the housing market. In reference to the rapid growth Montez exclaimed “It's the most growing neighborhood in the last couple of years. When they look at Fort Greene they say this is the most desirable area to live now. Because of

the convenience of Manhattan, you've got parks nearby and the subway and restaurants.”

Dan further supported the main reasons that Fort Greene has become so enticing, but also maintained that he felt as though there was still room for growth. He explained in detail, the unique public transportation opportunity that Fort Greene has cultivated for its residents and visitors. “Just accessibility wise, I mean in NYC if you don't have a car, trains are what you look for. The fact that we have basically every train line that comes to Atlantic station, you know when you start naming things off your list, how could it not blow up as a neighborhood? The scary part is, this neighborhood hasn't peaked yet.” Just as Montez, Dan and Rita attributed the initial influx of people into the neighborhood to its unparalleled accessibility to amenities and public transportation. Rita mentioned that when she first moved to the neighborhood in the early 1980s, she had a premonition that transportation systems would flock to the neighborhood and bring a much more diverse crowd of people. “I move here because I knew that with all of the transportation systems, someday it was going to be an incredibly popular and populated neighborhood.” Dan's description of the effect of an influx of different residents, mirrors Rita's premonition upon first coming to Fort Greene. In just the past 5 years, Dan explained that the face of the neighborhood has drastically altered due to a constantly changing population/demographic. While Dan recognizes his relatively new perception of the neighborhood, he mentioned that the older residents he had talked with were noticing drastic differences in the types of residents living in Fort Greene. “I know one of the big things they said that's probably the biggest change that they have noticed above everything else is the fact that you'll see people from one year, and then they will leave... Part of that is due to the

fact of how expensive this neighborhood has become.” The constant influx and outflow of new residents is due in part to an extremely competitive and constantly increasing housing market. Dan reiterates Montez’s belief that Fort Greene has become a highly prized area for real estate. “I think that is one of the main reasons why you see such in and out activity because it’s one of the most sought after zip codes in the U.S. right now. I can see why that would be.” Just as Montez and Dan attributed the main demographic and socioeconomic changes within Fort Greene to the proximity and amenities that the neighborhood offered to Manhattan residents, Rena offered a similar sentiment over a longer time period.

She attributed the metamorphosis to an influx of higher income levels into the neighborhood, driven by rising rents in Manhattan. “I think that our neighborhood changed because the rents in the city were so high that folks that would normally be living in the city, now moved into our area in downtown Fort Greene because we are so close in proximity to the city.” The added driver of rising rents in Manhattan, further supports the drive for a large influx of different income levels into Fort Greene. Rena likened the influx of different residents to a diversification of the retail market as a response to a wider range of residents. “I think as a result of people moving in, each bringing their own contribution to the culture, caused there to be a larger variety of shops and stores in our area... I think that people make the change.” While Rena highlighted a change in income disparity, she did not share much value judgment but rather just noticed the underlying drivers of change. Alternatively Fredrik commented on the income disparity in a negative light. While he previously identified himself as “lucky” to be able

to circumvent issues of affordability, he shared some sentiments on how economically stigmatized the neighborhood has become. “Income disparity in New York is wild. It is so encapsulated in Fort Greene, there is almost no middle class. It’s all wealthy and poor... Now the stock of housing is much lower, there are far fewer affordable places to live, even for people who have good incomes. The middle class is just not existing anymore.” Marie matched Fredrik’s grievances by acknowledging a change in the sense of community she feels on her block. She explained that she and her family bought her house for very little money but due to a drastically increasing competition in Fort Greene’s housing market, her house is now a commodity. While she expressed that her personal accrual of wealth has increased due to the geographic situation of her house, she maintains that the increase in wealth has caused a clear decrement in her sense of place and community. “I sometimes find it a little depressing, and I didn’t have a problem, we moved here because we liked it here, not because we wanted it to change. I felt very comfortable here from the beginning, so you know there is definitely something that is lost when an elderly woman dies and is being replaced by a family that can afford a 2 million dollar house.”

