

“AIN’T NO LIFE FOR A MOTHER!”: RACIAL CAPITALISM AND THE  
MAKING OF POULTRY PROCESSING WORKERS IN NORTHEAST GEORGIA

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2018

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“AIN’T NO LIFE FOR A MOTHER!”: RACIAL CAPITALISM AND THE  
MAKING OF POULTRY PROCESSING WORKERS IN NORTHEAST GEORGIA

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Cornell University 2018

This dissertation exposes racial capitalism through an on-the-ground study of poultry processing work in the American South. It is an ethnography of the South’s largest agricultural industry, of the production and consumption of cheap food through a cheapening of labor, but fundamentally, of people, places, and daily life. It is also a reflection or mirror on what we, as a society, have become, one that quite literally disregards, dismembers, and disables life for the comfort and wealth of a very few. Finally, it is a critique of the world as it stands from the perspective of workers moving in and out of “the poultry,” and an exploration of how change might emerge from this way of seeing, “from way, way below.” To understand poultry work and workers, we must understand how workers are made and re-made, but also how they shape production and consumption, as well as the broader communities in which they live, work, eat, move, celebrate, and resist.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Carrie Freshour grew up in a small, rural town in Northwest Georgia. She is one of twelve adopted children. She earned her Bachelors of Science degree in History, Technology, and Society at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. In 2010, Carrie entered the MSc/PhD program in Development Sociology at Cornell University. While at Cornell, Carrie has learned from and worked with many incredible scholars, activists, and revolutionaries both on and off campus.

*For Cleveland, Daniela, and my family*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to thank my parents, who supported my siblings and I in everything we attempted. They stood behind my original goal of becoming a WNBA point guard (sadly, I did not make this one), and have encouraged me throughout this long and arduous journey of grad school up North. I would also like to thank my siblings: Shannon, Tracy, Katy, Michael, Laura, Carmen, Adrian, Rosa, Rob, Anna, and Ernie. Some of my favorite memories growing up in North Georgia involve playing full-field soccer with them, eating giant pots of ramen noodles, and our many “adventures” trekking through the woods. I am thankful for their support even if this work has both pulled me farther away and at the same time sent me closer to home. A special shout-out also goes to my high school social studies teacher Mary Ellen Pethel, who first introduced me to the real Civil Rights Movement and Black Liberation, and Georgia Tech mentors Bill Winders and Amy D’Unger for introducing me to the discipline of Sociology.

I would like to thank my friends, troublemakers, and comrades in Development Sociology, particularly my cohort- Max, Divya, Rebakah, Paul, Alice, and Kasia. Divya and Max, especially, have remained a source of constant encouragement and laughter through many long Ithaca winters. I also had many incredible mentors in the department. Ian and Sara are, by now, DSOC elders to many of us, and I will be forever grateful for their friendship and love. Jum, Andrew, Sarah, Mirabelle, Ashon, Rodrigo, Sneha, Justine, Ellie, and Karla have also fostered a DSOC community that I am thankful to be a part of.

Because of my lengthy time at Cornell and in Ithaca, I have been honored to work and play with many friends, radicals, and revolutionaries. These include Max, Ayesha, Dexter, Kim, Guzman, Scott, Nimish, Vik, Laura, Alexis, Clare, Sally, Aki, Aditi, Kenneth, Rebecca, Anna Lisa, Ashley, Courtney, Omar, Nancy, Mario, Paula, Nick, John, Theresa, Kalada, and Allie. After returning from fieldwork, I found inspiration and radical love through The People’s School (Raju, Sena, Jeff, Zifeng, Marc, Andi, Naadhira, Allison, Arwa, Jerry, Bunny, Erik), APAA (Emily, Jeremiah,

Xiao Yin, Henri, Brian, Alice), and the MRC. I have learned so much from each of these people, for good and bad in the making/re-making of my dissertation and political life's work.

In Athens I was blessed and honored to work with the AIRC, DIA, and U-Lead. This brought me into movement building and community work with Daniela, Cleveland, Betina, Beto, Noe, Alejandra, JoBeth, Oralia, Aldo, Rick, Kerry, Brian, Rose, Erin, Noble, Tati, Marcela, Aleck, and Katherine. I co-coached/buddied with David, and although we did not agree on everything, I will never forget the many hours together playing soccer with the kids, giving rides, and babysitting. While working at the plant, I became especially close to a small group of women whose lives, in part, are presented here. Without them I would have given up. Their support on and off the line, in the form of jokes, food, and friendship have fueled this project.

I am honored to work with a bad ass committee. I often wondered why they kept me on, but am grateful that they did. They provide a model of scholarship and mentorship that I will always strive toward. Wendy introduced me to Steve Striffler's work early on in the project, and through her own work, forces us to see the value of ethnography, of working closely and honestly with people in the struggle. Nik inspires me to reach back to those radicals who have come before us, not only in building movements but in thinking through how we actually *do* academic work. He has also fostered a rad group of graduate students at UGA who were a constant source of friendship and support throughout fieldwork. Eli demands rigorous study while also providing the kind of understanding and support necessary to both complete this project and re-envision the future of labor organizing and movements. Finally, Phil, "PMc" as we call him, has been a constant source of intellectual inspiration and encouragement. I will always be thankful for Phil as a brilliant scholar, but maybe more importantly, as a caring and human mentor who always has his students' backs, even when they are causing trouble by going against the grain. He is the mentor, scholar, and teacher I hope to become, and I believe much of his success is due to his fierce and kind wife, Karen. To both of them, I am forever thankful.

Finally, I would not survive this research, writing, or world without the love

and friendship of Sarah G. and Alan C. These two have provided constant love, laughs, food, dance parties, and unwanted hugs throughout the most difficult stages of the diss. We have gone through two Beyonce albums together, hundreds of dance parties, and so much real talk over warm meals and drinks to count. #FreshMoney.

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*Figure 1- Transfer trucks waiting outside plant to haul chickens, July 31, 2016, photo by author*

## **INTRODUCTION**

We are living in what feels like a moment of political crisis. Hateful rhetoric and action dominate news and media headlines. Civil unrest, racial upheaval, threat of nuclear war, and environmental devastation loom. The world is becoming increasingly precarious, not only in the Global South, but also in the North where global entanglements of racial capitalism devastate and destroy. The picture is grim. But what got us here? The point of sociology, according to W.E.B. DuBois ([1905] 2000), is to understand and scientifically know the world, in order to shape social change. Similarly, for Karl Marx (1970), it is to know the world in order to change it. It is my hope that this dissertation contributes to the knowing-for-changing goals of the discipline.

This dissertation exposes racial capitalism through an on-the-ground study of poultry processing work in the American South. It is an ethnography of the South's largest agricultural industry, of the production and consumption of cheap food through

a cheapening of labor, but fundamentally, of people, places, and daily life. It is also a reflection or mirror on what we, as a society, have become, one that quite literally disregards, dismembers, and disables life for the comfort and wealth of a very few. Finally, it is a critique of the world as it stands from the perspective of workers moving in and out of “the poultry,” and an exploration of how change might emerge from this way of seeing, “from way, way below” (Kelley 1996). To understand poultry work and workers, we must understand how workers are made and re-made, but also how they shape production and consumption, as well as the broader communities in which they live, work, eat, move, celebrate, and resist.

### ***The Poultry Capital of the World***

I emphasize the role of “the South,” not as exceptional but as a mirror of historical and ongoing racial capitalism to the rest of the nation and world. The American South is a region constructed only in relation to other regions through a reliance on destructive forms of industrial agriculture and food processing. Today, it maintains a peripheral position in the global economy connected by practices and processes of strategic “cheapening” to other places of the Global South as a site of cheap labor, land, and life (Patel and Moore 2018; Simon 2017). Poultry, the US South’s largest agricultural product, is both shaped by and central to shaping the region, and it holds a prominent place in the South’s history, present, and future. Rather than offshoring production, the US poultry industry is unique in that it depends on an increasing precarity of life and work, where labor disorganization is the rule rather than the exception (Cobb 1993; Cowie 2001; Collins 2003; Woods 2017). To

accumulate unchecked profits, the industry feasts on historically entrenched racial codes, most fundamentally, the status of the Black worker in America since slavery<sup>1</sup> (Du Bois 1997; Baron 1971; Boggs 1968; Wilson 2000).

A focus on poultry encourages a re-thinking of the common deindustrialization narrative. This narrative emphasizes the decline of manufacturing and subsequent job loss through automation or outsourcing; it is characterized by the progression of blue collar work dominated by men to the “feminization” of service work (Milkman 1997; Cowie 2001, 2010; Leidner 1993; Moreton 2009). While this general trend is well documented in many places of the once-industrial North, the general narrative often ignores differentiated constructions of race, gender, immigration, and place. Poultry processing bucks these trends, as the industry has grown exponentially over the same period. Deregulation both inside and outside the plant has allowed and continues to bolster growth. This state/corporate nexus creates and depends upon the flexibility and discipline of marginalized women generally, but Black women specifically, in work and life.

While there is a growing body of historical, anthropological, and sociological research exploring animal processing work, my analysis couples work and life, inside and outside of the plant. I also distinguish different groups of workers, and, through ethnography, focus largely on the mobile workers, those who make up the statistics on

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<sup>1</sup> DuBois (1935) powerfully characterizes The Civil War as history’s largest “general strike” led by Black slaves. In this sense slavery was not an historic anachronism to modern capitalism, replicating feudal relations, but instead was foundational to global capital accumulation. This distinction is powerful in two ways, first it established Black slaves as the basis to the global proletariat, and second it distinguishes the role of the Black worker in the world as pivotal to the overthrow of capital on both economic and moral terms, for human liberation. These ideas are central to the Black Radical Tradition and lay the groundwork for much of Robinson’s ([1983] 2000) work in Black Marxism.

extremely high turnover rates by moving in and out of the poultry. These workers shed light on the difficulty of work but also on obstacles to survival outside. They constitute an important population, what radical geographer William Bunge (1977) calls the “non-working, working class.” Bunge used this term to place primacy on “working class children, injured workers, retired workers, unemployed workers, and sexually, racially, ethnically and religiously discriminated-against workers” (1977: 59) to argue that struggles must contend with the “second front” beyond the point of production and to the “point of reproduction.” I extend his analysis by considering the ways in which racial capitalism has changed over time to produce conditions for the “sometimes” working, working class, those who move in and out of the poultry, staying for ten months to ten years, piecing together life’s work in the meantime.

Importantly, this ethnography places Black women workers and their broader communities at the center of analysis, observing labor displacement and recruitment in a historical moment after the passage of several anti-immigration laws and a return to a majority Black workforce in the years following the 2008 global financial crisis. Black women’s labor is again necessary to meet the rising demand of cheap (fast) food in a historical moment when real wages and incomes are declining. When we look more deeply at the conditions of both life and work for this population, another narrative emerges that requires deep reflection, pointing to the contradictions in how we value low-wage workers, but also the basis on which we build and evaluate contemporary social and labor movements. Racial ideologies foundational to capital accumulation persist and evolve, so that the narrative of “work ethic” remains a destructive one, constituting a political project that distinguishes ‘good’ and ‘bad’

poor people with little retrospection on the conditions that create and exacerbate inequality.

Instead, by centering workers' experiences, those in, halfway-in, and no-longer-in the poultry, we can understand how racial capitalism spits people out, disregards entire neighborhoods and families, and deepens social inequality. What we do not see, or do not always have the imagination to see, is a way forward through a total abandonment of the myths so foundational to the persistence of racial capitalism, embodied most directly in the American Dream, what Malcolm X (1964) famously refers to as the "American Nightmare."<sup>2</sup> Workers expose the dream as an ideology that maintains inequality, holds people, entire populations captive, and ensures the false security of white supremacy. Through this dissertation, I hope to shed some light on a different way forward, to address the profoundly political question of social change as reflected through the lives of Black and, to a lesser extent, Latina women and their families at, and in-between, the poultry. The point here is not to simply examine how people are exploited and oppressed, but also to extricate what it is that exploited and oppressed people are struggling against and striving for? What are their *freedom dreams*? In this approach, I challenge conceptions of oppression wrapped in static identities, as the experience of oppression alone is not enough, but, to borrow from Marx, "oppression has to be *made* intolerable by actions and events" (Marx 1962 in

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<sup>2</sup> In a speech on April 3, 1964, an election year, at the Cory Methodist Church in Marcus, Ohio, Malcolm X gave the infamous speech, "The Ballot or the Bullet." Here he distinguishes Black political power but maintains the necessity of self-defense. Dismantling the American Dream, he states, "No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy. So, I'm not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver — no, not I. I'm speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare."

Abrams 1982: 51).

While this analysis centers Black women workers, I also spent much of my time working with several immigrant rights organizations. There were very few moments in which Black and Latina/o immigrant groups came together in solidarity despite often working alongside one another in low-waged work and living in close proximity. For many Latina/o workers in and around the poultry, organizing emerges through formal, coalitional, immigrant rights groups and non-profits, many of which were informal coalitions-turned-non-profits. While undocumented leaders within these movements value and practice a radical, anti-capitalist and anti-racist political vision of human dignity and rights staunchly against borders and policing, these groups receive a surprising amount of “buy-in” from a liberal, majority white, middle-class, and faith-oriented political base. These coalitions provide necessary financial support and political power, but they also prohibit alliances with the surrounding Black working-class communities despite the many shared experiences among these groups.<sup>3</sup> Instead,

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<sup>3</sup> My findings here mirror Gretchen Purser’s comments in an interview with Lindsay Bell (2013). She reflects on her ethnographic work with both informal day laborers (largely undocumented Latino immigrants men) and formal day workers (largely formerly incarcerated African American men). She contrasts organizing between the two groups, “I’ll just add, in the U.S. we have seen a lot of really robust activism about informal day labor. I myself have been very involved in worker centers that aim to regulate the informal day labor market by both providing some sort of accountability and obliterating the kind of anonymity that takes place on the street corners. By contrast, I know of very few organizing efforts going on with the formal day laborer market or with poor African-American workers more generally. There have been efforts to regulate the day labor industry, so for example, some states — Illinois, Massachusetts, New Mexico — have passed laws that ban some of the most exploitative practices, such as charging fees for mandatory safety equipment. But there’s been very little organizing” (83). At the heart of this distancing is the racialized valuation of “work ethic” that distinguishes Black workers who fail to “make it,” i.e. those who make up the “non-working, working class” from those who are deserving of care and concern. This distancing from Black workers found in Ribas’ (2015) work and blatant anti-Blackness among Latina/o immigrants to the “New South” has been documented across field sites, although the explanations for such vary, based often on assumptions of Black discrimination coming from the vantage point of Latina/o immigrants (Stuesse and Helton 2013; Stuesse 2016; Yukich 2013; Marrow 2011; McClain et al. 2006).

these coalitions inadvertently extend the social distance from Black communities by shaping a political vision focused on charitable inclusion and integration, rather than self-determination, in spite of undocumented leaders' own vision. Yet, the “underdocumented” youth within these movement spaces in Georgia draw on a historical set of ideals, reaching back to the Black Freedom Movement with an opportunity for a more radical vision of immigrant organizing.

By working alongside Black and Latina women on the line and spending workday evenings and Sunday afternoons with them outside of the plant, I construct a quotidian account of their sacrifices, agencies, and small triumphs, and most of all grinding effort to sustain livelihoods and family in and outside of the plant. Through the lens of these working lives, I provide a rich and nuanced account of racial capitalism –associated with the super-exploitation of Black and Latina/o workers in key areas of the industrial meat industry, and its impacts on these workers and their social reproduction. Such impacts of course reproduce a social space and labor force for continued exploitation, which is the ultimate effect of white supremacy attending the rise of racial capitalism.

### ***Documenting Life's Work at the Poultry***

From 2014-2016 I returned to my home state of Georgia to better understand the conditions of work and life in and around the production of the state's, and much of the South's, largest agricultural product, cheap chicken. Over the past two decades, there has been a plethora of advocacy, scholarly, and journalistic attention on the conditions of work “on the line” in poultry slaughterhouses across the South (Oxfam

America 2016; Fritzsche 2013; Hall, Alexander, and Ordoñez 2008; Striffler 2005; Ribas 2016; Gray 2014; Stuesse 2016; Stull, Broadway, and Griffith 1995; Fink 1998; Compa 2004; Sullivan 2000). Yet, despite growing public awareness, the poor conditions and low wages persist. I wanted to know how this industry continues to increase profits while relying on and maintaining a hyper-exploited workforce. This question is straightforward, but within it concerns the directly political question of how might labor unions or alternative labor movements effectively speak to and organize with this workforce? Or more directly, what are these groups missing? The conditions of this work are well-publicized, and the horrors of animal slaughter have been of national concern since Sinclair's writing at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, work inside poultry processing continues to constitute what labor scholars call the "3 Ds," that is work which is "dirty, dangerous, and demeaning" (Quandt et al. 2013). Often, the conditions of work have been used to explain and even justify the reliance on immigrant and migrant labor as opposed to a native-born workforce, a prime example of "jobs Americans don't want."

To better understand the growth of poultry production and consumption from the perspective of its workforce, I conducted ethnographic and historical research. Initially, I sought employment in one of the state's largest poultry processing plants. This plant is located near the Southern college town of Athens, Georgia, in the northeast region of the state. I first applied to work at the plant in October 2014, was briefly "interviewed" at the Department of Labor (DOL), commonly referred to as the unemployment office, and was hired a month later contingent on the successful completion of a two-day orientation. I worked first shift in evisceration, on the "kill"

or “hot” side of the plant, from mid-November 2014 until the end of April 2015. During this time I primarily worked in “draw hand,” or “drawin’ the birds,” as the older workers called it, “viscera arranger” as the employer called it, from 6:15am until varying times in the afternoon, usually between 3:30-5:00pm, clocking in over 1,000 hours of work on the line, not to mention the time spent in breakrooms and transit. For a majority of the time I did one job, moving between the four lines when needed, but spending most of my time on line 3 (out of 4 lines). My smallest weekly paycheck during this time was \$298.07 for 34 hours of work (paystub 3/21/2015, Appendix A), and largest was \$477.60 for 51.6 hours (paystub 2/28/2015, Appendix B). Occasionally, when money was too tight and I had the energy, I worked overtime, staying after and moving to the “cold” side of the Debone department, placing birds on cones, re-hanging birds after they went through the chiller, or stacking boxes.

It was important for me to travel between the two sides, as each was vastly different in the kinds of labor being done, but also the conditions of work and the demographics of workers. The Debone side was generally much younger, with most workers in their early 20s to mid 30s. This side is where most of the dismemberment and further processing took place, cutting the birds into wings, breasts, and tenders. Debone is cold and wet; workers layer up in multiple hoodies, sweats, warm gloves, hats, and boots. Finally, this side employs more workers in general (around 1,000 over three shifts) and more African and Southeast Asian refugees, notably from Somalia, Burma, and Laos; still the majority of workers on the line are Black American women. Because I spent less consistent time on this side, my observations here are limited.

I focus this analysis on the Evisceration or kill side. This side employs around 300

people over three shifts, is generally older ranging from early 20s to early 80s, and employs almost entirely Black women on the line. I never saw the “live hang” department, but I knew from breakroom observations that this department employed 8-10 workers each shift, all but one of whom were men. While I was inside the plant, one white woman worked in live hang. This was the only white woman I ever saw working on the line. These workers were distinguished by their hunter green plastic coveralls which protected them from the blood, piss, and shit of the frantic birds. After live-hang there are a few other steps that take place before the birds make it to the evisceration floor, or main section of the kill side. I worked on this side because this was the position that was open when I applied. My position remains one of the most physically difficult ones in the plant, second probably to live-hang and re-hang, and because of this, is paid slightly more (\$11.22/hr.) and has a higher turnover rate. In hindsight, I should have tried to move around the plant more, but because I only lasted a little under six months, I did not have the seniority to bid for another position.

I chose this plant for a number of reasons. First of all, it is one of the largest plants in the state, employing over 1,200 workers, and is owned by one of the top five producers in the country. It is typical of other large poultry processing plants, in that it has undergone several mergers and acquisitions since it first opened in the mid-1950s. Secondly, it is located in the Northeast region of the state, in Upcountry Georgia, with a long history of poultry growing and processing. Gainesville, GA, just an hour northwest, holds the self-appointed title of the “Poultry Capital of the World” and was home to the original National Broiler Council, now renamed the National Chicken Council (NCC). Having a base in Athens, GA provided connections to the state’s

largest public university, the University of Georgia (UGA). UGA has played an extensive role in the industrialization of poultry production, with the country's top Poultry Science department, dating back to 1912.

The effect of the university on daily life is also visible throughout the city and region. UGA shapes local politics and the scope of organizing. Each week, grassroots organizations hold protests and rallies at the university's famous "arches"<sup>4</sup> located on the main street downtown. Although most students are segregated into expensive condos and airconditioned apartment complexes, many are also active participants in local movements, most notably the city's most vibrant and visible movements around immigrant rights and anti-discrimination. The relationship of the university to the broader community is multifaceted to say the least, and local residents have a complicated love/hate relationship to the campus and its students, as seems to be the case for locals in most so-called "college towns." Yet, what I found most telling about this relationship was the stark disconnect regarding knowledge about the poultry plants surrounding the university, from UGA-affiliated Athenians as contrasted to local, working-class residents. For most folks associated with UGA, faculty, administration, and students, the poultry was an industry "hidden in plain sight," to borrow from ethnographer Timothy Pachirat (2011).

I supplement this ethnography with participant observation in and around the communities surrounding the plant, including the local public school system, several neighborhoods (public housing complexes and various trailer parks where workers

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<sup>4</sup> These are the same arches where white students protested integration in 1961, yelling, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate!"

live), and through active participation within immigrant rights and economic justice organizations where I attended weekly meetings, protests, marches, workshops, celebrations, and trainings. Because of the state's tough anti-immigration laws, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, much of this work entailed being an observant participant while giving rides, transporting food, cooking, sitting in deportation hearings, waiting during court appointments, accompanying meetings with parole officers, lawyers, and social service agents, and most commonly, babysitting.

I rely heavily on semi-structured, recorded, and transcribed oral histories with fifty-six women workers (Appendix C). Seven of these oral histories were with multiple (two and three) generations of family members connected to the poultry. For example, in one oral history, I sat with three generations of women, grandmother and mother who had worked in the plant, and daughter who had hopes to never work in the plant. These intergenerational oral histories were not always planned, but rather an unexpected gift in which the women of the house offered their time to sit with me over the course of several muggy, Georgia Sunday evenings, sometimes accompanied by a slice of red velvet cake, a plate of Sunday dinner, or a few cans of Nattie Light.

In addition to these formal recordings, I also conducted semi-structured, mostly recorded interviews with thirty-one community members, self-identified activists, educators, and political leaders who personally worked with or represented an organization that interacted with poultry processing workers. This research spanned seven counties (Clarke, Oconee, Barrow, Jackson, Madison, Oglethorpe, and Greene), although the majority of field work took place in Athens Clarke County (ACC), with interviews and observations extending to workers and their lives beyond the location

of my workplace ethnography, across multiple sites. This is an important point worth noting, as workers often moved among three or four plants, all within a 50 mile radius, some traveling more than an hour's drive between where they stayed and the plant. As in most of the South, public transportation was limited, so that workers traveling to plants outside the city of Athens had to depend on often unreliable cars or personal networks of catching rides, a major barrier to keeping an already precarious job. All of the names of people presented here are pseudonyms, unless they have specifically asked that I keep their name for public record. I have tried, as best as possible, to conceal the specific poultry processing company to the behest of Cornell IRB.

<b>Method</b>	<b>Category</b> ( <i>some interviews are classified in more than one category</i> )	<b>Number/Dates</b>	<b>Individuals</b>	<b>Hours</b>
<b>Oral Histories</b>	Women Processing Workers, including Family Members	41	56	51
<b>In-Depth Interviews</b>	Community Leaders/Activists	13	18	15
	Social Services/Non-Profits	12	13	18
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>66</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Observant Participation</b>	ACC School System, Family Engagement	9/16/2014-11/7/2014	200	175
	Plant Ethnography	11/13/2014-04/25/2015	300	1,118
	Immigrant Rights Meetings, Public Events, Demonstrations	03/2015-08/2016	40	204
	Economic Justice Coalition Meetings, Public Events, Demonstrations	04/2016-08/2016	15	40
	Volunteer Activities- Coile Soccer, La Liga, Athens Tutorial, Food Delivery, Rides, Childcare	04/2015-08/2016	60	340
	Accompanying Workers and Activists	07/2014-08/2016	25	100
<b>Subtotal</b>		<i>Sept 2014-August 2016</i>	<b>640</b>	<b>1,977</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>727</b>	<b>2,061</b>

*Table 1- Fieldwork Methods*

***A note on positionality***

I am a Southerner. I have a love and commitment to the South that I think most Southerners share, although there is no “one South” that we all carry or can all defend. This perspective of optimism and hope has changed over time, and has been greatly shaped by raising, fieldwork and through radical work with others. I grew up in a very unconventional household, and I believe those experiences have largely shaped both

my perception of the world and research motivations. My parents were born and raised in East Tennessee; they are Southern Baptists-turned Methodists, White Appalachians, and baby boomers with fathers who served in WWII. They married in 1969 when my dad was 20 and my mother was 17, running away and defying family so that they could be together as my dad entered the air force. Dad returned from Vietnam to my mother who worked as a secretary, bank teller, and nursery attendant. As a (white) vet, he easily got a job in the US postal service.

My parents tried having children, but my mom had two miscarriages and subsequently went through several years of depression. They adopted their first child, a 4 year old little girl and white Georgian in 1978. Shortly after my father had a “come to Jesus” moment and returned to school to become a Methodist minister. Mom rejoiced, because she also loved the lord and this substantiated her argument for him to have his American flag and Bald Eagle tattoos literally sandpapered off, reminders of drunken patriotism and wartime comradery in Phnom Penh. Once my father settled in the church, my parents began efforts to adopt my sister from an orphanage in the Philippines. While waiting, they found me, after another white family returned me to the agency for being too unruly. My parents’ lawyer, a family friend and congregation member, called my parents, and they were in her office half an hour later. After my adoption was finalized in October 1987, my parents adopted three more children: my sister Tracy (14-years old) 1990, sister Katy (7-years old) 1991, and brother Rob (2-days old) 1992. For a while it was just the seven of us. My dad settled down in a small Methodist Church in Northwest GA. My mother worked in the office of a construction company.

In 1996 the Methodist conference moved us to Blue Ridge, GA in the Northeastern part of the state. My parents once again felt “called by God” to adopt some more difficult-to-place children. Many people outside of the adoption system think adoption means wealth, and it often does, but my parents took in the kids no one else seemed to want. There are literally “look books” filled with hard to place kids. We were vagabonds ourselves, children out of wedlock, in and out of the foster care system, some forcibly removed from birth parents by the state. In 1998, our family doubled when my parents adopted seven Mexican American kids from Laredo, TX. They were siblings connected by blood, out of a larger family of nineteen children: Michael (14-years old), Laura (13-years old), Carmen (11-years old), Adrian (8-years old), Rosa (7-years old), Anna (6-years old), and Ernesto (4-years old). Before my parents adopted “the seven,” we, their previous five children, existed in what their fellow white friends and family members saw as acceptable norms for adoption, South Korean, Filipina, Appalachian white, mixed-race (light skinned) white and Colombian. But when my parents adopted “the seven” many friends, family, and church members reacted in a way I could not comprehend. This was Blue Ridge, GA in 1998, both of significance in shaping the backlash against our family and anti-“Mexican” racism against my siblings. Telling of the political climate, a few years before this adoption, a Mexican man seeking work as a day-laborer was murdered in Ellijay by a group of high school boys. The late 1990s marked a period of increased violence and anger directed at the growing number of Mexican and Central American immigrants to a majority white North Georgia, many of whom felt a growing sense of “invasion” from brown-skinned foreigners into a region that was historically exclusively white

(Phillips 2016; Loewen 2006).

What does all of this family history have to do with the making of this dissertation? Fundamentally, what I observed in my parents' adoptions can be simplified into two responses by white North Georgians, as either disgust and anger directed at them for aiding the arrival of "Mexicans" and/or an uneasy paternalism towards Latina/o and Asian immigrants through adoption. Both responses, through glaring omission, were also a reflection on white America's relationship to Black America. My parents never adopted Black children, so that their adoption of Asian and Latina/o children was always in relation to this unwillingness. My siblings and I were never white, despite having white parents, yet the expectations they had for us were shaped by this world view. These are the questions of race that have troubled me since childhood.

While I have been able to "escape" the South, receive a Northern education, and view the place, its people, and past with some reflexivity that distance allows, 10 of my 11 siblings have never left the state, and most have remained within a 20 mile radius of where we grew up. While in some ways I have "made it" into the security and opportunity for a middle class life, most of my siblings have experienced vastly different lives riddled with teen pregnancy, high school dropout, domestic violence, sexual assault, low-wage fast food work, juvie, prison, and drug addiction. The tensions I experience moving between home and Ithaca, and at times my own misguided distancing from and later revelation through "that kind of South," those who remain vagabonds in many ways, have greatly influenced this project.

Despite these roots, growing up in the small, rural, agricultural region Northwest

of my field site, I was not from, nor of the poultry life; neither was I from the communities in which I worked, lived, and celebrate here. Additionally, I was able to leave both the plant work and neighborhoods where I spent my time, retreating to my desk and libraries at the University, and finally back to upstate New York to finish this project. Yet, always being “in-between” in the White/Black spaces of North Georgia, grants a particular way of seeing and moving in the world, from the interstices if you will. This was helpful throughout fieldwork. Although researchers’ identities and positionalities may never fully “match” the people we work with, the subjects of our analysis,<sup>5</sup> my being perceived as somewhat foreign (in multiple ways), I believe, allowed me to enter spaces as more of a neutral observer than if I were a white or even a Black or Latina researcher, depending on the interview subject. Still, I am sure people’s perceptions of me as “Chinese” or “*Chinita*” as well as at times a “researcher” with the University<sup>6</sup> also shaped my interactions and conversations with women and their families, with people keeping some distance and maintaining a level

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<sup>5</sup> See Zinn 1979.

<sup>6</sup> I clearly remember one interview in particular where this distance of researcher/student and subject came up most starkly. Kenoa, a 34-year old Black woman who was born and raised in Athens and whose father worked in the poultry all his life, remarked on this difference most clearly when I asked her about her if she felt safe in her neighborhood, a HUD public housing complex less than a quarter mile from the university.

Kenoa: Yeah, just because I know the town. If someone just moved from somewhere else and tried to live here, they probably wouldn’t. I know everybody everywhere, if you don’t bother them they don’t bother you. I see you didn’t mind walking through. [laughing]

Carrie: I know I stick out though.

Kenoa: Right! I was like, I wonder who’s coming? I hope they don’t be scared. You walked up like a soldier (Kenoa, interview with the author, April 22, 2016).

At first, I felt a sense of pride, “walking up like a soldier,” but after some thought, her comments reflect the tensions involved in student research with the surrounding communities, especially working-class Black communities, and Kenoa’s own understanding of others’ fear and distance from what she has known her entire life.

of distrust that is defensively mobilized against yet another “UGA study.”<sup>7</sup> Despite this, or in spite of this distance, through this research and the act of overcoming many of these social-spatial barriers of class and race, my own vision of and for the South has been in many ways humbled and transformed. I hope as you read, my motivation for sharing this back history makes sense.

### ***Racial Capitalism and Social Reproduction***

Here is the real modern labor problem. Here is the kernel of the problem of Religion and Democracy, of Humanity. Words and futile gestures avail nothing. Out of the exploitation of the dark proletariat comes the Surplus Value filched from human breasts which, in cultural lands, the Machine and harnessed Power veil and conceal. The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown, and black” (W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*, 1935: 16).

I draw on Cedric Robinson’s intervention in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983). According to Robinson the “tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate—to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into ‘racial’ ones” (1983:

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<sup>7</sup> Radical geographer William Bunge puts this unequal and uneasy relationship best, from his experience with people in the neighborhood of Fitzgerald while a faculty member at Wayne State and pointedly in an article addressing the “second front” at the point of reproduction (1977). Radical organizing, he argues should take place in working class people’s homes, churches, union halls, bars, and restaurants, but most certainly not the university. He describes universities as the spaces of the “petite bourgeoisie, the middle class, not the working class” because, “universities are in a state of constant aggression against inner-city working class neighbourhoods by their physical expansion against such neighbourhoods, and intellectual aggression, such as sending thousands of students each year to ask insulting questions of the working class people surrounding the inner city campuses. The working class refers to this as being ‘studied to death’” (64).

26). Robinson's work challenges Marxist conceptions of race as an appendage to class, simply a way to "divide and conquer" or as a form of "false consciousness" to the real politics of class. Through critique, Robinson exposes capitalism as a fundamentally racial and I believe, as Federici and others have argued, gendered regime in which slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide are central to its maintenance and reproduction. As Robinson makes clear in Part I of *Black Marxism*, the first European proletarians were racial subjects *within* Europe, these were most notably the Irish, Jews, Slavs, and Gypsies, their labor *and* their mobility were forced through dispossession from the land, from the commons, a process that Marx ([1867] 1992) calls "primitive accumulation" and Harvey (2005) updates to consider as ongoing "accumulation by dispossession." Historically, the commodification of land and human life as labor, are "fictitious commodities" according to Karl Polanyi (2001), occurring through historically specific yet connected rounds of dispossession, enclosure, violent and "bloody" theft, and enslavement.

While racialism predated capitalism, as essential to hierarchies within feudalism, White supremacy as an ideology, emerged through colonialism, as a racial project. Quoting Otis Madison, Robinson puts it, "the purpose of racism is to control the behavior of white people, not black people. For Blacks, guns and tanks are sufficient." White supremacy,<sup>8</sup> as ideology, is a necessary fiction mobilized for the

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<sup>8</sup> Cedric Robinson's words are most useful here, in his final chapter of *Black Marxism*, "An Ending" he puts this distinction most cogently: "In its conceptually formidable reaction against irresponsible power, calculated social destruction and the systematic exploitation of human beings, there seemed to us to be a discernible reluctance in Western radicalism, or to put it more strongly, a flight from the recognition that something more than objective material forces were responsible for 'the nastiness' as Peter Blackman puts it. There was the sense that something of a more profound nature than the obsession with property was askew in a civilization which could organize and celebrate—on a scale beyond previous human experience—the brutal degradations of life and the most acute violations of human

extension of racial capitalism, sometimes upheld by elements of the working class itself (DuBois 1935; Roediger 2007). It not only divides Black workers from white but organizes people's anger and hatred as well as their social strivings, hopes, and dreams. Its most dangerous forms are no longer embodied in lynch mobs and Klansmen,<sup>9</sup> but emerge through punitive policing, felony convictions, public housing, job discrimination, welfare reform, and DFCS. Racial capitalism is inherently a global project, one that shapes the decisions and actions of migrants in the global South, in

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destiny. It seems a certainty that the system of capitalism was part of it, but as well symptomatic of it. It needed a name as the philosopher Hobbes might say. It was not simply a question of outrage or concern for Black survival. It was a matter of comprehension. (Robinson 1983: 442). This radical way of seeing is also mirrored in much of James Baldwin's work. I will quote in length, a part of his famous debate at Cambridge with William F. Buckley, on the matter of this false sense of morality shaped through white supremacy: "Now, I suggest that of all the terrible things that can happen to a human being, that is one of the worst. I suggest that what has happened to white Southerners is in some ways, after all, much worse than what has happened to Negroes there because Sheriff Clark in Selma, Alabama, cannot be considered – you know, no one can be dismissed as a total monster. I'm sure he loves his wife, his children. I'm sure, you know, he likes to get drunk. You know, after all, one's got to assume he is visibly a man like me. But he doesn't know what drives him to use the club, to menace with the gun and to use the cattle prod. Something awful must have happened to a human being to be able to put a cattle prod against a woman's breasts, for example. What happens to the woman is ghastly. What happens to the man who does it is in some ways much, much worse. This is being done, after all, not a hundred years ago, but in 1965, in a country which is blessed with what we call prosperity, a word we won't examine too closely; with a certain kind of social coherence, which calls itself a civilized nation, and which espouses the notion of the freedom of the world. And it is perfectly true from the point of view now simply of an American Negro. Any American Negro watching this, no matter where he is, from the vantage point of Harlem, which is another terrible place, has to say to himself, in spite of what the government says – the government says we can't do anything about it – but if those were white people being murdered in Mississippi work farms, being carried off to jail, if those were white children running up and down the streets, the government would find some way of doing something about it. We have a civil rights bill now where an amendment, the fifteenth amendment, nearly a hundred years ago – I hate to sound again like an Old Testament prophet – but if the amendment was not honored then, I would have any reason to believe in the civil rights bill will be honored now. And after all one's been there, since before, you know, a lot of other people got there. If one has got to prove one's title to the land, isn't four hundred years enough? Four hundred years? At least three wars? The American soil is full of the corpses of my ancestors. Why is my freedom or my citizenship, or my right to live there, how is it conceivably a question now? And I suggest further, and in the same way, the moral life of Alabama sheriffs and poor Alabama ladies – white ladies – their moral lives have been destroyed by the plague called color, that the American sense of reality has been corrupted by it" (1965). Where Robinson extends the analysis to cultural, ideological realms, Baldwin goes one step further to flip the question altogether.

<sup>9</sup> Although these were necessary in constructing majority white places like Oconee county today, where ten, possibly eleven lynchings were carried out by white mobs between 1905-1921 ("Bloody Injuries" 1998). Many Black residents of Athens Clarke County recall Klan violence terrorizing the city before and during the Civil Rights Movement (AOHP 001 2014; Taylor 2013).

abandoned rural spaces, in borderland slums, as well as anti-immigrant mobilizations emerging out of the exurbs, suburbs, and gated communities of receiving countries so that dispossession *over there* works hand-in-hand with white supremacist policies *at home* to maintain a cheapened, degraded, surplus population.

To analyze this process, I draw on the intricacies of daily life for Black women who work at the poultry as central sites of struggle. This work contributes to the long line of Black feminist scholars, geographers, and historians<sup>10</sup> who center Black women in their own analyses, to understand how gender and class subjectivities are, themselves, produced through racial difference. Haley argues this point most clearly, in the introduction of her article “‘Like I was a Man’: Chain Gangs, Gender, and the Domestic Carceral Sphere in Jim Crow Georgia” (2013: 53):

Georgia’s Jim Crow carceral regime produced women every day, and all of the women were white. That is, Georgia’s 1908 law establishing chain gangs to replace the notorious convict lease system codified “woman” and “female” as racially specific subject positions. White women constituted a separate and unique class of persons, defined as female, who would be protected from the brutal throes of the chain gang, while criminalized black women, positioned outside the category female, would be routinely forced to labor on public roads and as domestic servants in white homes.

White femininity across the Jim Crow South needed the creation and reproduction of a devalued and genderless (Davis 1983) worker. The effects of this relational devaluation continue to shape the poultry workforce today. This logic not only impacts social relations between Black and White, but as Vanesa Ribas (2015) argues, also emerges through the positioning of Latina/o immigrant workers to native-born Black. The mobile, “non-working, working class” of Black women who move in and out of

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<sup>10</sup> For exemplary work see: Tera Hunter (1997), Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2002), Katherine McKittrick (2013), Sarah Haley (2016), Angela Davis (1983) Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Rhonda Williams (2004, 2008), Pamela Bridgewater (2008) and bell hooks (1982).

the poultry are framed in relation to the “hard working” immigrant workers, who stay on the line and do not complain. Labor shortages are produced through the devaluation of Black women’s labor (Stuesse and Helton 2013; Stuesse 2016).

Robinson’s project not only exposes the structuring of racial capitalism, but also the Black Radical Tradition as a necessary starting point for an alternative vision. More recently, in his talk at the University of Washington’s Simpson Center for the Humanities, Robin D.G. Kelley (2017) draws on Robinson to argue that the Black Radical Tradition, which was evident in the Haitian Revolution (C. L. R. James 1963); the Black Southern vision for Reconstruction (DuBois 1935); and the Black Freedom Struggle in places like Mississippi and Alabama (Woods [1998] 2017; Stuesse 2016; Kelley 1990), were critical in “expos[ing] the racial regime for what it was, the tyranny of white supremacy masquerading as enlightened democracy.”

At the heart of racial capitalism is the ongoing degradation of work and life, dependent upon racialized and gendered difference. Yet, the conditions of social reproduction are historically and geographically constituted, shaping how people “do” this work. Examining social reproduction “from below” challenges and improves the grand narratives of growth and de-growth which pivot on the “golden age” of industrialization, to a general decline in manufacturing through offshoring and automation, to an economy where employment depends on the service sector. While these larger trends remain significant and are statistically evident, political economy must also be attentive to people’s everyday lives and their experiences of social change. This includes people from rural and semi-urban places across the American South, far from the industrial cities of the urban North. This sort of analysis is

informative beyond the US where the global population has only recently become “majority urban,” with lasting social and material ties to people and places persisting in majority agricultural and rural places.<sup>11</sup>

The narrative, centered on the experience of the West, of the US, is one of economic, and therefore social, decline, as deindustrialization destroys blue collar jobs. Those “good” jobs, that mostly men held. These jobs allowed for a certain standard of living that US citizens were able to enjoy, at the expense of consumption and global expansion elsewhere. Simultaneous to the loss of “good” manufacturing jobs due to automation, offshoring, outsourcing, and the expansion of global racial capitalism, US citizens encountered a degradation of social support programs through a retraction of the welfare state. So that by the 1980s, as deindustrialization was in full swing, accessing welfare programs became more difficult, federal and state budgets were cut, spending less and less on poor people. This is often credited to Reagan era reforms, most notably a change in AFDC, which would become fully solidified under 1992 era Clinton cuts, and TANF workfare policies. Yet a peculiar process was underway in the South, as more working-poor women were being pushed off the welfare rolls, low-wage agricultural, construction, and food processing work was subsidized through the recruitment of cheap, undocumented labor. Thus, what little labor organizing that occurred from the late 1970s up until the early 1990s in the South, largely led by Black women, was actively disorganized. Undocumented

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<sup>11</sup> Social and spatial barriers mobilized separating rural from urban can be at once a source of control and cheapening while at the same time a site of insurgency. For example, see Eli Friedman’s work on the cheapening of rural migrant labor through the place-bound *hukou* system, shaping access to state services such as healthcare, housing, pensions, and even education, in turn inducing a type of precarity for the workers who supply these services (2017, 2012)

immigrant recruitment contributed to the creation of a Black working-class out of work.

Underlying these structural changes is a deeply foundational persistence of what W.E.B. DuBois calls the problem of the color line (Du Bois [1903] 1994). Deindustrialization, and the rise of “pink collar jobs” (Moreton 2009) did not occur evenly across the US. As Black feminists bell hooks, Angela Davis, and Dorothy Roberts have acknowledged Black women often worked alongside Black men in the dirtiest manufacturing and agricultural jobs across the country, as migrant farmworkers in the fields, as food processing workers in the lowest-paid, “dirty” jobs parallel to cleaner jobs for working-class white women, and as domestics, “cleaning up after white people.” As we think about the *central* role of Black women to manufacturing jobs in this country, the story of deindustrialization must be retold. But not simply to account for “difference,” “diversity,” or “inclusion,” of Black women’s histories, but to better analyze the current political moment and struggles around labor, immigration, policing, and the increasing precarity of both life and work.

The poultry processing industry represents the centrality of Black working-class women to the rise, expansion, and decline of US manufacturing. First, while the welfare state has retreated or declined, forcing working-class and middle-class white women into wage work, for Black women who had limited access to the welfare state, this situation changed in form but not in effect. This has been documented elsewhere, by leading Black feminist scholars, yet the return of Black women to low-wage poultry work presents an indispensable truth about how racial capitalism not only operates, but expands, grows, and decimates, and also how it might be transformed. As

Clyde Woods (1998) argues the South holds an important regional (spatial) influence, emboldening an expression of white supremacy that has set the path for the rest of the country. Therefore, “as the South goes, so goes the nation.” Rather than seeing the South as exceptional, or backward, a pre-capitalist era or mode of production, racial politics within the South and subsequent social and economic politics, are paving the way for a world increasingly less free, more unequal, and degraded. Lessons from the South can teach us a great deal about the future of this country and world. The Black working-class experience in the South directly challenges the myth of meritocracy and the American Dream while, if we only pay attention, setting a path for liberation from racial capitalism.

### ***Outline of Dissertation***

In Chapter One, I outline the history of poultry processing in the US South. While the story of poultry processing is one of celebrated innovation by the industry, including a host of “founding fathers,” Jewell, Perdue, Pilgrim, and Tyson, this history depicts a different viewpoint of the industry from the perspective of its workforce. For this chapter I rely on workers’ own oral histories, those I conducted from 2015-2016, along with a collection archived at the University of North Georgia, conducted between 2000-2002 by Dr. Carl Weinberg and his students in and around Gainesville, GA. These oral histories are unique in that Dr. Weinberg and his students sat down with people working across different segments of the industry, from contract growers, farmworkers, line workers, chicken catchers, managers, and even HR representatives. Additionally, several of his interviews are with people born before WWII, who

experienced the early days of the poultry industry expansion and major changes to the workforce as Latina/o workers began displacing Black workers in the 1990s. I supplement both sets of workers' accounts with newspaper articles and archival data collected in the poultry science collections at the Russell Special Collections Library at the University of Georgia.

In the next two chapters I analyze the degradation of both life and work for poultry processing workers and their families. First, in Chapter Two, I describe the types of time, space, work-discipline workers experience through an on-the-line ethnography of the working day. I consider these contestations in light of federal USDA FSIS proposals to increase line speeds and automation. These speedups, along with others forms of worker discipline at the point of production, effectively speed up workers' very lives, often to the point of "premature disability." In this concept, I draw on Ruth Wilson Gilmore's research on the political economy of California's prison boom, where she defines racism as "the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (2006: 26). Here, I add the role of the working day, as a medium through which the corporate/state nexus shapes worker vulnerability. The disciplining effects of government directed line speeds extends beyond the plant, into workers' home lives often rendering their bodies disabled, and careers cut way too short.

In Chapter Three I trace the history of my field site, by relying on oral histories conducted through a special collections project with leaders among Black Athens associated with the famous Hot Corner Business District and Civil Rights Movement as well as my own oral histories with workers and their families. I also draw on

newspaper articles, conventional historiographies of Athens, including Frances Taliaferro Thomas's *A Portrait of Historic Athens and Clarke County*, "a classic on the Classic City," published by UGA press (2009) in addition to Michael Thurmond's account of the Black History of Athens in *A Story Untold: Black men and women in Athens history* (2001).

It is not only that black workers were replaced and displaced, but that some, a very few, have held tightly on, seeing the small gains they made during the "boom" of US industrial capitalism wither away as their daughters experience a leaner welfare state, as production and processing speed up to meet growing demand (profits) at the expense of workers' bodies and minds, and as they witness the "crack crisis" (Bourgeois 2003), "war on drugs," and subsequent criminalization of Black men at increasing rates (Gilmore 1999, 2006; Thompson 2016; Abu-Jamal 2016; Purser 2012; Peck and Theodore 2008). These changes produce a vulnerable workforce that continues to be churned in and out of poultry processing plants, as production expands globally, the state retracts locally, and their communities, as well as political vision, are pillaged and all but destroyed. In both chapters I draw on workers' quotidian struggles over time and space. These might rarely make the nightly news, and hardly constitute the exciting labor history of unionization drives and mass mobilizations in other segments of animal processing (c.f. Bacon 2012; L. Fink 2003; Horowitz 1997). Yet, as I make my case for the methodological primacy of racial capitalism, I argue it is these everyday acts we must pay attention to, in order to understand how union movements like those at Delta Pride Catfish in 1989, or conversely the tragedy of the Imperial Foods Fire in 1991, develop in the first place.

In Chapter Four I step out of the plant to focus on the construction of social movements around immigration in the contemporary moment of racial capitalism. For undocumented Latina workers in the plants, the difficulties of life and work faced outside of the workday heavily outweigh their concerns on the line. In Athens, GA there is a growing movement for immigrant rights which pushes back against policing, detention and deportation, and the separation of families, all centered around the status of being undocumented. This movement is most clearly articulated through a focus on very mundane, everyday needs of social reproduction. I connect the criminalization and mass incarceration of the Black working-class to the deportations of undocumented Latina/o immigrants, as constituting a gendered racial removal program (T. Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013a; T. M. Golash-Boza 2015). Here it becomes of central importance to connect movements across race and build solidarities among Black and Latina/o workers, including the deliberate strivings against anti-Blackness, and ultimately against white supremacy within these movements (Ribas 2015).

