

Rooting embodied wisdom for Black futures

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Abstract

Over the last 10 years, there has been a resurgence in urban agriculture in an effort for Black communities to reclaim autonomy over food sources and diets and a way to empower them to engage once again in the agricultural industry. This reconnecting builds collective agency and community resilience (CACR) (White, 2019). The benefits of urban agriculture within Black communities bring spiritual, mental, and physical wellness to the forefront, empowering upward mobility and encouraging an autonomous revenue structure. This research looks to the pioneers of the community supported agriculture (CSA) movement as a rooted framework for self-sufficiency, communal resilience, and land sovereignty (Baszile, 2021).

Art is a way of documenting and connecting individuals with specific subject matter that yields transformative understanding. Specifically, movement is a unique language spoken through the body and can tell stories about the lives and experiences of a person. Food is transportive, movement-based, creative expression that has been shown to improve health outcomes and to expand consciousness, promote healing, and self-awareness (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). We see movement as an opportunity to engage Black urban growers in self-empowered healing in connection with the environment around them to surpass historical trauma.

This qualitative study used narrative inquiry methodology to explore the ideas of Black growers' relationship to land, growing fresh food, and how those relationships to the earth influence how Black communities can secure and ensure future growth. Through an innovative participatory interview, we solicited stories from nine urban farmers incorporating elements of movement ranging from the grower's contemporary movement and African diasporic agricultural dances that lend to storytelling.

Three emergent themes from one-on-one interviews with Black growers emerged: (1) the generational gap to sustain and transfer agricultural wisdom; (2) reengagement with the earth is vital for Black communities for holistic health and wellbeing; and (3) longevity of urban agriculture persists to be a concern for elder stewards of the earth due to ever changing urban land conditions. This research illustrates a historical narrative of resilience that exists within Black communities' relationship to the earth. These stories are sacred and important to share because Black communities are so often regulated to urban areas and stigmatized due to lack of access to resources and consistently meet structural oppressive forces. As a Black movement artist and grower, I see movement as an expressive way to connect and highlight the dimensionality of the food justice movement.

Keywords

urban agriculture, narrative inquiry, resilience, Black growers

Disciplines

African Studies | Food Security | Interdisciplinary Arts and Media | Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies

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INTRODUCTION

In this research, we are centering on Black urban farmers as we are living in a time of food insecurity in Black and Brown communities. Over the last ten years there has been a resurgence of Black growers reclaiming their ancestral right to earth stewardship. "This is a moment in which Black gardeners are turning — or returning — to traditions of sustenance, solidarity, and sanctuary. They are finding a new sense of refuge in a traditional act of horticulture" (Edeani, 2021). It is in the wisdom of Black growers that we can tap into survival tactics that hold instrumental strategies for Black and Brown communities to find resilience and economic autonomy in a capitalist system. African Diasporic people come from a rich history of agriculture that consists of songs, dances, and specific techniques and systems created from our ingenuity and creativity.

Leah Penniman, a Black woman grower and leader in food justice, writes in her article *Black to the Land*, “Ghanian women created “African dark earth” a compost mixture of bone char kitchen scraps and ash that built up over generations capturing carbon and fertilizing crops” (Baszile, 2021, p. 61). Monica M. White, author of *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural resistance and the black freedom movement*, informs us that “slave gardens represented independent production grounds and can be understood as a strategy of resistance to a corrupt system and an effort to create food security” (White 2019, p. 13). With a history steeped in organizing around food production and community building, Black people are mobilized to create an environment that better fit the needs of the community. Currently, there is not enough support for the scale of Black growers’ operations to expand in scale. One Black grower, when talking about his Columbus, Ohio growing experience in his interview, shared his insight on how the scale of one’s operation determines the opportunity to garner wealth. Those who were White landowners had the opportunity to pass down large amounts of land, large-scale farming operations, or even funds to start up. “New deal farm programs...[made] America eligible and [magnified] opportunities to tilt programs to favor white male farmers and to push others either into agribusiness or out of farming” (Baszile, 2021, p. 70).