### *Indicators of Change*

The focal point of change in all of the interviews was the food retail landscape and yet most interviewees mentioned that changes in diversity, crime rates, and Fort Greene park as a dividing line, were also huge indicators of transition. A decrease in crime and an instilled feeling of safety was one of the most widely discussed indicators of neighborhood flux. Rena explained that Fort Greene’s status as a middle-class population,

in conjunction with its unique geographic location sandwiched in between lower income areas, lead to an increase in non-resident crime in the past. “We are in a very unique location. We are sandwiched in between two low-income housing areas and we saw an influx of non-homeowners. There is a correlation between poverty and crime... Often times we were subjected to all sorts of crime and people would come in and do things because they were not from the neighborhood.” She explained that the majority of crimes from her perception were perpetrated by non-residents of Fort Greene, and maintained that the majority of those people had moved away due to increasing rent in the low-income areas surrounding Fort Greene.

Montez shared a similar perception of the past to Rena. When asked what she thought the major differences have been in her eyes from when she first came to Fort Greene, she primarily highlighted an increase in crime-free police presence. She even outlined certain areas of the neighborhood that she was trepidatious to frequent due to widespread crime. “When I was here the first time you couldn’t even go in Fort Greene Park, even the police didn’t go in the park during the daytime, that’s how bad it was. Now to see that on weekend they have a farmers market there, it’s totally different.” Montez maintains that the increase in safety in Fort Greene park is a strong indicator of neighborhood progress. In some contexts Fort Greene park is portrayed as a community symbol of unity, while others consider it to represent a dividing line in the neighborhood. Kassy explains the economic isolation and divergence that is elucidated by the park. “We always talk about Fort Greene in a way that symbolizes Fort Greene Park as a divider to the community. What is happening on the North side versus the South side is a very

different story.” She further claimed that the census data on a small scale certain highlights Fort Greene park as a major economic dividing line in the middle of the neighborhood boundaries. “When you look at the data on a large scale versus a small scale, on a large scale we appear to be a very wealthy community but then on a smaller scale it tells a totally different story of disparity.” (See figures 3-4)

Rita also reminisced on the high crime rate of the past. “When I moved on my block, three of the houses were boarded up, it was still a pretty dangerous neighborhood and a lot of deserted homes.” While Rita maintained that she feels safer living in Fort Greene than ever before, she expressed that the safety was brought on by a changing demographic that has altered the diversity of neighborhood as a whole. She explained that the main indicator of widespread demographic change to her, can be seen in her waning engagement with her neighbors. “I don’t like the gentrification. When I moved in it was probably 95% Black, 3% Hispanic, and 2% White. I liked that it was a mixed neighborhood... Back then you kind of knew everybody, all ages. It was a wonderful melting pot.” The decrease in racial diversity of the neighborhood is something that Rita argued is a direct result of the business gentrification of the area. Interestingly, Dan acknowledged a change in diversity but said that he had actually seen diversity increase in the neighborhood. In reference to his portrayal of the neighborhood when he first arrived Dan explained “To go from something like that, to see where we are now, you have a bunch of young families, young professionals, you have such a good mix of diversity, that you think back to where we were before it’s crazy.” While she did not comment on racial diversity directly, Marie expressed a discontent with the loss of

community acceptance and engagement that she once felt. Her sentiments toward her diminished sense of place, were a salient representation of the major demographic trends outlined by other residents. “I find that people are less friendly, it’s a little weird that when people look more like me they seem less inclined to be my friend. It feels less neighborly, it has always felt like everybody knows everybody. Something has been lost in terms of, I used to know all of the neighbors and I don’t now, which is a little weird.” This sentiment can be attributed to a combination of any of the drivers of change outlined previously, but serves as a first hand perception of how the community has changed.

## **Discussion:**

### **A Redefinition of Terms**

Kassy mentioned that a redefinition of what true access to food means to different people is integral to beginning to think about how communities can increase food equity. The breadth of responses to questions of major decision-making factors and locations of main food sources, aptly exemplifies why a more case specific definition is necessary. While Marie, Fredrik, and Rita, mentioned that they do not really pay too much attention to the price of their weekly purchases, Rena and Montez emphasized rising costs and expenses as a limitation to their shopping experience. From a retailer perspective, Dan maintained that he wishes the price of all natural organic goods could stabilize, but that the cost is not imposed by his business but rather the high cost of those specialty items to begin with. Considering that the paradigms of the greater NYC food system are far less malleable than the community organization of Fort Greene, I think that Kassy's call for a redefinition of the term "food access" is the first step to addressing some of the discrepancies seen on a neighborhood scale and between the interviewees.