These ideologies play out in very subtle ways among young first-gen, DREAMers, and second-gen youth, within immigrant rights movements, and among white allies aligning themselves with immigration reform and more radical demands against borders. There is a great *opportunity* of connection across movements. In some places, and social spaces (social media) we see these connections, but as others have documented<sup>12</sup> often underlying these struggles, undocumented activists and their allies

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<sup>12</sup> See Gleeson 2015; Yukich 2013; Nagel and Ehrkamp 2016; Bloemraad, Voss, and Silva 2014.

align with white supremacy and situate their movements as containing only the “good,” “hardworking” and “family oriented” immigrants. Through this “jobs no one wants” and “hardworking” bootstraps logic, immigrant rights organizing reflects a conflicting vision of the American Dream, one that is ripe for a growing anti-poverty non-profit sector (the poverty rate for ACC in 2014 was 38%, Shearer 2016). As one long-time Black resident and community organizer, Mrs. Ovita Thornton put it, “Poverty is a wealth builder ‘coz people get rich off poor people!” (interview with the author, September 28, 2017). Racial capitalism in this sense not only divides workers at the point of production, but also shapes political organizing at the point of social reproduction often at the expense of a broader, utopian vision for self-determination and liberation. What is left, is an unspoken silence on parallel movements for Black workers, and Black working-poor communities. Will those movements repeat the “model minority” mistakes of other immigrant populations, or is there opportunity for real connectively? In Georgia, there is a burgeoning “underdocumented” youth movement that, I hope, might lead the way.





Figure 2- "Drumstick and Hot Biscuit Time" at the Gainesville City Commission Table, 1961<sup>13</sup>

## CHAPTER 1: HISTORY OF THE POULTRY FROM WAY, WAY, BELOW

*Explosions and fire tore through parts of a poultry processing plant in northeast China on Monday, killing at least 120 people in one of the country's worst factory disasters in years. Chinese news reports said many of the workers who had died had been hindered from leaving the factory, the Baoyuanfeng Poultry Plant, because the exits had been blocked or inadequate. The plant began operations four years ago and was considered a major domestic poultry supplier (June 3, 2013, Mishazi, Jilin Province, China).<sup>14</sup>*

*When working conditions at Imperial got tough or seemed dangerous, nothing was said. No complaints were ever officially registered, according to state records. That silence was broken Tuesday morning, after a fire broke out that left 25 workers dead*

<sup>13</sup> Photographs from letter correspondence to Abit Massey, Box 43, Folder 7: Abit Massey 1960-1963. Agricultural Economics Department records. UA92-043. Hagrett Rare & Manuscript Library, UGA Archives. Athens, GA. Correspondence letter reads, "It's drumstick and hot biscuit time at the Gainesville City Commission table. Commissioners approved a resolution passed by the Chamber of Commerce calling for laws to prohibit eating fried chicken by any other means than with the fingers. The city will draft ordinances making it illegal to eat fried chicken with knife and fork or 'other devices'. It's all a part of a promotion to get folks to eat more fried chicken. Left to right seated are Commissioners Cliff Martin, Otis Helton, Mayor Milton Hardy, John Cromartie and Harold Delong. Standing are waiter, Yank Brown, Georgia Poultry Federation Secretary Abit Massey and Chamber Manager Moffett Kendrick."

<sup>14</sup> See Buckley 2013.

*and more than 50 others injured. (Sept. 5, 1991, Hamlet, North Carolina).*<sup>15</sup>

The excerpts above describe two tragic incidents occurring with over a decade in-between and oceans apart. Media coverage for each fire commented on the number of safety violations, faulty fire exit plans, and grave misconduct by employers. For the Hamlet, NC workforce, this was a job that workers both “hated and appreciated” with the stark reality being that the workforce of majority Black women saw the poultry plant as their only option. Reporting on the Baoyuanfeng plant fire moves the focus from workers to the model of rapid business growth fostered by the Chinese government and private industry at the expense of worker safety and health standards. This plant was less than a year old, processed 100,000 chickens a day, and generated 3,000 jobs. While the separate plant fires directly illustrate the dangerous working conditions in the poultry industry, underlying these tragedies is a sinister narrative of untrustworthy workers to be disciplined and controlled. The locked doors that prohibited workers from exiting during the fires were considered a necessary precaution against slick workers stealing chicken. I bring these two tragedies together as poultry processing labor practices developed in the US are exported around the globe, alongside chicken parts. This logic informs the cheapening of workers’ labor for

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<sup>15</sup> Name, age, and hometown of the 25 workers who died in the Imperial Foods fire: Josephine Barrington 63, Hamlet. Peggy Anderson 50, Hamlet. Mary Lillian Wall 50, Rockingham. Philip R. Dawkins 49, Rockingham. Minnie Mae Thompson 46, Hamlet. Janice Marie Wall Lynch 43, Hamlet. Elizabeth Ann Bellamy 42, Bennettsville, SC. Cynthia S. Wall 41, Rockingham. Josie M. Coulter 40, Rockingham. Bertha Jarrell 40, Rockingham. John Robert Gagnon 39, Hamlet. Rose Marie Gibson Peele 39 Bennettsville, SC. Mary Alice Arnold Quick 38 Hamlet. Fred Barrington, Jr. 37 Rockingham. Martha A. Ratliff 36, Hamlet. Gail V. Campbell 33, Hamlet. Rosie Ann Chambers 31, Ellerbe. Michael Morrison 31, Hamlet. Rose Lynette Wilkins 30, Laurel Hill. Brenda Gail Kelly 28, Rockingham. David Michael Albright 24, Hamlet. Margaret Banks 24, Laurinburg. Donald Bruce Rich 24, Ellerbe. Jeffrey Antonia Webb 24, Hamlet. Cynthia Marie Ratliff 20, Hamlet (Tabor 1991).

the rapid growth of the production of cheap meat.

### ***Introduction***

Meat consumption is on the rise globally. Tony Weis (2013; 2007) describes this dramatic increase as the “meatification” of diets driven by changes in production practices. The average American now consumes double the amount of meat than the world average in 1961. The growth in consumption is linked to the cheapening costs of industrialized meat and exemplifies the emergence of the international grain-oilseed-livestock-complex (Weis 2007, 2013). Industrially produced poultry products constitute the rise of “food from nowhere” (McMichael 2009; 2013). This food undermines rural food sovereign communities, ecological biodiversity, and the health of both consumers *and* workers. While the poultry industry creates billions of dollars in annual revenues, \$63.980 billion in 2015 and 281,000 jobs last year (Kay 2018), what are the industry’s other effects? How have poultry plants both been shaped by and shaped the surrounding workforce and broader communities? In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the poultry industry in the US South, one that centers the work and workers as well as their attempts to organize. Ultimately, this is a history of class struggle in the poultry industry.

This chapter intervenes in the common framing of meat processing and similar work as “jobs no American wants,” and instead places immigrant recruitment within a longer history of corporate efforts to disrupt Black worker-led organizing while disciplining, displacing, and cheapening labor. The mechanisms of capital accumulation necessary for global meat production depend upon and exacerbate a certain set of living conditions for its racialized, gendered, and, at times, immigrant

workforce, namely an almost constant state of precarity, from which there are very few alternatives. Yet, it's not simply that the worst jobs have been and continue to be held by marginalized women, poor white, Black, undocumented Latina, but rather that the mass production of cheap chicken has fundamentally relied on the construction and maintenance of a cheapened and degraded workforce in the spatially segregated, oftentimes rural, American South. It relies upon and is reproduced through a logic of progress that depends and deepens inequality not only within the workplace but in the broader community increasing the spatial and psychological distance at a terrifying rate. It is through such communities that racial capitalism thrives, setting the model for global expansion. I connect this history to the present, in order to document the current moment as the largest poultry processing companies return to a majority Black, female workforce.

### ***Global Implications of the US Model***

While this research focuses on work and workers within the US, its implications are reflective of accumulation strategies employed globally by large meatpacking and processing industries. The US industrial model of vertical and horizontal integration in the poultry industry is rapidly being exported around the globe, concentrating profits and fueling rising consumer demand (Boyd, William, and Watts 1997; Constance et al. 2013; Patel and Moore 2018; Striffler 2005; Weinberg 2003). The FAO predicts that poultry consumption will increase at a rate of 2.3 times between 2010-2050 compared to beef and pork consumption, which is expected to increase between 1.4-1.8 times over the same period (Weis 2013). While the US

remains the leader in poultry production globally, production in Brazil, China, Thailand, and Mexico has followed suit over the last two decades. Annually, industry leaders from across Latin America attend an international broiler conference at UGA.

This global restructuring of animal and meat processing, according to Raj Patel (2016), follows the trajectory of other forms of industrialized agriculture through the displacement of local and small-scale farmers and butchers by companies like Tyson and Smithfield (Bacon 2012a; Martinez-Gomez, Aboites-Manrique, and Constance 2013). For example, in 2012, 80% of the 10,000 slaughterhouses in China were classified as “artisanal” or “un-mechanized,” but large-scale slaughterhouses are rapidly increasing as these corporations expand production throughout the country (Gao 2012). Additionally, cheap industrial imports from the EU and the US continue to devastate local production in places like South Africa, where the country is expected to lose 50,000 processing jobs in the upcoming year (Seeth 2017). As one farmer cogently states, “We have become a waste receptacle for the developed world” (Lovell in Seeth 2017). And most recently, China has placed an “anti-dumping” ban on Brazilian chicken in an effort to protect its domestic production from cheap imports (*Poultry World* 2018). The least desirable byproducts are dumped onto the Global South creating a “cheap” product for urban consumers at the expense of local production. While the value of corporate meat production has increased nearly six-fold in ten years (from 2004-2014) and is now valued at \$366 billion (*Poultry World* 2018), this has meant devastating effects for the global environment, consumers, and agricultural and processing labor.

### *A Note on Historical Sociology as Method*

Rather than seeing the past as a “background to the present,” I follow Philip Abrams’ (1982) method of historical sociology to “understand the relationship of personal activity and experience on the one hand and social organization on the other as something that is continuously constructed in time” (16). Individuals and societies are created with the raw material of the past, in a struggle to make the present. As Marx has so famously put it, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past (1852). It is through struggle that alternative visions emerge, shaped through and against the ongoing history of racial capitalism. For the study at hand, workers are always, and this is to borrow from E.P. Thompson (1964), “in the making,” in a process of becoming, their experiences and subjectivities shaped through and against racial capitalism. So that racial, gender, and class identities are not fixed, yet under racial capitalism, these are always organized through white supremacy, and shape how people work, live, and reproduce themselves. Racial capitalism is more than accumulation/exploitation but is instantiated in a demanding lifeworld expressed through intergenerational relationships across time in which people make do, where women workers are at the center of a precarious form of social reproduction that is patterned across these relationships. The poultry depends upon this production of precarity.

## *The Poultry Capital of the World*

Georgia has produced more poultry than any other state for the last 36 consecutive years, and poultry constitutes the state's single largest agricultural product (UGA CAES 2017). In 2015, this industry employed 29,831 workers in poultry processing alone (Georgia Power 2016). Production across the state has more than tripled since 1978 to meet exponential growth in per capita consumption across the US and around the world. Yet, it is no coincidence that this region, the self-declared "Poultry Capital of the World" also proudly boasts a "competitive advantage" for manufacturing through extremely low unionization rates (2.7%) and the lowest average of all hourly poultry processing wages (\$9.54/hour) (Georgia Power 2016). These wages remain 40% lower than all other manufacturing jobs (Lo and Jacobson 2011). Poultry processing provides an important site to understand how precarity is produced as well as contested among a racialized, gendered, and shifting immigrant low-wage workforce. Based on existing research<sup>16</sup> and popular and policy-oriented

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<sup>16</sup> Steve Striffler's (2005) work first documented this demographic change at its height in the mid-late 1990s in rural Arkansas. Striffler worked in a poultry plant in Arkansas for two consecutive summers, getting to closely know some of his coworkers and even accompanying them on a trip back to Mexico. Angela Stuesse (2016), another anthropologist, did community ethnographic work in Mississippi with the creation of MPOWER, Mississippi Poultry Worker Center through the University of Texas- Austin. She visited mobile home parks surrounding the plants where a majority of undocumented immigrant families lived, and she gauged perceptions of these new neighbors by working across different native-born white and Black communities. Importantly, she worked with MPOWER to lead Power & Oppression workshops with native-born Black workers and immigrant Latina/o workers to build cross-race solidarity for the workers center. Stuesse's ethnographic focus is on immigrant communities, placing their perceptions and interpretations of their new homes at the center. LaGuana Gray (2014), a historian working in Southern Arkansas and Northern Louisiana enlists another methodological approach in her book *We Just Keep Running the Line: Black Southern Women and the Poultry Processing Industry*. She traces the history of the poultry industry in the region of El Dorado, Arkansas as one plant draws on workers from the surrounding economically depressed areas. Her research emphasizes the economic necessity of poultry jobs as there are so few other options in the rural Black Belt South. Her fascinating research is intimately personal as her mother worked in the poultry all her life, alongside aunts, uncles, and cousins. She focuses on a set of oral histories with twelve plant employees. Her work also traces the influx of immigrant workers, from the perspective of native-born Black women workers. At the time of her writing, these workers made up a majority of the workforce

reports,<sup>17</sup> the industry in this region is depicted as one made up of mostly immigrant and largely undocumented workers from Mexico and Central America. The picture of extremely high turnover rates, always above 100%, ICE raids, and debilitating work also frame common perceptions of this work. Even among local activists and community leaders within Athens, most believed the plants were full of Latina/o immigrants. Yet, I found something very different happening while working in Georgia's largest plant. Through the interplay of national immigration raids, industry compliance, and anti-immigration laws, poultry processing labor has undergone another major shift, back to a majority native-born Black workforce. This movement reflects a longer history of the industry's dependence on a precarious and racialized workforce, as poultry plant workers are forced to move in and out of jobs, housing, and changing familial relations. For women poultry plant workers, precarity is experienced through the reality of deportability for undocumented workers and their families and through disposability for Black workers.

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as Black workers felt they were being rapidly replaced. Monica Gisolfi's (2017) *The Takeover: Chicken Farming and the Roots of American Agribusiness* documents the poultry industry's "silent revolution" in upcountry Georgia. This revolution provided the model for contemporary forms of capital-intensive industrial agriculture. Finally, Vanesa Ribas's book *On the Line: Slaughterhouse Lives and the Making of the New South* (2015) documents intergroup relations between Black and Latina/o immigrant workers through an eighteen month workplace ethnography. Importantly for Ribas, is the necessity of studying interactions at the point of production, where workers spend most of their waking time and have the most direct contact with one another. She develops the concept of "prismatic engagement" to understand social relations among minority groups through the lens of white dominance.

<sup>17</sup> These include investigative journalism and research by *The Charlotte Observer* (Hall, Alexander, and Ordoñez 2008), Human Rights Watch (Compa 2004), OxFam America (2016), Southern Poverty Law Center (Fritzsche 2013), Northwest Arkansas Workers Center (Ebner, Halpern-Finnerty, and Jayaraman 2016), among others.

### *Historicizing Work at “The Poultry”*



*Figure 3- Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, circa 1916-1960s*

The history of work at “the poultry,” as it’s commonly referred, is a history of both resistance and domination. Poultry production, up until the 1940s, remained very small scale, localized, and was considered “women’s work” (Gray 2014). Women raised birds amidst their backyard gardens for household consumption and a meager extra income, as the industry was advertised to the “housewives” of cotton farmers (Dimsdale 1970). Early producers include women like Cecile Steele in the Delmarva peninsula,<sup>18</sup> who, as early as 1928, grew-out over 3,000 broilers in her backyard.

Yet, soon after the Great Depression, white landowning farmers and merchants in Northeast Georgia took over the industry and its profits. According to historian Monica R. Gisolfi (2017), this takeover was structured along the pre-existing crop lien system used in the overproduction of cotton that previously dominated the region. Racially discriminatory state interventions under the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) worked together with an agricultural credit system, creating structural barriers

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<sup>18</sup> Delmarva includes Delaware, the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

to commercial poultry production for Black and poor white sharecroppers and tenant farmers. The AAA programs subsidized cotton farmers to idle land and quite literally displace farm labor (Raper [1936] 2005; Woods 1998; Gisolfi 2017). Between 1935 and 1940, the number of tenant farmers in the region dropped by almost 25 percent as landowners destroyed cotton crops in exchange for AAA allotment checks (Gisolfi, 2017: 13). This newly “freed” population was disciplined to become wage labor for the South’s agrarian economy or for the industrial cities of the North. Women lost autonomy and power as production moved from one of household subsistence to one of vertically integrated production. This is a trend that has remained constant to the industry with workers losing control over production and their own lives in the process.



These leaders of the broiler industry met in Washington, D. C., in June of last year, elected officers, and adopted bylaws for the National Broiler Council. They are, left to right, standing: Charles Vantress, Duluth, Ga.; Clyde Hendrix, Clinton, Iowa; Ray Firestone, Troutville, Va.; J. D. Jewell, Gainesville, Ga.; Otis Esham, Parsonsburg, Md.; Roy Ritter, Springdale, Ark. Left to right, seated: J. D. Sykes, St. Louis, Mo.; Lucien Jones, Lafayette, Ind.; B. C. Rogers, Morton, Miss.; Jerry Henshaw, Dallas, Tex.; Marshall Durbin, Birmingham, Ala.; Ray Purnell, Tupelo, Miss.; Henry Saglio, Glasco, Conn.; E. S. Kendrick, N. Wilkesboro, N. C.; Clyde Fore, Siler City, N. C. Not shown: H. C. Kennett, Durham, N. C.; W. R. Shaffer, Maurertown, Va.; Henry Tilford, Jr., Shelbyville, Tenn.; Frank Frazier, Richmond, Va.

*Figure 4- This picture and caption from a trade magazine in 1955 recorded the founding of the National Broiler Council in June 1954<sup>19</sup>*

While the poultry industry first flourished in the Delmarva peninsula, competition took off in the South due to the “pioneering” work of Gainesville, GA local, Jesse Jewell (NCC 2013) and leaders within the Georgia Cotton Producers Association like D.W. Brooks (Dimsdell 1970). Jewell was the son of a feed and grain dealer. He created the farming contract system by bundling baby chicks with feed to cash poor famers. After farmers grew out the birds, he transported and slaughtered the birds in the small slaughterhouse he built in 1941. The Cotton Producers Association

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<sup>19</sup> “History of The National Chicken Council” 2013

played a similar role, supplying feed (1940s), establishing a hatchery (1950), and securing efficient processing facilities. From the industry's inception, contract growers were expected to acquire the necessary capital to build chicken houses and manage facilities through "contracting firms, feed manufacturers, local banks, Production Credit Associations, and others" (National Commission on Food Marketing, *Food from Farmer to Consumer* 1966 in Dimsdell 1970). The industry received a major boost in 1944 when the War Food Administration reserved all the chicken produced from seven counties in North Georgia, ensuring a guaranteed buyer (Weinberg 2003). The takeoff of the Georgia poultry industry occurred through a combination of federal loans, purchasing guarantees, and private industry integration.

Jewell's processing plant in Gainesville initially recruited workers among a rural population of mostly white women and a small number of Black women (around 15%) (Horowitz 1997). Women came from cotton tenant farming and sharecropping livelihoods "out in the country"<sup>20</sup> of the surrounding counties, considered by Jewell to be "uneducated," "unskilled," and desperate for work (82nd Congress 1951). One such worker was Ms. Faye Bush. In 1948, she started working in Georgia Broiler in

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<sup>20</sup> Mr. Murdock. Doesn't it require great skill?

Mr. Thurmond. No, sir, it does not. Most of them are from out in the country. They come in, and it doesn't require much skill. There are some few jobs in there that require skill; for instance, they have a skillsaw, cutting chickens up, which requires some skill. But the average employee does not require any skill. Just picking the chickens and cutting the legs.

Mr. Murdock. Are most of the employees women or men?

Mr. Thurmond. Most of them are women.

Mr. Murdock. Are they mostly white or colored?

Mr. Thurmond. Yes, white.

Mr. Murdock. You have some colored?

Mr. Thurmond. We have some colored, but out of the possibly 450 employees I guess probably 75 are colored; not over that.

(82<sup>nd</sup> Congress 1951: 93).

Gainesville, Georgia at the age of sixteen after her mother was disabled from sharecropping work in Franklin County, Georgia. The plants, like all public places in the Jim Crow South maintained segregated departments,<sup>21</sup> but it was one of the few industries that hired Black people. Ms. Bush describes the situation in an interview in 2002 with Carl Weinberg, “Well, it was the first public job that black peoples had to work on, so I thought it was good because I thought I was making some money. They was paying 50 cents an hour. So it really was money to us back then” (Faye Bush, interview by Carl Weinberg, June 11, 2002). She worked “ruffling” and “picking” chickens at Georgia Broiler for ten years then at Fieldale for five years.

Gene Masters, a general manager of a plant in Albertville, Alabama, discusses hiring practices in the early days (1959-1964).

GM: The plant that I ran was... we did a extremely poor job of selecting employees. The education level was very, very low. We hired people directly off of the street when we needed them, with very little screening, which was dangerous. In fact, we had a murder on the premises one time by someone who was on parole that we hadn't checked the record on. And I don't know the percentage that could not read or write, but it was quite high, and I was not smart enough to even recognize it as a problem. You know, in that time period to think of people not having an education, not being able to read and write but, I have found chicken parts...legs put in a box that was labeled breasts or whatever and when I started trying to see who was stupid enough to do that I found out they couldn't read or write, and I sent them after boxes but they didn't even know what they were supposed to get...[laughter] (Gene Masters, interview by Robyn McClure, April 27, 2000).

Masters' comments on the hiring process are not vastly different from the hiring practices I witnessed in 2014. I say this not to point, as he does, to the “poor job” of

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<sup>21</sup> Ms. Bush describes a situation at Georgia Poultry where the fact of segregation really hit her; “I remember down at Georgia Broilers, I never forget this lady walked up to the water fountain, she was going to get her a drink of water out of the white fountain, and one of the bosses pulled her away. And back then, I guess that's when it hit me so bad. I'm not a violent person, but I think I would have had to hit that man if it had been me. And he told her that she couldn't drink from that fountain. I think that was the first time that I really realized how things really were” (Interview with Faye Bush, by Carl Weinberg, June 11, 2002).

selecting employees, those with criminal records, low educational attainment, unable to read and write, but rather to connect these issues, individualized at the level of the worker, to the broader institutions shaping workers beyond the plant walls. Many of these problems of education, incarceration, and unemployment have become more punitive. Similar “just in time” hiring practices, mirroring Masters’ “directly off the street” and “when we needed them” practices also remain, along with what labor sociologist Gretchen Purser<sup>22</sup> calls the “normalization of extremely precarious and degraded forms of employment (2012: 412), work that is both “degraded and degrading” (Hennigan and Purser 2017: 93).

Ms. Marie McAllister, a white woman born in 1945 also worked in the burgeoning poultry industry in Gainesville. Her father was a farmer and her mother picked cotton. She worked for Jesse Jewell from 1964-1967, but she found that the “city life” of Gainesville did not suit her. She describes her rural roots as the cause of this disconnect, “I come from the country, I mean back in the country. There I was in the city and those people...I worked on the line” (Marie McAllister, interview by Carl Weinberg and Chris Parker, July 12, 2001). Although Ms. McAllister does not explicitly discuss race, she distinguishes her work at the plant as “a different kind of environment” in which she “wasn’t used to all the talking” (McAllister, 2001). After three years she couldn’t take it anymore and returned to the country where she stayed

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<sup>22</sup> While Purser’s work with formal day labor workers, employed through temp agencies, leads her to conclude this is a recent, largely urban, experience of work, normalized especially for African American men with a “background,” I argue that the poultry in the American South set a precedent for these kinds of employment practices and labor relations. Yet, there was a marked “golden days” period of work in the poultry as Black workers across the American South won union representation and made demands for improved pay and working conditions.

tied to the poultry first as a farmworker cleaning chicken houses, then briefly as a grower before her family was pushed out by the upgrades required in their contract with Fieldale Farms.



*Figure 5- "Dirty" and "Clean" work a matter of Black and White, Photos by Swift & Company, Gainesville, GA 1945<sup>23</sup>*

Black women began working in the plants at higher rates during WWII as white women left for better paying jobs filling the shoes of men recruited during the war, or, as in Ms. McAllister's case, to return to the countryside. Initially, they were placed in "black jobs," the worst and dirtiest jobs at the plant. These were live hang—hanging live birds by their feet to be slaughtered—and draw-hand—removing the internal organs by hand for inspection (Gray 2014). By this time, labor organizing in the South lagged behind efforts of large-scale unionization in the industrial cities to the north. That's not to say that Southerners weren't organizing and disrupting production, as many labor historians have documented moments of labor insurgency led by Black workers in unlikely places and industries across the South. For example,

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<sup>23</sup> Photographs from letter correspondence to John E. Drewry, Box 13, Folder 1-2 [Drewry Photographs], 1940s-1950s. UA04-026. Hagrett Rare & Manuscript Library, UGA Archives. Athens, GA. Side by side, the photo to the left shows two Black women doing "draw-hand" while the photo on the right displays two white women doing what appears to be debone, cutting the cleaned and chilled birds.

at Georgia Broiler in Gainesville, Ms. Bush recalls a time in the early 1960s when a group of “mostly black people” walked off the line in protest against the heat on the line. She looks back on the walkout both noting the fear that workers had, but also the deliberateness of the action, which she clarifies for the interviewer.

FB: I think it was just the fear of speaking out. Because I think if we could have spoke out more, we could have done more. I think most people was afraid to speak out because of the way they had been all their lives. I remember one time the working condition was so bad, it was so hot in there ‘til we found ourselves walking out. But they gave you a certain time to be back on the line. Then you would lose your job. Jobs didn’t come by that easy back then. Peoples was afraid.

CW: So, are you saying that sometimes you would just walk out just to get some air?

FB: No, we called ourselves, ‘going to have a walk out!’ Everybody walked out in order for them to get some air to make it cooler. So they put ice in there and then they gave us a certain time to come back to work.

CW: So, you walked out as a protest?

FB: Right, right.

Similarly, Masters described labor discipline as a major problem in the early 1960s, at a time similar to Ms. Bush’s walkout. Whether by a sharecroppers’ union in the fields (Kelley 1990) or by washerwomen in burgeoning cities of the “new South” (Hunter 1997), Black-led working-class resistance in the South was not unprecedented. In a plant of 240 workers, where 95% were Black, Gene Masters recalls workers regularly controlling their time through absenteeism. This was especially common on Mondays after a weekend of relaxation, and partying. The interviewee describes this widespread problem, but also management’s failed attempts to control workers.

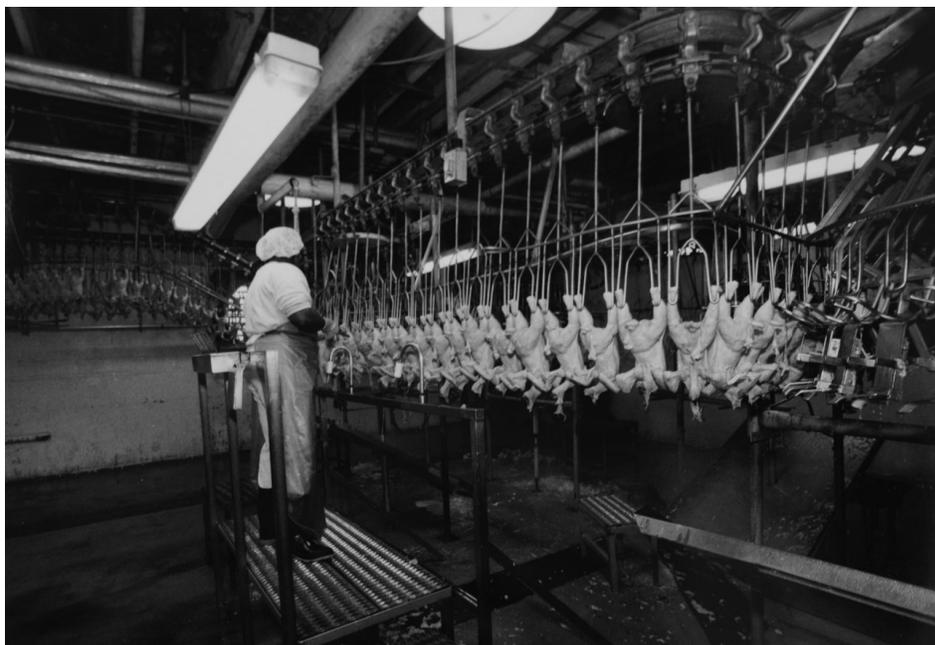
GM: Now, there were other problems, and management has always had to listen to some degree, but for instance the owner of the company that I worked for told me one time, ‘I’m tired of all these employees coming in late, drunk and have a bad weekend and show up at noon on Mondays and so on. So, if any group doesn’t show up at a certain time I want you to fire the group.’ That was the rule. Of course, when I did that

and one of them was a floor lady that we needed the boss changed his mind [laughter]. He thought that we ought to hire her back, maybe the whole crew. Yeah, we did have serious problem with weekend hangovers (Interview with Gene Masters by Robyn McClure, April 27, 2000).

This practice of weekend-hangover-induced-absenteeism mirrors historic patterns of worker resistance documented elsewhere as one in need of direct disciplining (see Linebaugh 2003; E. P. Thompson 1967). The leading industry publication out of Gainesville, *The Poultry Times* reported on the problem of absenteeism stating, “the light labor situation continues to be one of the main problems of the broiler industry in the Southeast.” Industry leaders blamed high absenteeism on “governmental social programs,” and the “willingness on the part of many employees to be satisfied with a minimum income level” (“Emphasis must be placed on absentee problem” 1972 in Weinberg 2003: 14). In 1973, a study through the USDA Experiment Station at UGA found that managers would knowingly hire 20% more workers in preparation for high rates of absenteeism (Weinberg 2003). This was clearly a problem of labor discipline that the poultry, in its early days, could not control.

Prior to legal integration of workplaces, Black workers were barred from many Southern plants in favor of white workers. Even during wartime speedups, Black workers remained the last hired and first fired, and would often only be brought in as scabs. Employers in the meat and poultry industries praised them for their “loyalty” and “willingness to do the dirty work which soon became distasteful to foreign women” (1929 DoL in Horowitz 1997: 200-201). But, by the early 1960s, Black women had largely displaced white women in Northeast Georgia. They took these jobs over a return to domestic work, working in the homes of white families, and because they were displaced by pesticides and automation in Southern agricultural work, most

notably in cotton production (Williams 2018; Gisolfi 2017; Gray 2014; Stuesse and Helton 2013; Faye Bush, interview by Carl Weinberg June 11, 2002). The poultry attracted workers because it provided social insurance programs of which they were previously excluded as agricultural and domestic workers (Woods 1998; Winders 2009; Glenn 2002; Hunter 1997). According to Gene Masters, the plant manager from Alabama in Weinberg's study, some Black women even came to the plants after the schools were integrated, and they made more money working on the line than they did teaching in the segregated schools (Gene Masters, interview by Robyn McClure, April 27, 2000). By the mid 1960s, most plants were fully integrated with black women making up the majority of the workforce. The rise of the poultry industry was built on the backs, arms, and hands of Black women in the South so that "Americans have their chicken in every pot but at an extraordinary cost to the people who produce them" (Gray 2014: 42).



*Figure 6- Pete Daniel. Fieldale, poultry processing plant, Gainesville, GA, 1987-1991*

***“Martin, Jesse, & Me!”***

*“There is a quiet resurgence in organizing and it is in the South and it is in the poultry industry. This is a real opportunity for the labor movement, but I don’t know whether we will be writing 10 years from now that we used it or that we blew it.”* Richard Bensinger, the executive director of the AFL-CIO’s Organizing Institute (Smother 1996).

Beginning in the late 1970s, many unions focused their attention on states in the right-to-work South. Poultry plants were central to these campaigns as the industry was growing at a rapid pace. Between 1983 and 1993, the industry expanded its workforce by almost 70%, opening 78,000 new positions (Schwartzman 2013). This was a moment when it appeared that workers had some political power. The first documented large-scale poultry strike, led by “mostly black women,” took place at Sanderson Farms in Laurel, Mississippi in February 1979 and lasted until December 1980 (Schwartzman 2013). The strike focused not on wages or overtime but on the pace of work, rules that limited workers to three-bathroom breaks per week, and

charges of sexual harassment against male foremen. Workers were “tired of being treated like dogs!” (W. Brown 1979). During the almost two-year strike, Black women constituted 68 of the 80 women who remained loyal to the strike for the entire time. The Vice President of the International Chemical Workers Union (ICWU) explained Sanderson’s tactics in this way, “They’re using people from out in the rural areas. They’re getting in a lot of blacks and they’re pulling in some poor white people from as far away as western Alabama to scab our strike” (Brown 1979). ICWU spokesman Bob Kasen explained the union’s efforts as representing a shift in organizing strategy, “We’ve believed for some time that we ought to be functioning with people who get banged around the most—blacks and women” (Brown 1979).

This common knowledge of “getting banged around the most” is evident in workers interviews and allowed for the construction of a shared working-class identity which often united workers across race for a time, in opposition to management and other, cleaner jobs. Mr. Don Mays, a Black man who worked “live hang” in several Gainesville plants in high school and after returning from the Navy, commented on this change from the time he started working at the plant in the early 1970s.

DM: Okay, like I said, at first there were only a few Vietnamese there, a very few. It was mainly Black and White. And we got along, kind of great I guess, because of the fact of where we were. Everybody knew that people looked down upon us. Because at that time if you work in a poultry plant you were just.... you were just takin’ the jobs that nobody else wanted. Kind of like a garbage man or somebody that pumps out septic tanks, or somethin’ like that. They are glad you are there, but nobody else wants to do it. It was great coz it was kind of like a band that everybody, we all knew that we worked in poultry places, we knew that, “the undesirables” as we’d call each other, nobody else wanted to associate with us but we were all just one big family (Don Mays, interview by Carl Weinberg, April 20, 2000).

Importantly, Mr. Don Mays distinguishes the “undesirables” from management

because they were “gettin’ their money.”<sup>24</sup> Instead, they shared a working-class identity inside the plant through their collective treatment by management and the outside world. He goes on to distinguish this relationship further, “We all poultry workers, we do a great job, and we’re ‘feedin’ America!’ Yeah, that’s a joke, among each other. Yeah, we’re feeding America, but hard to feed ourselves... We’re chicken catchers, we’re clean-up crew, we’re live hang” (Mays 2000). This did not mean that management did not discriminate against Black workers, as Mays puts it, “There was discrimination, discrimination was ‘bout like apple pie in America. Man, if you ain’t got it then it’s not America” (Mays 2000). Despite discrimination, workers had a shared way of seeing themselves in the world, a shared consciousness.

National unions saw the necessity in organizing the South in the midst of deindustrialization, and a decrease in real wages for most manufacturing jobs (Smothers 1996; Horowitz 1997). Unlike previous union drives in the South, like post-war “Operation Dixie,” which brought in outside organizers and did little to challenge existing racial hierarchies, this labor movement practiced “social movement unionism.” This meant building coalitions with non-labor organizations working for economic and social justice while centering Black leadership and Civil Rights

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<sup>24</sup> This somewhat mirrors Steve Striffler’s (2005) findings when he worked in the Tyson plant in the early 2000s. He argues that workers all identified as Mexican, joking, “we’re all Mexican here, screwed-over Mexican!” Even Striffler, who is white, was included in this breakroom banter. Striffler goes on to argue that this identification is a class identification, one that workers share in their experience of work, that is “shit work,” and poor treatment by majority white supervisors. Yet, there is a huge difference in his study at the Tyson plant in Springdale, Arkansas from the research in other poultry communities across the Deep South. Springdale was less than 2% Black in 2010, with immigrant and refugee labor replacing white labor rather than Black. This would be a fascinating follow up project; did white workers return to his plant after the largest plants were forced to better comply with ICE best hiring practices? Arkansas did not pass the same level of anti-immigration legislation that states like Georgia and Alabama passed, so it would also be important to compare the effects of these laws across states, a suggestion Eli Friedman made early on in my project.

(Seidman 1994; Fantasia and Voss 2004; Schwartzman 2013). The 1989 RWDSU drive at Cagle Inc. in Georgia represents this shift in organizing strategy. A photo from the campaign centers a group of Black women wearing shirts that say, “Martin, Jesse, and Me!” (Cromer 1990). This change in union strategy drew on the legacies of the Civil Rights movement while building local, grassroots Black leadership (Halpern and Horowitz 1996). Women poultry processing workers were centrally placed in within the lineage of the Civil Rights movement, so that the goals of labor organizing expanded to address economic and racial justice head on. After the fire at Imperial Foods in 1991, the National Poultry Alliance established “Freedom Summer ‘95” led by Civil Rights leaders Rev. Jesse Jackson and Congressman John Lewis (Schwartzman 2013).



*Figure 7- RWDSU in Buena Vista, Georgia. Photo by Linda Cromer, 1991*

From the first strike in 1979 to 1995 there were at least ten documented strikes and walkouts, many centered on unionization (Schwartzman 2013). In my field site,

there was at least one major walkout during this time period around contract negotiations with the plant's union.<sup>25</sup> Valerie Ready, Daily News staff writer, reported on the strike, "Around 50 disgruntled night-shift employees at Gold Kist's Athens poultry processing plant walked off the job Wednesday at 5:45 p.m. Without the support of their union. They vowed not to end the wildcat strike until they are given a \$1-an-hour pay raise, better benefits and improved working conditions" (1978). I was lucky enough to sit down with Theresa, who participated in the walkout. She was born in 1959 and grew up in a poultry family. Her mother worked at the plant for 26 years. She started working there right after high school, first doing vaccinations in the hatchery then on the evisceration line in processing. She recalls the walkout was most notably about bathroom breaks and the lack of heat in the plant during the winter. She remembers people fainting because they no one would relieve them from the line.

Theresa: We got to the point where the conditions got so bad that we actually had a walkout. It was protesting. The whole plant walked out without actually thinking about the consequences. We didn't organize it well. We didn't have the backup that we needed, so we kinda went at it the wrong way. We were about 12-hour standoff. We actually pulled it off for a while, but we had to go back and negotiate. We lost seniority. We didn't actually have, some people they had five years, they lost it. If you had four years and were working on five years, you lost that seniority. A lot of people weren't able to get the money they deserved. If you worked four years and you only had two months to go, you couldn't go in and get that little money in and get that you deserved. Work conditions, like I said, nowadays they have some sort of suit, protection, we only had a apron. We walked out because the benefits wasn't that good,

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<sup>25</sup> After interviewing Theresa, and hearing her recollections about the strike, I searched for news on this walk-out. It was nearly a year later when I came across a plant manager's personal webpage, comic sans fluorescent font in all its glory. This webpage documents his personal life and work, spending forty years in total across two plants. He was the floor manager of the Gold Kist plant at the time of the walkout. I plan to do follow-up research at the Georgia State Southern Labor Archives to pinpoint the union that represented the plant at this time. There was another walkout at the Durham, NC Gold Kist plant a year prior, led by some of the leaders murdered in the Greensboro Massacre who were organizing against the Klan and Nazis in the area. Kathleen Schwartzman's (2013) and Angela Stuesse's (2016) work best document the formal mobilizations within the poultry industry and are represented in this dissertation. I hope to follow these loose threads to find the more informal and spontaneous organizing efforts during this time period, Winter 2018!

just the pay was good. The conditions were terrible, water, ice, all night and all day. There were times when you didn't have any heat. They had to keep it cold because of the meat and all the chickens. A lot of people felt like they were treated unfairly because they had been there for so many years and hadn't really get a raise. You had people coming in getting better pay than the people who had worked there for years. I think you had some kind of cap where you couldn't go up any higher... We walked out it was a big walkout. It was all in the newspaper. We had the attention of the workforce in the big office, we just walked out without union backup.

Carrie: Y'all weren't able to get a union in?

Theresa: No. But I think by us doing that they recognized that hey, they had a reason to do that. Y'know, everybody felt if we did something then, my mother they worked under conditions way worse than I did. Now, the women, they have better equipment. We were young and hyped up. We didn't even need food (Theresa, interview by the author, March 14, 2016).<sup>26</sup>

For her article, Ready (1978) interviewed the most vocal leader of the strike, Fred Faust<sup>27</sup>, a knife sharpener who had worked at the plant four years. Faust put workers' complaints clearly, "We haven't had a raise in over a year. They just don't respect us. They want everybody to do two jobs" (Ready 1978). Faust went on to critique Gold Kist's distribution of profits, "I don't think it's right for them to make these big donations, to build a new warehouse and to re-build the personnel offices and then tell us they can't give us a raise" (Ready 1978). Workers also demanded overtime pay, better insurance, and sick days.

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<sup>26</sup> Theresa stayed for a few years before finding work in the Westclox Factory. She moved in and out of the poultry until finally getting hired at the university where she received disability retirement after 25 years.

<sup>27</sup> I tried to locate Fred Faust and followed up with Theresa about him. He passed away in 2015, at the age of 57.



*Figure 8- Gold Kist Workers on Strike, The Daily News, 1978*

This group of Black workers saw their union as ineffective and took it upon themselves to demand change. Lucy Mae Collins expressed this sentiment to Ready, “We pay \$3 out of each paycheck to the union and where does it go?” (1978). This is an event that is not well-documented on the public transcript of Athens history, yet it is one that remains in both workers’ and managers’ minds. Yet, the floor manager at the time recalls a different situation. In the article with Ready, he dismisses the workers’ strike, characterizing the walkout as “just a misunderstanding.” This misunderstanding involved problem employees and “outside agitators.” He recalled with me over email.

The wildcat strike you mentioned was in April of 1978. It was on the second shift about 6:30 pm on a [Wednesday] evening. It was instigated by a union representative on second shift named Faust. He was a problem employee that had been terminated on three occasions for poor attendance and performance, but the union had fought to have him reinstated. In order to save an arbitration fee, I had agreed to the reinstatement with certain conditions that Faust skirted on every occasion he could. The outside agitators were a University of Georgia professor and about six or eight UGA students that led the picket brigade outside the plant. This professor was a big supporter of the humane society and was against the use of poultry as a food source. We gave the

walkouts three days to return to their job and wound up terminating sixty-nine employees for failure to return to their job. It was a illegal strike in that the union contract had a no-strike clause in it. We filed suit against the union for breaking the contract and a settlement was reached that there would not be an arbitration into the matter. All these employees would not return to the plant. We did not ask for any money in our suit, only procedural rules to prevent this ever happening again and to have the union better control what they called their employees. Gold Kist bought the Athens plant in 1954.<sup>28</sup> It was the third plant they had at the time of purchase with two others in Boaz, Alabama and Trussville, Alabama (Email correspondence with the author, September 26, 2017).

Based on Theresa's recollection and *The Daily News* reporting on the walkout, this was a moment of insurgency led by Black workers. These workers held out for over three days, and, according to the manager, sixty-nine workers lost their jobs. It appears that the union worked things out with management, despite the workers' concerns and frustrations. Still, Theresa's memory of the walkout was one marked by excitement and a sense of purpose. She saw her actions and the actions of her coworkers as effecting change, one that affected her broader community. She connected this action back to the poor conditions of her mother's time in the plant, and forward to the women working in the plant today.

As mobilizations grew across the processing plants of the South, labor actions even became violent. In 1990, at Delta Pride catfish processing in Indianola, MS, a workforce that was 99% Black and 75% female struggled against the all-white/male plant supervisors and eventually the police. The police shot at and beat the women in attempts to break the strike (Kilborn 1990). Shirley Henley, a 34-year-old mother of three was beat up by a white police officer, and was arrested for disorderly conduct, resisting arrest, and assault on a police officer (Goozner 1990). Support for this strike

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<sup>28</sup> At the time of purchase, Gold Kist was the Cotton Producers Association, a cooperative representing cotton farmers across Georgia and some in Alabama. D.W. Brooks, from the University of Georgia, was the association's president at the time.

brought in Civil Rights Leadership from the SCLC and activists like Addie Wyatt. Joseph Lowery, president of the SCLC spoke to a rally of 400 striking workers saying, “The struggle for civil rights and economic rights is really the same thing” (Goozner 1990: Business, Section 4, pg.1). This approach to labor organizing, which centered racial justice and Black leadership, was necessary in many places of the rural South. For example, in 1995 at a Perdue plant in Dothan, AL, management tried to intimidate Black workers by burning crosses on the company’s property draped in union t-shirts (Compa 2004). The labor movement was forced to contend directly with two of Dr. King’s evils, racism and poverty.

1951	Gainesville, GA Jesse B. Jewell Inc. uses mob violence against AMC
1972	Forest, MS, 60 workers walk off line and form Mississippi Poultry Workers Union
1978	Athens, GA, wildcat strike at Gold Kist plant, 69 employees terminated for walk out
	Durham, NC, two months Amalgamated local 525 strike at Gold Kist plant, joined by the Progressive Labor Party
1979-1980	Laurel, MS, 211 out of 291 workers strike at Sanderson Farms
1982	Buena Vista, GA, 22 Black women walk out Buena Vista, to join RWDSU
1986	Indianola, MS, organize a union with UFCW at Delta Pride (catfish)
1988	NC, 1,000 out of 1,140 wildcat strike at House of Raeford Farms Inc.
1990	Indianola, MS, 1200 walked off the line over unsatisfactory contract negotiations with Delta Pride.
	Wilkes County, NC, 70 drivers at Holy Farms strike and join the Teamsters
1991	Hamlet, NC, Imperial foods fire, killed 25, injured 56, out of 245 workers

*Table 2- Table Labor organizing and action across Southern catfish and poultry processing industries.*

Yet, as growing numbers of Southern Black women organized, historical events were reshaping both the US social contract of the post-war period and the poultry industry. Nationally, unions experienced a general decline after 1954, when unionization peaked at 34.8% of all waged and salaried workers (Desilver 2014). And, in 1981, President Reagan dealt a devastating blow to organized labor by firing over 11,000 Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) workers who remained committed to a wildcat strike (McCartin 2011). While poultry workers, documented above, continued to use this tactic, this once powerful weapon lost much of its strength when mass firings and replacement, rather than negotiation, became the standard employer response. Additionally, Clinton-led neoliberalization, most notably welfare reform combined with NAFTA, restructured labor and the place of the industry within the US South. Unlike other manufacturing sectors within the US, poultry processing experienced continued growth in the 1980s. Tyson, the industry's

leader in production, expanded at a rapid pace, opening plants further south in Mexico while increasing the pace and amount of production at home for both domestic and new markets overseas (Bacon 2012a). The largest companies continued to integrate, and their profits grew by 14%. Line speeds increased from 35 birds per minute (bpm) in 1970 to 91 bpm in 1990. These speedups allowed for the rise of processed chicken (the McNugget<sup>29</sup> being the prime example of this phenomena), and by 2000, 90% of chicken was sold in pieces (Striffler 2005; Simon 2018; Patel and Moore 2018). This meant greater profits, but also an increase in labor demands. Tyson increased from 8,000 to 44,000 employees between 1980 and 1990. Black workers revolted through union organizing documented above as well as tried and trusted strategies of absenteeism and attrition (Griffith 1993; Schwartzman 2013; Gray 2015).<sup>30</sup>

Rather than responding to workers' needs, companies mobilized a labor shortage argument alongside overused pejoratives of Black workers and a lack of "work ethic."<sup>31</sup> This barrage against Black workers did not stop at the workplace but worked to target and criminalize Black motherhood while blaming low-wage workers use of social service programs, such practices have been mobilized against Black

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<sup>29</sup> A Cornelian, Robert C. Baker, invented the chicken nugget in Bruckner Hall in 1963, but McNuggets were not perfected until the 1980. The first trial run took place in Knoxville, TN, and in 1983 the McNugget went national with McDonald's becoming the second largest seller of chicken (Simon 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Once, absenteeism and high turnover rates could be used by workers to gain some autonomy, moving in and out of different low-wage jobs, from the poultry to Wal-Mart, home health care, Burger King, and back again. While this did not provide any changes in wages, Griffith argues that Black workers' weak labor force attachment provided a little dignity for workers with few other forms of control over their work. My own research corroborates this, yet as plants gained control over workforce through immigrant recruitment, this strategy lost its effectiveness as workers were not allowed to return to Pilgrim's if they had already worked more than one term at the plant.

<sup>31</sup> Contrasted to an earlier time, when Black workers were recruited as "loyal" and "willing" workers as white women left "distasteful" work (Department of labor 1929 in Horowitz 1997).

workers generally, and Black working-class women specifically, for centuries (Hunter, 1997, Hill Collins, 2005, Davis, 1981; Roberts, 1999; Kohler-Hausman 2017; hooks 1981). This connected to earlier forms of criticism of plant workers by management who were “satisfied with a minimum income level” (“Emphasis must be placed on absentee problem” 1972 in Weinberg 2003: 14). Claims about Black workers’ “laziness” and lack of “work ethic” were used to justify the “crisis of the poultry industry” and the need to recruit “hard-working” immigrants (Gray 2014). The mobilization of welfare reform alongside heightened anti-Black criminalization and incarceration successfully disorganized the insurgent Southern Black working-class, to which women poultry plant workers were central (Haney, 2010; McCorkel, 2013). This moment encapsulates what Schwartzman (2013) refers to as the “American Dilemma” as the US becomes a nation of jobs that 1) “nobody wants” 2) are shipped overseas and 3) people are not qualified. This dilemma paved the way for the recruitment of undocumented workers. It was strategic on the part of the largest poultry companies to fight growing unionization efforts by a majority Black workforce against increasing line speeds and workplace injustices (Stuesse and Helton 2013; Schwartzman 2013). So, Americans, and specifically Black Americans, *do* want these jobs, but not in the form that they had taken. Plants replaced workers who organized against these body debilitating speeds and 7-day work week. Direct and indirect forms of labor disorganization subsidized the cost for cheap chicken.