Through Black grower’s stories, we can understand the disconnect between youth and the economic disenfranchisement facing these communities. The voices of Black growers are also vital in offering alternative career tracks that align with their cosmological heritage. This research aligns with work conjured by Ananya Dance Theater, an all Femme and BIPOC dance company that creates work radicalizing the global arts field and social justice movements. Building on a feminist food politic protest-performance piece called *Roktim: Nurture Incarnadine*, “Roktim bridges food sovereignty and food justice by choreographing solidarity across geographies of inequality, struggle, and reimaginings” (Chatterjea, Wilcox, & Williams, 2022, p. 151). By witnessing this contemporary choreographic work, we were able to see how global food movements are linked through technocapitalism, forcing communities to be dependent on governmental seed and food production. “Technocapitalism promises to feed the global North and South albite differently through corporate and capitalist food securitization” (Chatterjea, Wilcox, & Williams, 2022, p. 152).

In the Black communities that we come from, the food sources are dependent on fast-food, corner stores, and SNAP programs that seem to be statically placed. The Good Food Revolution’s author Will Allan, a forerunner in the urban farming movement, illustrates the possibility of economic autonomy by offering an analysis on his drive through his neighborhood: “The whole place was a mess. But I could feel its potential. I knew from my drive through the neighborhood that I would not have any competition if I were to try to sell fresh fruit and vegetables there. The only other places I saw to buy food within a mile were McDonald’s, a Popeyes, and several convenience stores” (Allen, 2012, p.15). Black farmers are visionaries for communal resilience curating speculative space for growth and positivity.

Food sovereignty emphasizes local or indigenous control and prioritizes priorities within food systems, forwarding self-determination within uneven global development and settler colonialism, battling ecological degradation through sustainable valuing of knowledge, and promoting ecological preservation, diversification, and collaboration. (Desai, 2022, p. 150).

Those who are controlling the food, control the health and wellness of the community. This draws attention to the lack of autonomy in the foods that are imported into the community. Institutions like Mid-Ohio food bank are not tuned into the specific dietary needs of the community. “Food insecurity may directly result in an unhealthy diet, immediate hunger, and nutritional deficiencies. It is also associated with negative health outcomes in the long term, potentially impairing mobility, and ability to work. For adults, food insecurity is associated with diet-related chronic diseases including hypertension, diabetes, and obesity, as well as higher mortality. Mental health conditions associated with adult food insecurity include depression, anxiety, and social isolation. For pregnant women, maternal food insecurity is associated with increased risk of certain birth defects and prenatal and postpartum depression. Food insecurity during childhood and

adolescence also contributes to poor health, increased susceptibility to disease, impeded cognitive and physical development, and poor school performance” (Koh et. al., 2020). Black growers are aware of the need to interject to create a prefigurative politic.

Furthermore, the elders of the Black farming community expressed the succession rate is low for next generation stewards of the land. The USDA reported “the average age of a beginning farmer is 46.3, much younger than the average age of all farmers (57.5)” (Halvorson, 2021). This kind of statistic highlights the challenge of not having younger people in the space to alleviate some of the heavier lifting that needs to be done in growing space. Having conversations with elders who grow and support the community through food production it was evident that the generations after them also do not have the embodied wisdom to use garden tools or even how to begin growing. Farming education is imperative for communities who lack information on how to work with the earth for communal benefit.

In this research, movement serves as embodied wisdom as well as a text to understand the positionality of each Black grower. We are movement artists who recently moved to Columbus, Ohio from Brooklyn, NY with our collective “Brother(hood) Dance!”. We raise awareness to sociopolitical and environmental injustice in hopes to transform audiences and community members toward being more mindful in their humanity. We moved into the Driving Park east neighborhood which historically was a farming town called Kimball Farms. Ironically, this neighborhood today is food insecure, with the only grocery store with “fresh” food being a local Kroger. Franklin County (Columbus, Ohio) has “nearly 1 in 5 Franklin County residents (18%) or approximately 214,500 individuals, that experience food insecurity” (*Food Delivery Resource Center*, 2022).