Interestingly the two interviewees who emphasized price as a major limiting factor throughout their interviews, were also the two who included Pathmark as still part of their shopping routines. According to all respondents, Pathmark provided a base layer of food security and variety in the early-mid 1990s when no other major food sources were available. The majority however, stopped shopping at Pathmark due to quality and time concerns and shifted their bulk shopping to external grocery stores. None of the interviewees maintain Pathmark as their main shopping option but two have kept

Pathmark on their radar as a place to buy “canned goods” and “small things”. I think this is an extremely poignant difference in that those who consider price as a major concern, are willing to sacrifice to low-quality of the supermarket to some degree. This is a clear example of certain businesses catering to certain niche markets. Whereas Pathmark was once a place of unity as it provided the first large community supermarket in the 1990s, it has now evolved into only providing security for people that prioritize affordability over quality.

I suggest that a revision of food security and access to focus not just about affordability but also about cultural appropriateness, walkability, in addition to all of the elements mentioned by interviewees, is necessary to truly understand whether a community is underserved or not.

### **Generational Gap**

There was a clear generational gap in how each interviewee perceived their own level of access and security within Fort Greene. Three of the seven residents moved to Fort Greene during the 1990s and described the food retail landscape with characteristics of an underserved community. Reliance on one large scale supermarket, Pathmark, that served lower quality products was the main trend expressed by these residents. The food landscape in the 1990s did not have the class division that Patricia Allen mentions is inherent in most discourse around community food access (Mares, 2011; Alkon, 2011). Yet all three interviewees described a heavy reliance on Pathmark for a base layer of food security for the entire neighborhood. The apparent division seen between specialty markets and supermarkets seen in today’s food landscape, was not a factor in the time

period where the majority of residents migrated to Fort Greene. Montez supports this claim through her perception of Pathmark serving both residents from Fort Greene and elsewhere because it provided a level of food retail that had not been available at all previously.

Looking back further into the 1980s however, Rita, who moved to Fort Greene in 1982, maintained that she did not have the option to grocery shop locally due to a complete lack of fresh food. While she questioned Pathmark's quality, she did say that it provided the first grocery store in the neighborhood where she would shop. Comparing sentiments between those that moved to Fort Greene in the 1990s and Rita, it becomes apparent that perceptions of quality and levels of access are entirely relative to the time period.

Living in Fort Greene for the longest period of time since the 1950s Rena detailed the various manifestations of the food retail landscape within Fort Greene. Her portrayal of small specialty stores during her childhood paralleled the small specialty stores seen today but according to Rena were far more community oriented. She maintained that she would always see the same people at the stores she frequented as a child. This portrayal was very different from the one that Marie offered of shopping locally in Fort Greene. Marie mentioned that she was used to seeing the same faces, but that she did not recognize people when shopping in local, specialty markets anymore.

### **Perceptions of Community Change**

The catalysts of neighborhood change seemed to be one of the most widely discussed and disagreed upon topics. Some, like Fredrik and Marie pinned the rising real estate market as the main cause of demographic change. Others like Rena and Montez maintained that a rapid influx of different types of people into Fort Greene, prompted the change in types of businesses and sense of community. Kassy agreed that a rapid influx of higher income residents, led to a large economic schism of certain areas from others. This is further supported by the average household income data presented in figures 3+4.