### ***Labor Displacement through the “Hispanic Project”***

Latina/o workers were a small part of the poultry industry workforce until the

late 1980s. By the early 1990s, these workers were a quarter of the workforce, and by the 2000s, they made up 75% (Griffith 1993; Guthey 2001; Fink 2003; Guthey 2001; Striffler 2005; Interview with Don Mays, 2000; Interview with Rafael Guadalupe, 2000). These workers did not simply show up, but beginning in the mid 1990s, the largest plants—Tyson, Pilgrim’s, and Gold Kist—actively recruited undocumented immigrants from Mexico, but also from large immigrant populations already living in the US.

On a winter evening in January 2016, I sat down with librarian and local activist Aida who first moved to Athens from Puerto Rico in 1989. Aida, who celebrated her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday while I was in the field, is an energetic, warm, and independent advocate for the Latina/o immigrant community in Athens. Every person in town who works at all with the children of Evergreen or the “Hispanic community” in general knows Aida. She shared her experiences with the poultry industry, which she first encountered when working with families in the early 1990s across Northeast Georgia through migrant ed.

Aida: Yes, we would ask, “How did you come here?” They all said that when they were coming over from their countries usually through Mexico, most of them, there were signs, like in Texas and stuff that says “*Jeo-rja* poultry is looking for employees.” So, they came up, and it took a few to get here and then they would tell their family members, so a lot of people came over. At that time the poultry was called [plant name] and the other one I forgot the name, [plant name] and [plant name]. Out of those people that I used to visit, there was a few ladies that had accidents at work and were fired, and there was a lady that fell off a big gigantic tank that she was cleaning, and they just send her home. Then the next day when I visit... she said, “Oh, I cannot walk because I just fell last night and my back hurts.” And I started telling her, “That’s job related, that’s a job-related accident.” She said, “No, no they tell me I am fired.” I said, “No they can’t!” You hear all kind of stories, all kind of stories. Whenever we had parent-teacher conferences at Chase Street, that was my base Chase Street, they would say, “I cannot go because I have to go after 3 or after 4 because if I go in the middle of the day they’ll take points away.” That’s when I started finding out what was going on there... There was a time that a lot of people were probably

working with not the right documentation to be working so there was a big sweep and all those people were, y'know, let go. Now they have other different kind of way to hire people, but they still have the same treatment (Aida, interview with the author, January 28, 2016).

In Northeast Georgia, there are many anecdotal accounts of the plant recruiting workers at the flea markets and Sunday soccer leagues, and even distributing false documents from the company's HR office. Nick, an organizer for the local union from 2008-2012, discussed the common knowledge people shared about the poultry plant's own hiring practices.

Nick: There were allegations when I first got there that a lot of jobs were being sold in the flea market. That was a common allegation amongst employees, and that was something we heard going back a long time, and one of the people from HR was going out there and soliciting applications. So, I don't know exactly how that process worked. A lot of other companies had similar practices, so I think that would be the way that a lot of that [hiring undocumented workers] got through. At least from the front end (Nick, interview with the author, September 8, 2016).

These allegations were confirmed in 2007 when two HR employees, Scarlet Reyna and Maria Ortega, won a lawsuit against the company, then owned by ConAgra, for discrimination and wrongful termination. One HR employee in particular was targeted for making fake social security cards for undocumented workers, while at the same time consistently denigrating workers with racist comments, calling Latina/o workers "wetbacks," commonly stating, "Those damn Mexican women are only here to get pregnant or are only here to get money from the company," and referring to Black workers as "niggers" who were lazy, used drugs, and had criminal records (Reyna and Ortega v. ConAgra Foods, Inc. 2007).

Similar trends are documented in the pork processing and meatpacking industries (L. Fink 2003; Bacon 2012b; Pachirat 2011; Ribas 2015). The effects of industry recruitment efforts are most visible in the US South. The "Hispanic Project"

describes an early effort by poultry contractors to buss in Cuban workers in the 1990s (Stuesse and Helton 2013). Between 1990-2010, the “Poultry Capital of the World,” saw its immigrant population increase by 543% (US Census 2010). Georgia tied North Carolina as the top immigrant receiving state during this time.<sup>32</sup> As sociologist Kathleen Schwartzman (2013) argues, active recruitment of Latina/o immigrant and migrant labor was a “conscious strategy” of the poultry industry, aimed at lowering labor costs and quelling Black worker-led labor organizing. Mr. Don Mays described the changes as management quickly replaced any workers who complained, caught “raisin’ any ruckus,” or stepped out of “their place” (Mays 2000). The industry made these workers disposable.

In 2001, Tyson, the largest poultry producer in the US, and six managers were indicted with conspiracy to smuggle undocumented workers into the US and knowingly employing them illegally. One manager fatally shot himself a few months later, two others made plea agreements and the other three, along with Tyson, were acquitted in 2003. In 2009, ICE agents raided Pilgrim’s Pride plants in Batesville, Ark., Chattanooga, Tenn., Live Oak, Fla., Moorefield, W. Va. and Mt. Pleasant, Texas and detained 400 employees (Pilgrim’s Pride Corporation 2008). The company reached a settlement the following year, agreeing to pay \$4.5 million to a law enforcement fund at the Department of the Treasury and improve hiring practices. Pilgrim’s also released a public statement denying guilt, “The settlement does not constitute any admission of civil or criminal misconduct on the part of Pilgrim's Pride

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<sup>32</sup> The Pew Research Center reports that 58% of the fastest-growing Hispanic counties between 2000-2007 were in the South (Fry 2008).

or any of its directors, officers, management or other employees" (Garay 2009).

On a global scale, neoliberal restructuring beginning in the 1970s allowed the US poultry industry to grow exponentially through the deregulation of international markets. Additionally, as part of the Washington-led "Development Project" (McMichael 2017), Mexico oriented its agricultural production for export markets, dispossessing farmers from basic food production and essentially "freeing" them to join international migration streams. Tyson aided this process in 1989, when the company expanded production to Mexico, partnering with Trasgo and soon after opening Tyson de Mexico. Newly "freed" Mexican labor was then actively recruited by companies like Tyson with the promise of permanent employment, higher wages, and housing (Griffith 1990; L. Fink 2003). David Bacon (2012a) documents a similar sinister transformation in the pork industry through recruitment to Tar Heel, NC, where former-Mexican pig farmers became pork processing workers in the Smithfield Plant.<sup>33</sup>

While it is difficult to definitively measure the extent of immigrant displacement of Black workers, in her book *The Chicken Trail: Following Workers, Migrants, and Corporations Across the Americas*, Sociologist Kathleen Schwartzman (2013) uses census data to determine that during the same "boom" period of the industry in both production and immigrant recruitment, from 1992-2002, African

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<sup>33</sup> Through trade liberalization, most notably NAFTA, trade for both cheap pork and corn/soybean imports fueled Mexican industrial production at plants like Granjas Carroll de Mexico (GCM) in Veracruz's Perote Valley. The 120,000 wage-workers at GCM are contracted, much like temporary workers in the US, and are therefore denied benefits and profit sharing (required under Mexican Federal Labor Law). The scale of production and pork imports, which increased from 30,000 tons in 1995 to 811,000 tons in 2010, devastated small scale pig farming as an estimated 120,000 Mexican farmers lost access to their livelihoods (Bacon 2011). In 1999 Smithfield purchased GCM, owning production and controlling Veracruzano labor across borders.

Americans did not leave counties where poultry plants existed. For example, in counties surrounding the largest poultry plants in Mississippi, where the industry hired 26,320 more workers, 36,617 African Americans moved into these areas over the same time period (Schwartzman, 2013: 42). Yet, the recruitment and exploitation of a largely undocumented workforce successfully displaced the majority Black workers in the poultry and other meat industries across the South.

Black workers saw and analyzed these changes firsthand, comparing the newcomers' position to the previous treatment of Blacks in the plants. Ms. Faye Bush is insightful here, seeing the continuity within the workforce, "I always say that Blacks and poor whites made Gainesville the chicken capital of the world, and now the Spanish people just carrying it on" (Faye Bush, 2002). Mr. Don Mays commented on this process of labor displacement more directly.

DM: The Hispanics, they were just takin' the jobs that was given. We used to say back in the time, 'all they doin' is gettin' them some new niggers.' The government sayin' well, okay, we supposed to be, Black people supposed to be considered second class citizens, well okay what we gonna do is bring in some more give 'em green cards, give 'em a residence here, take out a little social security. Jesus Christ! (Mays, 2000).

While all the Latina workers I interviewed, regardless of their general sentiments toward Black people, shared management's sentiments that Latina/o workers worked harder than Black workers. Linda, 36-years old, immigrated from Mexico in 1998 and started work at the plant. She comments on the strength of Latinos in racial terms.

Linda: I feel in my work, there is one strong race. I think very strongly, in the work place, but I don't know if you remember but we used to be only Latinos in my workplace, then they start to rid of Latinos. Then they have to hire people, but they have to hire double the number of people for the same job. Then the poultry discovered that they were spending more. It's hard because we have to work harder now. I feel we are stronger (Linda, interview with the author, December 22, 2015).

Although Linda is undocumented, she remains in the plant. She has worked under three different names, but each time she loses her benefits.

Mr. Mays on the other hand, notes that the “Hispanic” workers worked hard, but just like everyone else at the poultry. The difference that made a difference, for him, was that these workers did not complain.

DM: They would work hard, just like anybody else, I am sure they would come in, they had family and things like that. They would they worked very hard. And it got to the point where they would work, they did real good, they would never complain, they’d just come in, and did their work and went home. As to where a lot of us would might complain about something we didn’t like, about safety things, or anything, the raise, the way we was being treated, the way that inspectors was acting, or just any little bitty thing. But then, like I said, it seemed like there came a time when you started voicing your opinion about something a couple of, maybe a week or two later, something may come up and you’re not there anymore. You weren’t replaced with another American, you was replaced with a Hispanic. Boy, they just liked to come in and do their job and go home (Mays, 2000).

The cheapened workforce initially served the poultry industry well. As several workers have noted, in the early days, new immigrant workers were less likely to complain. The language barrier often inhibited communication among native-born and immigrant workers. Legality also shaped native-born workers’ perceptions of their new co-workers, as rumors spread that the new workers were not paying taxes and were working for lower wages. In my field site union membership in the two largest plants dropped from 80% to 40% in one and 50% in the other (Aued 2007). Union leadership expressed this drop as a “cultural” change and made assumptions that Hispanics just simply did not want to join (Aued 2007). But, as undocumented migrants began settling throughout the South, and engaging in, what geographer Jamie Winders (2013) calls “Place-Making” activities, they not only became rooted with families in these receiving communities, but also began to expect and fight for their

rights as workers and as human beings. At the national level, large unions like AFL-CIO, SEIU, and UFCW stood with undocumented immigrants for comprehensive immigration reform for the first time in 2007. While public statements reflected unity, locals across the rural, anti-union South had a more difficult time carrying out this work. Not only did they lack resources, such as bilingual language skills among organizers and plant stewards, but the question of immigration forced unions to confront racial hierarchies within their own organizations.

As early as 2006, the local union attempted to bridge this segregation and collaborated with a local group, the Economic Justice Coalition (EJC) for the union drive at the plant. Mrs. Linda Lloyd, director of the EJC, recalled the organizing drive as I sat with her in her cramped office off West Broad, “The idea was to have a big cookout in both the communities, the Black community over at Riverbank and the Hispanic community out in Evergreen” (Linda Lloyd, interview with author, April 13, 2016). The union also hired bilingual organizers, like Nick Stanley, who I spoke with in the fall of 2016. He recounted the campaign with me over the phone, “It was carried by a few leaders in the plant, men in mechanics and women in debone” (Nick Stanley, interview with author, September 8, 2016). This collaboration paid off as UFCW Local 1996 won the election in September 2006. These groups teamed up again a year later in the months leading up to contract negotiations for the EJC’s annual Labor Day march. The march was followed by lunch and a town hall meeting on poultry workers’ needs involving representatives from the local chapter of the NAACP, faith-based community, labor, and immigrant rights organizations. The late Ray McNair, co-founder of EJC, fervently stood with both citizen and undocumented poultry workers,

stating “your struggle is our struggle” (Aued 2007). Across the South, coalitions among Black and Latina/o workers were gaining strength (Bacon, 2012; Stuesse 2016; Zepeda-Millán 2017). Undocumented Latina/o immigrants began making demands for union recognition and labor rights but also for immigration reform, DACA and DAPA, the right to drive, fair housing, healthcare, and transportation. They began to make demands for their basic right to live, in other words, for their social reproduction.

The largest mass mobilization of undocumented immigrants occurred on May 1, 2006 when hundreds of thousands of immigrants committed to a general strike. This strike hit the poultry industry especially hard. Tyson, Perdue, and Gold Kist were forced to close 22 plants across the South. The legacy of this mass, coordinated action remains a source of strength among immigrant activists and organizers continuing their work today. Yet, four months later, ICE conducted several workplace raids across the country. These raids along with indictments, in some ways disciplined large and small poultry companies from knowingly hiring undocumented immigrants. But they also work as a “gendered, racial removal program” (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013) often with lasting effects on detainees’ mixed-status families and broader communities who remain living and working in the US. Through the framework of racial capitalism, deportations work in relationship to the active criminalization of the Black working-poor. Both limit available strategies for social reproduction by pushing these populations into a state of precarity in both life and work, simultaneously disciplining and cheapening their labor while limiting coalitions with Black workers. From interviews with current and former workers, the plants in this region continued to depend on a majority immigrant Latina/o from the mid 1990s up until 2008-2009.

### ***The Gendered-Racial Removal Program***

The Crider Poultry raid in Stillmore, GA, illustrates the structural contradictions inherent in this industry's active recruitment of undocumented workers. Crider was the largest employer in Stillmore and relied on a majority Black workforce (70% in 1990) until the mid 1990s when recruiters began bringing in undocumented Latino/a workers. Recruiters provided fake documents, poor dormitory housing, and promised steady, permanent work. By the fall of 2006, the Black workforce had dwindled to only 15% (Martin 2014).<sup>34</sup> After Labor Day weekend that year, ICE arrested 120 workers during a workplace raid. Those who were not arrested left in fear of deportation and Crider lost 75% of its Hispanic workforce. These workers made up 900 of the 1,000 plant employees. News reports following the raid documented the plant's struggle to find replacement workers as the town's population dropped from 1,000 to only 532 within a few weeks. The desperation is illuminated in post-raid coverage as one reporter stated, "Now the company has again turned to blacks and anyone else it can find, including about 40 felons from a detention center and 30 homeless men from a mission, to keep running" (Glanton 2006). Hmong refugees were also recruited from as far away as Minnesota and Wisconsin (Ludden 2007; Perez and Dadethe 2007).

Although the plant I worked in was never raided, in April 2008 ICE raided several of the largest plants across the South, arresting 400 "hourly, non-management

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<sup>34</sup> David Purtle, Crider president hired Hispanics because "We want people who want to work and are willing to work every day" (in Martin 2009: 97).

employees.” Pilgrim’s Pride released an official statement a few days after emphasizing their use of e-verify and ICE’s “Best Hiring Practices,” working for the common goal of “eliminating the hiring or employment of unauthorized workers (Pilgrim’s Pride Corporation 2008). Similar to the situation in Stillmore, all the Latina workers I interviewed said the majority of the Latina/o workers left the plant or were fired at the end of 2008 and early 2009, and the largest plants returned to a majority Black workforce. Some workers attributed this turnover to President Obama’s election. Others, like Alessandra, currently working through a Temporary Protective Status (TPS) work permit as a Salvadoran refugee, couldn’t really explain the turnover, but recalls people leaving every day, “They took them [undocumented workers] to the office and they tell them, ‘so we need your birth certificate, and your social. If you don’t have those papers with you, please don’t come back.’ They don’t be mean, but they have to. We cry a lot” (Alessandra, interview with author, January 31, 2016). This personal account was repeated time and time again and was not limited to my field site. Tom Frischitze, a labor attorney was working in Alabama around this time for the Immigrant Justice branch of the Southern Poverty Law Center. He found a similar situation between 2007-2008 where plants would fire batches of workers, 30-40 at a time. He described the situation to me over an interview in January 2016.

TF: The workers felt like it was clear the company knew they were employing a large number of undocumented workers, but if they actually verified everyone at once and laid off everyone at once who was undocumented they wouldn’t be able to replace them. So, they were intentionally doing it on this rolling basis, so it would give the employer to find workers with authorization to replace undocumented workers in smaller groups (Tom Frischitze, interview with the author, January 22, 2016).

As word spread across the plant, undocumented workers voluntarily left. This mass exodus may be attributed in part to the ICE raids and the plant's change in hiring policies, but workers also left as anti-immigrant laws were passed across the state of Georgia and in other parts of the South. These laws worked to both criminalize and discipline undocumented immigrants. Beginning in the mid 2000s, Georgia passed several rounds of legislation, increasing the power of local law enforcement's role in collaboration with ICE. Although later declared unconstitutional, many counties across Georgia were compliant with Section 287(g) of the 2009 Immigration and Nationality Act, which partnered local police departments with immigration offices and detention centers. House Bill 87, passed in 2011, was rivaled only by the infamous SB1070 in Arizona in the level of severity and national media attention. HB87 requires all public and many private sector employers to use E-Verify to determine their employees' immigration status. HB87 also requires proof of citizenship to receive any public benefits. Senate Bill 350, passed in 2008, greatly limited the movement of undocumented immigrants by making it a felony if caught four times driving without a license within a 5-year period. Activists in my field site call this a "D.W.B" (Driving While Brown) and argue that this law increased the rate of racial profiling outside of their neighborhoods and the public schools. In a recent survey conducted by UGA's Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute (LACSI), 75% of the Latina/o community in Athens drive with fear and do not drive more than is necessary (Calva 2016). These laws work to both legally criminalize Latino immigrants while deepening the conditions of their precarious labor recruitment. Yet, at the same time, such laws do little to improve the conditions of the native-born working-poor who

remain. I will return to this issue of immigration and criminalization in Chapter 4.

A few undocumented workers remain in the plants, relying on fake documents. For the few Latina women who remain, often their helmets display a name that is different than their own, with management aware of their changing documentation. Yet, it is important not to confuse such management practices as somehow humanitarian, because when workers return to the plant, they lose all of the benefits they previously earned, like paid vacation or wage raises. If history of this industry teaches us anything, the firing of undocumented workers and a return to a majority Black workforce was a response both to growing visibility, dissent, and organizing among an undocumented immigrant population, nationwide, as well as expanding xenophobic and anti-immigrant legislation across much of the American South. While most undocumented workers I interviewed left the plant in 2008 and 2009 when the company began using E-verify and ICE “Best Hiring Practices,” many just moved to a smaller, less regulated, non-unionized plant about half an hour away. Others moved into lower-paying jobs at nearby food processing plants in bakeries or prepared foods, or into under-the-table restaurant and service work. For the few who remained on temporary work permits or maneuvering other precarious forms of documentation, the work has only become more difficult. The risk and fear experienced by undocumented workers who stay in the poultry is mirrored throughout their communities as thousands of undocumented immigrants continue to live in the poultry towns that brought them here. Many undocumented students, poultry workers, and activists I interviewed express feeling “stuck” or “in-between” as they have built families and communities in a place where they are never really welcomed, one that is never really

theirs.

***Black Workers Return and “Can’t Wait to Get Out!”***

Since the workplace raids spanning 2006 to 2008, many plants, like Crider Poultry, have returned to a majority Black workforce. After the raid, Crider was forced to increase wages first by 40 cents, then a dollar along with bonuses and overtime pay. Many new recruits were initially drawn to Crider for the relatively higher wages and housing. Yet, once these workers arrived, they found living and working conditions were not enough to keep them there. The dormitories that once housed undocumented workers were quickly shut down after new workers complained about the conditions. One worker commented on the dormitories saying he felt immediately degraded, and made plans to leave, “I’ve never lived like this and I can’t wait to get out” (Glanton 2006). Workers complained about long working hours, health and safety problems, and of supervisors who did not respect them. These supervisors constantly compared their work ethic to the “Mexicans” before them. Oliver, a former nursing home aid observed, “They want us to be like the Mexicans, working for little or nothing and not complaining. But we won’t take it.” A spokeswoman for Crider dismissed these claims, saying that they were made by “people who are not intent on working” (Glanton 2006).

While the pay lured workers in, most made plans to leave as soon as they could. They could not and would not stand the ways the supervisors treated them. One worker even noted the racist attitudes of the supervisors and went as far as comparing

the working conditions to lynchings of the Jim Crow South, “One day all of us are going to be hanging on the line instead of the chickens.” Ms. Smiley, a Black woman who came to work at Crider from two hours away, was fired after leaving the line to see the nurse when a chicken fell from the line causing her to hit her head on a pole. She told the reporter that the supervisor cussed her out. She responded, “I’m 42 years old. If you cuss at me, I’m going to cuss you back.” Other Black workers were fired for joining together and questioning their employer about paychecks that were shorted and alleged tax withdrawals when they hadn’t filled out the proper tax forms. Just four months after the raid, the plant’s turnover reached 300% and relied on a workforce of 65% Black, 30% white, and just 5% Hispanic. Similar shifts have also occurred across Georgia, evident in the plant where I worked. Nick, the union organizer, describes this change back to local Black workers, and later the use of refugee workers.

Nick: When they started cracking down on immigration concerns, they found that they couldn’t have a lot of Hispanic workers and then replacing them with a lot of local workforce, a lot of poor local workforce, which turned out to be mostly, vast majority Black, but there were, I don’t know maybe 20% white, and then by the end of my time there they were importing refugees who were, they would come to Atlanta as refugees then they would get referred to work that way. [The poultry] was one of the employers who was recruiting. They would come to work each day in a van, fifteen people from Somalia, ten people from... stuff like that. That was interesting. That was a hard group to talk to. There wasn’t a lot of Somalians over here and there wasn’t a lot of people who could communicate with them. I tried some French with a group from the Ivory Coast, from back in my high school days, but I found out I couldn’t relate simple concepts about what a union was, I didn’t have the language. That was the race to constantly be ahead of the detached labor force (Nick, interview with author, September 8, 2016).

While I was in the plant, 75-80% of the workers were Black, and 90% of line workers were women (field notes, April 2015).

### *Anti-Immigration and Black Workers*

When I explain my fieldwork to friends and colleagues, I am often asked how Black workers view Latina/o immigrants and the larger issues of immigration law and reform. Going back to Don Mays' comments in the early period of immigrant recruitment during the late 1980s and early 1990s, Black workers who saw the "Hispanic" workers take up more positions inside the plant, rarely blamed the newcomers, and instead saw their replacement as a tactic by management and sometimes the federal government, as he comments these were the "new niggers" (Mays 2000). Mays' perspective and my own findings substantiate ethnographic and historical research conducted by LaGuana Gray (2014), Vanesa Ribas (2015), and Angela Stuesse (2016) with a few slight differences. Stuesse (2016), working primarily with Latina/o immigrant populations in the Mississippi poultry industry, found that Black workers expressed anti-immigrant sentiment not on a personal level but rather at an institutional level, seeing immigrants receiving entitlements that Black people never received.<sup>35</sup> Ribas (2015) counters this argument through an 18-month ethnography working on the line in a hog processing plant in North Carolina. She found that, yes, occasionally Black workers expressed anti-immigrant sentiments, but only through personal interactions. These were not really about structural positions vis-a-vis "Hispanic" workers, but rather through their relationship to whites (as "closer"). In turn, Hispanic workers saw themselves as more exploited than Black

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<sup>35</sup> See her interview with Keisha Brown, angered by the success of Latina/o immigrants. "I'm gonna be honest. When I first started seeing how they was coming over here, you know, and I was looking, I was like, 'Man, they just heading over here. They got a brand new house, car. I done been here for ten years, and I can't even get a house,' you know?" (Stuesse 2016: 113).

workers, shaping their racist attitude towards Blacks drawing an affinity to whites based on anti-Black racism in their home countries and a lack of face-to-face interaction with white workers as equals (2015). Finally, LaGuana Gray (2014), similar to my research, centers Black women's perspectives on these "newcomers." She argues that Black workers, "who are accustomed to having some small measure of power, derived from the knowledge that the plant could not operate without black labor," must now share this power, with the threat of being usurped by Latino workers (Gray 2014: 140).

By the time I entered the plants, Black workers had returned to the plants, replacing undocumented Latina/o workers on the lines. My findings on the line mirrored much of Ribas' conclusions, in that Black workers rarely expressed anti-immigrant sentiment, having regained majority status. Kurwana, a 24-year old Black woman commented on immigration and labor in a way that was echoed throughout oral histories with Black women.

Kurwana: The Mexican women be working extra hard, I don't see how they do it, like for real. They just be focused. They don't even turn around and smile until the end they be like, "Hey," I be like, "Girl, I notice you doing!" I be like, "Slow down mama, slow down, it ain't that serious." For real! [laughing] I feel like the Mexican women, I'm a black woman myself, I feel like the Mexican women come in there and outshine everybody. They'll work. You know some people now like, "They shouldn't be living, Mexicans in our country, this and this." They're coming over here doing good. I feel like, everybody needs an opportunity. I feel like, they're coming in and do their work. Even the men, you see the Mexican men out here, they're gonna work, they work for theirs (Kurwana and Dominique, interview with author, April 27, 2016).

Kurwana in some ways respects the "Mexican" work ethic, which mirrors many white managers' comments and those made in liberal media and among immigrant rights groups. Latina/o immigrants work hard. They do not complain. They should be

allowed to stay. Yet, Kurwana, also through experience, makes the comment to “slow down mama,” to take it easy, as a tactic not only to protect one’s body, but also because the work, processing chicken for a giant agribusiness “ain’t that serious.” It’s important to place these comments in a longer history, to think about how they represent the sorts of everyday forms of resistance I’ll discuss in the next chapter, but also how they represent a critique of the kind of self-exploitative “work ethic” so foundational to the American Dream.

Yet, similar to Ribas, most interactions among these groups was limited to the workplace. Today, Black workers only occasionally interact with Latina/o workers outside of the plant, at second jobs like fast food, when eating at Mexican restaurants, once a month at the club outside of the main downtown, and at stores like Wal-Mart and Kroger. But for the most part Black and Latina/o community space and neighborhoods are segregated, although in the early days of Latina/o immigration to the area, this was not always the case. When I asked Betty, a 45-year old Black woman who worked at five different plants between 96-2002, if she interacted with Latinas/os outside of work, she replied, “I don’t even know where they live!”<sup>36</sup> (Interview with Betty, February 18, 2016). With undocumented immigrants forced to live on the outskirts of town and as they are increasingly pushed out of the poultry, there are fewer and fewer spaces in which these communities to interact, much less build together.

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<sup>36</sup> This is after jokingly saying, “We live like the Mexicans!” because she lives in a three bedroom house with eleven other people (Interview with Betty, February 18, 2016).

***“Ain’t No Job for a Mother!”***

Counter to popular rhetoric, for many of the most disenfranchised populations across the American South "the poultry" provides an essential, and even desirable form of "high" low-wage employment. As outlined above, working-class Black women have held a long-standing relationship with the poultry. Once, absenteeism and high turnover rates could be used by workers to gain some autonomy by moving in and out of a variety of low-wage jobs and piecemeal social services, from the poultry, to Wal-Mart, temporary disability, home health care, Burger King, and back again. Poultry plant workers with little control over the labor process would strategically take temporary pay cuts to provide brief reprieve for their bodies and momentary dignity for their souls (Griffith 1993). Yet, in the early-to-mid 1990s the largest plants used undocumented workers to destroy Black worker organizing, then easily escaped responsibility for these practices. Combined with disappearing social supports and increased policing and criminalization for a population with a historically tenuous relationship with the so-called welfare state, there is less dignity or choice involved in Black women’s decision-making to move in and out of this work. The obligations unique to women workers, especially when they are the head of household, underlie both their precarious positions as well as the everyday forms of resistance. Workers must strategically piece together both life and work, but as one interviewee, a 32-year-old Black mother of five noted, the poultry “ain’t no job for a mother” (Field notes, Tuesday, March 3, 2015).

Major workforce demographic changes in the poultry have not simply happened, but are historically shaped by industry relocation, recruitment, hiring, and

firing practices, and union-busting campaigns with the goal of both disciplining and cheapening labor. Industry strategies work alongside state and national policies from the Agricultural Adjustment Act of the New Deal to neoliberal restructuring of social services and welfare reform to produce a state of “non-working working-class” which must be understood as normalized for many members of the Black working-class. This has implications for the labor movement and requires us to re-center this segment of workers’ experience of contemporary racial capitalism, as I do in the next two chapters. This is not a “new” condition, but rather a “lifetime condition” (c.f. Arrighi 1990: 53).





*Figure 9- Time, Space, Work-Discipline, February 28, 2015, photo by author*

## **CHAPTER 2: “THIS IS YOUR HOME!” TIME, SPACE, WORK-DISCIPLINE**

It’s still dark out by the time I arrive at the plant. In the first few months of work, I am still careless, so I bike to the plant. The air is crisp and cool, and I feel a conditioned sense of accomplishment for being up so early while many are still sleeping. With each car that passes by, I wonder if they too are heading to the poultry. We rush to get on the line by 6:15am, relieving women from the night shift. The speed with which I get to my station determines Ms. Mary’s mood as we exchange places. If I’m a little early she smiles at me and tells me, “good morning baby.” If I’m just barely on time or late her eyes pierce through me with annoyance and anger. By my second shift “drawin” the birds, I’ve learned how to pull out the insides while keeping

the gizzards intact, what male chicken testicles look like, how to distinguish sick from healthy birds, and how not to bust my ass trying to catch the birds going too fast. This is the second day of what will be an almost six-month stint working at one of the largest chicken plants in the state of Georgia. While friends and colleagues considered this an accomplishment (although my goal was to make it ten months), most women I interviewed after leaving the plant were unimpressed, and one woman, Derica, even busted out laughing at my “little time” at the poultry! (Derica, interview with author, June 16, 2016). This was a humbling experience to say the least. Still, that little time I spent at the poultry was invaluable for this project. I entered “*the Poultry*” or “*la pollera*” with many expectations about *who* would be working inside, working the jobs that “no American wants!” Yet, the return to a workforce of majority Black women reflects a larger, ugly state of low-wage work in the US, and racial capitalism more broadly.

In this chapter I focus on the ways in which time and space are used to discipline workers within the walls of the poultry plant. Labor discipline is most directly tied to production demands and line speeds but is also indirectly carried out through everyday practices such as punching-in, “donning” and “doffing” protective gear, rushed lunch and bathroom breaks, and pay structure. Additionally, workers’ movement throughout the plant is monitored and highly disciplined. In the relatively short time I was employed, several rules were implemented to change the geography of the plant in order to better surveill workers’ mobility and restrict access to the communal and resting spaces. I begin this chapter with a focused description of “getting hired” at the poultry. In this section I draw heavily on field notes from my

first few days at the plant. Writing this section has caused me to laugh out loud recalling the story-telling skills of workers like Anthony in contrast to my own nervousness, and how utterly lost I felt and must have looked. Highlighting this process, what Guy Standing (2014b, 2014a) refers to as “work-for-labor,” extricates the forms of work-discipline people experience from the moment they start their precarious career at the poultry.

I supplement this localized snapshot of work-discipline in the poultry with a discussion of federal level changes in poultry processing line speeds, set by the USDA Food Safety Inspection Services (FSIS). As line speeds increase the industry steals time from workers in an effort to give more time to consumers. This facilitates the production of cheap processed chicken, often with disabling effects on workers’ bodies. Line speeds are tied to new inspection methods that maximize production first and consumer health and worker safety second. I present workers’ responses to both time, space work-discipline as observed in this (near) six-month ethnography, and place these within longer histories discussed in the previous chapter, marked by formal strikes, walkouts, and unionization drives. Through ethnography, it is possible to value what James Scott (1987, 1990) calls “everyday forms of resistance” as witnessed on the line and in the social spaces of the plant. These actions were often in response to what EP Thompson (1967) refers to as workers’ changing “time-sense.” Thompson argues that capitalist labor exploitation not only depends on large scale systemic change (private property, wage work, industrialization), but also on a reconfiguration of values, expressed, in the case of “Time, Work-Discipline,” through workers’ changing relationship to time. In order for waged work to “work,” it had to be re-

conceptualized as belonging to the employer, whereas all the things that workers do outside of the working day were reframed as wasteful and inefficient. For Thompson, this devaluation is both gendered, represented through the “labourer’s wife” who maintains a pre-industrial sense of time, and racialized, through the Mexican workers who return to their village for planting and harvesting as “indolent and child-like people” whose lack of time-discipline served as “proof of a natural inferiority” (1967: 91) and plantation workers in Cameroon who questioned the unending work without breaks, asking “no be ‘e go die?” “would he not die?” (F.A. Wells and W.A. Warmington 1962: 128 in Thompson 1967: 92).

While people’s working day at the poultry is regulated by the automation of animal slaughter, with lines running at all hours, day and night, control over their time is never complete, and is contested by workers and re-worked by employers. As discussed in the previous chapter, workers in the early days of the industry had more control over their time, coming in late and/or hungover on Mondays after a weekend of fun, high rates of absenteeism, quitting and returning depending on their own needs. Workers also frequently referred to “the good old days” when there was no clocking-in, the lines did not move so fast, and there was more freedom to cut up, sing, and dance to get through the day. Yet, over time, the industry has found ways to “tighten the screw”<sup>37</sup> of labor discipline through labor displacement and weakening labor

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<sup>37</sup> To borrow from EP Thompson, “Thus enclosure and agricultural improvement were both, in some sense, concerned with the efficient husbandry of the time of the labour-force. Enclosure and the growing labour-surplus at the end of the eighteenth century *tightened the screw* for those who were in regular employment; they were faced with the alternatives of partial employment and the poor law, or submission to a more exacting labour discipline. It is a question, not of new techniques, but of a greater sense of time-thrift among the improving capitalist employers” (1967: 78, emphasis added). So that time, work-discipline is not merely about what happens within the plant, but also changes in legislation and moral ideas about work and leisure.

movements, increased mechanization and line speeds, and workfare policies creating an environment in which workers are disposable.

For Marx, the relationship of machinery to labor is an essential part of this process. He describes this relationship in chapter 15 of Capital Volume I. “The instrument of labour now becomes an industrial form of perpetual motion. It would go on producing forever, if it did not come up against certain natural limits in the shape of the weak bodies and the strong wills of its human assistants” ([1867] 1992: 527). Through automation and deregulation, the poultry industry both lengthens the working day and speeds up production to avoid economic obsolescence of old machinery. Yet the non-uniform bodies of the birds provide a “natural limit” to full automation. In the US, workers process poultry around the clock, with three shifts and “anti-social” hours, forcing employees to work overtime, while sick, during machine breakdowns, and even over federal holidays, while requiring new technologies to grow birds and facilitate unnatural cycles in the hen house.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, if we look beyond the plant’s walls, even this time is taken from the worker, through the physical and mental exhaustion of work exacerbated by external demands of social reproduction and control of Black workers’ lives outside.

Additionally, to analyze the space of work discipline I consider the relationship between supervisors’ and workers’ view and use the space within the plant. This

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<sup>38</sup> “In 1928, it took 112 days to raise a 2.8 pound chicken that ate roughly 12.5 pounds of food as it grew to maturity. Forty years later, it took half that time for the grow-out, the industry term for the amount of time it takes for a chick to reach its full weight as a broiler. Ten years after that (1978) broilers raised on animal farms were 25% bigger than their predecessors were and ate only half as much feed. In 1995, the average industrial chicken hit the scales at six-plus pounds. It took forty-seven days for the animals to get that big, and, along the way, they consumed only ten pounds of feed” (Simon 2017). Time not only of workers but of birds growth.

relationship to space is highly visible outside of the plant.<sup>39</sup> Racial capitalism creates the dispossession and global migration of undocumented workers from the global south while reconfiguring Black workers' life's work through the projects of housing and urban development, the racial-spatial fix of mass incarceration, and studentification-led displacement. Referring to recent social media outcry over #BBQBetty and #PermitPatty, rapper-turned-filmmaker Boots Riley recently wrote, "[poor] people of color are often criminalized for simply being in plain sight" (2018). Relatedly, the invisibility of the plant, "hidden in plain sight" as Timothy Pachirat (2011) similarly describes the Omaha beef slaughterhouses of his ethnography, contributes to the sustained segregation not only of the act of slaughter at the poultry but also entire populations. Inside the built environment of the plant, workers are corralled through fenced and barbed wire gates, along dirty halls and unkept bathrooms,<sup>40</sup> and inside damp and dimly lit production floors. Space inside the plant is consistently re-made so that workers have few places to call their own. The only place of privacy and reprieve then becomes inside of workers' cars in the parking lot. Yet even these spaces are surveillanced with video cameras and the occasional aging security guard.

Workers are not passive recipients of disciplining strategies; and often defy their positions as mere appendages to speedups and automation. While no large scale,

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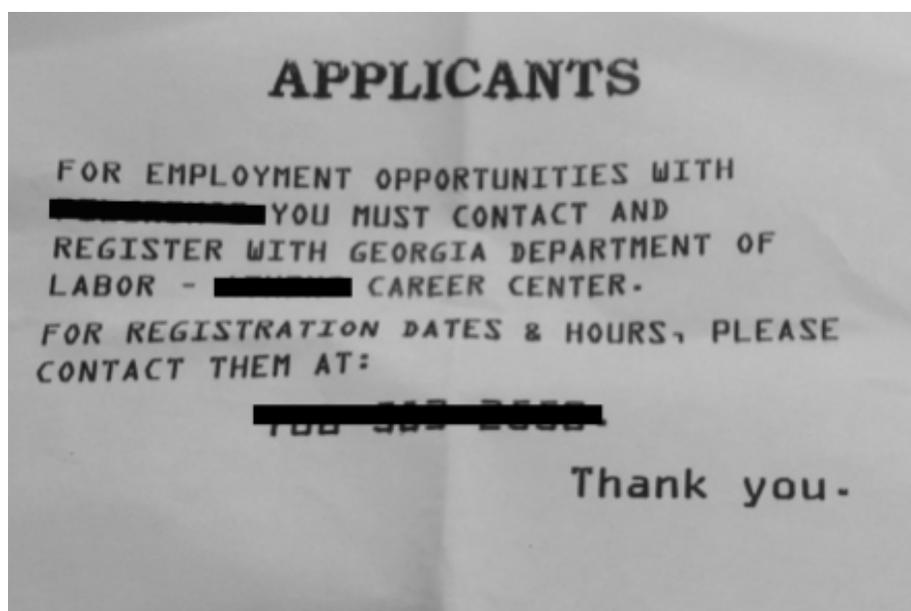
<sup>39</sup> See Melissa Gilbert's (1998) classic study "Race," Space, and Power: The Survival Strategies of Working Poor Women for a spatial analysis of the relationship between "place-based personal networks" and survival strategies among poor white and African-American women with children in Worcester, MA. For an understanding of spatial surveillance, particularly the use of CCTV and trespass law, see Don Mitchell and Nik Heynen (2014) "The Geography of Survival and the Right to the City: Speculations on Surveillance, Legal Innovation, and the Criminalization of Intervention."

<sup>40</sup> It was common practice for workers to "stay overtime" to clean the bathrooms and public spaces of the plant for a little extra money on their checks.

organized labor action occurred during my employment at the plant, workers practiced what James Scott (1990) terms “everyday forms of resistance.” These actions are essential in understanding how and why more formal, large scale labor actions might and do emerge. As Lila Abu-Lughod argues, these forms are “diagnostic” of power, reflecting how workers understand their relationship to power embodied by the line leaders, supervisors, USDA inspectors, union reps, HUD managers, and DFCS social workers. These actions are of course qualitatively different, but not disparate from the kinds of actions typically seen as Political. Robin D.G. Kelley documents these actions of infrapolitics, again borrowing from Scott (1990), for working-class Black men and women in the Jim Crow South of Alabama (1990; 1994). The concept of infrapolitics, according to Scott, encapsulates the daily struggle of subordinate groups, that, “like infrared rays, [are] beyond the visible end of the spectrum. That it should be invisible... is in large party by design—a tactical choice born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power” (Scott 1990 in Kelley 1994: 8). These actions are not to be measured on a continuum, but rather as Robin D.G. Kelley argues, “the relationship between black working-class infrapolitics and collective, open engagement with power is dialectical, not a teleological transformation from unconscious accommodation to conscious resistance” (1993: 112). Theft, foot-dragging, rule-breaking, dancing, singing, the destruction of property, absenteeism, tardiness, easing up, and faking it all reflect the daily oppositional strategies of Black workers at the poultry. Reading Thompson and Kelley together, I hope to think through the ways that workers are disciplined, but also how they might resist and even revolt.

This chapter sets up my argument in Chapter 3 tracing the conditions of life’s

work for Black workers outside, in their communities surrounding the plant, and Chapter 4 where I connect the thread of social reproduction under racial capitalism to the day-to-day experiences of the surrounding undocumented community, in spite of their changing employment at the poultry. Although these groups are seemingly disconnected by spatial segregation, language, and culture, their lives are intimately connected through both life and work. I examine their relationships to one another through what sociologist Vanesa Ribas (2015) calls “prismatic engagement” operating through the mediating role of white supremacy in the US, essential to racial capitalism.



*Figure 10- Step one of application process, October 20, 2014, photo by author*

### ***Getting Hired at the Poultry***

I was hired through the Department of Labor (DOL), aka the “unemployment office,” through a routine batch hiring where nearly 100 people showed up looking for

a job at the chicken plant. It was a chilly November day, weeks before Thanksgiving, shortly after my 28<sup>th</sup> birthday. To be hired, you have to acquire a referral, which requires the time to make multiple visits to the unemployment office. On many of these visits, I encountered entire families present at the office, mothers with infants and toddlers in tow. For people without reliable transportation, making the trip to the unemployment office is a one to two-hour endeavor even though it is a few miles from downtown. We gather in a large side room of the DOL to receive a short “orientation” on the advantages of working at the plant. We are also warned, if anyone has been hired more than once their application will not be accepted. There is a “database,” we are told, which keeps track of all these things. If any of us had a little too much fun over the weekend, maybe smoked a little and are unable to pass the drug test, the HR rep advises us, “just slip on out the back, and come back the following week when your system is clean.” The room is almost entirely Black, except for me and a few white men applying to be chicken catchers and mechanics. There are about twice as many women as men. We are reminded that the chicken plant is one of the few places in town that hires people convicted of a felony. We all rush to fill out applications. Some people jump in the line to be “interviewed” while still hastily filling in the final lines of the packet. Interviews are less than 5 minutes, where representatives from HR screen us, asking, “What job do you want? Are you sure you want this job, it’s tough work?” They then scribble some notes and are finished with you. Already there is a stark contrast in the time invested by both parties.

Later that afternoon, I receive a call back from HR. I am hired. “Come on Monday, bring your ID, and tell them to send you to Maria in HR.”

(Field notes, Thursday, November 6, 2014).

I arrive at the security gate at 6:50am, show the guard my ID, and follow the stream of workers into the plant. The halls are loud, active, as people are moving in and out as shifts change from night to day. There are nine of us waiting for orientation, four Black women, four Black men. I am the only Asian person, and I stick out like a sore thumb. I wonder where all the Latina/o workers are. From all popular and academic accounts, these plants are supposed to be powered by the labor of predominantly Mexican and Central American workers. But this is not what I find.

We are held in a small room to be interviewed by the director of HR and to fill out the remaining paper work. All the other new hires will work the night shift, the more popular of the two. It is known for having a higher turnover rate and a younger workforce. As we sit and wait in the small office, people talk about Gurley's<sup>41</sup> ACL surgery, the work ahead, their next meal, family, and especially their children. We wait for hours to do a physical exam and take our first drug test, the second disciplining measure we encounter, after the "security" gate and ID check. One guy in orientation has to come back tomorrow because he brought the wrong ID. Drug and alcohol use are monitored throughout your tenure at the plant, but really only matter if a worker falls or cuts them self. Blaming workers for their injuries is a common tactic, which leads to a general distrust of the plant nurse and underreporting.

People are nervous, worried they'll fail. I'm surprised by how many people

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<sup>41</sup> UGA's beloved running back, Todd Gurley.

have hidden urine on their bodies, so they can pass the test. I took Niacin last night, after being advised by my more experienced little brother. I made a rookie mistake of my own a week ago. One guy hears they make you take off your jacket and empty your pockets. The women are worried the nurse will do a strip search; they will not let her do a strip search! As everyone talks openly about this, a younger guy who goes by “D”, twenty-two, says this is just a daytime cover for his real work at night as a “Classic city” pusher. This seems to impress a young woman he is flirting with. He has a daughter which he proudly says he takes care of, even when he was locked up for six months, he still sent her money.

At first, I am not fully included in these conversations, but I try to butt my way in. I play up my Southern accent, something I hide up North, in an attempt to not to seem like such a nerdy academic by comparison. Not only am I the only Asian American, but I am also the only woman without kids. The sister has eight kids, the mom has three, and the younger twenty-something woman from out in “the country” in Greensboro, has four. She tells D and the other women, “all my kids have the same father, but he won’t have anything to do with them.” Another guy comes in wearing a bright, fluorescent orange hoodie. He is 24 and lives in the men’s shelter about a mile from the unemployment office. He talks about being locked up several times. While in the hallway a woman tells him, “Stop talking about being in jail! It’s like you’re being all proud about it. That ain’t nothing to be proud of.” They have a whole conversation on why he was locked up in the first place, what he must have been doing. He’s been banned from several public housing complexes and was caught smoking weed outside his family’s apartment on Thanksgiving. Cops came by and arrested him. The cops are

always harassing him; he shares another story about a time at CVS after a UGA game. The rest of the men in the room look tired of his talking. One of the men, who I later meet, Anthony, has worked 10 years doing live hang at a smaller plant about a half hour away. Another man with long braids, the first to arrive, is eager. "I'm ready to make that \$12, just gotta' get through the first five days!" He asks Anthony what kind of gloves they wear. Anthony describes the process, and then says, you know that cliché, "go to bed with the chickens wake up with the rooster?" Everyone laughs. Later, I see him helping the guy from the shelter with his application materials. It seems like he's having a hard time reading the form.

While we wait, a small, middle-aged Latina woman walks in the room and sits down. She has paper towels wrapped around her wrists and is opening a small sample packet of Bio-Freeze to rub on her shoulder. This room also doubles as the nurse's waiting room. The woman, who I later come to know as Cristina, has been working at the plant since she moved here from Mexico over fourteen years ago. They frequently move her around, and she currently works at a small table at the end of the line, cleaning the livers. She was in draw-hand, like me, but she complained about her hands and was moved. She has constant trouble with her hands, back, shoulder, and especially her wrists, even after having carpal tunnel surgery. She tries to make small talk, but her broken English is mostly ignored by the others. I try to speak with her in Spanish. She asks where I will work. "Debone?" I shake my head no. "Evisceración?" she asks. "Ah, sí," I say. She shakes her head, "yo también! Me duelen las manos. Tus manos," she points, "it hurts." She rubs her hands. I realize she has wrapped the paper towels around her wrists to create make-shift braces.

I finally see the nurse, an older white woman in a pink shiny tracksuit, think 1982, who carries a permanent disdain for everyone. After a few “yes ma’am’s” she treats me markedly different than she treats the other workers, even complaining to me about everyone who comes in. “He comes in here every day saying his arms hurt but then laughin,’ smilin’! If you’re hurtin’ you don’t cut up like that.” She is antagonistic and distrusts the workers who come in, and I feel ashamed of her affinity towards me. The nurse’s office becomes an unwelcome and even dangerous space at the plant. After I successfully pass the drug test, I leave the plant around 1:00pm. Five unpaid hours.

(Field notes, Monday, November 10, 2014).

### ***Orientation***

We return to the plant the following Thursday for two days of orientation. After we take photos for our IDs, we sit in the waiting room for about three hours. We get called back to HR one by one to for them to make copies of our ID and to fill out some tax forms. While we’re waiting, Anthony starts talking about food. He goes off about how big people are these days because the guy with braids is talking about how HR said he has to lose weight in the 45-day probation period. Anthony says, “We’ll lose weight alright, bending and scooping chickens all day!” Anthony starts talking about the steroids in meat. McDonald’s is the worst, he knows from experience because he worked there 15 years ago. He says, “That shit don’t bleed! Meat should bleed. It’s 20% beef, what is that other stuff?” He goes on to talk about how if you leave a french fry in your car, and you find it weeks later, it still look like a french fry! “Real

potatoes, they don't do that shit, they start sprouting and molding and growing algae and other shit, but McDonald's food don't spoil."