The lack of food resources didn’t shock us - leaving Brooklyn our closest and most convenient fresh food grocery store closed, leaving community members with a problem to fix on their own. These are Black and Brown immigrant communities that face the challenge of food insecurity. In a study called *Explaining Racial Inequality in food security in Columbus Ohio: A Blinder Oaxaca Decomposition analysis*, they reported a 68.2 percent food security gap between white and Black households. This gap can be accredited to socioeconomics such as transportation, where someone lives, interpersonal relationships that are friendly, and the food importation to that community. “In a 2017 USDA report using a nationally representative sample, the percentage of food-insecure Black households (21.8 percent) was 2.5 times higher than that of White households (8.8 percent)” (Koh et. al., 2020).

This kind of neglect is due to structural restrictions that are based on race, class, gender, ability, and overall access. Black growers in Columbus, Ohio, are fighting to keep the wisdom of the land alive for the next generations. We were fortunate enough to join the Growing Hearts and Hands community garden a year ago only to witness the resilient yet taxing work the elders of the community are doing to cultivate space to produce food and positivity within the community. As we started to deepen our relationship with the land and the Black growers in Ohio, we noticed there was a social movement towards food autonomy and fresh food options.

In African diasporic dances, we have a direct link to agriculture. Dances like the Ekon Kon from the Jola people of Southern Senegal portray the process of growing food. Within the dance, there is the embodied wisdom of the process of planting. First, you bend your knees and lean forward just a bit to keep your heart in relationship to the earth, a basic position for Africanist esthetics. Then, you take your right hand and swing it across your body and back as if you were clearing the way with a machete. After you’ve cleared out your planting space, you have to break up the soil, plant the seed, cover it with the soil, and ask for the rain. The knowledge lives within each step of this cultural production on planting, growing food and harvesting. “Through dance, communities and individuals negotiated virtually every important experience in life, their word answers to increase crop harvests, to initiate the young into adulthood, to celebrate marriage and birth. To help the recently deceased move into the spirit world to protect against evil, their word answers to educate the young and proper behavior. To heal the sick and to help the newborn

become settled and stay healthy in the mortal world. They word answers to celebrate puberty and to represent the essence of male and female roles in to satirize misbehavior some dances honored. The living and some dances honored the ancestors” (Glass, 2012, p.7). Brother(hood) Dance! sees dance movement as a technology metabolized in the body as food does. In embodying these movements, you are encoding and digesting the wisdom of knowing how to work with the earth and community in a harmonious way. We see dance as way to connect to intergenerational communities so that no one is left behind in the evolution of community agency and resilience.

Theoretical framework

We approached this research through an Eco-womanist framework coined by Melanie L. Harris who is the author of *Ecowomanism: African American women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*. “Eco womanism signals the importance of developing an interdisciplinary approach and method to doing environmental justice work” (Harris, 2017, p. 9). This perspective situates Black women’s voices forward in the environmental, food, water, and land, justice movements that often are co-opted by White mainstream narratives.

The Eco-womanist framework is a seven-step method that represents a spiral. For the purposes of this research, we worked with the first step, honoring experience and mining eco-memory, as a foundational platform for this participatory research. Each step is interchangeable leaving no room for linearity. As African diasporic dancers this kind of spiraling is familiar as a choreographic tool to conjure, ignite, and transform. The first step is an honoring of experience and mining eco-memory. There is value in the interiority of our bodies knowing. This research honors Black growers’ bodies and their experiences in their environments. Asking intentional questions was a key part in mining their eco-memories. “Eco-memory refers to collective and individual memory of the earth and relationship to and with the earth” (Harris, 2017, p. 28). In this case, the act of witnessing and listening to Black growers allows for the technology of storytelling to be forwarded and offers a life affirming future practice for next generations.

