

Reese, A.M. 2019. *Black food geographies: race, self-reliance, and food access in Washington, D.C.* University of North Carolina Press. Paperback ISBN-978-1-4696-5150-7. US\$22.95, 184 pages

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Ashanté M. Reese begins *Black Food Geographies* in the middle of a conversation. The first encounter that her readers have with the Deanwood neighborhood in Northeast Washington, D.C. is framed by the words of a resident: Mr. Johnson, a gardener and storyteller. This initial conversation between Mr. Johnson and Reese, which is "part agricultural knowledge transmission, part life history, and part life instruction" (p. 1) cues us in to the book's central focus: the agency that Black inhabitants in Deanwood forge and exert within the unequal foodscape that surrounds them. Reese argues that Black self-reliance and refusal do not solely impact how residents navigate food networks, but also how they conceptualize them within the broader contexts of history and communal identity. *Black Food Geographies* is, at its core, an invitation to listen thoughtfully to Black stories.

Reese is Assistant Professor of African and African Diaspora Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. These stories, which she collected through twenty-five semi-structured interviews with Deanwood residents, are complemented by archival research, participant observation at community gathering spots, and a 2016 survey completed by eighty-seven respondents. The book itself is structured in five chapters, which are interspersed with historical newspaper articles, photos, and maps of the Deanwood neighborhood. Reese connects her arguments to the ideas of diverse philosophers, cultural leaders, and academics—from Naa Oyo Kwate to Zora Neale Hurston to Alison Alkon—and concludes each chapter with a straightforward summary of the main themes and insights. Theoretically, she uses the framework of "geographies of self-reliance" to understand how Black residents procure food, exert agency, and connect with one another within an unequal food network, as well as the concept of "spatialized, racialized imaginaries" to illustrate how social discourse and communal history have shaped residents' sense of place and identity.

Reese leans upon the narratives and lived experiences of Black Deanwood residents to shape the flow of *Black Food Geographies*. Each chapter is named for a direct quotation from a resident, such as Chapter One, "Come to Think of It, We Were Pretty Self-Sufficient." Reese neatly weaves these personal, micro-level findings into the macro-level transformations that Deanwood (and other areas of Washington D.C.) experienced over the last 300 years. Chapter One traces the history of Deanwood's development through the lenses of community-building and food access. In the early 20th century, Black Deanwood residents took the farming tools that had once symbolized a life of enslavement and put them to use in their gardens and subsistence farm plots. Grocers, hucksters (residents who sold food products door-to-door), and women who ran small businesses out of their homes characterized this early foodscape. Midway through the century, this tight-knit community food system was transformed by industrialization and racial segregation, as supermarkets established themselves and then fled to wealthier, whiter suburbs, leaving Deanwood residents to navigate and adapt to yet another new foodscape.

In the following chapters, Reese explores the present-day experience of Black residents in Deanwood. Chapter Two examines "the many considerations at the heart of grocery shopping: time, money, stores' reputation, transportation, and preferences" (p. 17); the comments from Reese's survey here illustrate how themes of nostalgia, nothingness, and self-reliance dominate residents' understanding of their agency and vulnerability within unequal foodscapes. Chapter Three dives deeper into the framework of nostalgia, highlighting the fact that Deanwood's Black residents often rely upon nostalgic imaginaries to understand and challenge the failures of the state to support or invest in the city of Deanwood. The ideology of racialized responsibility, for example, is a way that Black residents interpret the reality of Deanwood's limited foodscape as a collective failure of present-day residents to uphold the self-reliant and community-centered traditions of the neighborhood's past. In the words of one resident, Daron, "What I saw was that the ones that survived...the ones that was afforded opportunities as a result of our parents and grandparents' struggle in the civil rights movement...forgot what their responsibilities were" (p. 88). Other nostalgic imaginaries mourn the loss of traditional, gendered family systems and the out-migration of middle-class Black residents after desegregation.

In Chapters Four and Five, Reese uses the examples of the Community Market grocery and community gardening to challenge the narrative of nothingness that often influences present-day Black residents' perceptions of Deanwood's real and imagined foodscapes. Run by a second-generation Black owner, Mr. Jones, this small, corner grocery store is a place where residents can see many collective food imaginaries in action, from Black entrepreneurship to community care. Deanwood's community garden program, headed by Ms. Johnson and Mr. Harris, aims to draw upon the neighborhood's nostalgia for its self-reliant past in order to "teach about health, literacy, and eventually, entrepreneurship" (p. 119). These individuals' unwillingness to surrender hope and accept the current limitations of Deanwood's foodscape exemplifies one of Reese's core messages: quiet refusal plays a significant role in Black residents' agency within their unequal foodscape. The seeds of food sovereignty within the community garden would validate and nourish the self-reliance and hope that lies embedded within Deanwood's identity.

To conclude *Black Food Geographies*, Reese re-emphasizes the importance of individual and communal agency within academic understandings of Black food inequities. She also reflects on the influence that Black feminist theory, along with her own identity as a Black woman from the rural South, has had upon her anthropological approach in the Deanwood neighborhood. By analyzing the lived experiences of a marginalized community, seeing value in their quiet acts of everyday resistance and self-reliance, and pushing back against limiting narratives of "suffering and dispossession" (p. 8) that often characterize Black communities, Reese situates her anthropological approach within the larger realms of social and racial justice. In this way, *Black Food Geographies* would be an ideal text for any undergraduate or graduate course within the domains of sociology, food studies, and anthropology that aims to disrupt traditional ideologies surrounding the ways that Black communities navigate and create food systems.

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