

# ROOTS OF RESILIENCE: REFRAMING FOOD ACCESS THROUGH ORAL HISTORY

## Abstract

Food security work is currently dominated by a deficit narrative, emphasizing bareness and inherent dependence among people of color in the United States. These beliefs have infiltrated the collective identities and memories of these very communities. This project introduces oral history as a potential medium for integrating historical context in food access narratives. Urban farming and local food networks have long been the foundation of resilience and solidarity in communities marginalized due to race, poverty, or geography. By preserving stories that have been tainted by social narratives of shame and oppression, we can better understand the roots of food security issues, and therefore provide more effective reform.

## Background

### FOOD POLICY

- Inefficient food policy reveals the need for a new perspective on food access.
- Flaws in existing food access programs include apolitical nutrition education programs, harmful corporate gentrification, and white-dominated community spaces.

### COLLECTIVE MEMORY

- Dr. Kato's initial research question asks why the intergenerational transfer local food provisioning stories and knowledge stopped in recent generations
- Why have these perspectives have been excluded from mainstream narratives?
- How can oral history preserve these memories?

### AGRICULTURAL HISTORY

- The main thesis of this project focuses on the importance of integrating authentic historical context into our understandings of food insecurity.
- Includes the role of agriculture in resilience and cultural identity, particularly in the face of negligent government.

## Objectives

- Identify a crucial deficiency in food access policy
- Problematize the isolation of policy discourse from social and cultural history.
- Illustrate the potential for oral history to contextualize political issues, and encourage intergenerational memory sharing as a form of cultural resilience.



**Grocery store locations in DC in relation to percent Black population**

Less than 20%  
Between 20–80%  
Greater than 80%  
Based on ACS 2016 5-year estimates

Retrieved from *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington, D.C.* (2019)

***“I do look back and wish I had more knowledge of it, because that house that my grandmother used to live in, I probably could have taken more care of the garden, and probably someday or one day it wouldn't have been bulldozed down...and that would have become one of the most precious things in my life”***

- Nathaniel Gant



Scan for references and for access to the full research paper.

## Method: Oral History

- **SUBJECTIVITY IN MEMORY:** Interviews begin with an overview of the interviewees early life beyond the narrow topic of interest, taking into account social and environmental factors that may be unique to their individual story.
- **INTERGENERATIONAL:** Youth interview their own elder family members, encouraging discussions within families beyond this project.
- **CHALLENGES:** Discussions must be responsive to the interests of the youth interviewer, while remaining relevant to the research question.
- **SOLUTIONS:** Development of interview training for participants, and “interview guides” to provide a roadmap of potential questions without necessitating a complete script.