This research also uses dance as a lens to analyze and highlight the embodied practice of Black growers in urban spaces and its impact on community as well as the growers themselves. Dr. Ananya Chatterjea artistic director of Ananya Dance Theater calls into being “Social Justice Choreography”. She describes it a “[shining the] light in the best way possible on stories that call out for justice and it’s a mosaic of inspirations that are understood through an embodied practice” (Pillow, 2022) By engaging with Black growers and being Black growers ourselves, we are on the front lines of food justice and land sovereignty.

We are choreographers, researchers, and activists who understand the multidimensionality of this complex environmental movement. Through dance, agriculture, and technology or D.A.T., we’ve created an epistemology for which we can understand the world. The diasporic dances of agriculture are in direct relationship to the Black growers. The process of daily labor, transportation, management, water supply and irrigation, *community agency*, and *community resilience* are movement oriented agricultural operations we gain insight from. Monica M. White coined the terms ‘collective agency’, to expand theories of agency to include a collective dimension. Community gardens are collective models to food insecurity. The green spaces/lots lay in the hands of the city and its plans of urban development - collective resilience.

METHODOLOGY

This is participatory research using a qualitative method that puts us as close to the Black growers’ experience as possible. We conducted interviews with Black growers in Columbus, Ohio, to gauge the impact of their operation. Due to the pandemic and changing seasons, we met the growers in spaces that felt comfortable to them. Some we met directly on the land and others we met via zoom. As each participant provided rich verbal information on their growing experience, our goal was to see how they embodied their work. Nine interviews were planned, however only five growers were available to participate. Interviews were video recorded, and photos captured

during data collection. Questions like ‘can you show me a movement that embodies the feelings of planting your first seed of the season, tasting your first harvest, and when you feel the most strength’ were asked to embody the movement they felt connected them with agriculture. Recordings from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common themes using thematic analysis. The researchers ensured rigor and trustworthiness via data triangulation of the findings and a thorough, rich description.

Participants were invited to participate in the study via interpersonal communication (in-person or via email) and interested participants were given an informed consent form detailing their participation in the study. Dates for data collection were determined by the availability of the growers. During the interview, participants were asked for stories and demonstrations of movement that relate to their engagement with their agricultural practice. Interviews lasted approximately 1hr and 30 minutes and were video and audio recorded. All data is presented here with pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality.

RESULTS

Interviews sought to explore how movement and agriculture are integrated into Black grower agricultural operations in Columbus, Ohio. When examining these interviews, four major themes emerged: 1) family, 2) motivation to grow, 3) structural barriers, and 4) community garden support. Each theme encompassed several sub-themes.

Theme 1. Family influence

Investigating Black growers’ family relationships to crops they have grown from their garden. A significant theme in the participants’ interviews was their connection to growing food within their families. The connection to growing food came through their grandparent's lineage. They were mentioned by participants in different ways. One mentioned spending two weeks bonding with their grandparents in their garden without their siblings. According to her mother, *“she thought it was very important that her children have their own relationship with different people in the family...we had our own time with our grandparents and so each one of us had different interests so my interests you know was a garden.”* (Jessica). Jessica also mentioned *“...when I would visit my grandparents...he had a huge garden on a plot of land adjacent to their home and again it was big and he still grow food and put it in baskets and people would come in and get what they needed.”* Similarly, as the participants recalled memories of spending time with their grandparents, Alex also shared his memory of being with his grandmother: *“I remember snapping green beans with my grandma but when I joined the master gardener program through Ohio State University that's really my first experience with growing”*. The memories of the participant's grandparents growing food influenced another participant to grow their own food. Stacy states *“I really didn't have any gardening experiences and I was kind of just following the work of my grandmother and doing that I knew I had to grow Zucchini because she made Zucchini bread”*. However, all but one participant considered themselves a grower. Mike states *“In Philadelphia, we had row homes and the backyard of my row home was as big as this table so my mother would have flowers out front and a few flowers but was not an intricate part of my experience growing stuff”*. It should be noted that this participant also won an award for gardener of the year 2022; even if he does not see himself as such, the community does.