D starts talking about chicken fingers, "They're just this paste. I seen a documentary about it...but they taste good though!" Anthony agrees, "Hell yeah they're good. Put a little sweet and sour sauce on that, and mmm. They're good, but they're killing us! Diabetes, is the silent killer of Black men. Diabetes, high blood pressure all of that. That's why we got what we got. Back in the day people grew their own food!" An older Black woman, named Denetra, talks about how she has to manage diabetes with some pills now. She has to stop drinking juice, but she just can't. This continues into another conversation about Soul food, fried okra, fried green tomatoes. The man with the braids says, "I was craving fried green tomatoes so bad the other day, so I just put a slice of regular tomato on some bread." Anthony laughed, "Man, you just wanted some bread. Bread makes everything taste good!" After everyone's gotten nice and hungry, Anthony tries to give D advice on life, he said he was a pusher back in the day, but "when you get old, you gotta slow down. There are all kinds of legit ways to make a lot of money, you just don't know." The man with braids chimes in about his hustle after the football games, while everyone is in the stadium he goes around and steals the coolers of beer, liquor, folding chairs, "They just leave it all!" he says. Anthony laughs, "well they were coming back for it!" Briefly the conversation turns to music, favorite rappers, that new T.I. Anthony says he used to like Gucci Mane, but when he was asked his opinion about Mike Brown, a few months after he was murdered by the police, Anthony said, "all that fool could talk about 'we're turnin,' we got bottles...' without caring about Mike Brown. That ain't

right. I can't stand behind a Black man who says that."

After everyone finishes the paperwork we go through the plant, past the cafeteria, up past a really nasty smelling section of Debone, and up five flights of stairs to the training room. There are red signs with white writing that point you in the direction of the "PLANT FLOOR" or the "TRAINING ROOM." The room is a large rectangular shape with brownish walls and long tables with chairs facing a large pull-down screen. Along the walls are inspirational signs from the company. The funniest one says, ["Always" Remember Safety First]. I'm not sure why the always is in quotes. There are twenty-seven of us, surprisingly more men than women, 18: 9. Most of the men are going to be chicken catchers or live hang. One man is white, then there's me, and everyone else is Black. Most are young, under 30. We meet with Kendra, from HR. Kendra is a Black woman who worked on the line and made her way into the office. There is a general antagonism between us and Kendra, and she sends it back treating us as if we're children. We are kept in the room where we watch cheesy occupational safety videos, meet with union reps, and fill out even more paperwork. After each short training video we have to collectively answer quiz questions using handheld clickers. Kendra gives us the answers, and threatens us throughout the process, "If y'all mess up, I can tell who messes up and I'm gonna send you down to the office." After several hours of this, we get thirty-five minutes for lunch, and if we are late Kendra will shut the door and not let us in! The disciplining continues.

When we return from lunch the training is even more torturous because the room is warm, and our stomachs are full. Everyone starts falling asleep. Three people

miss an answer. Kendra gets mad and starts making threats. One of the younger guys, Antwon, who will be a chicken catcher says, “You sure are breathing hard, you okay?” Everyone laughs. This does two things, it lightens the mood, but it also works to gently question her authority. Even though Kendra is a young Black woman who has worked on the line, she doesn’t have much patience for anyone. She leads orientations during the day on Thursdays and Fridays and comes in on the other days to work the night shift in HR.

The tutorials are cheesy videos about the company, and how proud we should be to work there. They review the Family Medical Leave Act. We can opt for insurance benefits after 60-days. We learn about all the ways we can be fired. Kendra says that the number one reason people get fired is because they don’t show up for work and “point out.” There are a lot of questions about the point system. We can get a point for missing a day, half a point for four hours or less, if we get two points in the 45-day period we are fired. After that you can get seven points and earn back points after 30-days of consecutive work. When we get to work we have a three-minute window, to clock in and be at our station. If we clock in at 6:00am, and our shift starts at 6:00am, then we are late and get half a point. If we clock in anyone else, we can get three-day suspension and maybe termination. I later interview two women who were fired for this act of comradery and many more who simply pointed out for being sick or taking care of children or elderly parents. This time now belongs to the poultry.

One of the guys in the room starts falling asleep. Kendra gets on to him, “If I see you fallin’ asleep again I’m gonna get Brittney in HR. You think we can’t fire you before you even start working?” Antwon stands up for the guy falling asleep, “Well,

we understand ma'am, but everyone is tired. You didn't make yourself known before [with these rules]. We are all tired, but he's gonna be straight." Kendra is clearly mad about this, but he speaks so calmly and has the support of everyone in the room. He diffuses the situation again.

The day drags on, module after module until 5pm. One more day of orientation before the first real day of work on the line.

(Field notes, Thursday, November 13, 2014).

### *Union Time*

Day two of orientation and Kendra seems to be in an even worse mood. At least five or six people are missing, never making it to the line. We cover modules on forklifts, maintenance, HACCP, chemicals, ammonia, animal safety, the kill line, transporting birds, sanitation, and "GMP" good manufacturing practices.<sup>42</sup> Kendra just gives us the answers so there's no incentive to pay attention. The hours drag on. We're getting every answer right. Kendra gives us another stack of paperwork. We sign, stating we've read all the safety precautions and are aware of our risks. It seems like you can get fired for anything. No false lashes. No gum. No cell phones. No music. No jewelry, no tongue rings, nothing.

We break at around 12:05 for a forty-five-minute lunch. I sit with Denetra again today and we agree to share a locker. I ask her where she worked before coming here. She says, "I worked at a nursing home back in Americus, GA. I didn't mind it,

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<sup>42</sup> Another time after working at the plant, we are forced to do these modules. This time, as in orientation, they are all in English, yet there are at least three Spanish-speaking workers in the room doing the module (Field notes, Tuesday, January 13-Saturday, January 17, 2015).

but I couldn't pass the test to get certified. I was plannin' on going back, but with this job I don't know if I'll have time to study and re-take the test." She and her daughters, ages eight, twelve, and fifteen, moved up here from Americus because "There's no jobs in Americus." She also worked in a poultry plant there. Denetra's son and one of his friends work in the Debone side, first shift. "Do y'all ride together?" I ask. "Naw, I take the bus." I find out she lives on the East side, in one of the large public housing complexes. She has to leave her apartment at 5:50am to take two different busses with over an hour's worth of travel time. Whereas, if she had a car, the trip would take her less than ten minutes. For workers on evisceration first shift, the bus is not even an option because it does not start running until after the shift begins. Over the course of fieldwork, I meet and interview a number of people who live in the same neighborhood as Denetra. It has a reputation for being "dangerous" and "sketchy" by outsiders, which is usually coded language for Black and poor, but Denetra says she doesn't mind it, despite what she heard before moving there. Later in the day when people start complaining about how long everything is taking, saying, "I got a second job to get to!" Denetra says, "Yeah, me too, I got a second job to get to and it's my children."

As we talk I eat quickly. Anthony comes in with his Tupperware of food. He asks if I saved him some of my food, this is a running joke we have, but I'm not really sure how it started. He sits by Denetra. We all talk a little. Anthony is a full-time student taking classes at the local technical college. He enrolled after going to the unemployment office, "If you've been outta work for two months, they'll pay for you to go for two years!" Anthony looks to be in his mid-forties, born and raised in Athens.

He will be a chicken catcher from midnight to six am. After lunch he rags the others for buying Popeye's and tells them he ate his mama's soup.

When we return from lunch there is a peppy older white lady with a heavily hair-sprayed brown bob, named Adrienne, waiting for us. She is a representative from a local bank. The bank has a partnership with the plant, so workers can sign up for a free checking account by setting up a direct deposit. There are no fees, absolutely none. You can also choose to have overdraft protection, up to \$500. Of course they'll charge you \$36, but you get the first time free. "Basically, it's like a loan," she explains to everyone, "if you're short on money but know you have bills coming up you can take out \$500 at once and just pay the fee, to hold you over until your check gets deposited." This feels like a sinister credit scheme on the bank's part, but people are excited about it. One guy asks for clarification, and then sort of translates it to everyone. "It's like a cash advance!" People start making jokes about wanting the card today, so they can go ahead and take that \$500. Few people have bank accounts. The younger guy from the shelter says he can't open one up today because he doesn't have an address yet, but could he pick up the card at the bank?

After the visit with Adrienne, three reps from the union come in. Ronnie, a black man in his mid-40s, worked in maintenance for 24 years. He's now the local rep. He's accompanied by two union stewards, an older black woman in her late 60s named Henrietta and a 30-something Latina woman named Lucía. Both women work in Debone. The plant is about 60% union. As Ronnie gives his spiel about how the union can protect workers and fight for wages, the women pass out forms and cards to sign up. Then a woman named Krystle, who is making eye contact with Kendra the whole

time, speaks up, “I heard that people can work and not be in the union, not have their money go out their paycheck, and still get the benefits of the union. If I join the union, I’ll be paying for other people to benefit who’s not in the union?” Ronnie says, “Yes, this is true, but those people are scabs. Without a plant with lots of union members, the union has no strength in bargaining this August.” She replies, “I don’t think Kendra was in the union. Kendra, was you in the union?” Kendra responds with a sly smile, “I can’t answer that.” One guy beside me who signed up decides he wants his card back.

Despite this exchange, most people sign up. Antwon, who has become the de facto leader of the group, is the first to say he’s signing the union card. Anthony also speaks out in support of the union, repeating what Ronnie said, calling people scabs, and reiterating how much we need the union for contract negotiations. Ronnie said he wanted the plant to get up to 70% union. Most of the people in the room signed the card. Denetra and I sign our cards. The most outspoken people so far are the chicken catchers, but they will spend most of their time away from the plant, with limited contact with other workers.

Henrietta, the union steward, who I later find out has been working in the plant for over forty years, tells everyone she has one year left. She gives us a testimony on why she believes in the union, “I got written up for answering my cell phone on the floor. It was cause my grandbaby had an emergency. Family matters more than that line!” She said she was able to fight the write-up with the help of the union. Then she got even more serious, looking around, making eye contact with everyone in the room, saying, “We all got the same skin color! Remember that! Don’t go to the white lady all the time [meaning the nurse] because she’ll contact your supervisor and they’ll try to

get you terminated. Don't complain in your first forty-five days. Don't bring up past accidents because they'll say it's falsification of documents if you didn't bring them up in the initial screening. So, if you have a preexisting condition you probably didn't get hired unless you lied about it, and if you bring it up after the fact you'll get fired." Then she told everyone to buy some gels and some aspirin at the dollar store and to take care of it all at home. "Don't wear jewelry. Obey every rule especially for the first 45 days because you need to keep your job! No one down in the office thinks your group will make it. They say y'all are too ratchet. But you show them wrong!" We end the day with Ms. Henrietta's words in our minds. Ms. Henrietta tells everyone how to survive the probationary period, after which they can stand up for themselves and fight for some things.

I start my first real shift on Monday at 9am.

(Field notes, Friday, November 14, 2014).

### ***Reflection on Orientation***

From this two-day orientation it is clear that work at the poultry is in high demand. Just making it to orientation is often cause for celebration, and many women I interviewed who were no longer at the plant kept an ear to the ground for hiring days. Several women who had worked at the plant before were "fixin' to start" back again at the poultry, grateful for a second chance. Even those who had jobs at one of the area's smaller plants or at the local bakery (also a food processing plant) coveted jobs at the larger plant. This meant frequent travel to and from the unemployment office and rounds of paperwork. It meant catching rides, the bus, or walking a few

miles each day. It also meant finding childcare or toting your kids along. All adding up to hours of work-for-labor.

People sought work at the poultry because it paid above minimum wage and did so every week. This is something every woman I interviewed brought up, several commenting on the need for other places, like Wal-Mart, to pay every week rather than every other week. Although the money is the same either way, low-wage workers living check-to-check cannot wait. This is often because there is a broader network of people who rely on them through informal arrangements, cash in exchange for childcare, transportation, and rent. Most women I interviewed and worked alongside lived in subsidized low-income housing, where payments were made on a monthly basis, but for those who weren't able to get into these apartments or were on the waiting list, and there's always a long waiting list, found makeshift housing in "extended-stay" motels and neglected apartment complexes paying weekly rather than monthly to skirt the multiple security deposits. These arrangements usually charge more than a regular, one or two bedroom, and make it so that low-wage workers with no savings or safety net can never catch up, much less get ahead.<sup>43</sup>

People's excitement about the bank's "cash advance" illustrates another way in which poor people pay more, although the \$36 fee beats the interest rates, as high as 300%, of the local "fringe banks" (payday lenders, check cashers, pawnbrokers, money wiring companies, auto title lenders, tax preparers that offer refund anticipation

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<sup>43</sup> Affordable housing in Athens through HUD, Section 8, or a non-profit such as Habitat for Humanity, ranges based on income and can be anywhere from \$0 to \$700. For weekly "extended stay" motels, women I interviewed told me they were paying anywhere from \$200-260 per week for one room (Field notes Tuesday, March 3, 2015; Shannon, interview with author, May 7, 2016; Derica, interview with the author, June 15, 2016).

loans, and rent-to-own retailers) concentrated along West Broad St. and the East Side (Baradaran 2015). Through these brief observations, it is clear that workers moving in and out of the poultry are disciplined in a variety of ways in relation to their employment at the plant, but most often their life's work is in conflict with their waged work. Put another way, in contrast to feminist geographers Mitchell, Marston, and Katz's (2004) concern over a "blurring" of social reproduction and production, of life and work, for women in the poultry, the border separating life and work is militarized, policed, and riddled with overage fees making both life and work near impossible. As James Baldwin (1960) famously put it, "Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor; and if one is a member of a captive population, economically speaking, one's feet have simply been placed on the treadmill forever." In the next section, I will move across different scales, from changes in federal rules and regulations, to worker actions, management decisions, and back again in order to portray the contestations around time, space, work-discipline at the poultry. These contestations inside the plant illuminate the ongoing process of structuring of workers' everyday lives under racial capitalism.

### ***"Stealing Company Time!"***

It takes me a few weeks to feel "comfortable" on the line, meaning that I'm not frantically trying to catch the birds, don't have too many re-hangs, and can keep up some level of conversation yelling across the line about lunch, family, and weekend plans. After a few weeks, I also get to know some of the other women. There are no

other Asian workers on the evisceration line, but I think this has worked to my advantage. Supervisors assume I don't speak English, so they don't bother me too much, other than a few funny interactions like the day my line supervisor, James, put his hands together and bowed to me.<sup>44</sup> A group of older women, especially Ms. Gladys and Ms. Margaret, take me under their wings. I also become close to some younger women, Lashawnda, Tracey, and Tammi, who I sit with each day at lunch. With everyone I meet, the same line of questioning comes up, "where do you stay?" "how old are you?" and "got any kids?" These questions point to the importance of place and family. People who were born and raised in the area, grew up knowing someone in the plant. Everyone has had an auntie or sister who has also worked at the poultry. There is even a common colloquialism, "If you're Black in Athens, you know someone who works at the poultry." The question of "where do you stay?" is significant as, increasingly, there are workers driving from miles away, some over an hour away as turnover rates remain high and rural Georgia has few other job options for "high" low-wage work. Almost all the women I met have kids and many have grandkids to get home to and feed, so that, like Denetra, their kids constitute a second job.

Poultry plant workers are treated with little respect or dignity, and, over the nearly six-month period I worked at the plant, rules and regulations were increasingly implemented in an attempt to ensure supervisor control over workers' behavior, bodies, movement, and their time. Time, or lack thereof, has been a common theme

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<sup>44</sup> The Spanish-speaking workers call me "Chinita" and most people I encounter ask if I'm Chinese. Even after months of working at the plant, the women I talk with every day, who I grow to respect and care for, compliment me by saying, "Carrie, you sure do speak good English."

throughout my observations and worker interviews. There's not enough time to get on all the proper gear, to eat lunch, to draw all the birds correctly, to trim every breast, to cook dinner, to spend with your family over holidays, to even sleep. Time is controlled at the plant through a rigid point system. Workers are punished with a point for being late to the line, for doctors' appointments for their children or themselves, and even for being sick or hospitalized. When a worker accumulates 6 points, they are immediately terminated. This pushes people to come to work while they are very sick, to forgo care work for sick family members, and to keep working until their bodies shut down from exhaustion. These rules of control not only shape people's working lives, but also have effects on their time and freedom when they leave the plant, what workers often referred to as their "real lives."

One morning, during break, I went to my locker to drink some water and check my phone. The lockers were recently moved from a small side room down the hall and across from the bathrooms, to the cafeteria. This move coincided with a removal of two benches in the small locker room, a place where workers would sit for a moment's reprieve (see Figure 9 at the start of this chapter). It was a quiet place of shelter away from the line even though it was dirty and often crowded. Older workers also used the benches to sit down when taking off their work boots at the end of the day. The locker rooms had a different feel, as a worker-only space, somewhat shielded from supervisors. Raquel, a popular, outgoing, 44-year-old Black woman and grandmother of three was also at her locker making her routine morning call home. Raquel is a trimmer on line four diagonally across the line from me. It seems whatever mood Raquel is in shapes the mood of the entire line; most of the time she is happy, dancing,

singing, especially on the Fridays when we have Saturday off. She smiles at me as she waits for the other line to pick up. Out of nowhere, Mark, the new Plant Manager, walks by, sees the two of us and yells, “that’s a write up! You know you’re not supposed to be on your phones. It’s an abuse of company time! You’re stealing company time!” I close my locker. Raquel quickly puts away her phone, but not before saying, “I am checking on my grandbabies!” Mark, a white man from UGA in his late 30s, doesn’t have the courage to listen to her and storms off. After he left, partly to me, partly to herself, she continues, “That ain’t right. Family matters more than a goddamn write-up.” (Fieldnotes, Tuesday, March 24, 2015). Workers are expected to separate their home and work lives and to deal with family matters on a schedule in line with production, yet workers resisted this separation as mothers, grandmothers, and aunties breaking the rules whenever possible.

At first, I didn’t understand why they moved the lockers. Plant management posted signs saying they were doing “renovations.” But after this incident, moving the lockers out in the open space of the cafeteria made it easier for management to surveillance workers. Mark could do a quick check when moving from his office to the floor rather than having to walk down to the other end of the hall. In effect, supervisors gained greater control over the geography of the plant. Lockers were never returned to the locker room. Additionally, with the benches removed, workers could not sit down unless they were sitting on the toilet. And to solve this problem of “stolen time” for physical relief, management introduced a new position for Ms. Belle, the oldest worker on the line, and later for Lilly when she reached seven months into her pregnancy. These workers became bathroom monitors, sitting by the sinks in the ten-

stall bathroom with a timer to make sure women were not spending more than 5-6 minutes “doing their business.” This would deter women from stealing time from production to check on children or just to rest their feet.

Bathroom breaks, as documented elsewhere,<sup>45</sup> are a privilege, not a right. The most diligent workers adapt their biological needs to the schedule of the line. Workers, like Shawnda, who worked in a variety of plants for 18 years, train their bodies to fit the demands of work. She recounted her efforts to me one summer evening, over a struggling AC unit, in her sister-in-law’s HUD apartment.

Shawnda: I didn’t go to work to play around. You got two breaks so whatever you need to do on your break time you should do it... I trained my bladder, even though I was on high blood pressure pills,<sup>46</sup> had the water pills, that didn’t stop me. I trained my body how to act. You’re not gonna keep on going back and forth back and forth (Shawnda, interview with the author, June 16, 2016).

Shawnda, it would appear, was consenting, in a Burawoyian (1979) sense, to her own exploitation. Yet, these decisions are negotiated by workers within a host of constraints and very few formal outlets for dissent. When I started at the plant, we were relieved by another worker one-at-a-time for a ten-minute break between 6:15-9:00am, one fifteen-minute break at 9:00am, one thirty-minute lunch break from 12:15-12:45pm, and one final ten-minute break, one-at-a-time after 2:00pm and before the end of the day. After about 3 months, the two ten-minute breaks were cut down to two five-minute breaks. The supervisors reprimanded us as if this as if this had *always been* the

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<sup>45</sup> *The Charlotte Observer* (Hall, Alexander, and Ordoñez 2008), Human Rights Watch (Compa 2004), Oxfam America (2016), Southern Poverty Law Center (Fritzsche 2013), Northwest Arkansas Workers Center (Ebner, Halpern-Finnerty, and Jayaraman 2016), among others.

<sup>46</sup> These are diuretics, sometimes called “water tablets” that make you pass urine more than usual, working your kidneys to expel the salt and water that comes out through your urine in order to lower blood pressure. Many women at the plant took these.

rule and the “floaters”<sup>47</sup> were quick to enforce the decision, scolding us for taking too long and keeping time with a stopwatch provided to them by the line leader. Women, in particular, suffer from these rules as they are most commonly the ones tied to the lines. Shawnda was rare, in that most of the women I interviewed complained about problems with the bathroom, especially when menstruating or if they were sick with a stomach virus or another digestive problem. Just a few weeks after starting work at the plant, a stomach flu went through the line and decimated most of us, including myself. I will spare the details, but these were some of the most uncomfortable days of my life. If the virus spread so quickly among workers, I do not doubt it was transferred to the hundreds of thousands of birds we were handling. Workers’ bodies, just like the birds they are processing, can never be completely disciplined.<sup>48</sup>

Many other small rules were implemented while I worked at the plant. Paper towels were removed from the stands to save money, but this also removed autonomy from workers in draw-hand who aimed to keep their bodies and station somewhat clean. Thick plastic aprons were banned, forcing workers to rely on the thin, disposable trash-bag-like ones that did next to nothing and left workers soaking wet. In March the supervisors assigned us to a particular clock for punching-in and out and tried to restrict workers from putting on aprons, smocks, etc. before clocking in. This allowed the company to comply with the “donning/doffing” ruling in which the major

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<sup>47</sup> This position was assigned to women who had been in the plant for a number of years and knew how to work every position. Floaters went through each line, relieving workers to go on breaks. When we were low staffed, line leaders and Quality Assurance (QA) inspectors would begrudgingly take on this role.

<sup>48</sup> See Blanchette (2014) for more on the “biopolitics” of hazards control in midwestern pork processing.

companies were sued for not paying workers for the time spent putting on and taking off protective gear (Leppink 2010). While the company no longer technically “stole” workers’ time, this change did three things. First, we were forced to clock in with gear in hand, squeezing our already tight timeframe of three minutes to get everything on and to the line. Second, by assigning us to specific clock-in stations, this also meant workers who clock out early for lunch, say 11:12 rather than 11:15, would lose 3 minutes from their paycheck. With assigned stations, we were also monitored when we clocked back in after the morning break at 9:00am or the lunch break, whereas before workers would clock back in a little earlier using that time to pick up clean gloves and aprons from the supply room before returning to the line. Third, it allowed each supervisor to stand by their specific stations to watch as each of his workers clocked out at the end of the day rather than loitering, changing into street clothes, then clocking out afterwards. Time is money!

Another major rule change occurred in mid-December when James called us over, in pairs, to the control room on the kill floor. Nelly, the trimmer from Honduras, and I go in together. She speaks some English, and understands a lot, but there is no translator present. He tells us we cannot throw livers, bang equipment, dance, or sing on the line any more. I say, “okay.” Nelly doesn’t say anything, but nods. We return to the line (Fieldnotes, Friday, December 12, 2014). Yet, workers continued to carry on these practices on Fridays before the two-day weekend or on special days like Christmas Eve or New Year’s Eve. This provided an incredible feeling of excitement that is really indescribable. When the last birds would ‘round the corner, becoming more spaced out, every two or three shackles empty, everyone would start singing,

dancing, and making as much noise as possible. The supervisors had no control over this small act of collective joy, as we were finally getting the hell out of the plant. Each of these incidents is illustrative of the seemingly arbitrary tactics of control experienced daily at the plant to dictate every measurable second of workers' time and restrict worker-controlled space while at the plant, but also a few small acts of resistance carved out by workers.

### *That We Hardly Ever Time to Dream*

For Thompson, workers' time-sense had to be controlled, in order to establish that time now belonged to the employer, whereas all the things that workers did outside of the working day were viewed as wasteful, lazy, and inefficient. This is especially true and contributes to the devaluation of women and their work. For Thompson, women are embodied by the "labourer's wife" whose work is never done. He quotes a poem by Mary Collier to illustrate his argument (in Thompson 1967: 79):

...when we Home are come, Alas! we find our Work but just begun; So many Things for our Attendance call, Had we ten Hands, we could employ them all. Our Children put to Bed, with greatest Care We all Things for your coming Home prepare: You sup, and go to Bed without delay, And rest yourselves till the ensuing Day; While we, alas! but little Sleep can have, Because our forward Children cry and rave .... In ev'ry Work (we) take our proper Share; And from the Time that Harvest doth begin Until the Corn be cut and carry'd in, Our Toil and Labour's daily so extreme, **That we have hardly ever Time to dream.**

This work is both necessary and inevitable, not external, to capital accumulation. Yet, by the logic of capital, women's very emphasis on their time outside of factory work pushed back against the sort of time, work-discipline necessary for capital. They lived

through an imperfect sense of time.<sup>49</sup> For women at the poultry, similar contestations remain over the working day, and, as previously mentioned, this is often the cause of worker conflicts with supervisors and the cause for pointing out.

Yet, for the women I worked with, daydreaming, while there was hardly time, provided an essential outlet and source of reprieve against the mind-numbing effects of work. This was one aspect of their working lives they could control. Shared daydreaming was a common practice among women workers in the plant, and the topic was always about striking it rich. The lottery was the most common source—as almost everyone in the plant played, and women would share news of any small scratch-off winnings and the anticipation of going to the store to buy tickets. Each day, one of the younger utility guys would walk around the plant sharing the winning numbers. When there was a particularly big Georgia Lotto, people were a buzz in the plant dreaming of the trips they'd take if they won, reminding each other, "If you win, don't forget the rest of us poor folks!"

People also day dreamed about how to spend their tax returns, on new shoes for their kids, new beds, to finally pay off the pay-day loan on their car. During breaks women often dreamed about being as rich as the *Real Housewives of Atlanta*. This

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<sup>49</sup> How did this division of labor develop? While Thompson traces this devaluation as a secondary process of time, work-discipline for European waged workers, Silvia Federici (2004) documents this long process, whereby women's bodies, and reproductive labor in particular, had to be devalued and controlled, in contradistinction to waged work. The witch hunts of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries provided a site of primitive accumulation as necessary for the development of capital as "colonization and the expropriation of the European peasantry from its land" (2004: 14). A sexual division of labor was created through the control and devaluation of women's bodies and their reproductive labor. Through this analysis, Federici treats gender, not as a "purely cultural reality" but as "a specification of class relations" (Federici 2004). While focusing on the violence of the witch hunts, she makes connections other forms of violent primitive accumulation through the slave trade and European colonialism across the Global South. Primitive accumulation, for Federici, is an ongoing process necessary to the subordination life to the production of profit.

was a popular scenario because one of the women went to high school with some of the workers at the plant and was even rumored to be the cousin of a lady on the night shift. One day in particular, these dreams took on a sort of theatrical form, with Tammi and Tracey acting out how we (they included me in this fantasy) would spend our money and how we would look back on our poultry days with laughter. Tammi excitedly said, “We won’t have to go get our nails done, we’ll have them come to us.” Tracey followed up, “We’ll have our own personal chef, and we’ll come in whenever we want. We can fly to New York... oooh, Italy for dinner!” Still, even these dreams are constrained by the reality of women’s everyday lives. In this specific instance, Tammi, who became excited at the thought of our own manicurists, started acting out a scenario in which she grabbed invisible scissors in her make-believe office and started trying to cut open invisible birds. Tracey laughed, playing the part of her assistant, “Ms. Tammi, Ms. Tammi! You are here, back to reality! [fake slapping her to wake up] Back to reality, you own this business. You don’t have to go back there ever again!!!” They had everyone cracking up. After a brief pause as the reality of the day sunk in, we collectively sighed, as Tracey brought us back, “Okay, back to work!”

For many of the women I interviewed, dreams like the one above served as a brief moment of entertainment in the face of a harsh reality. Working at the poultry, signifies a sort of hopelessness and end of the road for many women. This came through most clearly in an interview with Ericka. I had the pleasure of interviewing Ericka<sup>50</sup> over

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<sup>50</sup> Ericka is a fascinating woman. I came across her name after seeing something she had written. I reached out to her to talk about the integration of Athens, and told her about my project. She told me her mother worked in the poultry, and we quickly scheduled a phone interview. When we started the interview, Ericka started by saying her mother was shocked that anyone would care about her life, saying, “she wants to do what, now?” [laughing]. Ericka has such a brilliant way of describing the

the phone in December after I returned to Ithaca (Ericka, interview with the author, December 28, 2016). She is in her mid-30s and lives in New York City. She grew up in what she calls a “poultry family,” with her mother working in the plant for most of her life. She describes her mother’s entry into the poultry as exemplary of the last resort decision of an earlier generation rather than an “only option” for many workers today. She puts care in distinguishing her mother as both a “workhorse” and “not a statistic.” Ruth is 64 years old and a graduate of Clarke Central in 1972, part of the second graduating class from the integrated high school. Before that she went to all Black schools. She worked at Athens Regional as an orderly, and went to Athens Tech, finishing with a certificate in cosmetology. She eventually worked in the poultry plant for 35 years. Ruth never talked about her work, she never brought the poultry home with her, and always made sure to change out of her clothes when leaving the plant. She was “very particular” as Ericka remembers, “If you saw her you definitely would not think she worked at the poultry. She was a woman, she shopped at Harry’s [a fine clothing boutique]. She wasn’t hiding that she worked at the poultry, but I don’t think she was ever proud that she worked at the poultry. Hell no!”

Although she worked at the poultry for most of her life, Ericka recounts her mother’s dissatisfaction, “she’d say like, ‘I never intended in working in the poultry 35 years, ever!’ So, she had big dreams, but she never really left Athens. So, her joke is, it’s really not even a joke, she always says *I did* what she *wanted to do*. But yeah, she never left Athens” (Erika, 2016). This issue comes up repeatedly throughout the

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world and her experiences in it. I hope that she writes about growing up and her mother’s life. After we talked, she agreed that it would be a good idea to do an oral history with her mother and write something up. I offered my services to help her with the project in exchange for her time.

interview, that there was something different about Ruth, as with her, but she got “stuck... big time, that dream and that light, when you’re working that hard, at that point it just becomes about surviving and paying the bills. So, whatever you dreamt for your life, it *dies*. Sadly.” Even though her mother got “stuck” at the poultry, she continued to (and continues to this day) to work. In this sense, the poultry not only controls women’s time inside the plant, but also constrains women’s very dreams and goals. There was never enough time or energy to work toward anything else.

This is reflective on women’s work and life chances outside of or before working at the plant, some women had trouble even answering this question about a supposed “dream job.” As one respondent Chrissandra stated,

“I never thought about that. You know, like my daughter, she has dreams, to do, to be someone, you know, she is very inspired. But for me, I was a young mother, so I didn’t never think about what I wanted to be. All I know is I wanted a job, I wanted to eat, I wanted to pay bills. I never thought about... so I can’t answer that question. I never thought about, ‘I wanna be a teacher, I wanna be a doctor...’ I had her at 15... I never thought about being anything. When I had her, all I thought about was raising her. There weren’t no boyfriends, you know, it was just me and her. And when my mama lost her job in Atlanta, it became us. I’m okay with just living right now. I’m not where I wanna be, but I’m not where I was” (Chrissandra, interview with the author, March 19, 2016).

Her response expresses the kinds of basic and immediate needs many women in the poultry are struggling to meet, and the lack of opportunity to do much more. It provides an important reflection on the continued control of the Black workers’ labor, so that while women like Tammi and Tracey pass their days by daydreaming about high-power jobs and manicurists, in their everyday lives these women hardly have time to dream, the ultimate expression of labor discipline.

### *Everyday Forms*

Despite this overwhelming sense of control, workers found ways to maintain dignity and some collective power. After Mark started implementing new rules in late February, many women began getting together over lunch to talk about what could be done. The most aggrieved of the new rules was surprisingly the apron rule. Ms. Margaret and Janice got heated talking about how we had to pay twenty cents for new aprons if we needed a second one. Workers bought the more durable blue aprons on their own time and took them home to clean each night. Quita gave me one of these after I made it through my 45-day probationary period. It was more work to clean and take care of it each day, but it also kept my smock and clothes dryer and cleaner. Ms. Margaret heard at [another plant in the area] they got these for free, automatically. Janice had had enough, “I’m sick and tired of this bullshit! He [Mark] just wants a promotion. He don’t care about us.” Ms. Margaret responded, matching her anger, “I know that’s right! Things have got to change... I’m tired of people being scared. Bell, she’s too scared, why don’t she say something?” I ask them if they’ve talked to Ronnie, the UFCW rep. They said he is trying to get them reimbursed for their old aprons. This is probably a \$10 concession, but the union is not trying to have the rules reversed (Fieldnotes, Monday, February 23, 2015).

The next day, Debora, the former Harlemita and woman who trained me on draw-hand, stands up to James about the paper towels. Debora has been at the plant for eight years, and basically runs line three. James, the only Black supervisor, seems to empathize with us, but can’t really do anything about it. Mark runs the show. In the same day Mark yells at me for leaning on the back railing, a trick Debora taught me to

relieve your legs and feet, balancing one, then the other, alternating them ever so often. Over lunch, Jordan tells us that Mark fussed at her about her ear plugs. Yonya saw him yell at Ms. Bonnie (who has been at this place since 1968!) for being in what was once the locker room. “She’s old enough to be his mama!” Yonya exclaims.

Tracey and Ms. Gladys start singing,

Breaking rocks out here on the chain gang.  
Breaking rocks and serving my time.  
Breaking rocks out here on the chain gang.  
Because they done convicted me of crime.

They laugh about this, while also taking in the seriousness of the moment, their anger and rage at the similarities of their work at the plant today to the chain gangs of the Jim Crow South. Their singing reaches back to what Sarah Haley (2016) calls a “blues aesthetic,” as a counter-discourse to the racial regime of Jim Crow. Today, the song illuminates the inequality women feel on the line but also their shared consciousness and fomenting anger. Yet, this is as far as it gets. I haven’t seen Ronnie in weeks. Where is the union when we need it? We work for 10.5 hours that day (Fieldnotes, Tuesday February 24, 2015).

For a while in late February and early March, it seemed like workers would push the union to do more to represent their needs in light of all the new rules, but after a few weeks no one brought up the aprons, towels, or lockers again. Soon after, we were issued a written warning in English about breaks and cell phone use. In spite of the difficult and debilitating working conditions, the strict enforcement of rules, and the monotony of the working-day, women carried out small acts of survival and resistance inside the plant, establishing themselves as more than simply workers, but as people who could take pride in themselves and their “plant family.” This was most

visible as women expressed care and concern for younger workers' advancement within the plant, and passed along strategies for survival against the monotony and pain of the work. This began as early as Ms. Henrietta's sobering talk during orientation, to the day-to-day exchange of candy, gum, supplies, and advice. Due to my own positioning within the plant, as a comparatively 'young,' naïve, out-of-place Chinese girl, "la chinita," I was on the receiving end of many of these acts.

Women were quick to share food. This was an important act in light of the for-profit overpriced cafeteria food, another plant practice that mirrored the fringe banks outside. Workers could use their ID card as credit to be withdrawn from the next check. Items were priced a la carte. For example, a chicken patty sandwich, of the school cafeteria variety, and fries cost \$7.45. Add a Gatorade to that and they charged you \$10.85. In no time, this could add up to \$50 from your check each week. Although we all complained about the price and quality of the food, it was easy and warm, some comfort during a hard day when most women didn't want or have the time/energy to cook at home. But our group tried to support each other in staying away from that food. When someone had very little to eat for lunch, another would give them part of their food, soup one day, mac and cheese the next, tacos another. While unnoticed by the plant, cooking demonstrated an act of care that was also a way to reorient time outside of work, fostering social relationships to one another. Like shared meals, candy and gum, although illegal on the line, was another expression of care as well as a tactic to keep awake. Women also shared OTC medicines, sodas, energy drinks, and equipment (gloves, goggles, hoarded smocks).

In addition to these social-material offerings, workers in the plant shared

strategies of resistance to both the work and supervision. Workers use experiential knowledge to estimate the length of the working day by sharing information about the number of birds and their own calculations of line speed and bird health. This allowed them to coordinate with children and/or second jobs and gain some control over their time.<sup>51</sup> For example, in the plant where I worked 130,000 birds and a two-second-per-bird pace meant the lines were moving good and we would get out before 2:00pm. With 190,000+, no matter the pace, we wouldn't see sunlight until after 5:00pm. Workers would "steal time" by clocking-in early, taking longer breaks, working "leisurely overtime," and sometimes even walking off the line. Occasionally workers would inadvertently work with management to speed up the line and decrease work stoppages not simply to consent to labor discipline but to hold on to what little time outside of work they may have with what little energy the shift didn't take from them. Notably, this also meant sharing one's labor. During one particularly rough week, when I had the aforementioned stomach virus, Ms. Margaret noticed my discomfort during break and took over several times for me, helping draw the birds, easing my workload, and giving me much needed break. Because of her seniority in the plant, James did not reprimand her for taking time from sorting livers to help me.

Additionally, workers on the line shared stories, jokes, dance moves, and songs to keep each other entertained throughout the working day. This helped the day go by a little more quickly. For me, these strategies while on the line were especially skilled

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<sup>51</sup> Similar to Thompson "There we worked as long as we could see in summer time, and I could not say at what hour it was that we stopped. There was nobody but the master and the master's son who had a watch, and we did not know the time. There was one man who had a watch... It was taken from him and given into the master's custody because he had told them men the time of day..." (1967: 86).

and provided very small moments of reprieve and escape. This included telling jokes, often mocking supervisors or USDA inspectors, teaching Spanish/English across the noisiness and spatial divide of the line, inventing games to help pass the time, playing with the occasional chicken head, foot, or liver, making beats with the metal equipment, singing gospel or popular songs, and showing off dance moves. Although the divisions along racial and linguistic lines were often stark outside of the plant and even in the social settings within (like the cafeteria), these were the moments when workers would most actively engage across these lines. Unlike daydreaming, these actions were disruptive of in the eyes of management, but constituted an everyday form of resistance and celebration that could not be controlled.

Finally, women workers' acts of survival included care for one another as part of a "plant family"<sup>52</sup> reached beyond the plant walls. I can recount numerous occasions when a coworker had a death in the family, or a husband or uncle was deported, or a worker themselves had to take leave for surgery or another major illness. Once news spread of this particular hardship, a plastic Wal-Mart bag would be passed around to take up a small collection attached with a card of sympathy and support to sign. Workers would drop in a dollar or two, maybe five at most. While I do not believe these everyday acts should be viewed with naive hopefulness, they are reflective of unequal power, as rules are enforced by majority white male supervisors to a disposable (in the eyes of management) majority Black female workforce. This depends not only on historical patterns of Southern racialization, but also upon the

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<sup>52</sup> I saw this sentiment directly expressed several times in the plant. Most directly, after I passed my 45-day probation period, and moved from a gold to white bump cap, women congratulated me by saying, "Carrie! You're one of the family now!"

persistent threat of termination, and the lack of any better work options beyond the plant walls. It depends upon the workers' commitments beyond the plant, to their families, most specifically to their children.

**Speedups**

But what we often did not see, but felt as workers on the line, were the underlying ways in which federal agencies were also mobilizing notions of time and space to discipline workers inside the poultry plant. Poultry processing line speeds are regulated by the USDA Food Safety Inspection Services (FSIS). As line speeds



"We're really selling time along with quality and convenience," said Mr. Tyson over lunch at Herman's, where the chicken on the menu — garlic, barbecued or Cajun — was from Tyson. "We produce it and you assemble it."

A few years ago, Mr. Tyson noticed a surplus of gizzards, since fewer birds were sold with innards. He thought he could earn some money by finding a use for them. And the gizzard burger was born.

"Gizzards are high in protein, so we ground 'em up and added hamburger flavor," recalled Mr. Tyson. "The price was a third to a half what hamburger cost."

Gizzard patties were first marketed in the Watts section of South-Central Los Angeles. They were a flop. Undeterred, Mr. Tyson made use of his legendary Arkansas connections.

"I figured we'd try a captive market," he said. "I called a man I knew in the prison system. He agreed to serve gizzard burgers to the prisoners. Well, the first time they served them, he called me up and said, 'Don, if we try to serve 'em again, these prisoners are gonna riot.'"

Laughing loudly, Mr. Tyson added, "You know, you could almost eat those gizzard burgers."

Figure 11- "How Tyson Became Chicken King" Douglas Frantz, 1994, NYT

increase the industry effectively steals time from workers while giving more time to consumers, often with the resulting redistribution of time being subsidized through workers' bodies and federal disability.<sup>53</sup>

Don Tyson put this relationship most famously in a NYT interview promoting further processing as “selling time”<sup>54</sup> (Frantz 1994). This “selling” points to an unequal valuation of time under capitalism as speedups in poultry processing are relational to changes in consumption and the valuation of time outside of work. This excerpt (Figure 11) is a part of the same interview, where Tyson, unapologetically discusses “testing” gizzard burgers on residents of Watts and Arkansas prisoners. Tyson’s business model exemplifies an unequal valuation of both time and people, under capitalism, used to justify speed ups. As more (white) middle-class women entered the paid workforce, they had less time to spend on household duties such as cooking and cleaning, so that “Women’s Liberation!”<sup>55</sup> could be achieved by purchasing a bucket of fried chicken. But, beneath the surface of this liberation, is an invisible workforce, of mostly *other* women, working-class Black, undocumented immigrant, and refugee workers.

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<sup>53</sup> Disability is only accessible for those US citizens who persist in the application process. Currently, in Georgia, the average wait time for a SSI or SSD hearing is 16.6 months. The average case processing time in Georgia is 575 days. The Georgia average for winning a disability hearing is 48% (“Georgia ODAR Offices” 2018).

<sup>54</sup> In 1991, chicken surpassed beef as the most highly consumed animal protein in the US. This shift was based on Tyson’s production model, and by 1995 95% of Tyson sales were further processed chicken products rather than the whole broiler (“Per Capita Consumption of Poultry” 2018; Kleinfield 1984).

<sup>55</sup> This billboard ad is cited most controversially by Michael Pollan in his book *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation* (2013) which expanded his polarizing NYT article “Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch” (2009). Unfortunately, I could not find this exact ad, but I think “Wife-Savers” gets a similar point across.



“Colonel Sanders is a woman’s best friend. The Colonel’s the man who fixes Sunday dinner seven days a week. For weary wives. For working women. All you do is pick it up. Boxes, buckets and barrels full of finger lickin’ good chicken and all the trimmings. It’s ready to go in minutes at over 1700 locations. Colonel Sanders’ Kentucky Fried Chicken... mother’s little helper. ‘It’s finger lickin’ good.”

*Better Homes and Gardens*, November 1968.

Figure 12- Wife-Savers Ad, KFC, 1968

Over the past year, poultry processing line speeds were a matter of national concern. To briefly summarize, last fall, the National Chicken Council (NCC) petitioned to increase the allowable maximum number of birds slaughtered per minute, from what they call “arbitrary line speed limitations” of 140 to 175 bpm, or preferably removing the cap altogether (Brown 2017). The NCC advocated for an increase in order to “level the playing field within the US.” This meant bringing non-HIMP/NPIS plants up to speed, by “eliminat[ing] competitive barriers between the US and international chicken producers,” and “encourag[ing] more plants to participate in the New Poultry Inspection System” (Brown 2017). Thankfully, in January of this year (2018), the USDA FSIS denied the petition due to push-back from consumer and

worker advocacy organizations (Rottenberg 2018). Opponents of the increase cite a host of studies, governmental and advocacy-led, that connect current line speeds to high rates of injury and illness, particularly carpal tunnel syndrome and other musculoskeletal disorders among poultry processing workers (Barnes and Morris 2016; States and Accountability 2017; Musolin et al. 2014; Fortson and Hawkins 2015; Fritzsche 2013; Oxfam America 2016). These studies found that the everyday effects of the 15-30,000 repetitive motions each shift are at the top of peoples' complaints about the working day.

While this appears to be a victory for workers, taking a longer view of speedups within the industry reveals a troubling picture. Industry advocates and some USDA representatives have pushed for an increase to 175 bpm since as early as 1997 through HIMP pilot, an acronym within an acronym, which stands for (HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points-Based) Inspection Models Project). HIMP granted line speed waivers to twenty plants that allow them to operate at up to 175 bpm ("History of the HACCP-Based Inspection Models Project" 2015).<sup>56</sup> Each attempt to increase line speeds has been smartly packaged to improved technology and a more "modernized" scientific approach to biological hazards, food safety, and inspection, while ignoring not only worker safety, but also the political struggles around worker organizing.

Thus, USDA FSIS (de)regulation becomes another instrument used, in Marx's (1867) terms, to "shorten the part of the working day in which the worker works for

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<sup>56</sup> Since 2014, HIMP evolved into the New Poultry Inspection System (NPIS) with line speeds capped at 140, yet the 20 pilot plants continue to operate at up to 175.

himself,” and “lengthen the other part, the part he gives to the capitalist for nothing.” Not only are workers disciplined by the pace of work, but even after their shift ends, workers’ “free time” is hardly free, spent recuperating for the next day, buying aspirin and gels at the dollar store. Their very lives are sped up, with a majority of workers experiencing “premature disability,”<sup>57</sup> in which they must piece together a living from a monthly disability check. As previous scholars of the poultry and other animal processing industries have shown, this industry, like most of our contemporary global food system (McMichael 2017), has been built on the literal backs, arms, and hands of a marginalized workforce (Gray 2014; L. Fink 2003; Stuesse 2016; Striffler 2005; Pachirat 2011; Ribas 2015; Wells 2000; Mitchell 2017, 2011; Weinberg 2003; Yvonne, Liu, and Apollon 2011; Food Chain Workers Alliance and Solidarity Research Cooperative 2016, 2012). For the poultry, this can be traced to the racial dispossession of Black sharecroppers and tenant farmers, federal segregation of Black women to the most difficult and dangerous positions, and the more recent recruitment of undocumented, refugee, and prison labor. In this sense, FSIS inspection joins a host of federal and industry instituted policies to aid the exploitation of the poultry processing workforce.

### ***History of PPIA***

Upton Sinclair’s (1906) work *The Jungle*, marks the beginning of consumer

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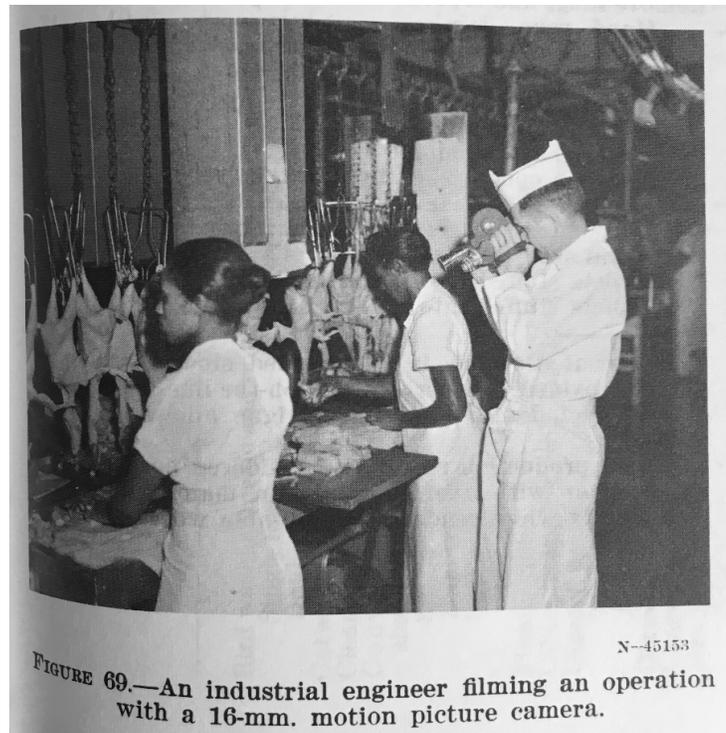
<sup>57</sup> Here, I am drawing on geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s work on the political economy of mass incarceration, which she argues depends upon an understanding of racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (2006: 28).

advocacy for safety inspection, influencing the 1906 Federal Meat Inspection Act (although Sinclair's expose was meant for the workers!). For the poultry industry, large-scale federal inspection was not established until 1957 through the Poultry Processing Inspection Act (PPIA) ("Poultry Inspection" 1987). This coincided with a rise in both production and consumption and facilitated the consolidation and vertical integration of the industry.<sup>58</sup> The main objective of the PPIA was "to protect the consumer and the worker in the plant from unfit and diseased poultry and to protect the producer and processor from an unworkable inspection program that might drive them out of business" (1957 in Linder 1995: 64). Unions, largely through Amalgamated Meat Cutters, which represented 30,000 workers and had contracts in almost a third of plants, strongly supported the creation of the PPIA.