## Gant Interview

### FINDINGS

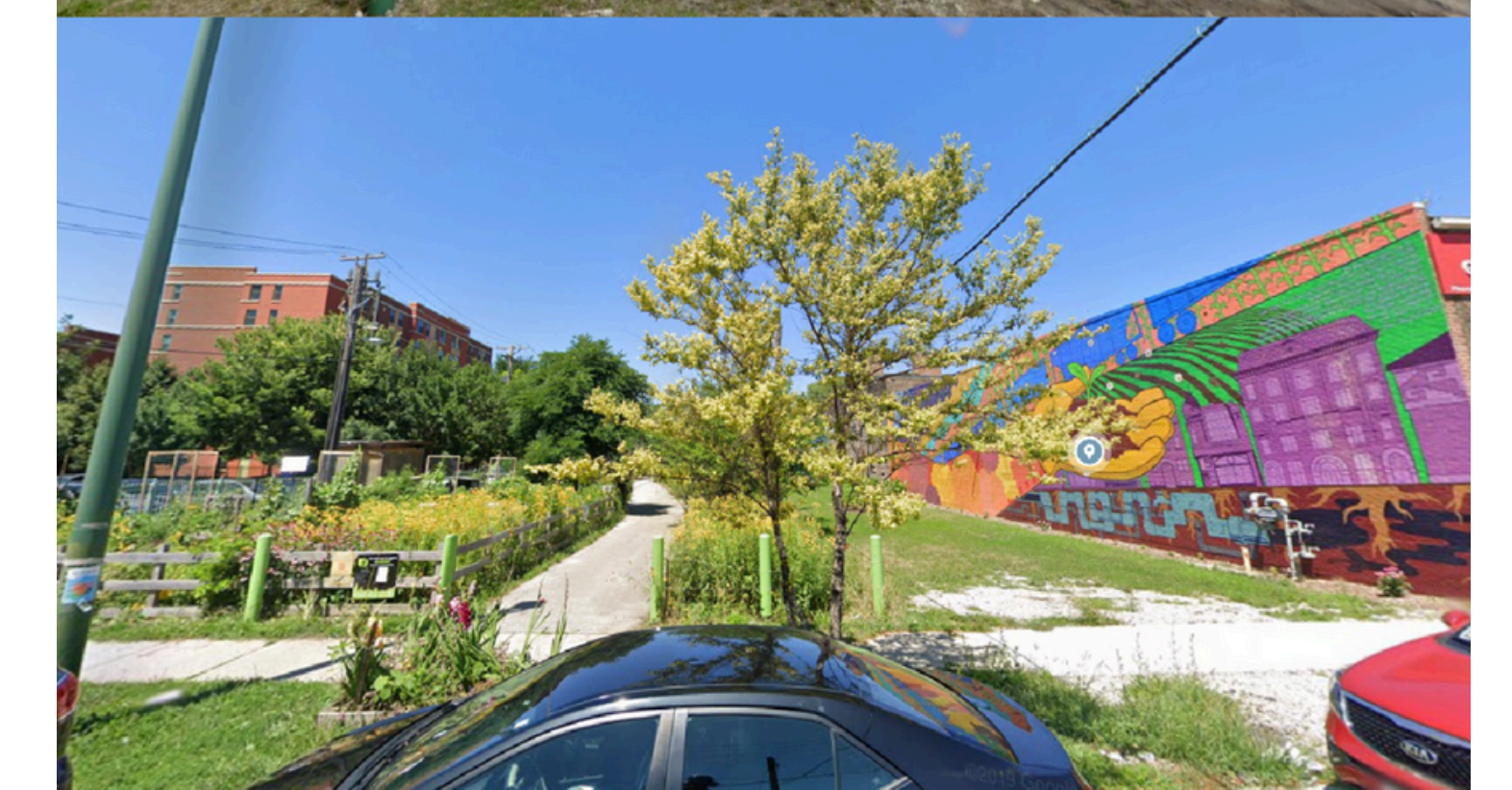
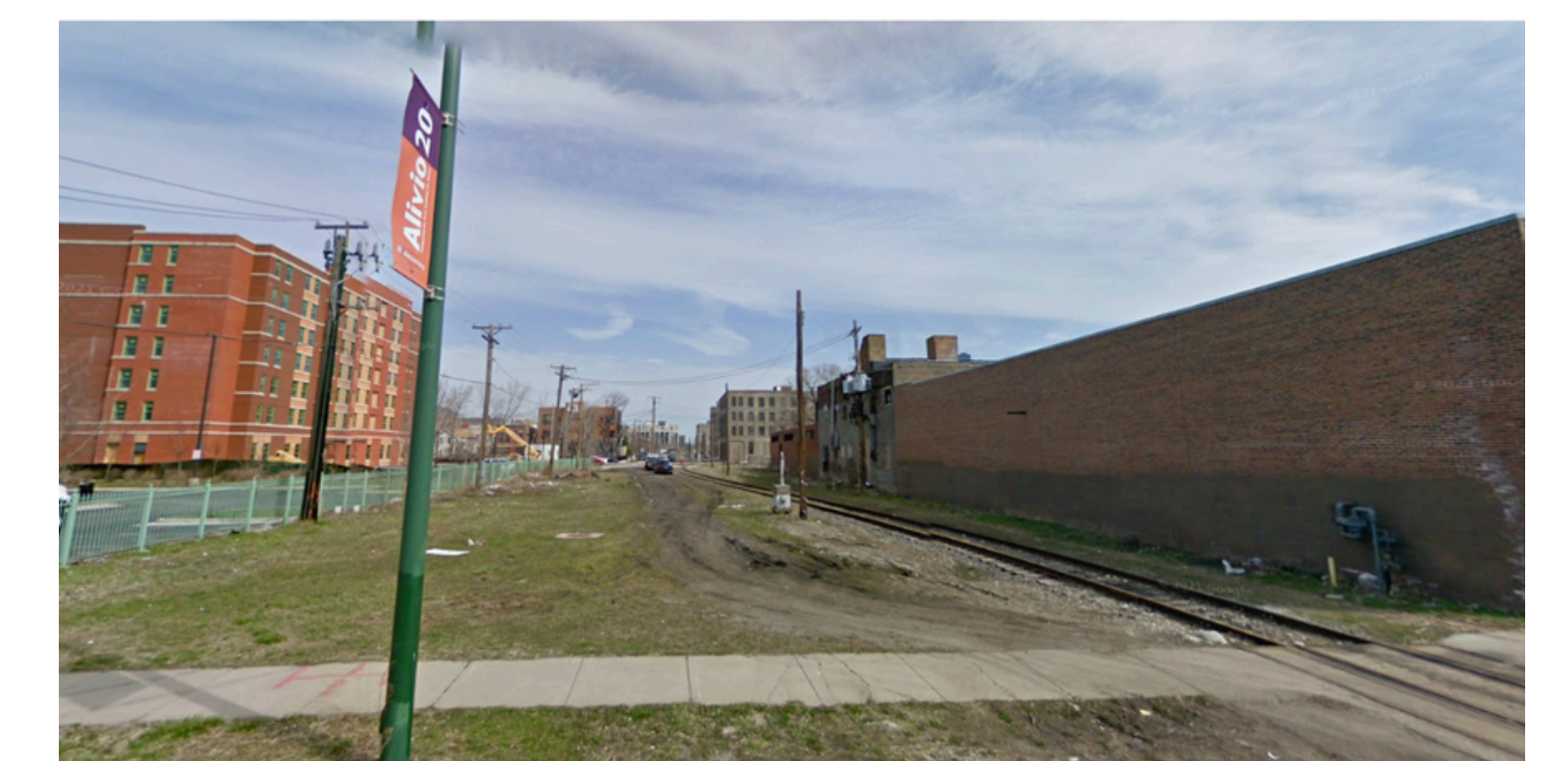
- Nathaniel Gant shared memories of his grandmother's garden, and his desire to engage more deeply with his family's gardening history
- Jalen, Nathaniel's nephew, led the interview

### TAKEAWAYS

- Collective memory is crucial to understanding the impact of local food provisioning on marginalized communities
- Nathaniel's initial disinterest in his Grandmother's gardening aligns with research on the impact of social perceptions of history on memory.
- An intergenerational format was particularly effective in portraying the role of familial relations in memory

## Urban Gardens

- Ineffective food access policy has led to appropriation of community green spaces, and rapid gentrification of lower income neighborhoods.
- When the historical role of urban gardening as a form of cultural resilience is ignored, gardens become vulnerable to gentrification
- Urban gardens illustrate the need for research through mediums like oral history to avoid harmful depoliticization.



**Pilsen, Chicago – community gardens become “tourist attractions” due to intensifying gentrification**  
Retrieved from University of Chicago's *Mapping Global Chicago* online undergraduate research initiative

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