Theme 2. Motivation to grow

When asked about their interest in growing, one participant mentioned her family lineage and connection to the land. Jessica stated *“My main reason for growing is the legacy from my grandparents. My maternal grandfather was a truck farmer in Anderson County, North Carolina...he was very successful.”* Furthermore, they thought about health and the issues that African American’s face in communities in food insecure locations. *“My second biggest reason is health because African Americans deal with blood pressure issues, heart issues, diabetes issues, obesity, infant mortality issues*

and I've seen all that manifest in my family, so that is a great concern and the other thing is...in Columbus the east side has a tremendous legacy in terms of the Black community and one of those legacies has to do with how we get food on our table" (Michelle). For other participants, growing food came out of frustration from being unemployed after returning home and wanting other new growers to understand the benefits of growing and cooking your own food. According to Cooper, "We were growing food. We were taking it to the food bank to people who sometimes hadn't been exposed to many of these fruits and vegetables...and then we're also often teaching people how to cook...it's like what do I do with this powerful thing teaching people not just to grow it but also how to prepare." Further "I initially started out of personal frustration and everywhere I've lived I've had a garden".

Theme 3. Barriers

Michelle stated *"The institutions at Mid-Ohio [food bank], they're getting credit donations because they receive so much then the food pantries because they give out so much but then I go to the alleys after the drop-off and I see pounds and pounds and pounds of food in the trash can because the wrong foods are coming down to the base so we don't see any change in the social determinants of health because the wrong food is in the pipeline and so people aren't getting what they need or don't have a way of understanding how to use what they get and so it just ends up in the garbage."* Basically, Michelle is warning that this trickle-down effect is only making matters worse for people having to access healthy foods. Urban agriculture in Columbus is not an easy feat.

One participant mentions how the neighborhood is changing due to gentrification. *"The neighborhood began to be heavily gentrified, and people started moving away and a lot of people who are participants have moved out of the area so now we are in a rebuilding phase with new residents and reorganization and restoration of our garden"*, said Jessica. This is extremely useful because it sheds light on the difficult problem of acquiring land and growing your own food. Cooper stated *"when you talk about land it's expensive. That's another reason why farming as a primary source of income would be so hard...It's really hard for people to jump into farming as a primary income that's a real leap and I feel privileged to have to be that point right now. But that's why I want to try to leverage that too, not only to show people what farming can do but hopefully to leverage even our own resources to help other people get a leg up because it is hard, maybe even impossible to break into these systems"*.

Theme 4. Community Garden support

The participants mentioned the community efforts toward stewarding a new green space. Donna said *"We started out with everybody kicking in fifty bucks. We later were able to do some things because we applied for grants for Columbus at that time."* In addition to using their own financial resources for collective investment, more people engage with the new garden and acquired new skills for their own garden-to-table experience. Mike shared *"Now we've had several people in our care group who did grow stuff and did have their own garden, so we came together cleaned to the land and of course, we were broke and had no money because we didn't know anything about grants or even how to go about it yet. So, we all kicked in some money to get us started."* Furthermore, it encouraged members to share their harvest within the food banks and churches in need. *"I got more people involved in growing their own food and having their own plots. We only ask that at the end of the growing season that you tithe give whatever you grow you share with the community and then we would give it to churches or to the food bank"* (Michelle). As the garden is growing, more people from the community are seeking urban agricultural education to learn about the different ways they can integrate their growing practice into culinary skills. Michelle said *"I think people are thinking about it more and more. I was really encouraged last night because Kimberly has her ten-week academy via zoom and there were about 40 people on that line last night which was great"*.