The effects of the PPIA extended beyond inspection. By banning un-eviscerated chicken for interstate commerce, the PPIA subsequently aided mechanization and further processing within the industry. Shortly thereafter, the USDA established its relationship to industry through time-and-motion studies with the goal of improving efficiency, and therefore profits. For example, in 1962, the USDA published a Marketing Research Report No. 549, "Methods and Equipment for Eviscerating Chickens." This study followed workers in several plants with a 35 mm camera in order to determine the most efficient cutting techniques, with the goal of aiding increased line speeds.

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<sup>58</sup> FSIS regulation also increased industry concentration based on firms' ability to invest in modernization techniques. In 1960, the 19 largest plants slaughtered 30% of USDA inspected poultry, only four years later, the same share was held by only 9 firms. Productivity per worker also tripled from 1960-1987; while profits increased fourteen fold from 1980-1990 (Schwartzman 2013).



*Figure 13- Engineer filming Black Women on Evisceration, 1962: 53*

The report also proposed combining job tasks to increase “man-minutes” for example, finding that “one worker can detach, wash, and trim both the heart and liver at the rate of 100 birds in 7.02 man-minutes, compared to 8.82 man-minutes for two separate operations” (“Methods” 1962:27). This would increase the overall birds per man-hour by a whopping 171 bpmh. Thus, efficiency was considered a desirable sign of progress, that could be improved upon to both increase line speeds, and therefore production, while reducing labor costs. Yet, as E.P. Thompson reminds us, “the historical record is not a simple one of neutral and inevitable technological change but is also one of exploitation and of resistance to exploitation,” with, “values [that] stand to be lost as well as gained” (Thompson 1967: 93-94). Through regulatory efficiency, the federal government sacrificed workers’ health and time to aid industry profits,

while speeding up life both inside and outside the plant.

Since the PPIA, the USDA FSIS underwent multiple changes, each effectively increasing line speeds and replacing federal inspectors with a processing company’s own employees.<sup>59</sup> Regulation allowed new forms of automation and speedups that not only increased the pace of work, but also disciplined workers’ days and bodies, leading to the displacement of workers who were unable or unwilling to keep up.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Line Speeds</b>
1957	Poultry Processing Inspection Act	
1962	Methods and Equipment for Eviscerating Chickens	30bpm
1972	Efficiency in Poultry Evisceration and Inspection Operations	35bpm
1976	Mechanized Evisceration	
1978	Chemical Baths "fecal soup"	
1979	Modern Traditional Inspection	70bpm
1982	New Line Speed (NELS)	91bpm
1985	Third-Generation Inspection System (failed)	182bpm
1986	Streamlined Inspection System (SIS)	70bpm
1994	Enhanced Poultry Inspection	95-140bpm
1997	Pathogen Reduction: Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point Systems (PR-HAACP)	
1997	HIMP pilot study beings with 20 plants	175bpm
2011	New Poultry Inspection System (NPIS)	140bpm
2012	Modernization of Poultry Slaughter Inspection	140bpm
2014	NPIS capped line speeds	140bpm
2017	NCC proposes to remove caps (failed)	175+bpm
2018	USDA FSIS denies increase	140bpm

*Table 3- USDA FSIS Regulation affecting Poultry Production*

Each attempt to “modernize” federal inspection contained a proposed speedup motivated by industry efficiency and profitability. Jimmy Boggs, organic intellectual

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<sup>59</sup> See Phyllis McKelvey, who worked as a USDA FSIS inspector for forty-four years (<https://www.foodwhistleblower.org/profile/phyllis-mckelvey/> 2018).

and Detroit autoworker, originally from Marion Junction, AL, clearly analyzes the state/capital nexus in a series of essays published by Monthly Review Press, “The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker’s Notebook.” He sharply argues,

“The great bulk of the capital invested in automation today comes from the government and is paid for by every member of the American population, whether he is a worker, a member of the middle class, or rich. This is all done in the name of research and defense, but, whatever it is called, the benefits are as great to the capitalists as if they had put out the capital themselves. Thus, the capitalists have found a way to get around the high cost of automation as well as the high cost of scrapping still productive machinery” (1963: 104).

Short-term workers, moving in and out of the poultry are also scrapped along with outdated machines. For the few workers who withstand decades of life in the poultry, speedups represent one of many forms of the degradation of both life and work.

Frances Hopkins of Cumming, GA is one such worker. Ms. Hopkins started working in the poultry in Gainesville in 1957, when she was seventeen years old. She described these speedups to an interviewer,

“You have to keep up with all of that it’s like [being] a zombie. When I first started they had done 36 birds a minute, then it went to 46, then it went to 90 a minute. Now what I’m doing at Tyson’s is 140 a minute. We look like a zombie in there sometimes. I told ‘em one time that I look like an octopus so many ways to go” (Frances Hopkins, interview by Lindsey Ferguson, April 23, 2000).

On the day Ms. Hopkins sat down for the interview, they had 152,000 birds, meaning they started at 8:00am and got off around 6:00pm for a ten-hour working day (Hopkins, 2000). These speedups not only lengthen the working day, but also speed up workers’ very lives in a sense, propelling many toward premature disability. While the National Chicken Council (2016) and US Poultry (“Providing Protein, Enriching Lives” 2017) report injury and illness rates at an “all-time low,” from 22.7% in 1994 when the BLS began measuring, to 4.3% in 2015, advocates and scholars argue this

decline is due to workers' fear of reporting and underreporting by companies (Compa 2004; Gray 2014; Stuesse 2016; Striffler 2005; Oxfam America 2016; OSHA 2015; NIOSH 2014; GAO 2017).

Reading USDA documents and proposals, it would appear that workers were quietly acquiescent throughout changes in inspection practices and line speeds as poultry made its ascent, surpassing beef in consumption by 1991.<sup>60</sup> Yet, as I argue in chapter 1, this time period is also marked by a growing poultry processing workforce, which often led the South and the nation in worker organizing and unionization as deindustrialization devastated other regional labor strongholds. Taken side-by-side, the omission of workers' concerns and demands presents a strange oversight in FSIS-level proposals and rule-making. I'd like to zoom into one particular proposal in 1994, this follows the Imperial Foods Fire which Bryant Simon (2017) among other scholars are giving new importance. At this time, two federal agencies, the USDA FSIS and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), established a "Memorandum of Understanding" to develop a working relationship and increase the role of FSIS USDA inspectors in monitoring and ensuring worker safety. This was a rare moment in which the USDA appeared to act autonomously from the poultry industry. Yet, the ultimate outcome of this MOU were dismal. In summary, it extended the OSHA reporting hotline to FSIS employees. And, later that year, under the Clinton administration (an Arkansas good ol' boy known to have taken presidential campaign money from Tyson upwards of \$100,000), FSIS developed a proposal for "Enhanced Poultry Inspection,"

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<sup>60</sup> Production increased 315-fold from 1937-1991 and consumption 137-fold over the same time period ("Per Capita Consumption of Poultry" 2018).

which would set the groundwork for the HAACP proposals we see today (Simon 2017). By changing inspection from organoleptic to microbial HAACP effectively removes FSIS employees from the line, from sharing physical space with processing workers, and the ability to bear witness to, learn about, and speak out against worker exploitation.

### *Speedups Inside*

This brings us to the current moment, as politicians like Georgia State Rep. Doug Collins and Secretary of Ag. Sonny Purdue support line speed increases tied to “modernization” of poultry inspection through the NPIS. Yet these proposals fail to account for workers’ own experiences of the working day. And as labor scholars have shown, poultry processing workers have historically responded through organizing unions and filing individual cases against their employers over line speeds and a host of other abuses. Those workers who have not been fired, replaced, or left due to threat of deportation or exhaustion, also attempt to control their time through many small-scale, “everyday forms” documented here. The title of this chapter is taken directly from my field notes and reflects this struggle over time:

Reggie in the dressing room asks, “How are you today Carrie?” I say, “Okay, but I’m not ready to work on Saturday.” He laughs and says, “I might have to miss this one!” Everyone hears that we have three more Saturdays to work. Bonnie comes out and Reggie asks, “How you doing Ms. Bonnie?” She says, exacerbated, “I’m ready to go home!” He says, “You are home, this is your home! I’m gonna get my mail transferred here!” Bonnie laughs and says, “All we need is a bed and a TV and we’re at home!” Birds are good today, I’m exhausted. We get out around 3:15 (Field notes, Thursday, March 5, 2015).

In this excerpt, Bonnie and Reggie share contested visions of time, from ownership (Reggie) to lack of control (This is your home!), but also a protection or coveting of

their time to the level of even pointing out to protect it.<sup>61</sup> Yet, I think this exchange also points to much more, a sense of shared frustration against the plant's control over workers' very limited free-time, which is often relegated to tv and bed, along with a critique of being overworked and underpaid. These are the conversations that the USDA and FSIS are missing, but ones that may give hope to worker organizing against capitalist theft of their time. While "everyday acts" in and of themselves do not present a systemic challenge to capitalist disciplining of worker time, they are both diagnostic of power and have the potential to lead to coordinated and collective social change. These workers have not fully-accepted (and will never fully accept?) the categories of time demanded from their employers. As I hope I've shown in this chapter, contestations around line speeds might expand to center the issue of time, not only for capital-oriented conceptions of time, but for workers' lives outside of and against this form of time-work discipline.

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<sup>61</sup> This mirrors a conversation between Big Bill Broonzy and Memphis Slim documented by Alan Lomax (1970) in his study of the Delta Blues. Memphis Slim: "I axed Mister Charley / What time of day. / He looked at me / Threw his watch away." Big Bill Broonzy: "He the man originated the old-time eight-hour shift down here. Know what I mean? Eight hours in the morning and eight more in the afternoon... You couldn't *tell* um you was tired... They'd crack you cross the head with a stick or maybe kill you. One of those things. You just had to keep on workin... From what they call 'can to can't'... You start to work early in the mornin, and work right on till you can't see no more at night" (in Woods 1998: 130).





Figure 14- Wall of Fame, June 15, 2016, photo by author<sup>62</sup>

### **CHAPTER 3: “AIN’T NO JOB [OR PLACE] FOR A MOTHER!”** *Burying the Past of Black Athens*

“The white inmates at the northern end of the cemetery turned over in their graves when they heard picks and shovels digging foundations for a large brick University building in 1938. They rested more easily when it was revealed that the digging was being confined to the southern end where the colored folks of Athens used to be interred; numerous tibias, vertebrae and grinning skulls of colored brothers were unearthed and thrown ‘over the dump,’ while surviving relatives and friends of silent sleepers in this city of the dead shuddered to think of what an extension of building construction would mean.”

This excerpt is from a letter by a public-relations firm sent to a librarian at the University of Georgia. It concerns the construction of Baldwin Hall in 1938. Baldwin

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<sup>62</sup> Diane’s sons stand by a wall to celebrate their achievements and artwork. Diane gave me written permission to take this photo after an interview. This was always a tricky balancing act, children loved posing for photos, but I tried, as best as possible, not to exploit their eagerness. Yet, this photo is powerful in displaying the kind of love and care Diane has for her family (living and passed) and her hope in their accomplishments.

Hall houses the social science and anthropology departments and was built using New Deal funds and publicly-leased convict labor.<sup>63</sup> During the initial dig, workers found 120 boxes of human remains. These were reburied, according to UGA Historians, in “two 95-foot trenches in or near a pauper cemetery on Nowhere Road” (UGA Historians 2018). This was not the last time African American remains would be unearthed from the Old Athens Cemetery. More recently, in 2015, workers found the remains of 105 individuals as they laid the groundwork for an expansion of the Baldwin Hall parking lot. What followed was a controversy that involved leaders from various segments of Black Athens, administration, faculty, and students at the University of Georgia (Parry 2017; Webb 2017; Blake Aued 2017; Shearer 2018). How the university reacted is, I believe, illustrative of the relationship between UGA and the local Black community over time. I use this episode as an event in the Abrams sense, and to set the stage for my historiography of Black Athens.

In the spring of last year, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* ran an article by staff writer Marc Parry entitled “Buried History: how far should a university go to face its slave past?” (May 25, 2017). In the article, Parry covers a recent controversy over the reinternment of graves from the Old Athens Cemetery to the Oconee Hill Cemetery. Initially, UGA relied on Southeastern Archeological Services (SEAS). SEAS did a visual inspection and declared the remains “appeared to be European” (Parry 2017). Yet, only after local Black residents pushed the university to conduct DNA testing, did a team of biological anthropologists, led by Dr. Laurie Reitsema (UGA), find that

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<sup>63</sup> See Sarah Haley (2013) “Like I Was a Man”: Chain Gangs, Gender, and the Domestic Carceral Sphere in Jim Crow Georgia for the use of prison labor in state municipal projects.

most of the individual remains dated back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were of African descent. Based on US Census figures over this time period, in which over 5,500 Black residents were slaves and only 19 were Freedmen, these were clearly enslaved individuals. Like most headline worthy stories, there are multiple sides to this story.

Oconee Hill Cemetery (OHC) was Athen's main cemetery from 1810-1856 and was historically the white cemetery (Shearer 2016b). The Black individuals buried in OHC were buried in the cemetery's flood plain and their families were kept from erecting any sort of monument or enclosure, often barred from even visiting the grave sites altogether. By 1900, the cemetery stopped allowing Black people to be buried there and was known throughout Athens as the "white cemetery." For these reasons, Linda Davis, head of the restoration efforts at the historically Black Athens' Brooklyn Cemetery, spoke out against the burial in Oconee Hills, stating that the remains needed to be "reinterred with their community" (Blake Aued 2017; Shearer 2017). By the 1880s Black Athenians were using Gospel Pilgrim and Brooklyn Cemetery as white supremacists upheld segregation even in death. These Black-only cemeteries provided sanctuary from the rules enforced at the white cemetery. Black Athenians could honor their dead in their own way, visit when they wanted, and use the stones and markers they desired, without the constant threat of having their ancestors dug up out of the ground (UGA Historians 2018).

Other vocal critics of the university's actions include Fred Smith, co-chair of the Athens Area Black History Committee and founder of the Black History Bowl, who called the actions "inconceivable!" Smith also put the situation in perspective at a press conference in March 2017, "we [Black residents of Athens] still don't have

value. That was just a slap in my face” (Shearer 2017). Local president of the NAACP, Alvin Sheats, responded at the same press conference stating, “It’s no surprise to me that these remains have been disrespected” (Shearer 2017). Proximity was the university’s reasoning for burying the remains in Oconee Hill over Gospel Pilgrim or Brooklyn Cemetery. Vocal Black leaders and residents requested that the university slow down to include more community input, but the University went forward, scheduling a memorial service on March 20, 2017. On March 7 during UGA’s Spring Break, Fred Smith received a tip that they were already breaking ground and found himself outside the gate of the Oconee Hill cemetery watching as workers lowered boxes from U Haul trucks into the ground. As Parry (2017) puts it, UGA was both literally and figuratively trying to bury its slave history.

Yet, slaves provided the necessary labor to build the entire enterprise of UGA, one of two public institutions built from 1783-1800. Much of the campus stands on a former slave plantation. And among the student body and higher administration, according to UGA historian Scott Reynolds, remain several direct and traceable familial ties to slavery and the institution’s benefactors (Parry 2017). In fact, so many of UGA’s students joined the Confederate Army during the Civil War that the school shut down for “the War for Southern Independence.” A plaque on the campus commemorates the school’s closure. While the University went ahead with the March 20<sup>th</sup> memorial, those in attendance skirted around the issue of slavery. UGA faculty and community members took matters into their own hands and held an event entitled “A Conversation about Slavery at UGA and the Baldwin Site Burials.” John H. Morrow Jr., a Black historian at UGA for over 30 years indicted his university for

consistently acting as if “the surrounding Black community does not exist” (Parry 2017). He went on to critique the university’s President, Jere Morehead, “He’s going to talk to the community. I’m not interested in hearing what the white community has to say about this. We know damn well what the white community thinks, because we’re connected to it — coaches and everyone else. But there is still no communication with the African-American community about these issues” (Parry 2017).

This conflict is reflective of ongoing divisions between the university and its majority white leadership and (wealthy) student body<sup>64</sup> to the local Black, residents of Athens. While the devaluation of human life here appears obvious in the segregation of black and white even in death, the blatant disrespect and disregard for slave burial sites and bodies, and the convict labor used to dig and expand the public white university, I’d like to draw out the ongoing effects of racial capitalism in the making of Athens and the poultry industry. To borrow from Clyde Woods (1998), it’s important to remember that displacement and dispossession are not limited to the physical removal of people from land, genocide, and accumulation through private property, but are also often symbolic, psychological and linked to the displacement of viable labor. In this sense, the making and re-making of Black Athens, including the spaces of reprieve, rest, and resistance from the degradation of work at the poultry, are essential to understanding who works at the poultry and why they continue to do so.

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<sup>64</sup> White students made up 67% of UGA’s student body in 2018, with only 8.5% Black (Stirgus 2018). An investigation by The Equality of Opportunity Institute, funded through the NSF and labs housed at Harvard and Stanford, also found that 59% of UGA students come from households within the top 20%, with a median family income of \$129,800, while only 3.8% come from the lowest 20% (Chetty et al. 2017).

Resource extraction, and the transfer of capital are as critical to the security of wealth for white Athens, represented in the University's relationship to its racialized, working-class population as to the growth of the poultry industry.

In the previous chapter I provide a glimpse of the demands of the working day for people inside the poultry processing plant, but also how workers themselves contest these disciplining measures. In this chapter I draw on oral histories and archival documents to analyze the structuring of Black community life surrounding the plant. In this sense, the construction of the place of life's work becomes as influential as the workplace on people's daily lives. Oral histories provide an opportunity for workers to share why and how people decide to find work at the poultry, the conditions under which they move in and out, and the ways in which they have made and continue to make life work. Through this process, the women I interviewed reflect on their experiences and articulate their understanding of the world, directly, less filtered through my perspective as with the plant ethnography. Finally, through oral histories, interviewees reveal Scott's "hidden transcript," that is the often-invisible forms of resistance and survival that oppressed groups enact shaped by, against, but also alternatively to racial capitalism. For working-class Black Athenians, moving in and out of the poultry, these actions, experiences, and understandings of place, struggle, and community are not well-documented in the public transcript, that is the newspaper articles, industry reports, legislation, and public record. They are also largely missing from poultry worker studies, with the exception of LaGuana Gray's (2014) work with Black women in poultry processing in Louisiana.

In this analysis, moving beyond the plant walls and the working day, to the

spaces of social reproduction, and with a longer historical scope, I hope to capture what Clyde Woods calls “existing capitalism,” that is the “gritty, chaotic, and ‘creatively’ destructive features in the day-to-day reproduction of inequality” (1998: 257). From this vantage point, Woods exposes the ways in which racial capitalism assumes a casino-like form taking hold and reconstituting previous structures of “plantation economies” across the South, to construct people and places as “commodities or objects to be gambled with by firms seeking short-term, above-average profitability.” The poultry industry relies on these conditions, put most simply as the degradation of racialized life and work. As Jordan, a 32-year-old Black mother of 5 memorably concluded, the poultry “ain’t no job for a mother,” but the demands of the poultry must be understood in relation to the hostility of the surrounding community against working-class Black life.

In spite of this relationship, it is also beyond the plant walls, where workers relax, recuperate, and develop what bell hooks refers to as “homeplace,” as a “site of resistance” (hooks 1999). In *Yearning*, hooks uses her personal experiences, growing up in a working-class family within a segregated Southern town, to argue for the strength of Black women and the space of the “domestic sphere” for Black communities. The home, in hooks’ account, represents a special woman’s domain, but one where “all that truly mattered in life took place—the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls” (1999, 41). Black women’s homes became sites of resistance because of their very position of marginality and served as counterhegemonic sites. This involved the work of physical and psychological separation for Black women, saving energy to “make life happen”

in their own homes, for their own children and families. In this sense, homeplace provided a space of refuge, one that was protected from the indignity and acts of dehumanization perpetuated by whites outside. Homeplace also fostered the collective knowledge, valuation, and strength for black families to connect with one another, to “build community.”<sup>65</sup>

### ***Getting Hired at the Poultry***

*“I knew I had to do this. It was either go to work or be on the streets. When you ain’t got no choice, that’s it, there’s no one to help you. If we need something, there’s no one to call. I got to go out there and get it.”*

(Chrissandra, interview with the author, March 19, 2016)

Women come to work in the poultry for a variety of reasons. For the native-born Black women I interviewed, most came to the poultry because they had a family member, often a mother, auntie, or even a daughter working there already. They came because they had a new baby or babies to provide for, and they came because it paid better than Wal-Mart, McDonald’s, Burger King, Kroger, or home care or because they had been laid off as other manufacturing plants in the area closed their operations.<sup>66</sup> The Poultry has benefits, so they came for the benefits, not only for themselves but for their children. For most women I spoke with, they came to the poultry because the

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<sup>65</sup> For a similarly powerful analysis of slave families and domestic lives, see Angela Davis’s classic work *Women, Race, and Class* (1983). Here, Davis argues that unlike for middle-class white women, the domestic space and support structures fostered there created an antagonistic space within slavery, one where labor could be performed for slaves and not the slaveowner. It also provided the only space of “true expression” as human beings. This is not just a matter of difference of perception, between white and black, but at the heart of very political question of the role of waged work for feminist movements, and the basis for Davis’ critique of the Wages for Housework movement. See also George Rawick’s *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community* (1973).

<sup>66</sup> Between 2000-2009 Athens lost nearly 1,000 jobs. A little over 300 of those jobs were tied to the two major poultry plants (“Chicken plant shutting down” 2009).

poultry remains one of the few workplaces that hire people “with a record.” During oral histories, women would often volunteer this information as a prime motivator for finding work at the poultry. In this way, the poultry, becomes a catch-all for the effects of Black criminalization for a generation of workers born into the get tough, “war on drugs” era of policing.

Many women in Marcus’s family worked at the poultry — his mom, aunt, great aunt, sister — a “hefty amount” as he puts it. I met Marcus through my work with the family engagement specialist at a local public middle school. She suggested I work with him, because he was motivated to go to college and always looking for something to do, being raised by his elderly grandfather. She described him, saying, “Marcus is like a 80-year-old Black man in a 16-year-old body.” During field work, I picked up Marcus at least once a week to cook dinner, go to the store, or eat ice cream. Marcus is very reflective, yet still sees the world with an amount of optimism. One day, after knowing each other a few months, I asked him, “What do you think about this saying, if you’re Black in Athens you know somebody that’s worked in the poultry?” This was as I drove him from his mostly Black neighborhood on the East side to his part-time fast-food job. His response is illuminating, “Yeah ‘coz the poultry, the thing is, the poultry will hire people no matter what, even if you’ve been in jail or whatever they’ll hire you. If you’re a felon, you’ll probably look to work at the poultry” (Field notes, Sunday, February 1, 2015). In this common understanding of the poultry, Marcus conflates race, specifically being Black, with a criminal background and work at the poultry. This view is supported across interviews, as “the poultry” takes you no matter what your background. Takeya, of the same generation as Marcus’s mom, Jessica,

worked in the poultry off and on for 7 years. In 2006 she went to the poultry for the first time because it was relatively easy to get a job, especially since she had a record.

Takeya: Especially here that's all that they have that will hire, mostly Blacks, I'm gonna be honest, they will hire you. I will say it like this, they're *lenient*. If you have a criminal background, and you can't go nowhere else you can go get a job at a poultry processing plant. A lot of times you get people who got backgrounds, you get what I'm saying? They hire just about anybody. A lot of Hispanics too. I know a lot of people. My mom worked. My aunt worked, she lives next door to me. She worked there for years now. She's got a lot of health problems now. I know a lot of people who's worked there (Takeya, interview with the author, June 3, 2016).

During interviews at the Department of Labor, the plant's HR rep reminds a room of over a hundred hopeful applicants, that the poultry is one of very few places that hires ex-felons. She names a few others, Home Depot, Lowe's, but the poultry is *the best*, especially for women. This contrasts to Ericka's view of the poultry for an older generation of Black Athenians, born before the Civil Rights movement. For them, the poultry was *the* place "back in the day" for *BLACK* people, "If you couldn't find any other work they'd say, 'go to the poultry, they'll give you a job'" (Ericka 2016). From formal segregation back in the day to de facto criminalization and discrimination today, the poultry remains both a last, and only resort for much of Black Athens.

Despite hating the work and the ways the supervisors treated everyone, the women I interviewed told me time and time again they stayed because they were responsible for other people and there were just *no better options* outside of the poultry. So that once people start at the poultry, no matter the initial motivation, they "get stuck." One day in early December, as the stress of buying Christmas gifts began looming over workers' heads, Tracey, a 42-year-old mother and my closest friend in the plant, expressed her frustration. She was working to the point of exhaustion, three

doubles in a row, with a supervisor who did little to help ease their work in the picking room. When Tammi advised her to tell him off, she held up two fingers and said, “two, I have two kids to take care of, TWO! I can’t be doing that, two.” Shortly after, she went on to express her frustration having to put up with this treatment, “We make pennies. It’s just a rat race. We can’t do nothing with those pennies, just trying to keep up all the time. But there ain’t no other place that has insurance. I gotta have insurance especially for my daughter” (Fieldnotes, Monday, December 8, 2014). Tracey is a single mother and sole provider for her daughter who has a moderate form of cerebral palsy. The poultry industry depends on these conditions. After our 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of work in a row, Ana, a Mexican woman on the mirror station, lamented “*la vida de pobres*” (Field notes, Saturday, February 21, 2015). The industry depends on a workforce with too many responsibilities and no alternatives, one that endures this life of the poor.

While business is booming for the largest poultry agribusinesses, for the people who give their bodies day-in-day-out to the plant and the surrounding communities, the current state of work represents more of an “American Nightmare.” I trace the changing experiences of work at the poultry and life in the surrounding communities, back to the period preceding the Civil Rights Movement, as this time frame remains most relevant for workers and their families. During the 1970s, on the heels of the Civil Rights movement, many Black workers’ parents and grandparents were able to etch out a meager sense of stability by working at “the poultry.” This sense of economic stability, has since crumbled for most poultry families, in a period of neoliberal racial capitalism, marked by a degradation of work, neighborhood dispossession, hyper-policing and criminalization, and labor displacement through the

recruitment of undocumented workers. While many scholars have traced these changes, emphasizing the decline of manufacturing jobs (Milkman 1997; Cowie 2001b), the retreat of the 'welfare' state (Fraser 2016; Harvey 2005; Keene [unpublished MA thesis] 2011; Kornbluh 1997; Bhattacharya 2017), and the expansion of the warfare state through increasing rates of imprisonment and incarceration (Alexander 2010; Gilmore 2006; T. M. Golash-Boza 2015), in this chapter, I will analyze the degradation of both life and work from the perspectives of intergenerational poultry families, who have remained tied to the industry and place. Despite these structural conditions, workers and their families do not simply acquiesce to those institutions that would render them "surplus" labor but instead, their very lives provide a cogent critique of the failures of racial capitalism (Gilmore 1999, 2006, Araghi 2003, 2012; Rehmann 2015).

By centering intergenerational families, I join previous feminist scholars who challenge the nuclear model of the stay-at-home mother and even the second shift mother. Yet, this work specifically draws from the work of women of color and Black feminists to consider the effects of low-wage, physically demanding and degraded work in a period of a decimated welfare state, mass incarceration, and anti-immigration legislation, in order to inform policy changes, social movement demands, and to improve current theorization of social reproduction. As feminist geographers Barbara Ellen Smith and Jamie Winders (2015) remind us, it is necessary to consider "whose lives?" and "which work?" when theorizing about contemporary conditions of social reproduction. For working-class Black communities, children play an instrumental role in shaping where, how, and for whom social reproduction is "done."

Black feminist and Chicana scholars (Bettie 2014; Roberts 2012, 1999; Anzaldúa 2012) have documented the level of responsibility that working-class youth take on, shaped by their social class, their parents' and grandparents' working day, and their own educational and aspirational subjectivities.

Yet, I distinguish the waning role of once stable, low-wage poultry work, as the changing experiences of poultry families highlight the effects of the "crisis" of social reproduction, alongside the degradation of work that has remained in place and even expanded across the South. Additionally, this chapter seeks to connect mass incarceration and workfare programs to the expansion of anti-immigrant state and national legislation and mass deportations, discussed in Chapter 4, to "preserve a racial caste" (Roberts 2012) by controlling and containing "surplus populations" no longer valuable for capital accumulation.

For a younger generation of processing workers, there are few alternatives to the poultry, yet today these workers find themselves in a drastically different poultry from those of their parents' and grandparents' generations. From the vantage point of intergenerational poultry families, the increasing precarity of both life and work is made visible, so that "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps," by hanging 14,000 live chickens or by making 20,000 cuts a day is impossible when your feet are all but cut off. Although for some poultry families, success means leaving Athens and the poultry plants, the history of Black Athens alongside contemporary community organizing efforts presents a clear critique of this model. This critique, articulated by both workers, activists, and Black "organic intellectuals," highlight the structural barriers to achievement within this framework, while also providing a vision that exists outside of

and beyond the dominant model of exit. These visions were expressed in everyday conversations and oral histories, at times reaching back to a collective memory of “Black Athens” while simultaneously constructing a vision of self-determination rooted in an intergenerational movement. Yet, for working-class Black Athens, following Clyde Woods *ala* Peter Jackson and Gramsci, “resistance may not always be active and open, often it will be latent and largely symbolic” (1998: 27).

For native-born Black youth living across poultry families, social reproduction is often spatially dispersed, extending beyond the nuclear household. The role of extended families, be it aunts, grandmas, and at times scaled up to an entire “Black Athens,” challenges the one-size-fits-all model of the nuclear family, and contemporary social welfare policies in the process. While many scholars<sup>67</sup> have documented the disruption of family and community life by the foster care system and mass incarceration, I focus on the relationship of these systems to low-wage poultry work. The physically demanding conditions of poultry work, especially control over workers’ time often extending irregularly beyond the 8-hour working day and/or constituting “anti-social” work schedules, contribute to a condition of intergenerational or neighborhood-level social reproduction. This means that childcare and all that goes along with it, is spread among several houses, made all the more difficult by policing and incarceration, poverty, and substance addiction for working-class Black families.

Importantly, the role of criminalization of Black men, and increasingly Black

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<sup>67</sup> See Roberts 2012; Ruiz and Kopak 2014; Enos 2001.

women, is evident within poultry processing communities, leaving mothers, aunts, and grandparents, as the sole breadwinners and heads of household. For ACC, and in areas concentrated with working-class Black families, over 66% of households depend on single mothers (ACC Economic Devp 2016). Out of forty oral histories with Black women workers, all but two were single mothers. The targeted criminalization of Black communities not only shapes women's work opportunities at the poultry, but also their ability to even raise their kids. In this sense, class relations are reproduced through a series of barriers to social reproduction experienced as a lack of control over workers' time and space. Through oral history and ethnography, I show that the ability to raise children in this country remains very uneven, with implications on young people's education (achievement gap), social relationships, and entire futures.

### ***Into a Burning Building***

In May 1954, the US Supreme Court declared the segregation of public schools unconstitutional through the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* case, a federal decision that then Governor Herman Talmadge of Georgia refused to accept. By 1956 only 1% of Black students in Athens went to integrated schools (Knight 2007: 197). At the time of *Brown v. Board* there was one Black high school on Reese Street, Athens High and Industrial School for grades 8-11, and four elementary and junior high schools, Reese Street, East Athens, West Broad, and Newtown, with plans underway to expand West Broad, Athens High Industrial School, and North Athens (a stone's throw away from the poultry plant). The first step toward integration was to close several small, rural, often church-affiliated, communal schools. The district developed

bus routes to concentrate Black students in larger schools within more urban/semi-urban neighborhoods of town. With this concentration came the removal of Black leadership and control over education in the region. But before the local public schools would be fully integrated, the university would lead the way.

On January 6, 1961, a federal judge ordered the immediate integration of the University of Georgia by admitting two African American students, Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes. This ruling conflicted with state legislation which threatened to cut off state funds to any white institution that admitted Black students. Riots ensued on the University's campus on January 11, with a mob convening outside of Charlayne Hunter's dormitory. Interviews with Civil Rights leaders from the time period recall a UGA fraternity off Broad Street hanging a Black doll outside the house while burning a large cross on the lawn. State and University officials eventually condemned the riots and repealed the laws against integration ("University of Georgia Integration" 1961; Daugherty and Bolton 2008).

Although the public schools today are majority Black and Latino, initially after integration these schools were still viewed by Black residents as belonging to the white students and their families. Agnes Green, one of the first students selected to integrate the public schools under the "Freedom of Choice" program, recalls the feeling of entering the "white schools," a feeling that discouraged her from staying at Childs Street Elementary School. Instead, she returned to the segregated school after one year of integration until graduation.

AG: We lost that *community feeling*. You know that old saying, "it takes a community to raise a child," and I think that, back when I was growing up, we had *community* and I do not know if these kids now have a community... An entire culture was lost

because we had to incorporate ourselves into their culture. Whereas, when we had BHHS, it was our high school. That was our culture. It was ours, and we lost that when we had to go to another institution. Once they moved [us] to Athens High School, even though it might have been better, the material things, the main thing that was lost was the *love*, the *caring*, and the *embracing* that we got from our teachers [italics added] (Agnes Green, interview with Monica Knight, August 12, 2006 in Knight 2007).

These were the “intangibles” as Green calls them, the feelings of love, care, and hope she felt the Black schools provided their students (Knight 2007). Decades before integration, W.E.B. DuBois addressed the issue of segregated schools as a reflection of society, of the attitudes and treatment of Black America by white. In an essay in the *Journal of Negro Education* (1935), DuBois argues,

“The proper education of any people includes sympathetic touch between teacher and pupil; knowledge on the part of the teacher, not simply of the individual taught, but of his surroundings and background, and the history of his class and group; such contact between pupils, between teacher and pupil, on the basis of perfect social equality, as will increase this sympathy and knowledge; facilities for education in equipment and housing, and the promotion of such extracurricular activities as will tend to induct the child into life” (1970 [1935]: 278).

As one of the only Black teachers in the ACC public school system in the 1970s, Mrs. Sheats saw a level of resentment among her Black students and families. For Black students bussed from places like Rocksprings (public housing complex off of West Broad) into Barrow elementary, where Mrs. Sheats was a first-grade teacher, the school was commonly considered “UGA’s school.” Mrs. Sheats observed, “Those students didn’t want to go to Barrow, they wanted to stay in their own neighborhoods with their friends.” Mrs. Sheats recalled the significance of the Black owned schools for those who attended.

Mrs. Sheats: I don’t know if you know of the history of how the original Black schools were closed down. It’s like taking away the Black church, taking away a foundation. Then you have a group of people, parents, grandparents, and kids, who feel like ‘we had this, but it was all taken away.’ Sometimes what we had was not that great, we had the

used books, we had the textbooks from the white schools, but we had *our* schools and then it was all taken away from us. We don't have anything to say to our great grandchildren. 'This is where I went to school.' We can't say that. It was taking away something, that causes, anytime you don't feel like you belong then you feel inferior, even though you fight it, you don't wanna say I'm inferior, but deep down inside you really feel inferior (Pat Sheats, interview with the author, June 8, 2016).

Significantly, many members of the older generation of Black Athens who attended the segregated schools, are preserving the memory of their schools, especially Athens High and Industrial School/Burney-Harris High School. This is evident in several interviews with former-students of the pre-integrated high school as well as multiple alumni-oriented social groups dedicated to the preservation of both the memory and physical space of these schools (“Athens High & Industrial School, Burney-Harris High School” 2002; “The History of Athens High and Industrial School/Burney-Harris High Schools” n.d.).

Despite mixed perspectives on the gains and losses of school integration from the local Black community, the Civil Rights Movement and the end of Jim Crow continue to hold significance for Black Athens, especially, the struggles around desegregation of the beloved downtown restaurant, The Varsity. This Georgia hotdog and burger joint opened its Athens chain in 1963. The Varsity had two locations, one downtown that only served African-Americans through a walk-up window, and one off Milledge and Broad, where African Americans worked as car hops but could not be served themselves (Gallant 2014). Nicole Taylor, producer, and Gabrielle Fulton Ponder, director, created a short documentary for *The Southern Foodways Alliance* to re-tell this significant moment in the city's history, “If we so choose” (Taylor 2013).

In the documentary, Taylor interviews former leaders from the Youth Council, a Civil Rights organization established through personal connections with Dr. King in

Atlanta. The Youth Council met in the Athens High and Industrial School building on Reese Street, where participants learned non-violent methods in preparation for the violence that would ensue. Ken Dious, Gloria Weaver, Charlie Maddox, Elizabeth Taylor, Shirley Taylor, Bennie McKinley, Patricia Thomas, Larry Sargent, Patricia Huff, Carolyn Turner, and Robert Harrison were key members of the Youth Council, who led the sit-ins at The Varsity from 1963-1964.

Dr. Robert Harrison, who participated as a teenager, comments on how the structure of work in Athens during this time shaped who was willing and able to protest. For Dr. Harris, it was clear a significant “plantation bloc” in the words of Clyde Woods (1998) persisted. Since most Black people were dependent on whites for employment, it was especially risky for their children to participate in the protests. Dr. Harrison, with a laugh, distinguishes his own involvement, “I guess my parents were so poorly employed it didn’t matter!” (Taylor 2013). Mrs. Bennie McKinley, in a recent oral history interview through the University of Georgia (Athens Oral History Project, AOHP 002 Bennie McKinley, interviewed by Alexander Stephens, July 11, 2014) commented on the unique role of young people for the movement. The very fact that they were not employed, and at this time period formal employment usually meant employed by White people, afforded them a certain amount of strength. According to McKinley, “The young people were not afraid,” and many of the most active youth saw their future selves in Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes (McKinley 2014).



*Figure 15- Youth protestors marching to the Varsity, "If We So Choose" Taylor, 2013*

Demonstrations took place over several years, with the largest erupting in the Spring of 1964, as organizers gained inspiration from the Greensboro sit-ins in North Carolina. The Klan held counter-protests on the other side of the street, with headquarters less than two miles away in the Beechwood Shopping Center. Klansmen, grown men, carried guns against the protestors', mostly high school students, bricks. Black car hops working at the Varsity kept the organizers informed on management, and "had our backs," according to Dr. Turner's memory of the protests (Gallant 2014). Other community members, especially among the Black-owned businesses of "Hot Corner," supported the youth by providing meals, comfort, and refuge each day in the Manhattan Cafe. The biggest confrontation occurred when both Civil Rights protestors and the KKK members were allowed to walk on the same side of the street. Youth Council activist, Bennie McKinley remembers this morning when police rounded up all the protestors and brought them to the Stockade, the former city of Athens jail. Instead of locking the protestors up, they kept them outside to keep the city from

spending money to feed the protestors until their family, churches, or other community members could pick them up.

The final standoff took place when youth organized with the Ebenezer Baptist Church. Reverend Archibald Killian, the first Black police officer in Athens, recounts the story from inside the ACC police department as Police Chief Hardy prepared the unit for a mass arrest at the Varsity. As Killian stepped aside, unwilling to join in the mass arrest, he was confronted by Hardy. Both men faced one another in a silent standoff. Finally, Chief Hardy conceded by saying, "Integration is here, there's nothing we can do about it," calling off the mass arrest (Taylor 2013).

In addition to the significance of Black schools prior to integration, there were also a greater number of Black owned businesses that served the community with material goods and a sense of racial pride and place. This was true for many places across the Jim Crow South as those who stayed "built a nation within a nation,"<sup>68</sup> building up a self-determined Black community despite, or in spite of, the state-supported segregation and degradation of Jim Crow. Athens' "Hot Corner" district, instrumental in the Varsity protests, had a concentration of 25-30 Black owned businesses. They occupied the corner of Washington and Hull extending three blocks north to "the Bottoms" neighborhood. Homer Wilson, among the last Black property owners in the area, son of M.C. Wilson of Wilson's Soul Food and Wilson's Styling Shop, remembers "Hot Corner" as a "Black Mecca" of Northeast Georgia (Athens Oral History Project, AOHP 001 Homer Wilson, interviewed by Alexander Stephens,

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<sup>68</sup> See W.E.B. DuBois' use of "A Negro Nation within a Nation" speech on June 26, 1934, marking his resignation from the NAACP (Rucker 2002).

June 25, 2014). This reflected a longer history of Black migration from rural areas of Northeast Georgia to Athens. Local Black Historian Michael L. Thurmond (2001) traced the significance of Athens to freedmen in the summer and fall immediately following emancipation in 1865. He found a former slave's powerful description of the meaning of Athens to freedmen during that time, "Right off colored folks started on the move. They seemed to want to get closer to freedom, so they'd know what it was—like it was a place or a city" (in Thurmond 2001:13).

As Athens represented a place of freedom within Georgia in the postbellum South, Hot Corner represented this place within Athens during the Civil Rights movement. Black owned barber shops, lawyers offices, a drug store, dentist's office, funeral home, theater, cleaning businesses, hotels, bootleggers, pool halls, and of course restaurants and cafes made up "Hot Corner," cultivating and housing Black artists like Neal Pattman and community leaders like Homer Wilson and Mrs. Wade. For Homer Wilson, Hot Corner was especially important, not only for economic self-reliance but also for shielding Black residents of Athens from painful, degrading interactions with white businessowners. Mr. Wilson, born in 1946, recounts an incident he had with a white storeowner during Jim Crow:

Homer Wilson: I went to the store to get some oranges and apples and brazil nuts. Back then, you couldn't say it like that, so I asked for the oranges, and I asked for the apples. I asked for the Brazil nuts, and he knew who I was. He said, "aren't you MC Wilson's son?" I said, "yes," he said, "well don't come here trying to change nothing." So, I had to change from saying brazil nuts, I had to say, "nigger toes." And that just really tore me down. I told him that I'd be back. I said the wrong thing; I shouldn't have said that. I told my mom, and my daddy went back and talked to him. I just couldn't say a thing like that... [long pause] Can I take a break? [Audibly upset] I don't like to tell that story... I'm alright, I just need to calm down a minute... I'm alright, I'm better now. I used to couldn't talk about it at all! People need to know, things like that actually happened, but let's get back to hot corner! [Laughing] (Wilson

2014).

The pain and anger this interaction caused remains in his mind after over fifty years. Freedom for Mr. Wilson is a place, and that place is far away from Jim Crow business owners. That place is Hot Corner.

Mr. Wilson also recounts advice he received from his parents but also from hanging around his dad's barber shop. He learned, "The things you do when you're in the presence of whites, the things you don't do when you're in the presence of policemen. They've always taught you how to survive in those kinds of relationships. What to say, what not to say, sometimes they'd give up their rights in order to survive during those times" (Wilson 2014). These actions of survival included a sense of what W.E.B. DuBois famously termed "double consciousness" where Black parents, like Wilson's taught their children to deal with the things white people said to them. Wilson was taught to "eat it and solve it to get yourself out from under." His father used to describe it in this way, "It's like having your hand in a lion's mouth, you can't jerk it out, you have to ease it out." So that on the outside, Wilson and his family appeared acquiescent and accommodating, while in private, these sorts of actions were merely a way to survive in the Jim Crow South, where Klansman were a visible presence throughout the county, and would "burn your house down" for speaking back. After the incident at the corner store, Mr. Wilson's mother said he "put the whole family in danger" (Wilson 2014).

### ***Freedom is a Place***

In previous chapters I outline the historical changes within the poultry

processing workforce. While working at the plant, a few “purple hat”<sup>69</sup> women, Ms. Belle, Ms. Anne, Ms. Shirley, were still on the line, with the start dates labeling their helmets reaching back to 1964, 1965, 1968. With an impressive 50+ years of service to all three plants, these women were among many working class Black Athenians to gain “good” employment in the manufacturing plants across Athens after integration. The 1970s and early 1980s mark the “golden years” for much of Athens’ Black working class, as the struggles of the Civil Rights movement dismantled Jim Crow, enabling Black workers to seek employment in the growing manufacturing sector (Cobb 1993). Wilkins Industries, a sewing factory, was the first to integrate in 1953, hiring Black women on the line. Colonial Poultry (1954), Westclox (1954), Westinghouse (1958), and Bellgrade Manufacturing Co. (1963) all contributed to post-war manufacturing growth throughout the region. While the end of Jim Crow and the passage of the Civil Rights Act were hard fought victories of Black self-determination across the South and the country, what Black Athenians gained through the civil rights movement they lost in the unintended decimation of Black schools and Black owned businesses like in Hot Corner.

During this time period, many Black Athenians who did not leave the South during the second ‘Great Migration,’ instead left the fields as sharecropper and white people’s houses as domestics to join the emerging industrial working class (Hunter 1997; Gisolfi 2017). Following desegregation movements across the country, Black workers were finally allowed to enter the plants and benefit from higher wages and

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<sup>69</sup> Special purple bump caps given to workers who had been at the plant for over 25 years. Regular workers wore white bump caps. New hires, before reaching the 45-day period, wore gold bump caps, supervisors blue, line leaders black, and lab techs yellow.

worker protections, from which they were structurally barred through New Deal programs and the National Labor Relations Act (Pimpire 2012, 2017; Winders 2009; Stuesse and Helton 2013; Gray 2014). Similar to urban centers of the industrial North, struggles centering labor rights across the South, albeit limited to wages and working conditions, established momentary security. Even in the poultry plants these “golden years” are remembered as providing good, stable, working-class jobs and a path to homeownership and middle-class dreams for future generations. Following Cowie (2016) this period marked one of “Great Exception” in the US, after World War II solidified social and labor gains from the New Deal and Wagner Act (1935), in which workers obtained considerable power. Even with the setback of Taft Hartley Act (1947), nationally, workers’ wages rose and in many manufacturing industries, real wages continued to increase until the 1970s (Cowie 2016).

For working-class Black Athenians, manufacturing jobs allowed for a middle-class existence, and reflected a national trend, as the post-war welfare state expanded, unionization rates were at an all-time high, and the Black freedom struggle exposed the moral bankruptcy of white supremacy. But many of the gains of this period depended on the remains of the war economy and the expanded “development project” globally (McMichael 2017). Specifically, for the poultry industry, the conditions for post-war production growth depended on the War Food Program. Through the WFP, the US military rationed beef and reserved poultry in the Delmarva region so that Southern poultry “took off,” simultaneously entrenching a gendered and racialized division of labor in the rural South (Gisolfi 2017). Briefly, as Black Athenians fully-integrated Seaboard in 1964, this generation of workers was able to participate in the

“American Dream” to the exclusion of agricultural and domestic workers nearby and workers of other (global) Souths.

With some amount of choice among “high” paying jobs, many Black Athens’ neighborhoods cultivated a sense of stability. Ericka explains what these jobs meant for people in Black Athens.

Ericka: You know back in the day some of the high paying factory jobs like ABB (former Westinghouse power plant, now Power Partners), I had cousins and people who worked there, there were only a few Black people that worked at ABB. Westclox. CertainTeed. I mean, some of these places that I’m naming now, some of my classmates and friends, either their father worked there... Those places you could graduate from high school and you could go to Athens and make \$20 an hour. Nobody wanted to go work in the poultry. They wanted these other factory jobs because, you know, you’d look in the parking lot and everybody had a new car, you didn’t have to smell a certain way. Nobody really, it was the bottom of the totem pole to work at the poultry (Ericka 2016).

This time period, of fleeting prosperity is recalled in interviews with several current and former Black workers in the poultry plants. Jessica, Marcus's mother who was in and out of jail, low-wage restaurants, poultry work, and unemployment, talks about the differences between her own experiences of work as compared to those of older women in her family, aunts and grandmother in particular, who worked for the poultry for at least thirty years. Several of them owned their own homes and continue to occupy these homes off of Cane St., located across the street from a large public housing complex on the East Side. Jessica, along with her ex-boyfriend, were never able to buy their own home, and instead were invested in a rent-to-own situation in the same neighborhood. They each worked over 60-hour weeks at a small plant nearby. Her neighbors were the old-timers, family members, but also the well-to-do in Black Athens.

Jessica: Yeah. I mean in that neighborhood, them people been up there 30 plus years.

The commissioner lived in that neighborhood. Those people, they been living there. Families. Older people. I think we were the youngest couple that lived there. My auntie, she been living there 30 years. Most of them folks they own their houses. We were rent to own. I lived there a couple months. It was some older people who lived there, they was 92 and 94. I think they son or they grandson was selling it, they getting old. They wasn't able to see for themselves (Jessica, interview with the author, October 24, 2015).

This aging generation, embodied in Jessica's great-aunt and grandmother, were at the prime of their working lives in the post-war period. For Sheila, born in 1959, her parents' jobs at the poultry, her dad a chicken catcher, her mom on the evisceration line, provided a "good" upbringing, one where her parents could provide. She recalls life then, some fifty years ago, "They paid all the bills, took us out to eat. Every Friday we had Church's fried chicken. Every Saturday my daddy cooked fish, we'd have a good time" (Sheila, interview with the author, June 7, 2016).