### **Suggestions for Future**

While the majority of focus was placed on identifying the main causes and identifiers of neighborhood change through the food system, some offered leverage points that they thought could begin to bridge the socioeconomic divide in food purchasing. Kassy explained one solution derived by MARP was to initiate a farm-stand style CSA within the Ingersoll and Walt Whitman low-income housing developments. “The organization started with some short term solutions like a CSA that has 50% of shares cater toward low-income, bringing fresh food into the area on a seasonal basis.” While she recognized the short term nature of such endeavors, she highlighted cultural boundaries as one of the main factors dividing the clientele of the Fort Greene farmers market. She explained that while communities may have access and affordability on paper, breaking down the cultural constructions and knowledge of how to use certain ingredients is a much slower and systemic change. “We learned through our focus groups and surveys that even with access people aren’t necessarily choosing the healthier option

because they don't know how to cook it." The solution that MARP derived to help break down such barriers and increase education was a program that brought residents of the low-income areas of Fort Greene, into the farmers market for a tour. Geographic isolation is another huge challenge in creating true food access and the tours offer just one solution to reducing the cultural stigma. Kassy explained "We switched our programming a little and we added some components around that and we have now been doing what are called healthy shopping tours. We sign people up at the farm stand and then they go to the farmers market the next day. The surveys afterwards show that people learn something new each time." This simple yet broad solution to dismantling the stigma of the farmers market is supported by other interviewees as well. Fredrik succinctly said "Just like upper class people feel less inclined to shop in the low-income areas, they [low-income residents] probably feel exactly the same way about shopping in higher income areas. If you strategically place a food co-op in a divided area, it can promote a lot of unity." This unique perspective on a food vendor as promoting unity rather than the division seen in most of the food retail landscape, is a true leverage point for the future. Providing affordability and access is certainly a first step in bridging the gap between low/high income and conventional/alternative food systems, but bringing cultural boundaries and reservations into public discourse is a much longer and crucial step in creating food access.

## **Conclusion:**

New York City in many ways is a magnification of social and economic inequity. The incredible population density and unfathomable diversity, make social migration extremely visible yet very complex to deal with. This research presents just one way to observe and begin to discuss economic inequity within a small community. Food is an almost subconscious part of everyones daily life, and yet is underutilized when it comes to analysis of social relations. The food retail landscape is the back bone of community organization because it provides the most essential amenity to residents. As Carole Counihan explained in the first chapter of her book entitled *The Anthropology of Food and Body*, “Food is a product and mirror of the organization of society on both the broadest and most intimate levels. It is connected to many kinds of behavior and endlessly meaningful.”

This thesis shares the stories of seven individuals, all of very different backgrounds, interacting with the same rapidly changing landscape at one point in time. The breadth of opinion outlined offers a true narrative of opinion on food access, that would otherwise be summarized through affordability only. It serves as a call to action for a much deeper assessment on what true food access means to a diverse group of people in a community. Kassy Nystrom succinctly put it “Yes there is access but is that enough? Thinking deeper on the idea of what is access, and not just a physical ability.” The purpose of this research is not to suggest a cure-all policy nor is it to speak for anyone else. It is simply to share the stories of 7 very different individuals interacting with a complex system at one point in time.

Laying out how humans describe their own interaction to the landscape around them through personal narrative, naturally illuminates the intersections and divergences in opinion. It is those points that must be considered when considering any sort of action in leveraging the gaps presented throughout this project. This report is primarily for use by the generous interview subjects and members of the Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project, who are thinking about issues facing the community of Fort Greene everyday. It is secondarily for any reader that is interested in how food can be used as a lens through which to view larger social issues. Finally, it may someday be of use to neighborhood planners and current Councilwoman Leticia James, as a database of personal experience from which to draw from when considering the direction of our constantly changing neighborhood. The work does not stop here, but the information collected inspires a call for action and implementation, that is inclusive of individual experience and perception.

## **Glossary**

**Food Justice:** Seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010).

**Food Sovereignty:** The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems (IPC Food Sovereignty).

**Food Desert:** A district with little or no access to large grocery stores that offer fresh and affordable foods needed to maintain a healthy diet (Smith, 2011).

**Urban Food Desert:** An area that has limited access to affordable and nutritious food, where at least one-fifth of the population lives under the poverty line, and where there is no supermarket within a one-mile radius (Ver Ploeg et al, 2009).

**Food Security:** The availability of food and one's access to those resources. Including both physical and economic access to food that meets people's dietary needs as well as their food preferences (World Health Organization, 2013).