DISCUSSION

Our interviews provide insights on the families' impact on growing their own food, the community garden barriers and support, and motivation to grow their own food as Black growers in Columbus. Having first-hand accounts of Black growers gives direct awareness to the positions of power in the community. One of the farmers mentioned that to generate more visibility and wealth, Black farmers need access to scaling their operation. *"Scale for us is important because this is what we need to do to prove you know what I'm saying we're only 2% Black farmers and you can go anywhere and we only supply 1% of restaurant or business, like we need scale! We need scale and we need people to see that black farmers can reach scale..... I think when we reach scale that will also help draw in more younger farmers right well because maybe they don't always see it as something that's gonna be you know like a farmers market type of life and I do love that I do it's just at the same time we need to be supplying airlines with food we need to be supplying even prisons I mean everywhere food is we should have a hand in it no way that honestly food which is one of the most important things that we have on earth should be controlled by a small group of people"* (Raymond). Being able to be an industrial farmer versus a local farmer has vastly different movement strategies for economic autonomy. Not being able to go to a certain scale in production leaves out entire groups of farmers who would benefit greatly from having contracts with airlines, schools, and restaurants.

In the conversations with Black growers, we witnessed how they galvanized their communities and self-interests by going to the earth. As one of them mentioned, they took their frustration out on the earth. This story helped us understand that earth transmutes energy. Rather than engaging a human and transferring her anger at the world, she gave it to the earth because she knew the earth could transform her state of being. This is representative of an earth-honoring faith. It was important for us to engage Black growers because we see the disconnect in our communities between who grows the food and who that food goes to. Coming from such rich traditions of agricultural wisdom, our research goal is to root these technologies in the body through performance for sustainable Black futures. Sharing their eco-memories with us are testimony which we do not take lightly.

Seeking fresh food in Black and Brown communities is a struggle. A Black women grower explained *"There are class and gender issues, you know, in the farmers market, there's some political dynamics. I know, when, 2018 I started a farmer's market up at the 17th and Mount Vernon and I was told very firmly by the market managers in Columbus, were White women, that it was not my time to start a market. It was not on their schedule, to have a market in King Lincoln and that I should wait. And it was me in two tomatoes once again"* (Michelle). Stories like this are important because they show us the intersectional reality of the food justice movement. White women who control whether a community can have a farmer's market or not reek of the imperialist privilege over the land and its resources. This eco-memory is a counter narrative to what might be produced by the Mid-Ohio food bank in terms of their support in food insecurity.

What seems to be an obvious challenge is farming as a primary income for urban farmers. Economic autonomy lifts an entity out of poverty and death dealing capitalist system. "Economic autonomy allows communities to provide for their members financially and to help them move from dependence to independence and from powerlessness toward a position of power" (White, 2019, p. 10). One grower stated that there are only 2% Black farmers in the United States. We attended the third Black Farming Conference, September 9th and 10th 2022, in Yellow Springs, Ohio. It was a hybrid conference so that more people could enjoy the experience. It was reported by a Black woman who is a Agraria regenerative farmer in residence, that we are up to 3% Black farmers in the United States. Weaving wisdom from stories of Black growers inside of a dance performance with movement, they created alongside movements that already existed for agricultural advancement in African diasporic communities contemporizes the narrative of Black farmers within community and shifts the focus into a reclaiming practice of land and food sovereignty.

Listening to how a grower was a facilitator of a care group and collectively its members, created a community garden through cleaning the land together and pooling their money is an example of community agency and community resilience. This kind of community movement is powered by people invested in their community for change and transformation. Brother(hood) Dance! follows in the tradition of Ananya Dance Theater's mission of "People powered dances of transformation", by taking on this kind of participatory research we are transformed as well through the transference of storytelling.