*Figure 16- Abandoned Westclox building after it closed its doors in 2001. Photo by Carl Berkland, November 18, 2002*

For Black workers who were able to get a job in a higher paying manufacturing plant, life was even better. Marcus's granddad on his dad's side was a

part of this generation. As a youth, he marched with Dr. King to end segregation, served in the military, worked for a few decades in the ABB plant, and eventually graduated from Athens Technical College. Marcus considers his granddad his only role model because, “He went to college and made something with his life, took care of what needed to be taken care of, made money for himself, and never had to live paycheck to paycheck” (Marcus, phone conversation with the author, November 26, 2016). Similar to Ericka’s aunts and uncle, Mrs. Pat Sheats’s mother, Broderick’s mother, Takeya’s parents, Sheila’s parents, and many other Black Athenians with working parents during the 1960s-1980s, home ownership in neighborhoods on the East Side and Newtown, was the most important and concrete gain of the Civil Rights movement and subsequent expansion and integration of manufacturing jobs to Black Athenians.

Ericka's childhood “home house” on MLK and Water St., on the East Side was located in one such strong, Black working and middle-class neighborhood. The similarities between Ericka’s “home house” and hooks’ “homeplace” are powerful. This is where her aunts and uncle raised her, in a house bought initially by her grandfather and passed down for generations. This was “Black Athens” as she describes it and illustrates the centrality of the place of East Athens to her memory. The people in her neighborhood, in her community, they gave her the tools to allow her to dream bigger and to eventually move outside of Athens (Erickam, 2016).

Ericka: So, you had people, our neighbor directly across the street from us, she worked in the poultry a million years. And then, you had Mary Moore who was the first Black woman to be on city council in Athens. That was my next-door neighbor. Behind us a nurse, teachers, some of the first Black teachers that worked in Athens integrated schools lived literally 5 houses up from us. I grew up in a very stable working-middle-class neighborhood in Athens.

Especially important in this neighborhood were a core group of Black women, educators, and Sunday school teachers. These were women who had left Athens but returned to make mentoring a central part of their lives. This includes Athens-famous women like Beverly Johnson, Miriam Moore, Jessie Barnett, Virginia Walker, and Evelyn Neely, the unofficial “Mayor of East Athens.” Mrs. Neely was central in securing control over funding through Lyndon B. Johnson’s Model Cities Program during the 1970s. This antipoverty program fostered Black leadership across the South as an alternative to politics as usual. In East Athens, the community used the funds to build a community health center. These funds also provided a safeguard against some of the more disastrous “urban renewal projects,” also known across the country as “negro removal.”

Today, the neighborhood that she so fondly remembers and is proud to have been raised in, is rapidly changing. Located along the eastern bank of the Oconee, this area provided a segregated Black neighborhood settled initially by freedmen following the Civil War. It was mockingly referred to by white Athenians as “Blackfriars” after the fashionable London Whitefriars (Thurmond 2001). Yet, in the 1970s, federal urban renewal projects funded the creation of the North Oconee Park and displaced folks “living on the river.” Ms. Faye Bush, of Gainesville, recalls similar changes to the city’s south side due to urban renewal.

Faye Bush: When urban renewal came through, it changed the whole south side of Gainesville. Because where you see the banks and things, Wachovia Bank, it used to be all Black-owned residence up there. Where the old Health Department and all that, Blacks used to live there. The County came in. It was meant for a good thing because I remember when Lyndon Johnson came through and went up College Avenue and he wanted to see the houses. They kind of came in and relocated everybody. *Put us all*

*over here* (Faye Bush, interview with Carl Weinberg, 2002, emphasis added).

Displacement continues to this day, although the process now appears privatized as UGA students and developers expand into the East Side of town buying up Black owned houses.

Ericka: Now (laughing) it's completely different. I'm like wow, the whole neighborhood, it's like students, and it's being gentrified. But prior to that if people know a little about Athens, that park, North Oconee Park, used to be nothing but Shotgun houses. It started off mill workers and mainly black. My family, was a really close knit Black family that lived "on the river" as they called it. Then urban renewal, 1970s urban renewal, the city did eminent domain, bought up all that property, most of the people moved into those brick houses there [public housing off Nellie B. and Vine St.], but they weren't really offered fair market value. That's a whole 'nother conversation. Most of the people who live in the neighborhood that you see like First, Third, and Second Street were people who lived on the river, and that includes my family.

Historically, East Athens held community pride for a high rate of Black home ownership, but today, the rental rate in East Athens is 70%, even higher than the ACC rate of 61.7% and almost double the national average (US Census, 2013). For those who do rent on the East Side, 61% of them pay more than 35% of their income (Albrycht et al. 2014).

While Ericka stayed in the "home house" most of her youth, she also stayed with her mother during high school when she had a car and was more or less independent. The "home house" was owned by Ericka's grandfather, and passed down to her aunts and uncles; it is held in all of their names. Ericka cogently remarks on the difference of home ownership her "home house" made, "my aunt, that household was very stable because they never had a mortgage to pay because that house was paid for because my grandfather left it for them. There was a little more stability in terms because the phone never got cut off, there was always a refrigerator full of food or a

deep freezer full of food.” For most of her life, she lived with her aunts and uncle because her mother worked the second and third shift at the poultry with overtime at Wendy’s or another fast food restaurant.

When Ericka was in high school she moved in with her mother on Georgia Avenue, in Normaltown. This apartment was less than two miles from the East Side where she grew up, but it felt worlds apart. Ericka comments on this, first saying that it was “mostly students,” then follows up, as if to clarify the coded language, “there were *not* a lot of *Black* people” (Ericka 2016). To live in this neighborhood, her mother had a roommate and worked at the poultry and at IHOP three shifts a week. Still, her mother did it to “experience something” outside of and beyond the “home house” and the East Side. So, while Black Athens as geographically centered on the East Side became a source of support and pride for young people growing up like Ericka, for both she and her mother, as neoliberal programs gutted the neighborhood, it also became a place to escape. For her mother, it meant moving across town to the “white” side, living in well-maintained apartments in Normaltown, Boulevard, or Five Points, and for Ericka this meant moving on to bigger cities, Atlanta and New York where the weight of segregation in Athens could no longer confine her.

Broderick Flanigan, an Athens native, artist, mentor, and activist of a younger generation born after these “golden years,” interviewed former business owners to better understand the conditions for Black owners before and after integration. He found that most left for the malls in the 1970s or went out of business because they could not compete with the lower prices of white-owned stores and restaurants (Flanigan in Aued 2017). Allen, the owner of one of the few remaining Black



*Figure 17- Flanigan in his studio on Vine St., serving the youth of Nellie B. Photo by Shubham Kadam, Red and Black, 2016*

publications, *Zebra Magazine*, characterized the situation for his publication in this way, "when you're in the Black media, the mass media gets the chicken, and we get the chitlins." (Aued 2017). During the 1960s and 1970s, as integration meant the end to several Black-owned businesses on Hot Corner, HUD and university sponsored Urban Renewal projects also transformed several Black neighborhoods. In the early 1960s "Lyndontown," was bought up by the University and "the Bottoms" neighborhood on Hull and Lumpkin was demolished to build the HUD sponsored section 8 housing complex, Bethel Midtown Village (more commonly referred to as "Bethel Homes"). Vibrant Black owned businesses and neighborhoods were replaced by state-sponsored "projects" in the Jay Z sense of the word.

## *The Project of Projects*

“You don't have to live next to me  
Just give me my equality”  
Nina Simone, *Mississippi, Goddamn!*

“When we reach the end of this long block, we find ourselves on wide, filthy, hostile Fifth Avenue, facing that project which hangs over the avenue like a monument to the folly, and the cowardice, of good intentions.”  
James Baldwin, "Fifth Avenue, Uptown," 1960



*Figure 18- Photo by the author, June 15, 2016. From left to right: Public Housing, Luxury Hotel, Student Apartments*

Black home ownership is essential to establishing wealth and security, but recent reports find that Black home ownership was as low in 2015 as it was in 1968, before the passage of the Fair Housing Act (Jones, Schmitt, and Wilson 2018). Yet the issue of homeownership goes beyond the wealth created in the private property of a physical structure, but speaks to the meaningful construction of place, of what Ericka finds in her “home house.” This is what bell hooks (1990) is speaking of when she

talks about “homeplace,” as a site of both refuge and strength for Black families across the segregated US. In Athens, this segregation remains in the collective memories of older Black residents and in the continued distinction of who the “downtown” is for, and who is kept out. Although struggles to integrate restaurants like the Varsity occurred over fifty years ago, the color line persists, and recent struggles over a college-town bar “General Beauregard’s” and all the name denotes, continue.

For most of working-class Black Athens, downtown is not for them. Ericka describes this situation clearly, when she names restaurants and businesses downtown that continue to be owned and operated by Klan families. She also distinguishes downtown Athens as a space for the college students, maybe even for Black college students, but for what she calls, “old school Black people,” downtown has never belonged to them. During oral histories, I asked women where they went for fun, where they enjoyed going out? Many mentioned the Black-owned bar/club/auto-shop Gresham’s, and a few large clubs on Commerce Rd. and Atlanta Highway. Only three women mentioned ever going downtown, Takeya in her high school days and Harriet and Betty occasionally go to one or two “segregated” bars to drink or play pool (Takeya, interview, June 3, 2016; Harriet, interview with the author April 4, 2016; Derica, interview June 15, 2016; Betty, interview, February 18, 2016). It is common knowledge that downtown is for the “white college kids.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Sheila (interview, June 7, 2016) only went downtown back in the day to panhandle outside of a few restaurants. Puddin (interview, April 6, 2016) doesn’t like her son to go downtown because the one time he did, he got into some trouble with the police. Latasha (interview June 18, 2016) said, “it’s definitely racist downtown,” and Takeya (interview, June 3, 2016), who used to drive a cab downtown, remembers a few racist incidents driving drunk college kids downtown. Now she mostly avoids it. Fenwick (interview, February 24, 2016) and Ericka (interview, December 28, 2016), in separate interviews, said that working-class Black people do not feel downtown is for them. Emely (interview, December 29, 2016), born in the US to Salvadoran parents, felt downtown was not very safe. Her only

Yet, the “home house” of Ericka’s and many other Black working-class families is increasingly less accessible as most of the high-paying manufacturing jobs have left. Although the poultry remains, the work has been so heavily degraded through line speedups and declining real wages, that homeownership through employment at the poultry is rare. All the Black women I interviewed lived or had lived in some form of public housing, either through HUD and Athens Housing Authority funded properties or through Section 8 subsidized units. Public housing in Athens is symptomatic of racial residential segregation and city-led displacement of Black residents over the city’s history. Today, over 90% of the 1,154 public housing units in ACC are occupied by African American residents (Dr. Geraldine Clarke, interview, Athens Housing Authority, October 11, 2016). Athens Clarke County is considered a “housing-stress” county, meaning that a household spends 30% or more of its income on housing, has more than one person per room, and/or has an incomplete bathroom or kitchen (“Housing Stress” 2014). Unsurprisingly, housing stress counties are concentrated in the US Southeast and West (“Housing Stress” 2014). Additionally, across the state of Georgia, ACC has the second lowest percentage of owner-occupied housing units, meaning a majority of residents are renters (42% in 2000) (“Poverty Data” 2018).

In Athens, the first public housing units were built during WWII and were developed for segregated communities. Parkview Homes near downtown, opened in 1941 where it housed 154 white families. Broad Acres Homes opened less than a year

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experience being participating in immigration rallies and having college kids yell “nasty stuff” at she and her friends.

later at West Broad and Rocksprings, housing 126 black families (Morales 2012). In 1955, Rocksprings Homes was built on Rocksprings and Baxter, Parkview Extension was built in 1959, and a number of AHA “scattered sites” were built, including Pauldoe off Hawthorne and Nellie B. on the East Side, between 1967 and 1974. A \$5.5 million revitalization project, named “Project 51” provided much of the funding for these units (Thomas 2009). As part of this project, an affluent and majority white neighborhood, “Licksillet” (North Avenue at Willow) and two working-class, historically Black neighborhoods, “The Bottoms” (Hull and Lumpkin) and “Lyndontown” (off Lyndon Ave.) were torn down to make way for downtown development and Bethel Midtown Village off College Avenue. In the 1970s, as Ericka recalls above, homes along the river were demolished to build North Oconee Park, and people were moved into newly-built brick units on Vine or Nellie B. During this revitalization project, the University of Georgia also expanded along Baxter Street, demolishing a white-only vocational school, the Jeruel Academy, a segregated Black school focusing on “racial uplift,” and shotgun houses for working-class Black and white families (Morales 2012; Knight 2007). Town View Place, off of Oconee St., was the last public housing unit built in Athens in 1990.

***“Where white folks wouldn’t stay—wouldn’t even walk—now they’re building houses,” Rev. Archibald Killian, 2015<sup>71</sup>***

Interviews with workers and community leaders among Athens’ Black

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<sup>71</sup> in Matthew Pulver, 2015, “From Public Housing to Student Housing.”

working-class communities comment on the loss of home-ownership and sense of place within historically Black neighborhoods in areas like Newtown and the East Side. These neighborhoods, along with business districts like “Hot Corner,” are significant as they have provided generations of refuge, from a generally segregated and unwelcoming downtown. For long-time residents in East Athens, they see the community change stemming first from the role of “urban renewal” and public housing in their neighborhoods and second from the process of “gentrification” coming from the rapidly growing student population, what some scholars call “studentification” (Pickren 2012). Finally, residents on the East side attribute much of this change to later “revitalization” projects in the 1990s, when the ACC government allocated \$2 million to the Nellie B./Triangle Plaza, commonly known as the “Iron Triangle” area (Pulver 2015). This area, across from Nellie B. was known to house an open-air drug market at the height of the nation’s crack epidemic. With these revitalization efforts, the city built a police station into the neighborhood and paved the streets and added sidewalks. The county built Dudley Park, extending the North Oconee Park from an earlier “revitalization” project.

While driving through his neighborhood one winter day in 2015, I noticed several student apartments and renovated two-story houses along Rose St. Marcus, whose grandfather has owned his small, two-bedroom house on Rose St. since the 1970s, commented on these changes in a critical, yet clear language, in the way only a teenager can, “Yeah, a lot of the UGA students are fixin’ up their houses ‘cause the university gave them some money, but my granddad has owned his house a long time. He don’t have the money to fix it up right now and can’t get that UGA money” (Field

notes, February 2, 2015). While there is no evidence of direct loans by the university, property values are rising in the area as developers buy up more of the East Side for UGA's growing student population. As a result, property taxes for long-time residents are also rising, markedly for older home owners like Marcus's granddad. Business owner Isaiah Ellison commented on the changes to *Flagpole* reporter, Matthew Pulver (2015), "There's a certain community ownership that the long-term residents have. The community's quickly vanishing before their eyes, and they feel helpless and can't do anything about it. That resentment spills over. They're feeling squeezed out of their communities." Yet, as residents express a feeling of powerlessness, Ellison clearly understands the effects of gentrification, calling it in Harvey-esque style, "That's what gentrification is, displacement, displacing folks without sharing with them" (in Pulver 2015).

For a younger generation of women working in and out of the poultry plants, those born after 1970, their parents or grandparents may have bought a house on the East Side, earning enough from their poultry or ABB wages. Yet, this foundation of Black community life and wealth on the East Side is quickly eroding. Today the current generation of workers rely on subsidized rental properties or public housing in Rocksprings or Bethel Homes. This comes out in interview after interview, as subsidized housing, like poultry work, is a last resort for many families, but one that has become a normal part of everyday life. While Marcus lived with his mother, Jessica, they moved around to several public housing and section 8 apartments across Athens: Pauldo, East Broad, Firewood, Bethel, a trailer park in Winterville, Oak Hill, and off Cane Drive just over the span of his young life. They were even evicted from

one house before he went to live with his granddad. Because of the instability of his living situation, he went to 6 different schools from elementary to high school: Fowler Drive, Barnett Shoals, Gaines, Howard B. Stroud, Coile Middle, and Cedar Shoals. This is one reason he likes high school so much, because before he did not see the friends from the neighborhood at school, but in 9th grade he saw them all again. He recounts his excitement on the first day of high school, “I was like, ‘Aay! I remember you. I remember you I remember you. I remember you!’” (Marcus, interview with the author November 26, 2016).

All but two of the Black women I interviewed had lived in their current place for less than three years, with a majority occupying their current place for less than six months. Sharon explains it this way, “I only been here like six months. Before that I had lived on North Avenue, about a year. And before that I lived up the street [on Cedar], I lived over there for about two years. Just on and on, move, move” (Sharon, interview with the author, April 28, 2016). Moving becomes the norm for working-class families, making it difficult to establish the mundane things like routine and regularity, much less a sense of place-based community and neighborhood ties. While *de jure* segregation in schools and housing was outlawed, economic inequality combined with a lack of social supports ensures a new kind of inequality and new rounds of dispossession (Freund 2010).

This movement is usually not by choice and sometimes means that women wind up in a neighborhood that is far less than ideal. When I ask Sharon if she feels “unsafe” in any areas of Athens, she quickly names her own neighborhood, then backtracks a bit, qualifying her comments (Sharon 2016):

Carrie: Any parts of town you don't feel safe?

Sharon: The East... well I'm on the East Side. Nellie B. and over there that way, yeah. This lack of choice also became clearly evident in an interview with Chrissandra, Beverly, and Dey'Asia. I commented, somewhat naively, on the neighborhood, a 160 unit section 8 housing complex on the North side of town, saying that it was a "nice" neighborhood, with kids playing outside and spacious green space. Chrissandra quickly corrects me, "No. No it isn't. It's home but it's not nice. It's just temporary... I've been here over 3 years now. It's home. It's okay, it always can be worse. But this is not the place that I would like to live. But my daughter is going to go off to college soon. She's my only child. She's in 11th grade...She's going to do something for herself." Despite Chrissandra's criticism, she still distinguishes home as, "the best place to be. It's safe. That's what our fun days look like. Looking at movies. She'll dance or tell us about her day. She'll be in school... We'll be looking forward to her coming home. If we have money, we'll go out to eat. It's not too much. Go to the zoo."<sup>72</sup> For many poultry families, home held a similar meaning, as a "homeplace," a space of safety, family, joy, and refuge even amidst a neighborhood or area that was undesirable. Yet home in these large section 8 complexes is always conditional, temporary, in-the-meantime, lacking permanence in the way Ericka describes her "home house."

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<sup>72</sup> This was a common activity among the families I interviewed. What people call the "zoo" is actually a free public park with a bald eagle and grizzly bear, maintained by the city. The park also has one of the city's public pools.

### *Workfare Changes in AFDC to TANF*

In the US today, the privatization of state support occurs simultaneous to increased criminalization/incarceration of poor Black communities. This structurally maintains and entrenches racial capitalism in order to keep poor people poor. Those who defy and resist are written off, criminalized, ignored, as society writ large maintains a small pipeline for a very select few to escape, to not be as their parents were/are, and to seek upward mobility. Escape, from place, family, and neighborhood is aided by the faith-based, privatized, social service agents who provide the kind of social support the state once provided after working-class Black mothers fought for the meager gains of AFDC and welfare rights (Mink 1999; Roberts 1999; Keene [unpublished thesis] 2011; Tillmon 1994; Kornbluh 1998). While some children of poultry plant workers are able to imagine a life beyond the chicken plant, a vast majority find themselves returning to the plant, or to even lower-paying service industry jobs. This process is aided by the restructuring of welfare in the mid-1990s, as both work and life have become increasingly precarious.

President Bill Clinton began constructing what would be TANF in 1993, with the goals of decreasing the rolls and placing more welfare recipients back to work. Clyde Woods (1998) argues that TANF was Clinton's response to the mobility of capital and the need for cheap labor. This framework was mobilized by white Southerners, Clinton of Arkansas and Gingrich of Georgia with a focus on rehabilitating the "work ethic, family life, and morality." There were limits to government intervention, and TANF would provide the discipline necessary to "help people help themselves":

“Government has had to learn that there is not necessarily a program for every problem, and that all the good intentions of the world can come crashing down if there is not good motivation in the inside of the people who we’re trying to help. So government has tried to find new ways to impose personal responsibility on the people who would be the beneficiaries of tax dollars, whether they are business people, having to comply with stricter compliances, in order to get loans and grants, or welfare recipients, who in return for a check, have to sign a contract, promising to pursue a path of independence, through education, training, and job placement” (Clinton in Woods 1998: 267).

In effect, Woods (1998) argues, welfare reform, a disguised package of budget cuts, created a new national system of unfree Black labor. With a Republican controlled Congress, the bill expanded to include state-controlled block grants and a five-year federal time limit. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act on August 22, 1996. There are four major goals of TANF which orient the way funding is distributed: (1) to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; (2) to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out of wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two parent families (“About TANF” 2017).

With the passage of welfare reform in 1996, TANF is now funded through federal block grants and state-level Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds. Since 1997, federal funding remained frozen, capped at \$16.5 billion, meaning it has lost about one-third of its original value after accounting for inflation. MOE funding varies by state but must reach 75-80% of the state’s 1994 State expenditure level (“Categories

and Definitions for TANF and MOE Funds Notes” 2018). In the initial years after TANF was passed, TANF had the effect of increasing the number of single mothers in the workforce, but as the economy weakened, these short-sighted employment gains have all but disappeared (Floyd, Pavetti, and Schott 2017; Hildebrandt and Stevens 2009). Since 2008, many states have also relied on a \$2 billion contingency fund, with funds running out each year.

The reform was initially “successful” in getting women off the rolls, but for Georgia and many other states across the country, concentrated especially in the US Southeast, falling TANF benefits are even less effective in aiding families to escape “deep poverty.” Through the Clinton administration’s own commissioned study, more than 11 million families suffered permanent loss of income as a result of welfare reform (Woods 1998). This follows a longer-term trend of decline in benefits in AFDC beginning in the Reagan years. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that between 1970 and 1996 AFDC benefits fell between 20-40% for all states after adjusting for inflation (Floyd, Pavetti, and Schott 2017). The dismantling of AFDC bolstered national-levels of inequality, entrenching a high concentration of Southern poverty.

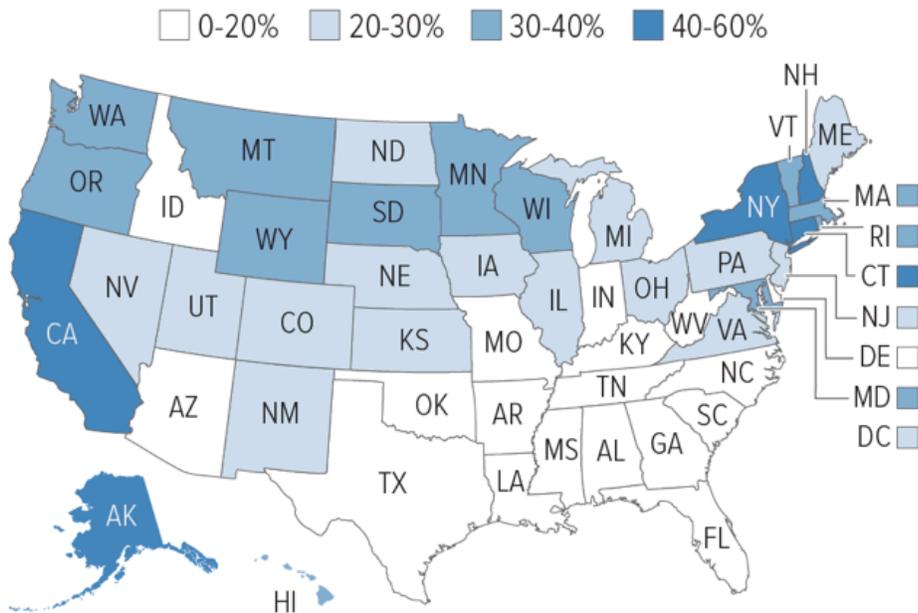
Taking a closer look, a family of three—mother and two children—must make less than \$784/month with combined assets of less than \$1,000, while committing to 30 hours of work training each week in order to receive \$280 of TANF cash assistance (ways and means). This is 16.7% of the federal poverty line. If this same family in Georgia combines TANF and SNAP benefits, they will still remain at less than 50% of the federal poverty level (Floyd, Pavetti, and Schott 2017). Of the ten lowest paying

states, nine are in the US Southeast. Georgia ranks the 9<sup>th</sup> lowest overall. In 2016, across the state of Georgia, less than five out of every one hundred poor families receive Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) funds. This ratio of TANF-to-poverty continues to fall from pre-TANF rates in 1994-1995, where nearly ninety-eight out of every one hundred received AFDC benefits in Georgia, on a national level the ratio was sixty-eight for every one-hundred families in poverty.

Since the introduction of TANF, the requirement of workfare means that working-class people, moving in and out of the formal workforce, experience greater precarity in their everyday lives. For example, Edin and Shaefer (2015), using the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and ethnographic methods, found that since the passage of TANF more people are living on less. In 2011, more than four percent, that's one out of twenty-five households with children were living on less than \$2 per person, per day. This percentage has doubled since 1996. The key difference for the "poorest of the poor" post-TANF was that there was absolutely no cash coming into these homes, no earnings and no welfare check either.

## Maximum TANF Benefits Leave Families Well Below Federal Poverty Line

Maximum TANF benefit as percent of poverty line (for a family of three)



TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Note: The federal poverty level for a family of three in 2017 is \$1,702 per month in the 48 contiguous states and Washington, D.C.; Alaska and Hawaii have higher poverty levels.

Source: 2017 Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines. TANF benefit levels for a single-parent family of three were compiled by CBPP from various sources and are current as of July 1, 2017.

CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES | CBPP.ORG

Graph 1- “Maximum TANF Benefits Leave Families Well Below Poverty Line”

For the poultry families I interviewed, those working in the plants were not eligible for TANF cash assistance, but even among for those moving between jobs none received TANF. An older generation of workers, embodied in Ericka’s mother Ruth, held welfare in disdain, significantly adopting Reagan-era beliefs about welfare and its recipients. Ruth worked at the poultry and multiple other jobs in order to keep off of welfare, to keep her house, and to pass down a sense of pride to her daughter. Ericka remembers her mother bragging, “You know, I’m not one of these lazy women

who's on welfare..." even though her mother occasionally received food stamps. But, as Ericka (2016) puts it, "she was not one of the ones to be bragging about that or hung that on her hat... as a badge of honor. No. She thought that was terrible." For most of Ruth's career at the poultry, she walked about a mile to work. After which, she would walk to her second, part-time job at Wendy's on Prince Avenue, where she worked for 16 years.

Ericka: I can count on my fingers how many times I see my mother lay in the bed, be sick, or anything. I think she started working in the poultry when I was maybe a year old or less, and she always worked two jobs in addition to the poultry. So that's another crazy thing too. Yeah, she's always worked. She worked part-time, for about 16 years at Wendy's on Prince Ave. She worked there two or three days a week from like 6 to close, so yeah. My mother had two jobs her entire life.

Ericka looks back on her mother's work ethic and expresses a great sense of pride, a pride that both motivated her own sense of work ethic, motivated, in turn, against the "handouts" of welfare.

Almost all women workers I interviewed received some state support in the form of WIC, SNAP benefits, disability, Medicaid, food banks and pantries, and housing subsidies, but no one used TANF at the time of interview and few had ever used it. Since many women I interviewed had "records," convicted of drug-related felony charges, they were structurally barred from receiving either SNAP or TANF benefits. Marcus's mother, Jessica (2015), the only respondent to talk about using welfare, explains this phenomenon. She recalled using "welfare," then AFDC, for her oldest daughter, born in 1994, but never for her younger children. Instead, for Marcus, born in 2000, and her two youngest boys, born in 2004 and 2006, she pieced together off-and-on poultry jobs, "little restaurant jobs," and unemployment insurance, and relied on family members to take on a bulk of the childcare.

Over Domino's pizza, Jessica comments on how difficult it has become for women to receive welfare, even without felony charges. She empathizes with the younger generation,

“It's a little rough now. It ain't the same. You go through a whole lot more. I think it's hard, it's different from back then. I had my first child in 1994. It's different. Making these young girls go to school, and they probably don't even stay, they probably don't get the benefit 'coz they don't wanna follow the rules and stuff about getting it” (Jessica, interview with the author, October 24, 2015).

Instead, the poultry is seen as a “last resort” for many women, and to stay on the job, it requires a certain amount of desperation, a desperation induced by no other options and a grave amount of responsibility. Welfare reform of AFDC places “personal responsibility” at the center, dismantling hard fought social support, placing poor people, most often women and mothers, as entirely and solely responsible. Workers like Jessica see this situation clearly, as an impetus to work at the poultry, a place most people avoid even thinking about, much less go to seeking work.

Jessica: I think to keep somebody up there, they gotta have some type of responsibility, bills, something like that. I think it'd be better if they had like older people. Cause people come and go, like sometimes we take breaks, like 10 minutes, and people never did come back. They talkin' bout it's too cold (interview, October 24, 2015).

Jessica found herself in this very situation at the time of the interview. She just left her boyfriend, a long and tenuous relationship. Yet, in the breakup, she not only left a romantic partner, but also their rent-to-own home, her ride to a third shift job at Harrison's poultry, and a sense of stability living across the street from her mother, aunt, and two youngest boys. She received unemployment after losing the job at Harrison's due to transportation and was waiting to start orientation at the bigger poultry plant. But soon after starting, she lost the job because she had trouble adjusting

to first shift from the “anti-social” work hours of third shift. Her body was trained to sleep all day, often forgoing food until time to go to work again the next night. For many weeks she would go multiple days without sleep, crashing for entire weekends. The transition to first shift was impossible.

The last time I checked in, Jessica was still unemployed. Marcus explained his mother’s situation eight months after our initial interview with Jessica, “she doesn’t have a job right now, so I help her when she needs it coz you know she’s my mom.” Right now, Jessica works for a temp agency, but still has trouble adjusting to first shift work. Marcus says she still sleeps all day. With no access to cash assistance, financial responsibility falls largely to Marcus and his older sister. His mother currently survives on money from Marcus’s after-school job at The Varsity and his older sister Tiffany’s low-wage salary, also at the poultry. In this sense, responsibility is displaced onto Jessica’s children, Marcus still in high school, his sister with two children of her own. Because Jessica has not been able to “get back on her feet” to retrieve her two youngest boys from her aunt’s care, they have been placed in the foster care system and she is unsure if she will ever get them back.

Chrissandra, eager to get back to the poultry, presents a similar situation for her family. Currently, their family of three relies on Beverly’s small disability check each month, food stamps, and heavily subsidized housing. Because they don’t have TANF, I ask them what they do when they have bills that are too high for the month, with Chrissandra, answering in such a matter-of-fact way I felt naïve for even asking such a question. This would not be the first time I would be humbled by such ridiculous questions.

Chrissandra: I mean, it's if you don't have it you just don't have it. You just *don't* have it. It's not really too much you can do. We really don't have much family. We gotta stick it out. The hard times they make you stronger, it really does. That's one thing I teach my daughter, you don't have it, there's not much we can do about it, just pray about it (interview, March 19, 2016).

Repeatedly throughout this interview Chrissandra makes this point clear, often life is about praying, making do, and getting by. This comes up again when talking about transportation. Right now, they have a car, but at times they don't have gas, or their car is broken, they get on the bus, "we're not too good to get on that bus. If we can walk, we'll walk. You gotta do what you gotta do" (Chrissandra 2016).

Jacquita, Sheila's daughter, expresses a similar outlook. She says she cannot rely on family, her family does not have anything to give, so instead they find other ways to make do. Her husband works long hours at Home Depot, she receives food stamps through her son, and she tries to scrape together work here and there. Even though her family can rarely help, friends come by to drop off pampers, food, and provide rides. This is what her family has come to depend upon in the place of any welfare cash payments. She describes it this way, "people stop by, 'here you go girl!' You know, so I get blessed. That's how I make it with the little money I do get, that my husband do supply" (interview, June 13, 2016). So that small gifts "by the grace of God," come to step in where welfare cash payments once did. One of her goals is to get her credit score up so she can have a credit card, so she does not have to worry about things like running out of gas.

In addition to Jessica's experience of welfare's new form, many women, like Sheila, who were not kicked off the welfare rolls or dissuaded by the stringent work requirements, were instead barred from TANF benefits due to drug-related felony

charges in their youth. Sheila did not even have access to SNAP (food stamp) benefits because of charges over a decade old. Instead, Sheila currently lives on a small disability check of \$733 a month, in section 8 housing. After she pays rent, \$400 a month, and utilities, around \$200 a month, she barely has enough to eat. She doesn't receive food stamps, and some of her biggest "outings" were to the food bank off Barber St., or to the monthly food pantry days at a nearby Baptist church. To make a small amount of cash, she kept her grandson, when her daughter Jacquita was working at the poultry. She'd also "illegally" take in boarders, although this was against HUD policy. Since Jacquita got fired from the plant, Sheila keeps him on rare occasion, not expecting to be paid, but sometimes asking for help with a utility bill, \$60 here and there.

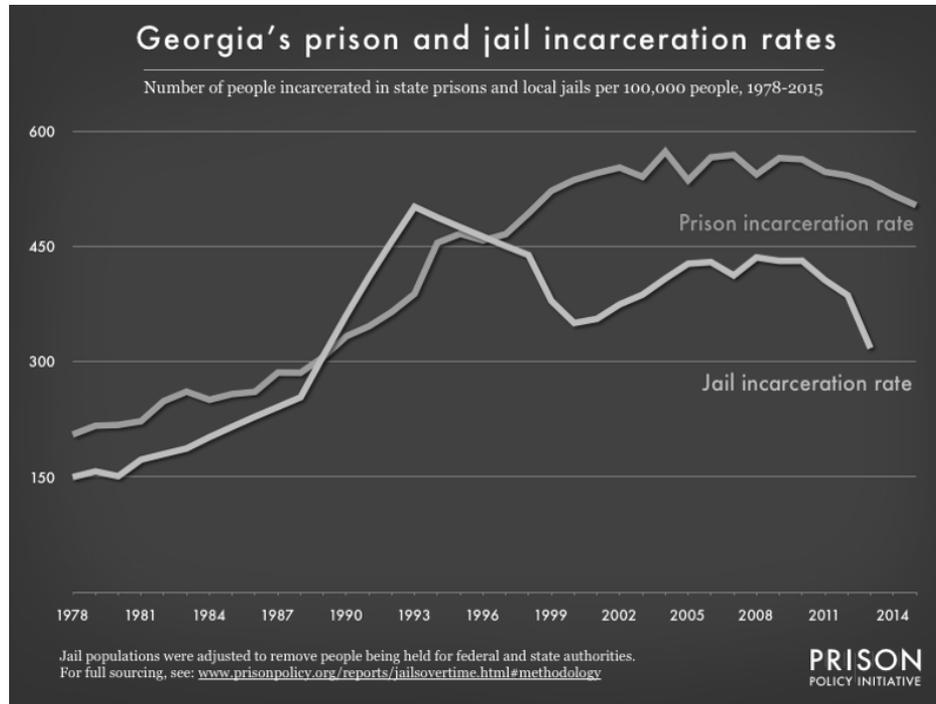
### ***Criminalization and the War on Drugs***

"Prisons wear out places by wearing out people, irrespective of whether they have done time" Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 2006, *Golden Gulag*.

On the night of February 1, 2016, I met 24-year-old Tiara as she was being released from prison for "possession" of marijuana and "disorderly conduct" in her own neighborhood. She had been in jail for a few weeks. I was there, for less than a day, for a protest with undocumented students which feels very silly in comparison. She did not want to go into the details of their arrest, but her boyfriend, who she lives with, was also arrested at the same time and stayed in jail. Tiara was bailed out by her boyfriend's mother because she is the one with a job, at the poultry. She's been

working there for a year and two months, going in at 10:00pm and staying overtime until 8:00am most days. At the time he got arrested, her boyfriend was unemployed and looking for work. She was not sure when he would be released, but she said he knew lots of people inside, cousins, uncles, “it’s not too bad.” Tiara was worried about getting back on at the poultry because she technically “pointed out” while locked up. While the conditions through which I met Tiara are unique, the normalcy through which she viewed her stint in jail are common among the Black women I interviewed. Since the 1970s, and rapidly increasing since the 1990s, incarceration has become a part of the everyday for many Black, working-class people across the country, and at devastating rates in the state of Georgia.

Beginning in the 1970s, the US took a punitive turn toward punishment as interest grew in “incapacitation and deterrence” over rehabilitative and community efforts (Mackenzie 2001; H. A. Thompson 2016; Kohler-Hausmann 2017). This turn was largely based on a study by Sociologist Robert Martinson (1974) who argued that treatment programs had “no appreciable effect on recidivism rates” (Mackenzie 2001). The logic behind incapacitation follows, as long as offenders are locked up, they cannot commit crimes outside of prison. This went hand-in-hand with growing support for “get tough” laws and the “War on Drugs.” And, by the 1980s, with the passage of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and 1988, community-oriented corrections, rehab, and services, were replaced by punitive measures that increased policing and control over offenders. The rates of imprisonment for drug-offenses subsequently soared (Gilmore 2006).



Graph 2- Georgia's Prison and Jail Incarceration Rates (Prison Policy Initiative 2018)

In the 1990s, punitive policing underwent further restructuring, expanding its reach. For the state of Georgia these laws were especially harsh. For example, following California, in response to the infamous murder of 12-year-old Polly Klass<sup>73</sup> in 1993,<sup>74</sup> Georgia passed a “two strikes” law in 1994. This was the harshest of already harsh “three strikes” laws being passed around the country. Under “two strikes,” if a person is charged with the second “strike” they are sentenced to life in prison without parole. This includes drug offenses. Additionally, youth from age 13-16 could be charged as adults if they committed one of the “seven deadly sins.” This drastically increased the incarceration rate across the state.

<sup>73</sup> Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2006: 108) argues this case was used to spark California’s punitive policing laws, including “three-strikes” drug laws.

<sup>74</sup> Contrast this to the attention given the Atlanta Child Murders, see James Baldwin (1995 [1985]) “The Evidence of Things Not Seen.”

Mackenzie (2001) in a quantitative study of incarceration rates for drug offenses among State and Federal prisons, found that in 1980, this population accounted for 15 inmates for every 100,000 adults, but by 1996, this number grew to 148 per 100,000 adults. The Federal prison population expanded, and the rate of drug-related imprisonment grew to 60% of all inmates, for state prison populations, this number reached 23% (Mackenzie 2001: 14). Drug offenses are largely state defined, and in Georgia possession of less than an ounce of marijuana counts as a misdemeanor with penalties of up to \$1,000 in fines and one year in prison. If a person is charged with possession of a Schedule 1 or 2 drug, they are charged with a felony offense with sentencing from 2-15 years on a first offense, and even longer sentences for second or subsequent offenses (Boslaugh 2010).

Overall, the PEW Research Center found that in 2009, if you combine jail, prison, probation, and parole rates, Georgia ranks first, with 1/13 adults under the authority of the correctional system, as compared to 1/31 nationally (“One in 31” 2009). The South has had generally high prison population growth and the state of Georgia ranks 4<sup>th</sup> overall for incarceration rates with 1/70 adults in prison or jail in 2007. This number compares to 1/169 in 1982, with a growth rate of 141%. These rates are highly racialized as African Americans make up 58% of the prison population while only constituting 31% of the total state population. In 2015, investigative reporters for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* found that of the 423 inmates serving life sentences for drug crimes in Georgia prisons, 419 were Black, most of these inmates for selling less than \$50 worth of drugs (Teegardin 2015). In addition to the war on drugs laws, in the 1990s, several states, including Georgia, passed “Truth in

sentencing” (TiS) laws. These laws drastically reduced the ability to release prisoners before they served 85% of their sentenced time. Before TiS was passed, inmates experienced indeterminate sentencing, meaning that decisions on behavior and release were based on correctional authorities and parole board decisions, and inmates could be released earlier than their sentencing date based on a hearing and human interaction. This meant release time could be favorably subjective, but with TiS, human agency was removed from parole decisions after sentencing.

In addition to an expansion of these punitive laws, the overall industry is becoming highly privatized. In 2000, several states were allowed to contract with private probation agencies. A Human Rights Watch report, “Profiting from Probation” (2014) found this practice is concentrated across the American South. Privatized probation means that private companies have partnered with the court system and rely on an offender-funded model of probationary services, i.e. people formerly incarcerated must pay for their own probation. Probation fees are of course not a new expense, a modern day “debtor’s prison” but the rates increase drastically through privatization. With little state oversight, probation companies become powerful debt collectors through which a person’s freedom depends on their ability to pay (Cohen 2014). The longer a person takes to pay off the debt, the longer they stay on probation, incentivizing the companies to maintain probationary status. Human Rights Watch (2014) found that over the span of two years, thirty-four private probation companies supervised 349,000 probation cases, mainly for misdemeanors and traffic offenses. These companies collected over \$200 million in fines from people on probation and parole (Cook 2014). A recent lawsuit was filed against the company Sentinel Offender

Services for collecting \$1.8 million from parolees in the month of June 2012 alone. One-third of Sentinel's fifty-seven offices are in the state of Georgia. The effects of both harsher policing and incarceration laws has been devastating for working-class Black communities while extremely profitable for the state. For all the Black women I interviewed, either she herself or a close family member has been picked up or charged for petty drug offenses, with long-lasting effects on children, entire families, and communities.

Marcus saw his dad get arrested when he was four years old for selling crack outside of their home on Pauldo.<sup>75</sup> Because his dad was charged possession with "intent to sell" he was quickly locked up with a felony charge. He served five years and was released around Marcus's ninth birthday. His dad was out for a few months, but soon after was arrested and charged a second time. I ask Marcus why he thought his dad was arrested a second time. He responds rather nonchalantly, "For the same thing. He was selling drugs, coz that's the only way he knows how to make money" (interview November 26, 2016). Marcus talks to his dad as much as he can, on the phone. He doesn't know when he'll get out, but he hopes he will be released before his graduation from Cedar Shoals. With only a few months to go, his dad is still in prison down in South Georgia.

### ***State Violence and Premature Death***

"Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation

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<sup>75</sup> Pauldo was a public housing complex now demolished and rebuilt as Denny Towers, a mixed income unit

of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore 2006).

On November 22, 2014, 12-year old Tamir Rice was murdered by Cleveland police officer Timothy Loehmann while holding a toy gun on a playground with his sister. Rice's murder followed the July 17 murder of Eric Garner by NYPD officers in Staten Island and the August 9 murder of 18-year old Mike Brown by Ferguson Police Officer, Darren Wilson. The following February 2015, while I was still working at the plant, the US Justice Department announced that no federal civil rights charges would be brought against George Zimmerman for his murder of 17-year old Trayvon Martin. Walter Scott was murdered by Charleston police officer Michael Slager in early April 2015, and 25-year old Freddie Gray was murdered in custody of Baltimore Police a few weeks later, during my last days at the plant. These high-profile murders of Black youth and men<sup>76</sup> by cops (excluding George Zimmerman) sparked mass protests and momentum for the Movement for Black Lives and Black Lives Matter nationwide. Locally, students and community members organized vigils at the UGA Arches and marches downtown. While working at the plant it was evident that these murders weighed heavily on Black workers' minds. Anthony's comments during orientation reflect a collective consciousness forged in Black identity and experience, and, in this

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<sup>76</sup> Black Lives Matter activists and intellectuals shortly after these high profile cases began emphasizing the experiences of Black women at the hands of police brutality, violence, and premature death, most evident in the #SayHerName initiative (Chatelain and Asoka 2015). During oral histories with women workers I asked an open ended question about the role of policing first for the interviewee, then with regard to their children. While many women discussed their own personal run-ins with "the law" most emphasized their children, what they were teaching them, and how they had responded in the past when their child had a confrontation with a police officer. Mothers and grandmothers placed a greater emphasis on fear and protection for their sons than for their daughters, although they are the ones to respond to the effects of police violence.

case, over the murder of Mike Brown, one that warranted a shared response. Gucci Mane was written off because he did not share the level of concern that was expected, when the lines were so clearly drawn between an unarmed Black teenager and the white cops.

Yet, Tamir Rice's murder elicited an important response I saw repeatedly throughout daily discussions about police and gun violence and oral histories with Black women. This contrasted sharply to leftist conversations at Cornell and among activists within Athens. One day in early January Raquel and a QA inspector, Patricia, discussed the Mike Brown case and the murder of Tamir Rice, over the roar of the line. Both women agreed that it was not safe to let the kids, especially the boys, in their family play with toy guns. Patricia asked Raquel what she does when her grandson plays with a gun? How does she stop him? She laughs and says, "I say, 'I'm gonna bust your ass!' and I chase down after him!" They continue to talk about Tamir Rice. Raquel asks, "Why didn't he put down the toy gun when the cops came?" Patricia thinks a minute, "Well that cop just got out of his car and immediately shot at him! He didn't have time!" (Fieldnotes, Saturday, January 3, 2015). While Patricia and Raquel talk about how "shameful" it was that the cops shot "that little boy," and how "cops shoot Black people all the time," both women take responsibility as Black mothers, grandmothers, and aunties, as well as place responsibility on their Black sons, nephews, and grandsons. They prepare them for a world in which their children cannot play in the same way White children do. Where there are few expectations on the state.

A similar sense of responsibility came up during oral histories. A few weeks

before a meeting with Sharon and her daughter Latasha, a young Black man was shot in the face by the ACCPD over at the Golden Pantry off College Station. It was 3:00am when the police went to arrest him for an open container violation because he was seen pouring liquor into a Styrofoam cup.

Sharon: Yeah, not even a week ago a guy got shot in the face over there at Golden Pantry. That was my best friend's son. He's still in the hospital but they had to really, the bullet shot through his jaw. She said he looked like elephant man. After the police got through shooting him. They really couldn't put him back together like he's supposed to look. She was like, "It was awful."

Carrie: Did you see the video online?

Sharon: I haven't caught the video yet.

Latasha: I seen it.

Carrie: He wasn't doing anything.

Latasha: He was.

Carrie: He was?

Sharon: Yeah, yeah.

Latasha: The gun was right there, and he kept putting his hands like he's trying...

Sharon: You know when they tell you put your hands up that means for you to put your hands up, don't move, don't do nothing. All along he was trying to reach for the gun, the cop was fearing for his life. He shot him. He was really trying to tell them he got a gun.

Latasha: When he came out the gun was showing. He basically was trying to shoot the police.

Sharon: Yeah. So, the mom said it wasn't his [the cop's] fault, the mom said it was her son fault. 'Coz she said that when he told him to surrender and put his hands up he should've did that. He shouldn't have reached down. All along they worried 'bout their life. They got a right to shoot, if you see a gun, he reaching for that thing...

Latasha: He slick trying to reach for it. They tell him, "don't move." every time he trying to grab the gun anyway. It really on you, it's your fault you got shot. That video ain't that wrong, these folks [the cops] did their job, he did what he was supposed to do. Can't get mad at him, it's on video.

(Sharon and Latasha, interview with the author, April 28, 2016).

I was surprised by our difference in perspective on this shooting, especially in light of the national movements at the time. Yet, for Latasha, Sharon, and even the man's mother, the onus really was never on the cop, who was "worried about his life," instead, the man should have acted with more sense, as should any Black man, in a similar situation with the police.

Derica, a 30-year old Black mother of two, discussed her stance on guns with her 12-year-old son. Derica voices a more critical opinion of policing, but still acknowledges the role of Black mothering in preparing both her children generally, and especially her son for run-ins with the law.

Derica: I tell them all the time that despite what the school is saying despite what you may believe, when things happen you got to be prepared, and whenever you making the decision, and I hate to say it like this, I always tell them to try to make sure that *you know for a fact that you are black*. That's an issue already. So, a teacher is talking to you and you get loud, maybe you need to tone your voice all the way down because you don't want anyone to think you're being aggressive and take it the wrong way. I tell my son he has to be careful when he's dating. He has to be careful when he's out playing with other kids (Derica, interview with the author, June 15, 2016).

This segued into a discussion of an incident in which her son got into some trouble because the police were trying to accuse him of stealing a bicycle in the neighborhood.

Derica: That was the first time in my life that I felt that my son could go to jail, and he hadn't done anything. Even though I know he was a kid, just the feeling of helplessness, the feeling of you couldn't do anything. Feeling like, 'well what am I to do?' I'm the only one. I know he wouldn't do this, but everyone else is saying he did it. And, so, where's the proof, where's the evidence. What do you do? You know I tried my best to tell him you don't get into situations like that. You have to be careful because *your freedom, your life*, all of that is on the line and that's a hard lesson to teach a kid. I have to tell you, he had guns, not real guns. but because we're from Washington [GA] he knows how to hunt deer he knows how to do all these things. When he came here I said, 'you know what,' that was during the time when the police was shooting boys that had play guns [Tamir Rice], and I was telling my son, 'you can't go outside with your gun anymore.' He said, 'momma, why do I got it? I got a bebe gun too. I wanna shoot birds.' I tell you he's good with his gun. If he's gonna shoot birds, he could shoot many birds. But it's totally different. It's like because my son is *Black* he can't have the option of being in that kind of sport. He has to look at it

in a different way (Derica 2016).