**Demographics:** Relating to the dynamic balance of a population especially with regard to density and capacity for expansion or decline (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

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## Appendices

### **Figure 1: Letter to Interview participants**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Jack Steele and I am a senior at the University of Vermont studying Environmental Science and Anthropology. I am working on my final senior thesis which is a community profile of how food in Fort Greene has changed over the years. I have lived in Fort Greene for almost my whole life so this is an issue very dear to me. I know you work/ got your contact from \_\_\_\_\_. I was wondering if you would be free to chat briefly at some point about your experience in Fort Greene and how you may have seen the food landscape change. My schedule is fairly flexible when I am in the city and I will be home for \_\_\_\_\_. Let me know whenever is most convenient for you and we can devise a plan to meet or chat over the phone. Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to talking with you soon!

Sincerely,  
Jack Steele

### **Figure 2: Map of Average Household Income in Fort Greene, Brooklyn in 2000. Based on 1999 Census data.**



Note: Tan regions between Park Ave and Myrtle are Tract 29.01 (left) and Tract 185.01 (right). Red pin placed within Tract 181.

**Figure 3: Map of Average Household Income in Fort Greene, Brooklyn in 2012.**



Note: Tan and light orange regions represent Tract 29.01 and 185.01 respectively. Red pin placed within Tract 181.

**Figure 4: List of Interview Questions**

**Questions for All:**

1. How long have you lived in Fort Greene?
2. What do you do for a living?
3. Where do you shop for food now?
4. How often do you go food shopping?
5. What products are most important to you?

**Questions for less than 10 year residents:**

1. Why did you move to Fort Greene?
2. When you first moved, where did you shop for food?
3. Has your primary location for food shopping changed?
4. If so, why did it change?
5. How has your perception of the neighborhood changed since you first moved here?
6. Can you outline any stores that may have come into business or ran out of business since you have been living in Fort Greene?
7. Have you seen any price fluctuations since you have been living here?
8. Where do you buy your fruits and vegetables?
9. How much money do you spend on groceries per week?
10. Has this amount changed since you have lived here?

11. How far do you travel to buy food?
12. Has this distance changed from when you first moved here?
13. Would you say it is easy to find affordable yet healthy food in Fort Greene?
14. What are your main priorities when shopping for food? Brand, organic, price, aesthetic, etc.
15. What is one turning point in the neighborhood that you have experienced?
16. What foods in specific have you seen change the most in price from when you first moved here to now?
17. Has the sense of community changed for you?
18. If you could implement some change in the next five years, what would it be and why?

**Questions for greater than 10 year residents:**

1. How long have you lived in Fort Greene?
2. What were the primary food sources when you first moved here?
3. How far did you used to travel to buy food?
4. How far do you travel now?
5. What foods were most important and prevalent back then?
6. Have you seen any change in the price of foods in certain areas? If so, could you name any specific blocks/areas where price has fluctuated?
7. Approximately how much did you spend on food when you first moved here? Has this changed to today?
8. What were the stores like that you used to shop at?
9. How have they changed up until today?
10. What were some important items you looked for each week?
11. Have those items changed over time?
12. What kind of people were shopping with you? Has this changed?
13. Has the collective meaning of food shopping changed for you over time?
14. Do you think that food retailers have changed overtime in response to the changes in the community?
15. What is the biggest indicator of change within the community that you have seen?
16. What is it you would like to see change in the next 10 years in Fort Greene?
17. Who do you think will be the major force in implementing this change?
18. What types of foods do you find priced too high?
19. Did you ever receive food assistance?
20. If so, how has that changed over time?
21. Do you think more people are interested in where their food comes from than how cheap it is?
22. How has the influx and outflow of different people altered your sense of belonging and community in Fort Greene?

**Figure 5: Table of contact in community partnership organizations**

Organization Name	Phone Number	Email
Brooklyn Food Coalition	347.329.509	info@brooklynfoodcoalition.org
Myrtle Avenue Eats Fresh	718.230.1689	<a href="mailto:kassy@myrtleavenue.org">kassy@myrtleavenue.org</a>
Fort Greene Neighborhood Action Partnership	718-694-6957	drglose@fortgreenesnap.org
Fort Greene/ Clinton Hill Food Co-op	718-208-4778	info@greenehillfood.coop