CONCLUSION

Kimberly N. Ruffin articulated the concept of African Americans relationship to the earth as a beauty-to-burden paradox in her book *Black on Earth*. Harris interprets Ruffin's explanation of environmental experiences as they are unique due to "the movement of the beauty of nature found in black people, deep awareness and connection with the calming rhythms of the earth is simultaneously marked by the horrors of lynching of black bodies, the realities of rape and oppression of Black enslaved women and men, the domination and cruelty of white racism and the control and abusive ways of white male slave owners and white women mistresses" (Harris, 2017, p. 41). The beauty-to-burden paradox is at the heart of this research. The connection to the earth is an amplification of beauty and cannot be decoupled from the framework of sculpting environmental thought and legislation.

The D.A.T. process synthesizes the internal movement and external movement of Black urban growers' operations and connects African diasporic systems of sustainability. This problematizes the fields of dance and agriculture because they are seen as singular disciplines. Brother(hood) Dance! sees the through line in connecting the two through technological processes of storytelling, dance making and farming practices because they are inextricably linked. Four themes from one-on-one interviews with Black growers emerged: (1) Community garden support to grow and address the generational gap to sustain and transfer agricultural wisdom; (2) Family influence to reengage with the earth is vital for Black communities for holistic health and wellbeing; (3) Structural barriers set in urban agriculture persists to be a concern for elder stewards of the earth due to ever changing urban land conditions; and (4) a motivation to grow as varied inspiration amongst growers.

Brother(hood) Dance! as an entity curates experiences through embodied practices to address socio-political and environmental injustice. Through dance and technological storytelling be that oral, audio, or film we can advance and create platforms for stories to live beyond the temporal context they manifested in. This work shifts the dance field to be more conscious of the food justice movement as we are aware of the lack of access to food in artistic communities. We are Black artists in Black communities experiencing the same injustice. Food insecurity is a part of our daily struggle. Nina Simone once said: "It's the artists responsibility to reflect the times". We feel it is our duty to engage food justice and land sovereignty head on with the tools we have. The dance in our collective's name is the vehicle for embodied liberation and strategy. We are as strategic as Black farmers in urban spaces organizing to ensure growth for seasons to come.

This research serves as foundational material to create social justice choreographic work. We are offering a different perspective on the food justice movement by focusing specifically on embodiment of the movement in a multidimensional way. This research illustrates a historical narrative of resilience that exists within Black communities' relationship to the earth. These stories are sacred and important to share because Black communities are so often regulated to urban areas and stigmatized due to lack of access to resources and consistently meet structural oppressive forces.

This is one part of our collaborative MFA thesis project. The information provided within this study will be transformed into artistic displays within gallery installations and a live dance performance called *Black on Earth* named after Ruffin's book. We intend for this research to be accessible to the Black growing communities through digital and live experiences. We will also

build workshops from the eco-memories and embodiment of the participants in this research. Through art and education, we can build new models of seeing the world to heal and collectively shift oppressive systems that persist disease and disfunction into Black and Brown communities.

Sankofa, a Ghanaian proverb, helps us to see the importance of 'looking back to go forward, go back and get it' demonstrating the philosophy of resilience within the African diaspora. The benefits of urban agriculture within Black communities bring spiritual, mental, and physical wellness to the forefront, empowering upward mobility and encouraging an autonomous revenue structure. That spiritual connection is the earth connection. The movement that the growers provided and that we embodied are somatic modes of knowing. By having this kind of embodied data, we can gather humanistic understandings to the challenges and strengths of Black growers. This is a part of the social justice choreographic structure in which to knit speculative futures. Through dance, we will make visible and give honor to the contemporary Black grower from the over saturation of white male mainstream environmentalism. When someone thinks of a farmer, a Black farmer is never the first image that comes to mind. Having access to land and the know how to grow are valuable in the 21st century where technological advancements move us further away from the earth. Black growers' stories and movement in urban settings tether us to the earth and invoke a need to shift awareness to what earth is telling us through the practice of growing fresh food for our communities that are in city limits.

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