While the reaction to these murders and the mobilization of groups like the Movement for Black Lives, BLM, The Mothers of the Movement, and even white-led groups like Standing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) awakened an invigorated urgency among activists and movement leaders alike, for the working-class Black women I encountered, these killings were less shocking, but rather reflective of the everyday assault by law enforcement against Black people, directly through police brutality, violence, and murder, but also indirectly through traffic violations, fines, fees, court dates, parole, arrests, and jail time. As Black mothers, these women felt it was their responsibility to ensure their sons knew how to interact with the cops, and no matter how unjust the situation was, they taught their children, and especially their sons, how to survive. Mirroring Mr. Homer Wilson's discussion above, instead of worrying about the Klan and regular "mean, lowdown" whites, Black working-class mothers focus their parenting on the state sanctioned cops, judges, and parole officers. The underlying message remains the same, as they teach their children to "know that you are Black," with strength and pride, but also in preparation for everyday acts of violence. "Premature death" for sons went hand in hand with "premature disability" for mothers.

In addition to an everyday presence of law enforcement for men and women, across poultry families, "premature death" is visible as poultry plant mothers mourn the deaths of 20-something year old sons, as another Wal-Mart bag collecting donations makes its rounds in the cafeteria. In my short time at the plant, the bag was passed around four times for the deaths of young adult sons or grandsons, and once for

the deportation of a woman's husband. Many Black mothers I interviewed discussed the loss of their sons and fathers at ages inconceivable in middle-class America. Sheila's son, mentally and physically handicapped, was run over by a truck, while she herself was in a mental institute. Ms. Gladys, who I sat next to at lunch each day, lost her son in a convenience store shooting a few years before I met her. Memorial pamphlets for young men, documenting their funeral to friends and family were handed around the plant at each passing for those who could not attend the funeral. One worker on sanitation, second shift, was killed in a shooting. About ten workers made and wore memorial shirts with his high school yearbook photo and his favorite saying in the following week.



*Figure 19- Living room wall with tributes to Obama, daughter, and son's funeral program, June 7, 2016, photo by the author*

While many workers experienced the premature death of their loved ones, most commonly young Black men in their lives, Latasha's story stands out. Latasha started work at the poultry before her four-year-old son Tayvon was born, during her "partying days" from 2010-2012. She left the plant nearing Tayvon's birth, but not for maternity leave, but because his father who also worked there died from a complication smoking medical marijuana. His mother, whom he lived with, told Latasha that it was like he had a heart attack in the shower. Tayvon's dad was 26-years old, going to Athens Tech to be a teacher. He had been in and out of foster care for most of his youth. She got choked up recounting the incident, at first, when her friend came to tell her, she immediately thought he had gotten fired or went to jail. She didn't know how to react, and thought it was a bad dream. She decided she couldn't go back to the plant.

Latasha: I tried to go back, and I couldn't work right, cause I'm always constantly looking in that spot [where he worked]. I was like, okay, this isn't gonna work. I got people coming up to me, every day. I'm fucking like five months pregnant. I don't wanna hear that. You know, everybody's running up to me like, 'oh what happened?' I cannot do that" (Latasha, interview with the author June 18, 2016).

She has too many memories of Tayvon's dad at the plant. He had moved from Ft. Lauderdale, where he lived in foster care although he was originally from Athens. He worked night shift in evisceration, and all the girls were after him. She was more nonchalant about him, not so impressed. This must've caught his eye because he soon started asking Latasha for her number, every day, she wanted him to leave her alone, but her homegirl asked her to give him a chance. She described the short-lived romance like this, "We just started talking. Probably a month, two later, I'm pregnant. I'm like ahh. I didn't plan on gettin' pregnant by him. But stuff happens you know. I'm

not ever gonna think of Tayvon as a mistake. He's really a blessing, you feel me?"

Tayvon looks so much like his dad that Latasha is reminded of him every day.

While this was a tragedy for Latasha, she has two cousins in a similar situation. Both of their babies' fathers passed away from drug overdoses, as she explains, "One of 'em died from pills, overdosed, and the other one cocaine." They each have sons, so they encourage them to bond. She tells them, "Y'all know that y'all's fathers are not here, and y'all gotta stick together." His mother is suing the company but none of that is going to Latasha or Tayvon, and she had to get him DNA tested recently to receive any life insurance benefits for Tayvon from his dad's death.

### ***Incarcerated Mothers***

An increase in overall incarceration rates, what Michelle Alexander (2010) famously calls the "New Jim Crow," is coupled with an increase women's incarceration, experienced at one time or another by many women at the plant (Enos 2001). While not all women I interviewed had personally served time, many claimed their record kept them confined to places like the poultry. Sharon discusses the continued influence of an old felony charge on her job prospects, explaining how she got fired from a clean retail job, "I got fired because of my background check, it's not real bad, but when you get in trouble back in the day when you was young and something just follow behind you. So basically, they don't hire you if you have a felony" (April 28, 2016).

Women like Jessica started working at the poultry as a "start," a way to clean up. She shares this reasoning with me over the course of our interview, with her son

sitting beside her. “I don’t know if Marcus told you, but I used to drink. I been sober going on 3 years. Working at Harrison’s [poultry] was a start.” Throughout the interview, she discusses her problems with drugs and alcohol, but especially alcohol. This, she believes, forced Marcus to learn about the law and police, and learn fast, “He pretty much, he know about the law cause I used to be in and out of jail when I used to drink. I be in jail all the time.” Now she makes it clear that she’s “clean,” confessing to me (this was uncomfortable), “I ain’t doing nothing on the weekend, not partying, not getting into any trouble, keeping to myself.” This became a common theme as many would redeem themselves to me, over the course of our interview, in the eyes of “authority.”

For Jessica, the volatility of addiction and imprisonment combined with on again, off again work at the poultry affects her access to education, housing, and even her own family. As mentioned above, Marcus moved several times while living with his mother. Jessica details the time she lost her house because she went to jail for six months for breaking probation when, one month, she did not pass the drug/alcohol test with her parole officer (PO).

Jessica: I was on a program for about six years and I lost it coz I went to jail. Sat in jail for 6 months... I’m trying to get back on track, but if me and him [her long-time boyfriend] don’t get together I’m gonna get my own place again. I was living out on Winterville Road. Well I started living there with him first, and it didn’t work, and I moved in my own place. But then we got back together and, I don’t really trust him so, I moved again. I just been gone for about a week. So, I really ain’t got no intention of going back. Focus on getting a job and saving my money and getting my own place again. And get my two small boys back.

As her story illuminates, the smallest slip can return a person back to prison, with devastating effects on their lives after. For Jessica, this meant returning to a partner she does not really trust because she was evicted. It meant losing her job and her boys,

even after six years of sobriety.

Takeya has also had formidable experiences with the law and prison system. Although Takeya's parents raised her to focus on her education, she says she got, “mixed up with the wrong crowd,” and into some trouble with the law for getting “caught up in drugs.” She did jail time and was charged with a felony, but I couldn’t push too much on this, because Takeya wants to keep that stuff behind her. When she talks about her time “locked up” she describes it with religious reflection as she saw it as, “God’s way of teaching me a lesson. If it had not happened, I would still be getting into trouble to this day” (Takeya 2016). She recognizes that her jail time was the result of structural racism but also personal choices, her hanging with the wrong crowd, being targeted by the police, and surrounding herself by negativity, violence, and drugs. But she refuses to use “a race card,” as she puts it, and instead claims the crimes she was charged with, “I did all the stuff that I got arrested for doing. I had to pay the price. At the end of the day I had to look myself in the mirror and know what I did. I wasn’t proud of it. You understand me?” But, later in the interview, when I ask Takeya what she wanted to be when she was little, she said, she wanted to be a police officer! What changed? She responds point blank,

I went to jail. (laughing) I don’t wanna be a police no more, people hate the police. When the first time I got arrested I thought, I don’t wanna be a police. I thought it was so cool growing up, the cops. I didn’t get the concept. I’m not saying police are bad people. I totally respect what the police do, when they do their job correctly, but when you got people that’s abusing their power and misusing their authority, I don’t agree with that. I see a lot of that, in and out. Whenever you’re locked up behind bars, they talk to you, treat you a certain kind of way like an animal. You got some that take it way over. I wanted to be a police, I’m not gonna lie, when I was a kid I thought it was so cool, their uniform, it was cool they could carry a gun. when you’re growing up as a kid your parents teach you that the police are the good guys, but when you grow up that ain’t how you look at it.

This perspective is interesting, because even though she blames herself and takes responsibility for the things she was in prison for, she still hates the police and sees how they unjustly treat Black people, especially working-class Black people. Her parents tell her to trust the police, they're the "good guys!" This generational difference reflects Brian N. Williams's (1998) study on the East Side as the ACCPD experimented with community policing. Williams conducted qualitative research in the years initially after the city built a police station across from the "iron triangle" on the East Side. Williams found that an older generation, born before the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) into a segregated Athens, viewed the police as generally good and helpful. Whereas a younger generation, those born during or after the CRM, as holding a general distrust of the police, gained through negative, first-hand interactions with the police, reflecting a shift toward more punitive policing practices over this same time period.

Takeya's parents' view of the police greatly differ from hers. Their trust is shaped in part by the economic stability they obtained through steady, blue-collar factory work, in the "golden days" of Black Athens. This opportunity, albeit limited, shaped their perceptions and attitudes about the police contrasted to the countless Black mothers I've interviewed since who tell their children, especially their sons, not to trust the police, to be calm and ready for the police to target you, to "know that you are Black!" (Derica 2016). Latasha even talks to Tayvon, who is three, about being labeled because he is Black, she says it's part of "keeping it real with him," because she's, "on that parenting 101 for real!" Takeya's family, like so many working-class Black families in this Southern college town, have had run-ins with the police and

have served long jail sentences. She currently has two uncles serving lifetime sentences with little hope of seeing them in her lifetime.

### ***Foster Care/Intergenerational Care***

People suffer not only because the government has abandoned them but also because punitive policies make their lives more difficult. These two trends— private remedies for systemic inequality and punitive state regulation of the most disadvantaged communities—are mutually reinforcing. Mass imprisonment of blacks and Latinos allows the state to exert direct control over poorly educated, unskilled, and jobless people who have no place in the market economy because of racism. It also preserves a racial caste system that civil rights reforms were supposed to abolish (Dorothy Roberts, 2012: 1479).

There are several studies documenting the role of intergenerational care within Black American families (Dorothy S. Ruiz 2000; Dorothy S. Ruiz and Carlton-LaNey 2008; Waites 2009). I connect these strategies of care to the demands of low-wage, physically exhausting work and the restructuring of both welfare, prison, and foster care. As poor, Black mothers experience higher rates of criminalization and incarceration, children are forcibly taken from their homes allowing the state to intervene and reshape people's care networks. This intervention is two-fold. First it works to control mostly poor Black mothers while simultaneously enforcing an additional economic burden by institutionalizing child support payments, often to other, blood-related family members. Second, it individualizes care, integral to a restructured welfare system, by enlisting childcare payments to meet the state-level MOE minimum. This ties poor parents to low-wage jobs or jail. In this sense, welfare reform, drug laws and punitive changes to DFCS and foster care enforce this unequal relationship between working-class Black mothers and the poultry plants. Labor

discipline is also produced by the state.

Even for women working in the plant without a record, childcare is often the biggest motivator and source of tension to working at the poultry. The demands of work and length of the working day often marginalize motherhood to the point that women must rely on other family members to care for their children. In displacing child care duties to other women in their families, often young mothers working in the plant only see their children on the weekends. Workers' free time is spent sleeping, recuperating for the next day, as other people, largely workers' mothers take on the duties of full-time childcare. The homeplace becomes intergenerational. A majority of the Black women I interviewed had their first child in high school, which became an insurmountable barrier to graduating. Ms. Sheats comments, from a clear moral standpoint, on the effects teen pregnancy in East Athens, from her experience as a public school and community educator (Pat Sheats interview 2016):

Mrs. Sheats: One thing that I have seen and has a tremendous impact is children having children, and, women having multiple children out of wedlock. So, you are 18 years old and you have 3 children, you see her dating, partying, men to come in, the children see this, then it becomes a vicious circle. 'well mama does that.' So now you got mama and sons and daughters all dating. So, where's the authority? Where's the father figure? Where's even the mother figure? So many times, the grandmama is raising children. You've got these little children who are not sure who they belong to. A couple years ago—I have no problem with mixed relationships—I had a family of children, beautiful children, you could look at them and tell they were mixed, black and white. They lived in the neighborhood [East Athens]. They were dirty. They were smelly. And this little boy must've been in the third grade, and so, when they came in, you know me, I'm going, "hey!!" asked him what his name was, he told me. I'm, "oh, okay." I look at his chart, it's not the same as his brothers, not the same as his mothers, there's no father. I probably had a look on my face, he said, "I'm mixed." I said, "no that's fine!" He said, "no, I'm just mixed up." When a child says they're mixed up just because they're mixed... Identity crisis. But they don't know how to say that, they don't know what that is. I'm mixed up. And he was! That's the sad part about it. It's funny that he would say that, but it's sad because he was mixed up. Had all kinds of, he didn't have learning problems, he was smart! All kinds of behavioral problems, all kinds of emotional problems.

I bring in Mrs. Sheats' observations not to make a moral claim about children "out of wedlock" or single-motherhood, but instead to note the normalcy of teen pregnancy, or as she puts it, "children having children." Without the kinds of social supports provided in prior generations through welfare and actively desecrated through state intervention, many children in the surrounding East Athens community are left without hope, according to Mrs. Sheats.

Rather than the special place of "Black Athens" that the East side provided for Ericka, Mrs. Sheats observes a rapidly declining amount of hope, structurally produced and maintained. Dorothy Roberts' analysis of the role of prison, foster care, and the punishment of working-class Black mothers is critical in contextualizing this observation by Mrs. Sheats, as it would seem hope is necessary for collective action. Roberts argues, "Like the prison system, placing large numbers of children in state custody interferes with the ability of community members to form healthy connections and to engage in collective action" (Roberts 2012: 1487).

Jessica's experience of motherhood is riddled with state interference. She had Tiffany when she was 16 years old, dropped out of high school and tried to make it on her own. She initially went to the poultry but did not make it past her 45-day probationary period, so she worked in a few restaurants off and on. Around this time, the state increased its role in largely poor Black families, through the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, passed just a year after TANF. Through this law, a judge could now rule for children to be placed in foster care if their mothers were incarcerated. Adoption became the solution to foster care (Roberts 2012). By the time she had Marcus, at twenty-one, her auntie helped her out when she needed, and

watched the kids in exchange for informal, cash payments. Jessica was arrested at the same time his father was picked up for selling crack. At the time of the arrest, he and his sister were taken from their home. Marcus's grandad on his father's side and Tiffany's grandmother on her father's side were granted custody of the kids. They did this out of familial obligation and sense of responsibility, rather than instituted by DFCS. When Jessica got out of jail, they did not ask her to pay them money to support the kids, but she sent a little money and bought them clothes or food when she could.

At the time of the interview, Jessica's two youngest boys were staying in her auntie's house, where her mother also stays. They were taken from Jessica when she went to jail the most recent time, three years ago. Unlike ten years ago, in the case of Marcus and Tiffany, DFCS removed Jessica's two youngest boys and placed them in "out-of-home" care under the supervision of her aunt. In turn, Jessica was forced to pay child support, "\$60 out my check every week," bringing her paycheck down to \$292 while she was working at Harrison's poultry. It is not my aim to glorify or romanticize the informal relationship of care in the case of Marcus's grandfather and Tiffany's grandmother, but instead to emphasize the difference of punitive state intervention in the case of Jessica's two youngest children. Today, Marcus's little brothers have been removed from their great-aunt's house and into child protective services because they got into some trouble with the law for petty crime and trespassing violations. Because his mom is currently unemployed, she was denied custody. One reason she sought work at Pilgrim's was for the slightly higher pay, so she could be more financially stable and able to take them back. She couldn't do that while she was, "going from check to check." But today, they remain in the foster care

system, out of their family's care altogether.

Even without a record, most women working in the plant rely on familial and especially intergenerational care. While Chrissandra was working at various poultry plants, her mother helped her with Dey'Asia, just as Beverly's mother helped her with Chrissandra before that. Because she worked the second shift, she'd leave for work at 4:00pm and her mother was there to stay with Dey'Asia. They all lived together at the time, so Chrissandra never had problems with childcare. This was a mutually beneficial relationship that challenges the structure of care work traditionally conceived of for white, middle class families, on which most family-work policies are based. Chrissandra is grateful that she and her daughter live with Beverly, especially while working at the poultry. This made life easier, as Chrissandra recalls, "when I got off of work the house would be clean and the food would be ready. All I had to do was shower. I prayed with my daughter before she'd go to sleep. Every night. Sometimes she'd stay up just till I get home."

For fun, they spend a lot of time together watching movies and talking about the past, what they've been through and how to be better. Dey'Asia describes it in this way, "It's like satire. Like you'll take bad things or tragedies and make it something to laugh about. You've done been through it but now we're better. We just look back." I ask Beverly the same question and she responds similarly, saying they would stay in most of the time, she was just too tired to do too much else, always exhausted. Beverly was very young when she had her oldest daughter, so she believes they grew up together, people thought they were sisters. Chrissandra says this is why they are so close, "we *had* to grow up together." And Beverly's mother, Chrissandra's

grandmother, was there to help raise them.

The demands of poultry work, a dismantling of AFDC, and an increased role of punitive workfare and DFCS for working-class Black mothers all work to undermine the “Black Athens” of Ericka’s childhood. In response, non-profits and the University have stepped in through a culture of “volunteerism” that benefits students, expands access to grant money, while further removing and relocating power elsewhere, outside of the “home house.” In this context, mentors and teachers are expected to play a big role in the lives of Athens’ youth, and particularly for working-class Black and undocumented youth. This has resulted in the burgeoning of youth-oriented programming often in coordination with service-learning requirements through the university. Marcus’s participation in a program called “Mentors for Life” provides one clear example of this process. Through the Boys and Girls Club, he was partnered with Ms. Susan, a middle class white woman, who has stayed with him since he was eight years old. Marcus says she and has been “like a second mom” to him.

Yet, there remains a tension between mostly white, middle-class educators and administrators in the schools, coming from the university and the parents and students coming from the East Side, Nellie B., The Oaks, and Garnett Ridge. Often, Black working-class and increasingly immigrant Latina/o parents do not feel welcome in their children’s schools. There are of course institutional reasons for this (see Haskins recent study on policing, and the role of immigration enforcement around schools like Coile). This not only affects the parent-teacher relationship, but also, according to Mrs. Sheats, it has a big role to play on students’ behavior. She becomes enraged when explaining this disconnect to me, “...and you wonder why they’re misbehaving, you

wonder why they're not happy! We don't seek to find out why. It's not that James is bad, it's 'My mama says I don't belong here. I don't see anybody that looks like me.' It's a big problem." For most of her teaching career, Ms. Sheats was the only black teacher, but as she acknowledged, "I couldn't teach all the black kids!"

In these cases, care work spans generations and across households.



*Figure 20- Ms. Sheats in her "retirement" at after-school program, May 12, 2016, photo by the author*

### ***Conclusion***

These narratives and family histories provide "A Story Untold," to borrow from local Black historian Michael L. Thurmond (2001), in popular and academic accounts of poultry processing work and workers. From this analysis, I have argued that it is impossible to understand work at the point of production, without understanding people's day-to-day beyond the workplace, at the level of social

reproduction. For Black women workers at the poultry, the ways in which social reproduction is “done” has changed drastically over time, structured through neoliberal reforms, a retreat of social services, predatory housing and fringe banking, as well as punitive policing and mass incarceration. All of these factors compel people to work at the poultry, to continue to hold on for generations despite a clear degradation of this work. Yet, due to the conditions of work at the poultry, the responsibility of social reproduction is displaced to other family members from these households, including children and youth, so that entire families and neighborhoods are both supported by and support the poultry. An understanding of the everyday effects of poultry work must go hand-in-hand with an analysis of larger political-economic institutions affecting working-class life. Therefore, for workers to gain any sense of power over their working days, they must also achieve dignity and self-determination over their lives outside of work. Labor movements must expand to consider these needs. In the next chapter, I discuss the changing relationship of immigration to the poultry industry as well as immigrant rights and underdocumented

youth organizing as a source of social change.



*Figure 21- "Martin and Malcolm" Artist/activist Broderick Flanigan's mural on Fairview and Nellie B. in East Athens*



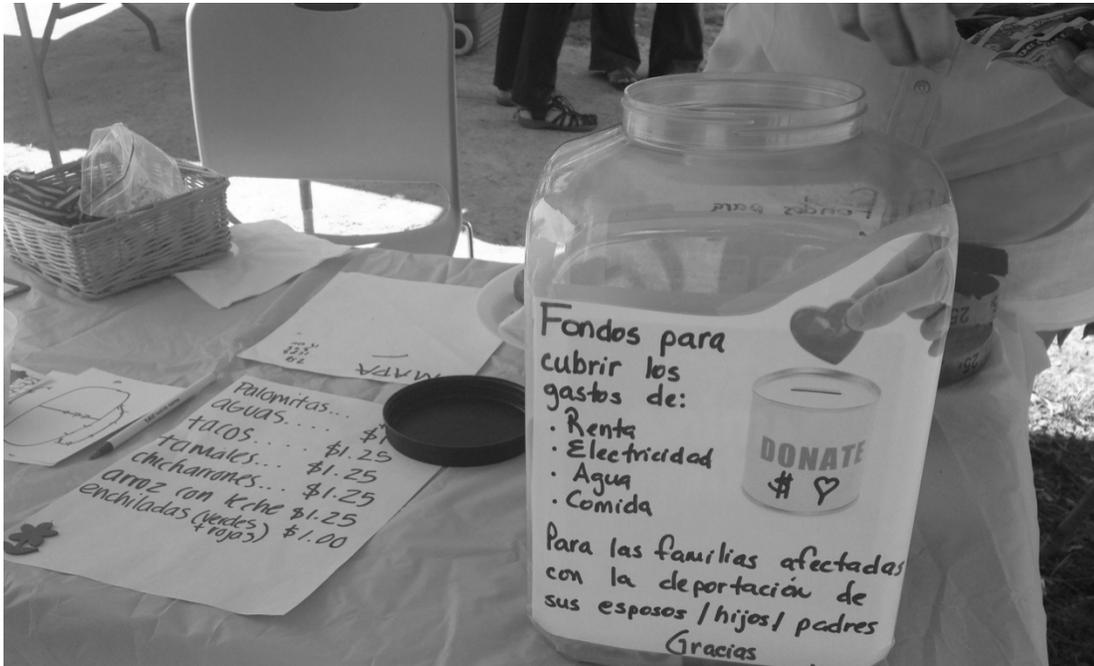


Figure 22- Weekend Fundraiser in Evergreen, May 2, 2015, photo by the author

#### **CHAPTER 4: “THE MUNDANE OF MOVEMENTS” IMMIGRANT RIGHTS ORGANIZING AND THE CONTINUED CRISIS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION**

On Thursday, April 5, 2018, ICE officials arrested ninety-seven people at a small meat processing plant in Bean Station, TN (Sacchetti 2018). In addition to the surprise plant raid, ICE also blocked roads to stop people who were entering and leaving the plant. The National Immigration Law Center declared this raid the largest since the Bush era, as part of the Trump administration’s efforts to increase immigration enforcement. Immigration raids, such as this one, are represented by popular news outlets as nativist backlash in the protection of “US jobs,” or as unjust attacks on immigrants who take the “jobs no American wants.” But, in a period marked by both “mass deportation” (Golash-Boza 2015) together with “mass incarceration” (Alexander 2010; Gilmore 2006), (both pre-existing the election of Trump) we might

better understand these raids and the mobilizations around them, as acute expressions of contemporary racial capitalism.

In this chapter, I focus on the work of several grassroots immigrant rights organizations in North Georgia, which formed in immediate response to the Board of Regents ban against undocumented student education in 2010 and Georgia legislation HB 87 in 2011. I joined the local immigrant rights coalition (now referred to as the IRC) following a 5-day raid, from March 1-5, 2015 in which 2,059 people were detained for removal across the country. It was during this time that I was nearing the end of my work at the poultry. The IRC knew of 15 people who were detained, firsthand, all but one of whom were men and the main breadwinner of their household. This was part of a national ICE program known as “Operation Cross check,” which, according to ICE Director John Morton (2012) constitutes an effort of targeting “convicted criminal aliens,” although a majority of the cases IRC responded to were based on driving violations. This was not the first nor the last of its kind. This chapter is a preliminary attempt to decipher the work of these organizations situated within the racial space of the American South. Much of this chapter focuses on underdocumented young people stuck “in-between” as they understand and question the contradictions of the American Dream.

I use the term “underdocumented,” borrowing from youth activists, to signify those with temporary status (i.e. TPS or DACA) but no real path to full citizenship. First, I outline the contemporary mechanisms of global racial capitalism, as experienced by undocumented immigrants and underdocumented youth in Georgia. These take the form of anti-immigrant laws affecting mixed-status families,

neighborhoods, and broader communities as well as the Board of Regents ban against youth education. Next, I describe the ways in which citizen and undocumented immigrants organize in response to these laws, most notably through the Immigrant Rights Coalition (IRC) to meet the mundane daily needs of undocumented immigrants and their mixed-status families. I draw out the tensions that emerge through organizing a broad coalition of community members beyond the undocumented community. After which I highlight the work of underdocumented young people who draw on historical collective memories of both their parents' narratives and the Black liberation struggle to situate their own protest and activism. In doing so, they challenge the popular positioning of Dreamer youth as lacking agency ("they were brought here as children!") or in need of "saving" by social service agencies and educators (deficit model). Undocumented immigrant and underdocumented youth organizing in Georgia provides a cogent critique of the failures of racial capitalism. How these activists respond and organize reflects a vision around the right to simply live, but also the seeds of an alternative vision of life's work.

While most of this dissertation has focused on Black workers and their families, what emerges through this chapter was the outcome of my observant participation, allowed to work among several immigrant rights organizations and through informal conversations and reflections with underdocumented youth. These conversations often took place after interviews with their mothers who were working or had worked in the state's largest poultry processing plant. For this chapter in particular, I am especially indebted to Daniela, a young immigrant rights activist and organizer who became a paid research assistant, translator, subject, friend, and

colleague. Daniela is a critical yet caring sociologist in the making. Underdocumented youth mentor and middle school educator, Rosemary Gay, also helped me conduct interviews for this chapter. Her steady dedication to this group in Athens is unwavering. Finally, I am tremendously grateful for the time spent with several long-time activists and educators who sat down with me to piece together an unfinished history of immigration to and organizing in Athens, GA. These include Aida, Yolanda, Beto, Gilberto, Noe, Oralia, Aldo, Rick, Kerry, JoBeth, Betina, Erin, Noble, Alejandra, April, Casey, Tom, Larry, Nick, Linda, and Patrick.

### ***Situating Immigration within Global Racial Capitalism***

Out of the exploitation of the dark proletariat comes the Surplus Value filched from human beasts which, in cultured lands, the Machine and harnessed Power veil and conceal. The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black. (W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*, 1935: 16)

Racial capitalism, as DuBois powerfully argued, is a global project.

Contemporary patterns of immigration, through this lens, must be understood not only as a result of US imperialism on the global South whether by military invasion, war, unequal trade agreements, rural displacement, and “Development,” but also relational to recruitment efforts and capital restructuring within the global North (Schwartzman 2013; Golash-Boza 2015). In addition to Robinson’s theory of racial capitalism, this chapter draws on a growing body of literature across the social sciences on Latina/o immigration to the US South (Stuesse and Coleman 2014; Coleman and Stuesse 2016; Smith and Winders 2015; T. M. Golash-Boza 2015; T. Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013b; Weise 2015; Ribas 2015), and a few key studies focusing on

undocumented youth organizing in Georgia in particular (Peña 2012; Soltis 2015; Voekel 2016). I am thankful for both the published and unpublished work of activist-scholars and educators who were foundational to the creation of Freedom University, U Lead, and IRC.

As I argue in Chapter 1, across the American South undocumented workers were actively recruited to disorganize Black-led worker-power (Stuesse 2015; Gray 2014; Freshour 2017) for an internalized “race-to-the-bottom.” Undocumented immigrants supplied the labor for rapidly growing industries within the US South that could not be outsourced elsewhere (Striffler 2005; Griffith 1995, 1990, 2011; Cravey 2003; Cravey and Valdivia 2011; Smith and Winders 2015; Stuesse and Helton 2013). Yet, unlike patterns of immigration largely constituted by mobile men in the decades preceding IRCA, and even into the mid-1990s across the “Nuevo” or New South, by the late 1990s to early 2000s, undocumented immigrants began establishing families and reshaping the geographies of new immigrant destinations across the American South. For the few Latina women I interviewed still working at the plant, most arrived to the area between 1990-2000, and all came knowing they would find work at the poultry. Although several of these women had worked elsewhere as hotel cleaners, domestic workers, and farmworkers in the US, Texas, Virginia, Tennessee, and Florida being the most common states mentioned, they did not relocate to Northeast Georgia looking for just *any* kind of work. They had friends or family members who worked in the poultry and told them it was good work and high pay, in a place where rent and

other living expenses were low.<sup>77</sup>

Jamie Winders (2013) documents this process of “place-making” in Nashville, TN, as undocumented Latina/o immigrants became less migratory and instead purchased homes/trailers, sent their children to school, and established “Hispanic” business enclaves. As a result, in the state of Georgia, the Latina/o population increased four-fold from 1990-2010. Across the state, Census data puts the “Hispanic” population at 9% of the state’s total, while in my field site “Hispanic” residents make up 13% of the population. Local immigrant rights groups believe the actual number to be as high as 20%. Within the public-school system, “Hispanic students” constitute 25% of the district, joining African American students at 50% reflecting a longer history of “segregation academies” since the 1970s.

Despite the risks involved with staying in the state, undocumented people across the South continued to establish a sense of place and attachment to the region. This change was noticed by immigrant rights activists and community leaders across Athens and the larger region of North Georgia. Aida, branch librarian and local superwoman, currently works in the city’s largest undocumented neighborhood. Before this she worked as one of the county’s first migrant educators in 1992. One evening, as children came in and out of her makeshift office in the center of the small library housed inside a doublewide mobile home, she described this change in migration and place-making as immigrants began to call Georgia their permanent

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<sup>77</sup> I have talked to far less second generation, children of immigrants working or tied to the plant than expected. The few that I met working in the poultry now are DACA recipients working to provide for their parents and siblings. When people still had hope for DAPA, some workers admitted to me that they were helping their parents save for those fees as DACA recipients themselves.

home.

Aida: Suddenly there was a switch in the community at large and they just want to learn English. A few years ago, they're like, "we're not going back to Mexico. We're wasting our time." It's basically like a [Mexican] GED, they said, "what for? They don't recognize that here." So, they kinda started like rebelling on me, and so they said, "We want to learn computers. We don't know how to use the cell phones," so we created these computer classes. Then we created programs that were the ESL classes (Aida, interview with the author, January 28, 2016).



*Figure 23- Librarian Ms. Aida leading "Gente y Cuentos" with a group of 10 women from the neighborhood, March 2, 20156, photo by author*

### ***Anti-Immigration in the Peach State***

The Department of Homeland Security classifies an undocumented immigrant as "a foreign national who either entered the United States without inspection or with fraudulent papers or, entered legally with a visa but remained in the United States without authorization." Within the US, 73% come from Mexico and Central America,

11% from Asia, and 7% from South America. Of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants residing in this country, an estimated 2.5 are young people brought as children (Soltis 2015).

Beginning in the early 2000s an anti-immigrant movement responded from the suburbs of Atlanta, in communities with limited contact with undocumented Latina/o populations. Julie Wiese documents this process in other parts of the “exurban” and suburban South (Weise 2015). Once Latina/o immigrants began to establish lives within the region, to be more than simply invisible workers, latent racialism was mobilized into law not among the farms of South Georgia nor the poultry towns of North Georgia, but out of the gated communities in suburban white enclaves north of the Atlanta “beltline.” Emiko Soltis (2015), director of Freedom University, describes this logic underlying the actions of Southern lawmakers who believe, “a certain population of people of color should work in low-wage labor, but be prohibited from higher education and the right to vote” (2015: 21).

On May 1, 2006, undocumented immigrants mobilized across the country, in cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, but also in small towns like Albertville, AL and Gainesville, GA, demanding a place within the United States through comprehensive immigration reform. Participants carried American flags and peacefully marched, by the thousands, in cities across the country. They presented themselves as “new Americans” (Winders 2006) forcing lawmakers, employers, and citizens alike to consider how the US would be affected by “a day without immigrants.” This mobilization followed immigrant youth activism and the creation and failure of the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors)

Act in 2001. Under the DREAM Act supporters positioned undocumented youth as “working hard toward the American Dream,” while blaming their undocumented parents who brought them here as children (Pérez 2009).<sup>78</sup> The national marches following the failure of the DREAM Act pointed to the paradox of Latina/o undocumented immigration to the US, as parents of Dreamers began to also make claims for their basic human rights and a path to citizenship. Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico gave voice to these contradictions, expressing public concern that demonstrators were sending the wrong message, as immigrants who “come to American to work, yet they’re not working” (CNN.com 2006). Were undocumented immigrants joining the growing population of the non-working, working-class? Undocumented immigrants are desirable recruits if they remain the “surplus labor” that US capital requires, but shunned and deported when they become anything more.

In the state of Georgia, May Day mobilizations of 2006 came just a month after the state passed HB 529, “Georgia Security and Immigrant Compliance Act,” which required all employers with ten or more employees to verify their immigration status. This law also required proof of legal status to receive any public benefit. D.A. King emerged from the Atlanta suburb of Marietta, GA as the law’s most outspoken proponent and the state’s loudest anti- “illegal” immigration activist (King 2018; Weise 2015). King grew up in the suburbs of Detroit and moved to the suburbs of Atlanta in the early 1990s. He began his career as an anti- “illegal” immigration activist in the late 1990s, after a Mexican family moved in across the street. In an

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<sup>78</sup> For a critique of this framing see Yukich 2013; Pérez 2009; Gleeson 2015.

article published by Fox News in 2011, King describes his frustration after a group of about 20 “illegals” soon after filled the three-bedroom home. He was bothered because “the yard was full of old vehicles and loud parties disrupted the neighborhood” (“D.A. King” 2011) This was an affront to the white suburban landscape he and his wife created for themselves, what George Lipsitz (2006, 2011) calls the “white spatial imaginary.”

His political activism began in full after September 11, and in 2003 he turned all of his attention to the cause with a “No Amnesty!” rally at the state capitol. He founded the Dustin Inman society in 2005 in honor of the death of Dustin Inman, a resident of Woodstock, GA, another Atlanta suburb. Dustin was killed by a hit-and-run, who officials believe was committed by an undocumented immigrant. Since founding the organization, King serves as an informal advisor for state representatives and plays a critical role in fostering support and pressuring state lawmakers to pass anti-immigrant legislation. In an interview with King following the May Day protests, he connects his “anti-terrorist” nativism to an economic argument about jobs, critical of a shift he saw among undocumented immigrants from “we’re just here to work,” to “demanding an unconditional path to citizenship” (Cowan 2006). King bemoans the financial loss caused by his full-time activism, forcing him to “refinance his house and sell stock his grandmother left him” (“D.A. King” 2011). Luckily for King, he was able to find a fiscal sponsor in the Michigan based US Inc. (DeParle 2011). This educational organization was founded by John Tanton, who the SPLC calls the “racist architect of modern anti-immigrant movement” (“John Tanton” 2018). In 2008, Georgia also passed SB 350, making it a felony to drive without a license if convicted

four times in five years. Effectively, this law criminalizes undocumented immigrants who are unable to obtain a driver's license. A recent report by the Advancement Project and GLAHR found that SB 350 led to police disproportionately targeting Black and Latina/o drivers ("Manufacturing Felonies" 2016). This is the most commonly cited reason for deportation among the families working with the IRC. This law directly prohibits undocumented people's movement, to increase the precarity of their everyday lives. The psychological as well as real threat of deportation looms over their everyday trips to the grocery store and to work.

Just a few years later, Georgia passed HB 87, "Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act," one of the country's worst anti-immigrant laws, as a copy-cat bill to Arizona's notorious SB 1070. D.A. King was essential to the law's passage. While the worst sections failed to pass (including a "show me your papers" law and measures to prohibit citizens from "knowingly helping" undocumented immigrants), HB 87 granted local police the ability to act as federal immigration officers through the 287(g) "secure communities" program and institutionalized documentation for public benefits. Judge Thrash, who struck down the most heinous sections of HB 87, commented that the true goals of the law were, "to create such a climate of hostility, fear, mistrust and insecurity that all illegal aliens will leave Georgia" (CNN.com 2011)

HB 87 not only increased surveillance and local law enforcement's coordination with ICE, but also aimed to criminalize social movements that brought citizen and undocumented immigrants together. This law also created the Immigration Enforcement Review Board to hold state and local government accountable to the crackdowns. Since its inception, the board has received twenty complaints, nineteen of

which were crafted by D.A. King. This is where my research begins as immigrant rights groups began organizing in response to the law's effects, racial profiling by local police departments, "driving while brown" traffic stops, and neighborhood raids and deportations. Immediately following the passage of HB 87 community leaders and undocumented activists alike noted a mass exodus from the state, and from the largest poultry plants and other major employers. For those who remained in the state, their mobility became drastically limited as anxiety and fear over deportation increased. In Georgia, national rhetoric and laws affecting immigration confronted state and local level laws, so that geography affected undocumented persons' view of the law, freedom of mobility, access to social services and public space (Stuesse and Coleman 2015). On the ground, in and around the region, this has forced undocumented and underdocumented immigrants into more precarious working and living situations, but it has also fostered a strong community of immigrant rights organizers and underdocumented youth activists.

As a majority white, suburban movement, anti-immigrant mobilizations defend what George Lipsitz calls the "white spatial imaginary" through anti-immigrant laws that discipline undocumented life and cheapen their labor. The driver's license laws are another way to target public space, directly on the roads and highways but also of the mobility of undocumented immigrants in the racial space of the South where driving is imperative to work and life. The education ban also comes at a time when the top five public universities became increasingly competitive, limiting white, middle class students' access to the best state universities and through the politics of the HOPE Scholarship (Voekel 2016; Pickren 2012). These laws are mobilized for a

white citizenry defined through his/her identity as “taxpayer” for a bastardized version of the “commons,” the taxpayer supported “goods” of public education, space, and benefits. These goods constitute an exclusionary “commons,” from which working-class undocumented immigrants are excluded alongside historical exclusions of the Black working-class to produce a degraded, racialized surplus population. The disciplining of racialized labor occurs hand-in-hand with the mobilization of White Supremacy. In Athens, GA grassroots immigrant rights organizing which takes on the mundane daily needs of the area’s undocumented population might be mobilized, in the tradition of the Black Panthers, as organizing for “survival pending revolution.” As racial capitalism free rides on these activities, the crisis of social reproduction illuminated through immigrant rights organizing, can potentially undermine the entire system.

This situation for undocumented families in which deportations target undocumented men, often the family’s main breadwinner, works side-by-side the longstanding criminalization of Black communities, and particularly Black men in the US (Gilmore 2006, Alexander 2010). Deportations constitute what Golash-Boza and Hondagneu Sotelo (2013) term a “gendered-racial removal program.” Racial profiling is so common outside of undocumented neighborhoods and majority Latina/o schools that activists in the area colloquially call this, “driving while Brown.” The criminalization of Black and Latino men leaves women, mothers and grandmothers, and the eldest, often underdocumented children as the replacement breadwinners and heads of household.

Underdocumented youth are also retained for a low-wage workforce through

the Board of Regent's ban on higher education. This immediate structural barrier to "upward mobility," compares to another type of plunder of working-poor Black communities. While there is no explicit ban against Black youth, the rising costs of higher education combined with a retreat of social services, the degradation of work, and the criminalization of working-class Black people outlined in chapter three, function to keep these young people in their place, "stomping on their dreams," as one child of a poultry plant worker put it (Ericka, 2016). The poultry industry, and other low-wage industries depend on this, on a captive population with too much documentation i.e. records, felony charges, jail time, and another population with too little or "in-between" documentation. In this chapter I connect mass incarceration and workfare programs to the expansion of anti-immigrant state laws that "preserve a racial caste" (Roberts 2012) by controlling and containing "surplus populations" no longer valuable for capital accumulation.

### ***Community Support and the Immigrant Rights Coalition***

In spite of these laws, undocumented immigrants and their allies continue to organize across the state. The IRC coalesced through networks forged with the local Economic Justice Coalition, founded by Dr. Ray McNair, a member of the university's School of Social Work and Mrs. Linda Lloyd, the daughter of sharecroppers and the first African American woman to graduate from the university's school of Social Work. Unfortunately, Dr. McNair passed away before I could meet him, but every community leader I met had been affected by his work. Dr. McNair and Mrs. Linda Lloyd, along with undocumented activist Beto, began working with undocumented

immigrants in organizing their own May Day march in 2006. They held their rally a few days after the national march. They worked together a year later through a worker justice campaign with day laborers at Home Depot (Linda Lloyd, interview with the author, April 13, 2016; Beto, interview with the author, October 18, 2015; February 26, 2018). In 2007, the EJC joined the United Food and Commercial Workers, to organize a series of community BBQs focused on the poultry plant's unionization drive. These gatherings were unique in that they focused on bringing together Black and Latina/o workers by holding events in the large public housing projects and mobile home parks around town. The UFCW won the union contract, but a year later lost a majority of the undocumented workers after the company signed an agreement to work with ICE in response to immigration raids in their other plants across the South (Aued 2007).

The IRC emerged on the heels of HB 87 after key founders gained community organizing experience through the EJC. Beto recalls his experience working with Dr. McNair and Mrs. Lloyd and listening to discussions and “revolutionary Black Panther style” speeches during Black Athens’ Hot Corner Fest. While Beto found himself hanging out with the “Black Revolutionaries” in town, his ideas were less accepted among mainstream liberal organizers of Human Rights Fest. They allowed him to present on immigration, but when he asked the founders to actively endorse full immigration reform, they told him, “You know, we do the fest, but we don’t do activism” (Beto 2015). Beto re-named the festival “Human White Fest,” and became more involved with the EJC’s living wage campaign at the local university.

The first official meeting of the IRC involved Beto and his brothers and sister-in-

law, a core group of students and faculty from the local university, and members within the town's faith-based community in the basement of a downtown coffee shop. During this time, the IRC focused their energy on state-level immigration legislation, know-your-rights training, and local community-to-cop relations in and around the largest undocumented neighborhood in town. Beto and his brothers also began their own organization, "DIA," to focus on building leadership within the undocumented community.



*Figure 24- May Day Rally, downtown Athens, May 1, 2016, photo by author*

This brings us back to March 2015, when I first joined the IRC as they responded to the devastation caused by "Operation Cross Check." The group knew of fifteen families directly affected by the raids. In an emergency meeting called at Beto and his brother's house, the group formed a subgroup they called, "Community Support of Families in Crisis of Deportation." Community Support was made of core members of

IRC but was structured to “provide emergency assistance and emotional support to families in crisis because of immigration detentions and deportations.” Most notably, this group worked with separated families and connected them with financial and other forms of support because in most cases the male breadwinner of the home, often a father, husband, and/or son was the one deported. Initially, the group established a “buddy” system of IRC members assigned to affected families. They also created a gofundme page to raise money for legal fees and basic needs like rent, electricity, and food for the families left behind.

Because families were often mixed-status, with citizen children among undocumented parents and underdocumented older siblings, the IRC buddies focused on the more mundane aspects of everyday life, including providing rides, dropping off food and clothing, paying bills, and soliciting work opportunities for the adults left behind. These are essential aspects of social reproduction that are “indispensable to society,” but for undocumented immigrants in a hostile state, they are activities that are made precarious by laws that directly limit their mobility and access to basic daily needs. As this work is displaced onto “buddies” with citizenship status and underdocumented children with temporary protections under DACA, immigrant rights organizing at first appears reactionary, forced to handle the endless, but necessary “mundane of movements,” addressing the needs of social reproduction in a moment of racial capitalism that limits undocumented immigrants’ ability to work but also to simply live.

While anti-immigrant laws have made organizing difficult among an older generation of undocumented immigrants, those who came to Athens in the early to

mid 1990s and remain today, a budding movement exists not only among the more “radical” leaders like Beto and his brothers and neighbors in DIA, but also among DACAmented and citizen youth within these families. Daniela sees the difference between herself and her parents as one that has developed through political education with groups like Freedom University, U Lead, and her more radicalized peers and teachers (interview, December 29, 2016).

Daniela: Our parents’ generations didn’t really fight against those things, because of fear. Our parent’s generation are not educated in the same way, most didn’t finish high school, and don’t understand the government here and their rights. Ignorance fuels fear, not that they gave up or accepted, but they didn’t know and were too afraid. Whereas we knew better, we were educated, and we had the guidance to go about it. It was something that affected us. We see the change that was happening with the rallies across the nation, we see that we can make a difference. We learned from the rallies from Precious Knowledges and with Arizona’s SB1070 activism.

While she sees her parents’ generation as less active, much of her inspiration to stand up comes from her parents’ situation. Yet, Daniela maintained the separation, not to keep her parents in the dark, but because she worried her parents would try to keep her from being involved.

Daniela: They wouldn’t understand why I was doing it, if explained it as it was they would see it as a risk and interfere with it. I don’t want them to worry for me, because I knew I had Mr. H. and Freedom University to guide us. We knew we were protected, but they wouldn’t understood why it was necessary or why I put myself under “risk.”

This protective fear is shaped by the laws that maintain racial capitalism and white supremacy in Georgia. Although Daniela says she’s always known about her undocumented status, it didn’t really “hit her” until she was 12 or 13, when her status affected her ability to go to the doctor and when she faced the reality of her parents having to use fake papers to work. With this knowledge came a fear and anxiety, not only for herself, but for her parents, “They’re not driving safely, just like anything bad

can happen at any time. That's when it really hit me, when I was like 13. That's when it was like, "okay I'm not really supposed to be here, and it's hard, but I gotta stick through it." This fear was not unwarranted, as in the state of GA undocumented persons are not allowed access to a driver's license; being caught too many times driving without one, can lead to deportation. She describes an incident involving a broken taillight.

Daniela: Yeah, my dad has been pulled over 3 times. He got arrested once and we managed to bail him out before proceedings could be done. It was really stressful that night. I remember my mom didn't sleep at all because she was too worried what would happen. It's just really crazy thinking about how a small tail light can end up him being deported.

Daniela had to take care of her younger siblings as her mother dealt with her father's case. Since the interview, Daniela's father was detained, once again for a small traffic violation of driving without a license. A traffic violation became grounds for deportation as the local sheriff's department recently signed an agreement to work more closely with ICE. Daniela was away at college during the incident but returned home to help her mother. The family was luckily able to get him out on bail, but they are unsure what will happen if he is pulled over again. They are laying low for the time being, and her mother takes on more responsibility.

The issue of "fake papers" shapes where undocumented people can go but also where they can work. For Evi, she sees this affecting her mother's job opportunities. In turn, his limitation shapes the expectations her parents carry for Evi and her younger siblings (interview with Rosemary Gay, December 28, 2016).

Evi: Sometimes it's really hard to be a mom and be able to manage all that stress. Because it's really hard to not take the stress home, and sometimes she takes the stress out on me and my brother, and she like feels bad about it... She's really just not enjoying what she does every day, so it's really sad, but she's like, "We have to wait and see what happens with you."

What's even more telling is how underdocumented youth view the unjust treatment of their parents while also taking responsibility for it. Evi, Jose, and Leo all shared similar experiences watching their elders being mistreated, by local law enforcement and in daily interaction with other residents of Athens.

Evi: My dad was really, really calm like not a big deal, these things happen. But I was like Dad it's not fair, it's really sad that you think it's okay but it's not okay. I had never experienced anything like that... My dad is tan, and he has a very thick accent. And the policeman felt like, "I can attack him, ask him these hard questions, eventually maybe have to pull him over for an interrogation..."

Jose: I do see how people talk to my grandma or to my parents... I feel like the older crowd that are Hispanic are discriminated more, because I feel like they view us more like, "Oh, maybe he was born here. Like he knows English, he's like the newer generation of Hispanics, like he knows English and stuff." It's like our parents are more targeted to be discriminated. Yeah, I guess just mostly because they learned to get used to it, but we're obviously not gonna tolerate that. Like they know we're gonna talk back and correct them.

Leo: Now that I think about it, um, it's another instance with my mom. Like I said, she works at a restaurant as a waitress. She sees a lot of people, and actually sometimes people who aren't Hispanic will be working there too, but sometimes they would tell my mom that she's one of the good ones... I don't know if she takes it as a compliment or anything, I don't know really her exact response or her exact feelings about it, but definitely I would take it as an insult.

While each youth internalized their parents' stories in different ways, they are connected by their changing expectations on how their parents should be treated, but also what they can do in response to such treatment. This perspective emerges out of their underdocumented status.

### ***Being Stuck “In-Between”***

Daniela tells me that she is the only of her parents’ children who is undocumented. She jokes with her mom, asking her why she didn’t cross the border sooner, so she could have been a US citizen. Things would have been much easier for her. She calls J and B (educators in U Lead) her adopted *abuelas* because she cannot know her real ones in Mexico. She went back once, with her sisters. They are free to come and go as they please because they were born here. While there, she was responsible for the two of them, but she doesn’t know Mexico. She is currently away at school, but her mind is often focused on her family in Georgia, often worrying,

“When and where will the next raid be? If something happens to my parents would I have to go back home? I’m kinda like the middle-man. I relate to parents but also to my sisters, although not completely with either. I had the license, the documentation. I went to parent-teacher conferences, but FAFSA, federal loans, etc. I can’t help [my sister] in that way. I had to learn it, so I could know everything of both worlds” (Daniela, interview with the author, December 29, 2016).

President Obama introduced DACA on June 15, 2012, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Plyer vs. Doe* which made public education a right to all children, regardless of immigration status. To qualify, applicants must have come to the US before the age of 16, lived in the U.S. since 2007, and be younger than 31 years old on June 15, 2012. Only current students, high school graduates and veterans are eligible. Applicants who have committed a serious crime, have more than two misdemeanor convictions or are deemed to be a threat to national security are automatically disqualified. To file for DACA, most youth go to a lawyer or to a community organization to ensure that all their paperwork is correct. Most of these places charge anywhere between \$100-300, plus \$450 for the application fee, and again every two years for renewals. Despite

these costs, in 2014, when DACA was first up for renewal, over 83% of DACA recipients filed to renew, highlighting the importance of DACA on recipients' lives (Cantor 2015). As of June 2016, there are 28,045 DACA applicants in Georgia, ranking the state eighth in the nation (“Immigration and Legalization” 2014).

Although DACA is a federal program it is bound to state-level laws, so that DACA recipients are treated differently depending on where they live. Unfortunately, Georgia is one of the most unfriendly states to underdocumented people. While Georgia grants a driver's license to DACA recipients (unlike Arizona), Georgia's Board of Regents banned DACA recipients from attending the top 5 public universities. For these DACAmented youth, DACA was never really enough. While it granted them some temporary protections and freedoms, without a similar measure for their undocumented parents, DACA actually put more responsibility on them.

Similarly, for Temporary Protected Status, applicants have to re-apply every 18 months, unlike DACA's 24 months, paying a \$500 application fee each time. Juli and her mother were granted TPS in 2001. She knows other people who have TPS due to war or other natural disasters. The temporariness of each of these expensive measures is felt by the youth, as Juli acknowledges, “Like any time it could be taken away. In some ways, even if you do have a status, you're still living in that fear.” Within these families, underdocumented youth take on duties outside the home for their undocumented parents because of an expanded, yet liminal freedom granted them through their temporary status. Jose describes his family's piece of mind once he qualified for DACA, “It's better to know like someone in the family has a driver's license and so they can feel safer going to places, like work and stuff.” This newfound

responsibility was heightened in states like Georgia. Daniela explains what DACA meant to her and her family:

Daniela: I guess it was easier for my parents because I could drive legally, but then it kinda unintentionally put a burden on me. It's not a full burden, because then I would have to drive everywhere, but it caused problems, because I couldn't get my license on my own and I had to pass my aunt off as my mom. So, it's good but it's not enough. I can work but I can't get any benefits from work. Just money. I can't file for health care or any of that. Still, it does change a lot, like I didn't realize how much of a difference it made until this past month because my DACA expired and my current renewal was delayed. So technically I didn't have DACA for almost a month. I was just freaking out because both of my parents' cars are in my name. So, if a cop pulled them over they would see that my license is expired so they shouldn't be driving the car. It's just like I'm freaking out because I don't have a license, I don't have identification, ICE could come knocking on my door any minute. They would come to my house in GA, but they wouldn't find me, they'd find my family. So, it's scary to think about. Anything happening to them would be scary. It did take a toll on me. I was stressed about it, I was distracted, I wouldn't feel safe.

Class difference also comes out in the interview with Leo, as he took on the responsibility of dealing with authority figures, often middle-class agency representatives, as the oldest son with temporary status and bilingual skills.

Leo: Class to be honest plays a big factor as well. I feel like working class Hispanics feel like they don't, I won't say deserve, but they don't deserve to like, they're just not on their level. They're too, I guess you could say ghetto to be speaking to someone who's middle class, which is absolutely wrong, but I feel like that's the way that a lot of people from like my community, where I grew up, feel about it.

These responsibilities are shouldered alongside the double burden of knowing that they must represent their parents and sometimes grandparents outside the home until their younger siblings, often citizens, are able to take up the work. All the while their own status is precarious, giving way to a program that is "good, but not enough" (Daniela, 2016). These responsibilities shape the life trajectories for the oldest children and their experiences of youth, affecting even the smallest, most basic aspects of fun

and friendship, even of play within these formative years. Jose, Leo, and Evi describe this discernment, jokingly, in their focus group:

Jose: I've been invited to like a couple parties and stuff and I'm like, uh I don't think I wanna go to those maybe 'coz there might be like drinking or something, but they have citizenship and I don't. And if I get caught at the wrong time, and in the wrong place, that's gonna affect me toughly, like they can take away my DACA and stuff, so you really have to be cautious.

Leo: My friends are definitely like, they're more reckless when it comes to what they do, and that's cause they're all citizens, really. ... I mean the worst that could happen is they [get] taken to jail, or something like that, whereas I take the risk of being kicked out of the country. Yeah, I definitely think about the risks. [When driving] I don't like slouch or anything. Make sure I turn my headlights on, make sure I'm going at limit speed. Even when it comes to like – jaywalking too! [laughing]

Evi: Ok, I jaywalk...

Leo: I mean I jaywalk, but –

Rosemary: But you think about it?

Leo: I gotta make sure that like you know there are NO cops nearby cause like, I dunno. That's how many risks I gotta think about.

Jose: Mmm-hmm, it's like little things like jaywalking I guess. Or even like at school too. If I try to like get in a fight or start something with somebody, I gotta not fight at all 'coz you'll like bring yourself into trouble, stuff like that. Like little things.

This contrasts to their younger, often citizen siblings in mixed-status families who experience a different "youth."

Evi: I think I've known forever, but it didn't really make any sense or like click, and I didn't really understand the limitations I had until my brother came. Since he turned one he was able to visit my grandparents. Every single summer, my brother goes back to El Salvador. So, I guess that really put things into perspective, like, whoa, there's still limitations to things I can do. So, I guess I was always really jealous of my brother, I still am. You'd think like after 12 years it gets easier, but it doesn't... But that's where it really hit me knowing that I was illegal, or not illegal, but underdocumented.

Yet, this seemingly arbitrary difference *within* households has the potential to foster a powerfully different orientation for citizen siblings.

Emely: I agree already it's hard, y'know like for Juli or D because you guys already don't have the privileges like me who was born here, and then having to deal with that and then knowing within your own family your sister can do all this, but you can't, I feel like that's not fair at all... It's not easy to open your eyes like that see what's actually going on. Coz I mean I did because of Juli or because of my parents, I grew up having them. But people who were born here it's hard to see that it actually affects peoples' lives (Emely, interview with the author, December 29, 2016).

Emely describes her unique positionality and how this shapes her involvement as a youth activist. Because TPS was extended to both her mother and stepfather, Juli is not solely responsible for carrying legality within her family. With TPS they are able to drive and work, albeit in a way that costs them almost \$1000 every 18 months.

Temporary safety is expensive. Still, Juli is banned from attending the state's top public universities, despite being in the top ten percent of her graduating class. And, in January of this year, the Trump administration announced it will end TPS for immigrants from El Salvador in September 2019. The effects of this decision are yet to be seen, but it is unlikely that Juli or her family will return to El Salvador. Her mother remains working in the plant.

### ***Board of Regents Ban***

In this section I will focus in on the Georgia Board of Regents ban as primarily a struggle over social reproduction. For many white, "taxpaying" citizens across the state, this ban protects an exclusionary entitlement, in an era of increasingly competitive higher education. Contestations over higher education reflect the structuring of racial capitalism on daily life, while also illuminating the ways in which

obstacles to social reproduction maintain cheap labor for production. Many underdocumented youth do not realize they are undocumented until they begin to look for work or apply to college. In the state of Georgia, these youth are faced with an unjust reality.

Evi: when I came into high school I realized, these policies are more real than I thought, you know? Especially like after I joined ULead I really realized I can't go to any of these schools. I'm banned, and even [if I'm not banned] then I have to pay international fees. So, I understood why my cousins struggled so much.

In 1982 the Supreme Court issued *Plyer vs. Doe*, ruling that all children, regardless of citizenship status had the right to public education, but this ruling also allowed states to maintain control over higher education. In 2008, Georgia passed SB 492 which denies in-state tuition to undocumented students who attend state public universities/colleges. Just two years later in 2010, the GA Board of Regents passed Policies 4.1.6, banning undocumented students from the state's top five public universities, and 4.3.4, requiring universities to verify lawful presence for tuition status (Soltis 2013). Georgia is now a part of three Southern states that exclude undocumented students from higher education, alongside Alabama and South Carolina.

These laws developed, after a Kennesaw State University student, Jessica Colotl, was stopped by campus police for a minor traffic violation. After finding she did not have a driver's license, Cobb county police, as early participants in the 287(g) program, handed Colotl over to ICE. She was held in an immigration detention center in Alabama for 37 days. Colotl was released after KSU's President Daniel Papp wrote

a letter of support and the ACLU and immigrant rights groups across the state also organized (Cook 2010). This came with a wave of backlash, led by fellow Cobb county resident, D.A. King (M. Davis 2010). Cobb county leads the state in institutionalizing its residents' exclusionary values, blocking the extension of MARTA (public mass transit) into their gated communities, passing resolutions to condemn homosexuality, cutting off funding to the arts in education (Voekel 2016).

In the racial space of the American South, political leaders present their anti-immigrant actions as a way to protect taxpayers in the face of an inept federal government. Proponents of the Board of Regents' ban, Policy 4.1.6, relied heavily on this logic. Republican state senator of District 47 and staunch supporter of the new anti-immigration law, Frank Ginn, was sympathetically quoted in the local paper, "these children who are brought over by their parents illegally across the border are victims. But at the same time, legislators had to pass a state law to tamp down on illegal immigration because it's costing Georgia taxpayers money and the federal government won't act" ("Senator sparred" 2011). This idea was also represented by Middle Georgia College student David Bachman, covered by the AJC following the decision, "for every illegal person who is attending a public university, that's another U.S. citizen turned away" (Diamond 2010).

The protection of the white spatial imaginary was "under threat," as the top five public universities also became increasingly competitive during this time period (Voekel 2016). Additionally, the cheap and "uneducated" workforce so demanded by Georgia's industries was also threatened by access to higher education. Jim Jolly, Board of Regents rep of Dalton, GA, argued that the new rules will make sure students

are classified properly for tuition purposes. Jolly, interestingly enough is the chief executive officer of J&J Industries, Inc. and board member of The Carpet and Rug Institute, an industry that greatly benefited from the recruitment of undocumented workers in the mid-1990s (Striffler 2005; Winders 2013; Weise 2015).

Along with HB 87, Georgia legislature tried to pass HB 59 to expand the ban to all public institutions of higher education, and in 2012, after the enactment of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the Board of Regents quickly responded by changing the language of Policy 4.1.6 to include the exclusion of DACA students. In spite of these changes to immigration law and the current ban against undocumented student education, underdocumented youth across the state, along with their allies, have been organizing since day one. They not only organize for the right to higher education, but for comprehensive immigration reform and a pathway to citizenship for themselves and their families. This organizing can only be understood through a critical lens on the racial space of the American South.

### ***Behold the Land!***

“I trust then that an organization like yours is going to regard the South as the battleground of a great crusade. Here is the magnificent climate; here is the fruitful earth under the beauty of the southern sun; and here, if anywhere on earth, is the need of the thinker, the worker and the dreamer. This is the firing line not simply for the emancipation of the American Negro but for the emancipation of the African Negro and the Negroes of the West Indies; for the emancipation of the colored races; and for the emancipation of the white slaves of modern capitalistic monopoly.” ~ W.E.B. DuBois, October 20, 1946, “Behold the Land” closing session of the Southern Youth Legislature, Columbia, SC.

The US South is not simply a geographical space, an amalgamation of states, but is viewed in the American political imaginary as a political backwater, the seedbed

of racial hatred and exclusionary politics. I see the South not as exceptional, but rather as a mirror on the rest of the nation, a place of contradictions, of deep love and radical organizing but also of shame, hatred, and fear. I write as a Southerner who views the place I was raised in a way similar to DuBois above. In a speech addressed to the Southern Youth Legislature in Columbia, SC, DuBois declared the South as the “battleground of a great crusade,” but also a site of opportunity for “a new nation, a new economy, a new culture in a South really new and not a mere renewal of an old South of slavery, monopoly and race hate” (1946). Similarly, as the Young Patriots put it, “The south will rise again, only this time in solidarity with our oppressed brothers and sisters” (Sonnie and Tracy 2011).

I want to challenge the misperceptions about the South in order to bring into focus one of a multitude of social movements taking place in the American South, one in which underdocumented youth are at the center. I see the South as a racial space, as a material and tangible manifestation of racial capitalism, but one that is contested and changing. Caroline Knowles theorizes space as an “active archive of the social processes and social relationships composing racial orders. Active because it is not just a monument, accumulated through a racial past and present—although it is also that—it is active in the sense that it interacts with people and their activities as an ongoing set of possibilities in which race is fabricated” (Knowles 2003, 80). In this sense, the American South, is both an active archive of white supremacy, embodied by the KKK and the middle-class suburbs and gated communities, as documented above, but also of a radically alternative vision, the Black Radical Imagination evident in the freedom struggle and carried on through contemporary underdocumented youth organizing.

As evidenced in Emiko Soltis' (2015) work as a professor and director of Freedom University, underdocumented youth activists draw heavily on the living legacy and collective memory of the Black Liberation Struggle across the South. Through political education, actual conversations and relationships across race, generation, and movements, underdocumented Youth who participate in Freedom University draw upon and creatively extend the work of their adopted elders across the Black Radical South. Drawing on this tradition, youth organizing takes the form of creative non-violent, direct action, connecting across the time and space of these disparate movements. By framing anti-immigrant law and the education ban as part and parcel of a longer trajectory of racial capitalism, organizers recognize the ways in which contemporary struggles are connected against the racial project of white supremacy, one that sought to control Black Southerners through the economic and political violence of Jim Crow while severely limiting the imaginations of Southern whites. Out of this political climate and social history emerges an underdocumented youth movement that directly confronts the hypocrisies of American-style racial capitalism.



*Figure 25- Underdocumented Youth Protest, University of Georgia, February 1, 2016*

***“Education for liberation, not accreditation.”***

SNCC and segregated Black Colleges formed freedom schools to organize youth across the South and coordinate with other social justice movements, most actively in the 1960s-1980s. Freedom Schools were not simply about education as such, but rather allowed Black students to direct their political education to the Black Freedom Movement. This was education connected to the struggle for Black liberation. Mark Levy, a white student from Queens College in NY participated in Freedom Summer in Mississippi, under SNCC’s direction. Levy described the logic of Freedom Summer in a recent *New Yorker* article, “We’d ask, ‘If your goal is to fight segregation, what do you want that white society has—and what don’t you want?’” (Blitzer 2017). “What don’t you want” is the key question to imagining a New South.

Today, the legacy of their movement shapes the direction of underdocumented youth organizing. Leo sees this connection, to Dr. King and to Nelson Mandela, as a

great source of strength.

Leo: King, Mandela, to be honest those are the people that you look up to, or at least that I look up to as a kid. Seeing all the great things that they do, and to be like, kinda doing the same thing that they're doing is a blessing. Well, it's not a blessing that we have to do it because of these laws. Yeah, to be honest, it would've been okay that we wouldn't have to do it in the first place, but to know that, we're following in their footsteps, you know like, we're coming from hard times, from circumstances that we didn't get to choose, and we're doing something about it, it seemed like how they did it. It's, I don't know, it kinda makes me feel like, it's not even a feeling that I feel all the time, but I feel like strength almost. Almost a feeling of pride.

The most direct link comes through education-oriented groups like U Lead and Freedom University, both originating out of Athens, GA in response to the Board of Regents Policy 4.1.6. The current director of Freedom University, Emiko Soltis, describes the connection to Freedom Schools in this way, "They provided a tangible example of how to build alternatives in the face of separate and unequal access to education, how to develop leaders from the grassroots, and how to practice being free in order to bring about the world they know is possible" (Soltis 2015: 23). Since Freedom University's creation in October 2011, over 250 students have taken classes and participated in the educational space.

Freedom University was founded by a group of volunteer professors from the University of Georgia (Betina Kaplan, Lorgia Garcia-Pena, Pamela Voekel, and Bethany Moreton) and undocumented youth and community leaders to create a space for students banned from higher education across the state. This coalition formed after a meeting hosted by UGA's department of Education on "Immigration and Education." Co-founder Pamela Voekel (2016) describes the process as one emerging through solidarity with underdocumented youth.

P.V.: Following these demonstrations, four of us on the faculty at the University of Georgia in Athens—one of the campuses to which these students no longer had access—asked Keish Kim and Georgina Perez, two leaders of the Georgia Undocumented Youth Alliance (GUYA), what others should be doing to support their efforts. Their top priority, they told us, was to be in a college classroom while they advanced state and national movements that tied undocumented students' demands for in-state tuition and admission policies to the overall degradation of public higher education: declining public funding, metastasizing administration, rising tuition and fees, contracting financial aid, and burgeoning student debt.”

When Freedom U first started, there were 100 applicants for 30 spots. One reason for the quick response was due to the work of friend and immigrant rights leader Beto. Beto was foundational to the establishment of Freedom University, although his perspective is often marginalized in the stories and articles written about FU. He provided a link between the professors and the students within his neighborhood, including his nephew and other underdocumented youth who were active in GUYA (Georgia Undocumented Youth Alliance) and were early participants in FU. Additionally, Mrs. Linda Lloyd, local leader of the Economic Justice Coalition, a group that focuses on working-class Black voter registration, living wage campaigns, and worker-owned cooperatives, joined in as FU’s fiscal sponsor. Linda Lloyd compared the “gendered-racial removal program” of HB 87 and the education ban to breaking up families during slavery and Jim Crow segregation. The EJC raised money for supplies and gas for volunteer drivers. Since 2011, both underdocumented students and allies have engaged in a number of direct actions targeting the ban at Board of Regents meetings, the state capitol, across college campuses, and in celebrations in local high schools.

Soltis describes the goals of Freedom University, cultivated through Freirean pedagogy and practice as: (1) creating a safe space based on mutual care and respect

for each other's human rights, whereby teachers are also students and students are also teachers, (2) teaching subjects and skills that are relevant to students' lives and deepen their understanding of their own history and identity, and (3) using students' everyday knowledge as tools to analyze their own oppression and the oppression of others (Soltis 2015: 23). In this sense, Freedom University is not a social movement per se, but rather fosters interracial organizing among Black, Latina/o, Asian, and white youth, their educators, and allies across the South by bringing underdocumented youth into contact with each other and with former SNCC and Black Freedom Movement leaders. By planning actions in commemoration of the Greensboro Sit-ins (Feb 1, 1960), the desegregation of UGA (Jan 9, 1961) and by meeting Black leaders like Charles Black, Constance Curry, and Dr. Bernard LaFayette, Representative John Lewis, Reverend Raphael Warnock, and Reverend Joe Beasley, FU students engage in the active archive of the South's Black Radical Tradition. In the not-too-distant past, Black students were also banned from the University of Georgia, Georgia Tech, the Georgia Medical School, and other tax supported public institutions (Soltis 2015: 38). FU students were able to compare their fight against the Board of Regents Ban to the struggle for education, jobs, and housing across the South in the 1960s.

As FU students attended the Freedom Summer Conference in Jackson, MS for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, they saw that Black liberation in the South also meant liberation for their oppressors, against the tyranny of White Supremacy, or as DuBois puts it, the "emancipation of the white slaves of modern capitalistic monopoly." This perspective lies at the heart of the Black Radical Tradition as a necessary alternative to White Supremacy. Freedom University's movement from Athens to Atlanta in 2014 also

worked to substantiate these linkages. FU relocated to the MLK Center. The significance of this relocation is ingrained in Daniela's memory, highlighting the changing meanings of racial space within this "active archive" of the South. The Civil Rights Movement provided the foundation from which underdocumented students continue to build.

For members of the Black Freedom struggle of the 1960s and underdocumented youth today, actions were and are rooted not only in resistance but also in their collective Freedom Dreams. These were evident in young people's demands for education—but also demands for a *transformed* education, that does not simply mirror the liberalizing function of higher education as it currently stands, as the valorization of white supremacy. Direct action protests by Freedom University students and U Lead students form a strong Southern resistance movement against the ban, against HB 87, and against the rescinding of DACA and TPS. Yet at the level of the everyday through meetings, political education, and participation in a truly intergenerational movement, underdocumented youth are creating what Lorgia Garcia Peña (2012) calls the "New Freedom Fights."

Since Freedom University left Athens for Atlanta in 2014, some of the founders of FU have gone on to create U Lead. U Lead and Freedom University differ in organizational structure and purpose but are both shaped by underdocumented youth activism and political agency. Daniela describes her own self-transformation as a leader within U Lead. In 2014, she met Curtis Acosta, director of the Mexican American Studies Program in Tucson, AZ. He shared their struggle over education which inspired Daniela and a group of friends to start their own group with a teacher

at their public high school. The group began by organizing a screening of the film *Precious Knowledge*. Thirty-five students showed up. They also built the group's knowledge about HB 87 and Policy 4.1.6. They coordinated rides to Freedom U once it moved to Atlanta, participated in marches, and even spoke up at rallies against the ban and HB 87. Eventually they created *Undocufiles*, a monthly newsletter to inform their peers about issues affecting undocumented students and their communities. Through this organization, Daniela met educators at UGA and became active in U Lead.

At U Lead, students come from across and outside of the county to receive a warm meal and meet with volunteer mentors and tutors to work on homework, college and out-of-state fellowship applications, and to learn about events and organizing for the movement. While U Lead is not as vocal and directly political as Freedom University, for a variety of pragmatic reasons on the part of the founders, U Lead creates a small space for youth activism in coordination with larger groups like Freedom University. As such, U Lead has become the hub of underdocumented youth activism in Northeast Georgia.

In so doing, these underdocumented youth are also transforming white allies, both youth and adults, who were drawn to their "innocence" and "victimhood," yet now question racial capitalism's structuring of education. Dory MacMillan, a senior at Clarke Central and co-founder of Dream Fest reflected on her own transformation, "As a citizen, I disagree with the [anti-immigrant] laws and policies, but I think that also, as a student, I realize that they negatively impact me. My experiences with my peers are some of the reasons my education has been meaningful. The idea that

[undocumented] students could be excluded not only hurts them, but hurts us, the students who are still eligible to go to the [five most selective] universities.” (Hovaness and Milligan 2013). In this sense, undocumented youth activists expose “the tyranny of white supremacy masquerading as democracy,” thus exposing racial capitalism and the need for an alternative vision.



*Figure 26- Shutdown Stewart Protests, November 21, 2015, photo by the author*

### ***Survival Pending Revolution?***

In conclusion, I would like to consider how undocumented youth and the IRC’s collective work exposes the crisis of social reproduction under racial capitalism. Could we think about these actions in connection to those of what Huey P. Newton of the Black Panther Party called “survival pending revolution”? This focus was at the center of the Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Program and broader political strategy.

In an essay by leader Huey P. Newton entitled, “To Die for the People,” he states the reasoning behind the BPP’s survival programs as a way to “bring the people to the level of consciousness where they would seize the time” by serving their “interests in survival by developing programs which would help them meet their daily needs” (The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation 2008).

Among these programs were the free breakfast programs for children, clothing programs, medical transportation programs, health clinics, dental services, an employment program, childcare center, landbanking program, free food program, a safety program for the elderly, and finally an Intercommunal Youth Institute (The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation 2008; Patel 2012; Heynen 2009). All of these were provided free of charge, as the BPP attempted to redistribute wealth and “fight robbery by capitalists” by taking donations from wealthy business owners to fund their programs. Unlike government entitlement programs like TANF, the BPP provided programs that would also enable human dignity. Again, Newton’s own words put it best, “We will not get caught up in a lot of embarrassing questions or paperwork which alienate the people. If they have a need we will serve their needs and attempt to get them to understand the true reasons why they are in need in such an incredibly rich land. Survival programs will always be operated without charge to those who need them and benefit by them...” (The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation 2008: 5).

In many ways the IRC deals with similar questions of charity versus self-determination in meeting basic needs, leadership from and for underdocumented youth and undocumented immigrants, and a broader agenda of political education and immigration reform. From the testimonies shared here, it is clear that

underdocumented youth are not passive recipients of movement rhetoric and have never been fooled that DACA or other forms of temporary protective status have granted them access to the American Dream. In this way, underdocumented youth are flipping the immigration question from what is the role of the immigrant in America, to a reflection on what is America under racial capitalism? Those active in U Lead, in Freedom U, and other organizations become critical agents of social change by inspiring their friends, siblings, parents, and allies to see both the hypocrisies of American style racial capitalism and their Freedom Dreams constructed in the active archives of the Black radical South.

Additionally, the coalition of members that make up the IRC is growing. Since I left Athens, the post-election panic, which fell upon the majority, liberal white Athens, mobilized masses of people to community meetings as new coalitions developed in response to the election. IRC meetings of 5-10 have grown to 40-50 with subcommittees and the inclusion of professional grant-writers and near-non-profit status. U-Lead has also grown exponentially, and houses 70-80 underdocumented students and their families each week. These mobilizations are in response to white politicians who gain popularity by way of “deportation mobiles” and state-wide raids and deportations at a level even greater than what I witnessed in 2015. Ultimately, anti-immigrant laws in Georgia constrain undocumented immigrants’ most basic access to “life’s work,” to the very “geographies of survival” through the threat of mass deportation similar to the sustained attack on Black working-class communities through mass incarceration. This crisis of social reproduction exposes the terrifying logic of racial capitalism and the maintenance of both capital accumulation and White

Supremacy, which requires the immigrant rights movement in Athens and across the country to shed ties to white liberalism, but not necessarily white people, and the American Dream. While there is a problematic lack of substantial coalition building among immigrant rights activists with Black Athens, in addressing this crisis of social reproduction, IRC and other groups have the opportunity to build broader movements connected through a systemic fight against racial capitalism.

On September 5, 2017 the acting Secretary of Homeland Security Elaine announced a “wind down” of DACA. Underdocumented youth whose DACA expired after March 6, 2018, are already without the temporary protections. As these forms of temporary status are placed on the chopping block, the coalitions underdocumented youth have built will surely be tested. I hope that the youth presented here, their stories and actions, encourage the reader to shift their gaze, not on the underdocumented youth to be “helped” or “saved” but rather to the American values we reproduce and the role of racial capitalism in structuring young people’s lives. As scholar-activists work with these and other movements, might we keep in mind Daniela’s words, inspired by Dr. King, “when one group of people gets attacked so do the others. Once that group falls so do the others. We can’t let them fall because we don’t want to fall either.”



*Figure 27- "Manny" smiles at the camera during performance at Latino Fest, October 11, 2014, photo by author*

### ***A Note on Family Separation***

As I sit down to finalize this chapter, news headlines across the country document the atrocities happening in the Southern border states as the current administration uses the psychological and emotional terror of family separation to deter migrants from Mexico and Central America. Estimates find that border control agents separate an average of sixty-five children per day, and since May, 2,342 children have been taken in total (Domonoske and Gonzales 2018). Photos and videos of men, women, and small children being held in makeshift holding cells, which look eerily similar to dog kennels, have gone viral. Public outcry in the press and on social media criticize the actions of immigration officers at the border with statements like,

“This is not America!”<sup>79</sup> and headlines reading, “Separating is offensive to the ideals of America.”<sup>80</sup> Yet, as Childish Gambino (2018) reminds us, “This is America.”

Luckily, historian Tera Hunter (2018) reminds us that this practice of “Child-Snatching” is, as Don Mays describes discrimination, “as American as apple pie!” For enslaved African-Americans, separating families was common practice, especially as white settlers expanded the plantation economies westward through the Louisiana Purchase. Hunter found that slaves were even punished, “if they dared to cry, complain or fight back,” and, “to justify their brutality, slaveholders used the perverse reasoning, articulated by Thomas Jefferson in the 1780s, that slaves were incapable of expressing sentiment or love” (Hunter 2018). And as Pamela D. Bridgewater (2006) argues, this conceptualization allowed slaveowners to see Black women not as mothers, but as “breeders,” producers of property and wealth through their very reproduction. This practice worked to deny slaves any stable sense of family while simultaneously bolstering white supremacy, materially, but also psychologically.

After slavery was abolished, freed “orphans” were taken from their families to work for former owners. Child removals continue today as a disproportionate number of Black children are placed into foster care (60,733 in 2015, 23% of total) (“The AFCARS Report” 2016). Similarly, the US (and Canadian) government has a long and ongoing history of forced snatching and assimilation of Native American children through boarding schools and adoption. If families failed to follow white middle-class norms of parenting, children were taken and given to white families in an effort to

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<sup>79</sup> See Connelly 2018

<sup>80</sup> See Bala and Rizer 2018

“rescue” the children and improve the “plight” of the Indian (Jacobs 2014). In the Canadian province of Manitoba alone, there are nearly 9,000 indigenous children in the Canadian Foster Care System today (Taylor 2018).

Unfortunately, the latest incidents of family separation at the border are the most recent iteration of a longer history of forced separation of working-class families of color. The point of this analysis is to trace the connections of this frontal attack on daily life, on raising children, on social reproduction. The violence of racial capitalism emerges not only in the workplace, but, most intensely, in the spaces beyond the working-day, at the border, in the public housing projects, and inside public schools. This attack on Black and undocumented Latina/o immigrant social reproduction represents a fear and crisis of white supremacy with hope and revolution existing first and foremost as people take control of social reproduction for their communities, as they most simply live in defiance of laws and surveillance that would render them disposable.

I think it’s fitting to end this chapter with the words of James Baldwin, in an essay addressed to public school teachers.

America is not the world and if America is going to become a nation, she must  
find a way--and  
this child must help her to find a way--to use the tremendous potential and  
tremendous energy  
which this child represents. If this country does not find a way to use that energy,  
it will be  
destroyed by that energy.

James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers," *The Saturday Review*, 1963



## CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have traced the history and making of both the poultry industry and its surrounding community through an ethnography that centers Black women workers and their broader families. While this industry has experienced exponential growth since restructuring in the post-war period, such growth has not meant worker compliance and acquiescence. The industry is one fraught with labor organizing, wildcat strikes, walkouts, and the anti-union busting attempts that come with “selling the South.” Within this history of labor organizing and disorganizing, immigration recruitment became the political alternative, albeit a temporary one, to improving working conditions, pay, and benefits. While the workforce has changed over time, Black women remain a constant source of “cheap” labor within this indispensable Southern industry. It is an industry built on the literal hands, arms, feet, and arms of a marginalized workforce, produced and reproduce to ensure “cheap” chicken.

Through ethnography, I connect the working day, as experienced on the evisceration line in one of the largest processing plants in North Georgia to workers’ lives beyond the plant walls. Inside the plant, I document the relationship between USDA FSIS line speed (de)regulation to plant-level attempts at controlling every part of the working day. Both work to control workers’ time, but also their bodies, often leading to “premature disability,” pushing workers out after a few years. The contestations around time-sense are never complete, so that employers must continue to invent new rules and regulations to ensure workers do not “steal company time!”

Yet workers employ several tactics of resistance to take back or take control of some amount of time within and outside of the plant walls. Additionally, I argue that we must better theorize the ways that space is used and reconceptualized to discipline workers, increasing surveillance and closing off the small avenues of freedom workers manage inside. In this sense, bathroom and lunch breaks are not only about the five or ten minutes away from the line, for rest and reprieve, but also potentially volatile spaces where workers might share grievances alongside of their Tylenol and mac and cheese.

I next move to the communities surrounding the poultry plant, tracing the contemporary mechanisms of global racial capitalism that both degrade working conditions while simultaneously decreasing or all out removing access to the state's "social safety net" for low-wage, working poor mothers. This moment constitutes a "crisis of social reproduction" according to Nancy Fraser (2016), as budget cuts and the consolidation and relocation of services function hand-in-hand with the emergence of punitive social service and workfare policies, state-sanctioned actions against immigrant youth education, hyper-criminalization within majority Black working-poor communities and schools, studentification/gentrification, the mobilization of ICE raids, deportations, and the separation of families. These institutions work to create a captive surplus labor force with increased competition for shrinking low-wage, working-class jobs. The poultry industry across the US South has greatly benefited from this neoliberal turn, and is one of the few remaining "good" low-wage jobs available in the post-industrial US for workers without a formal or even high school education, those who have been previously convicted of a felony, and others who

negotiate varying forms of immigration documentation. Here, I ground this analysis in Athens, but also argue such crises are produced through particular places long hostile to Black workers. Throughout this chapter, I have tried to illuminate the small, quotidian ways in which Black working-class communities tied to the poultry carve out a living, and create what bell hooks refers to as a “homeplace,” extending occasionally beyond the borders of the home. Yet, the ability to construct a homeplace remains precarious when women are highly mobile, constantly pushed from job to job and house to house.

Finally, I return to the issue of working-class, largely undocumented and underdocumented immigration. I argue that Georgia’s anti-immigration laws rely on an ideology of exclusionary white supremacy emerging from the suburbs of Atlanta. These laws in effect criminalize social reproduction, in an attempt to discipline undocumented communities to accept low-wage, “3-Ds” work, but also to deter political organizing for their dignity and humanity. Despite these laws, under the banner of “immigrant rights,” broad coalitions work across ACC for immigration reform and in response to the devastating effects of deportation and family separation. Through observant participation, I show how local immigrant rights groups have responded to mass deportations and the education ban. Underdocumented youth in Atlanta and Athens are forging a new freedom movement by drawing on the living legacy of Civil Rights movements and the tradition of Black liberation in intergenerational coalitions with former leaders. This, I argue, is largely due to their location in the active archive of the South as well as their DACA or TPS status being “stuck-in-between,” their undocumented parents and citizen younger siblings. Rather

than seeking inclusion and proving deservingness, these underdocumented youth challenge the basis of the American Dream altogether. This is a necessary intervention for mainstream immigrant rights organizing which seeks to “save” the innocent to the inclusion of a just and democratic America. By exposing the dream as a nightmare, there may be hope in building across movements and against white supremacy as the foundational ideology to racial capitalism.

***“A job ain’t the answer”- Jimmy Boggs, autoworker, organic intellectual, Detroit***

This conclusion is not an ending, as there is always work to do and more to learn and know from people in the struggle. I have not captured all that I had hoped, nor did I talk to everyone I should have. So in many ways, as this dissertation presents the workers “in the making” this project is very much still a process, in the making. I present a small sliver of the whole. Yet, as I reflect on the long march of the dissertation, I want to make a comment about the current political moment, when there seems to be very little place for hope. When looking back at photos of strikes, marches and protests, there appears to be so much faith expressed in the workers’ eyes, faith in a movement that will win, yet often has betrayed them. How do we, as a society, address the racism that surfaces as premature disability and death? How do we address the persistence of an ideology so foundational to our nation’s being? More jobs? Shortening the working day? Increase wages? Anti-work? Millennial-led unions? What would freedom look and feel like?

I hope I’ve outlined some of the causes of the degradation of life and work, reaching beyond the point of production while not losing sight of it. As Jimmy Boggs

puts it, “A job ain’t the answer.” Short-term economic fixes as band-aids to a persistent problem of human morality will not work. The solutions and answers will have to be found in the movements of people struggling not only to survive but who hold an evolving political vision for the future. I think Robin Kelley puts this work of struggle best. “Community, solidarity, collective struggle is very hard work and is not a product of oppression. It’s a product of imagination, culture, conversation, spaces of semi-freedom where people can laugh and cry out loud, share pains and pleasures, plan, teach, learn.” Those spaces of semi-freedom are being constructed in places like Jackson, Mississippi and Athens, Georgia. I’ll end with Clyde Woods, as I think he puts the situation best in his conclusion of *Development Arrested*.

If we are to build a society where working-class knowledge and participatory democracy are truly treasured, we must understand that the South is the center of African American culture, not its periphery. The Delta then becomes understood as a Mecca. Future political and economic movements must view African American folk culture as a central, and necessary, element in the construction of new institutions and new regional realities. The ‘civilizing’ activity of providing ‘nondeviant’ role models for the creation of new men and women must come to an end. Instead, an all-out effort must be undertaken to celebrate and valorize the millions upon millions, living and dead, who met the regimes of daily destruction with unshakeable dignity. In the same vein, the lands, rivers, streams, air, plants, and animals of the region must be restored to their sacred status. Until then, ‘every hill and molehill,’ every blade of grass, every flutter of the flag, and every note that is played, must be contested.

# APPENDIX A

Pay Date: 03/27/2015 - Regular						
			CARRIE FRESHOUR 140 N PETER ST ATHENS, GA 30601			
Personnel Area	1007	Period Begin Date	03/15/2015			
Employee ID	00567332	Period End Date	03/21/2015			
Base Pay Rate	\$11.22	Pay Frequency	Weekly			
Taxes	State Codes	Marital Status	Allowances		Additional Amounts	
Federal		Single	2			
Primary State	GA	Single	0			
Secondary State		Single	0			
Local			0			
Earnings	Current Period	Rate	Hours	Hours YTD	This Period	YTD
1.5xOT	03/15/2015-03/21/2015			50.62	0.00	849.03
HrlyPay	03/15/2015-03/21/2015	11.22	34.03	498.31	381.82	5,548.34
<b>Total Earnings :</b>			<b>34.03</b>	<b>548.93</b>	<b>\$381.82</b>	<b>\$6,397.37</b>
Pre-Tax					This Period	YTD
<b>Total Pre-Tax :</b>					<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
Taxes					This Period	YTD
WHLD FED					\$-19.42	\$-469.38
WHLD GA					\$-16.72	\$-303.39
OASDI FED					\$-23.68	\$-396.64
MEDICARE FED					\$-5.53	\$-92.76
<b>Total Taxes :</b>					<b>-\$65.35</b>	<b>-\$1,262.17</b>
After-Tax					This Period	YTD
Un Dues					\$-8.01	\$-104.13
CafeMeal					\$-10.39	\$-121.68
Sup Clos					\$0.00	\$-5.35
Chkn Sis					\$0.00	\$-11.53
<b>Total After-Tax :</b>					<b>-\$18.40</b>	<b>-\$242.69</b>
<b>Net Pay</b>					<b>This Period</b>	<b>YTD</b>
<b>Total Net Pay :</b>					<b>\$298.07</b>	<b>\$4,892.51</b>
Leave Balance Summary						
Leave Type	Leave Number	Leave Date	Leave Text			
Vacation Bal	0.00	03/27/2015	Vacation Bal			
Pay Summary					This Period	YTD
Earnings					\$381.82	\$6,397.37
Pre-Tax Deductions					\$0.00	\$0.00
Federal Taxable Wages					\$381.82	\$6,397.37
Social Security Taxable Wages					\$381.82	\$6,397.37
Medicare (HI) Taxable Wages					\$381.82	\$6,397.37
Total Taxes					-\$65.35	-\$1,262.17
After-Tax Deductions					-\$18.40	-\$242.69
<b>Net Pay</b>					<b>\$298.07</b>	<b>\$4,892.51</b>
Pay Distribution List						
Description	Type	Amount	Account #	Bank		
Account						

## APPENDIX B

Pay Date: 03/06/2015 - Regular							
[REDACTED]				CARRIE FRESHOUR 140 N PETER ST ATHENS, GA 30601			
Personnel Area	1007	Period Begin Date	02/22/2015				
Employee ID	00567332	Period End Date	02/28/2015				
Base Pay Rate	\$11.22	Pay Frequency	Weekly				
Taxes	State Codes	Marital Status	Allowances		Additional Amounts		
Federal		Single	2				
Primary State	GA	Single	0				
Secondary State		Single	0				
Local			0				
Earnings	Current Period	Rate	Hours	Hours YTD	This Period	YTD	
1.5xOT	02/22/2015-02/28/2015	16.83	11.63	43.02	195.73	721.12	
HrlyPay	02/22/2015-02/28/2015	11.22	40.00	385.16	448.80	4,278.79	
<b>Total Earnings :</b>			<b>51.63</b>	<b>428.18</b>	<b>\$644.53</b>	<b>\$4,999.91</b>	
Pre-Tax					This Period	YTD	
<b>Total Pre-Tax :</b>					<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	
Taxes					This Period	YTD	
WHLD FED					\$-58.83	\$-373.32	
WHLD GA					\$-32.48	\$-238.11	
OASDI FED					\$-39.96	\$-309.99	
MEDICARE FED					\$-9.35	\$-72.50	
<b>Total Taxes :</b>					<b>\$-140.62</b>	<b>\$-993.92</b>	
After-Tax					This Period	YTD	
Un Dues					\$-8.01	\$-80.10	
CafeMeal					\$-18.30	\$-88.69	
Chkn Sis					\$0.00	\$-11.53	
<b>Total After-Tax :</b>					<b>\$-26.31</b>	<b>\$-180.32</b>	
Net Pay					This Period	YTD	
<b>Total Net Pay :</b>					<b>\$477.60</b>	<b>\$3,825.67</b>	
Leave Balance Summary							
Leave Type	Leave Number 1	Leave Date	Leave Text				
Vacation Bal	0.00	03/06/2015	Vacation Bal				
Pay Summary					This Period	YTD	
Earnings					\$644.53	\$4,999.91	
Pre-Tax Deductions					\$0.00	\$0.00	
Federal Taxable Wages					\$644.53	\$4,999.91	
Social Security Taxable Wages					\$644.53	\$4,999.91	
Medicare (HI) Taxable Wages					\$644.53	\$4,999.91	
Total Taxes					\$-140.62	\$-993.92	
After-Tax Deductions					\$-26.31	\$-180.32	
<b>Net Pay</b>					<b>\$477.60</b>	<b>\$3,825.67</b>	
Pay Distribution List							
Description	Type	Amount	Account #	Bank			
[REDACTED]							

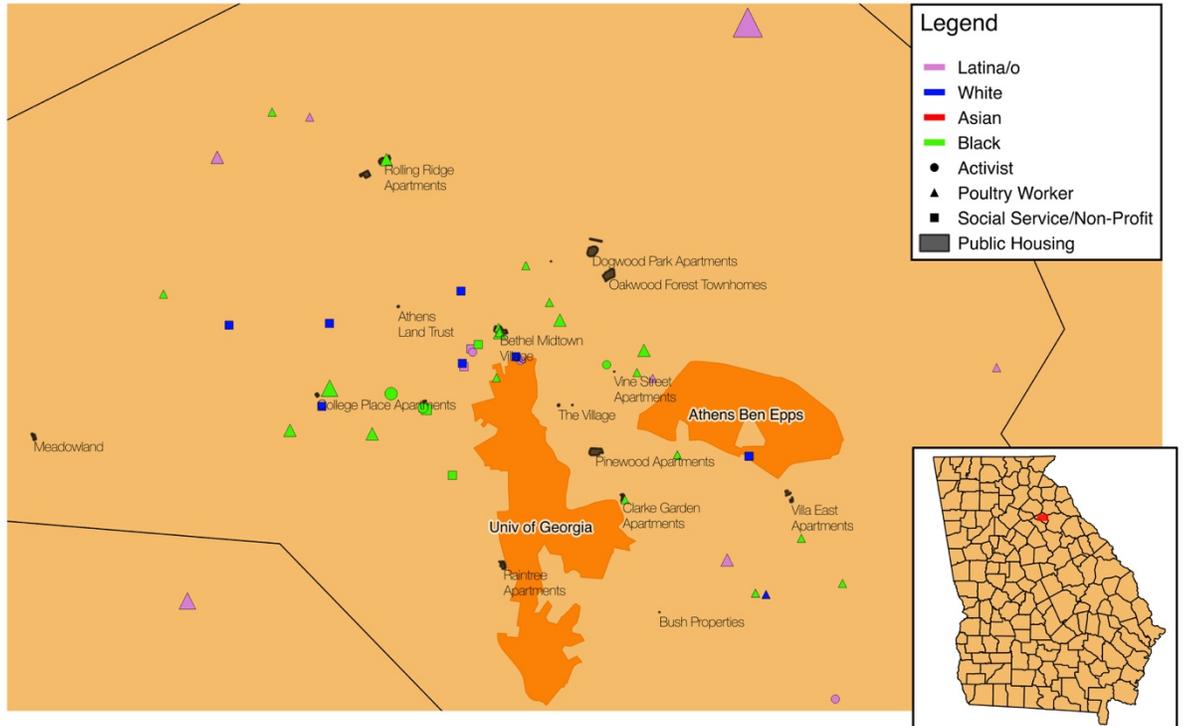
### Appendix C

Interview #	Date	Pseudonym	Individuals	Race	Duration (mins)	Type
1	10/12/15	Yolanda	1	L	60	A
2	10/18/15	Beto	1	L	92	A/PP
3	10/24/15	Jessica	1	B	46	PP
4	10/30/15	Sara	1	W	76	SS
5	11/10/15	Amy	1	W	68	SS
6	11/17/15	Ale	1	L	79	A/SS
7	11/17/15	April	1	W	74	SS
8	11/28/15	Cecillia	1	L	50	PP
9	12/22/15	Linda	1	L	42	PP
10	1/22/16	Tom	1	W	71	A/SS
11	1/26/16	Aracelli	1	L	63	PP
12	1/27/16	Larry	1	W	71	SS
13	1/28/16	Aida	1	L	70	A/SS
14	1/29/16	Rayna	1	L	52	PP
15	1/31/16	Alessandra	1	L	78	PP
16	2/3/16	Lucy Hudgens	1	W	43	SS
17	2/3/16	Tangeneika	1	B	30	PP
18	2/5/16	Focus Group	6	L, L, L, L, L, L	145	PP
19	2/11/16	Meredith Brooks	1	W	49	SS
20	2/11/16	Yadira	1	L	50	PP
21	2/12/16	Focus Group	6	L, L, L, L, L, L	90	PP
22	1/16/16	Tiara	1	B	51	PP
23	2/1/16	Pat and Annabella	2	W, L	120	SS
24	2/18/16	Betty	1	B	45	PP
25	2/20/16	Toni/Lolita	2	B, B	74	PP
26	2/24/16	Fenwick	1	B	40	SS
27	3/14/16	Iniestra	1	L	45	PP
28	3/14/16	Theresa	1	B	55	PP
29	3/19/16	Beverly, Chrissandra, Dey-Asia	3	B, B, B	72	PP
30	4/4/16	Harriet	1	B	48	PP
31	4/4/16	Mary Kay	1	B	70	PP
32	4/6/16	Missy	1	B	49	PP

33	4/6/16	Puddin/Shay	2	B, B	47	PP
34	4/8/16	Jon	1	A	45	PP
35	4/13/16	Linda Lloyd and Patrick Davenport	2	B, B	61	A
36	4/14/16	Carmina and Walter	2	L, L	61	PP
37	4/17/16	Soñia	2	L, L	57	PP
38	4/19/16	Sonja	1	B	61	PP
39	4/21/16	Denetria	1	B	39	PP
40	4/22/16	Kenoa	1	B	66	PP
41	4/27/16	Dominique and Kurwana	2	B, B	77	PP
42	4/26/16	Carmina and Walter	2	L, L	145	PP
43	4/28/16	Sharon	1	B	49	PP
44	5/2/16	Tammy Dalton	1	W	55	SS
45	5/2/16	Kathy	1	W	98	PP
46	5/7/16	Shannon	3	B, B, B	90	PP
47	5/7/16	Cristina	3	L, L, L	90	PP
48	6/3/16	Takeya	1	B	73	PP
49	6/7/16	Sheila	1	B	71	PP
50	6/8/16	Pat Sheats	1	B	83	SS
51	6/13/16	Jacquita	1	B	39	PP
52	6/15/16	Derica	1	B	100	PP
53	6/15/16	Diane	2	B, B	39	PP
54	6/17/16	Shawnda	1	B	80	PP
55	6/18/16	LaTasha	1	B	47	PP
56	10/11/16	Dr. Geraldine Clarke	1	B	80	SS
57	11/26/16	Marcus	1	B	80	PP
58	12/1/16	Tene Harris	1	B	40	A
59	12/28/16	Evi, Leo, Jose	3	L, L, L	150	A/PP
60	12/28/16	Erica	2	B, B	77	PP
61	12/29/16	Daniela, Juli, Emely	3	L, L, L	103	A/PP
62	9/8/16	Nick Stanley	1	L	100	A
63	1/28/16	Lisa Caine	1	W	23	SS
64	3/4/17	JoBeth Allen	1	W	35	A/SS
65	9/28/17	Ovita Thornton	1	B	58	A/SS
67	2/26/18	Beto	1	L	120	A/PP

# Appendix D

## Interviews and Oral Histories



\*Map created by Cornell undergraduate, Cindy Chen, using GIS

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