

Greenwood Avenue Farmers Market: more than just produce

Through research and interviews, we have concluded that the Greenwood Ave Farmers Market has been designed in a way which allows it to provide far more than just fresh produce to its customers; it addresses many causes and consequences of 'structural violence' in surrounding neighborhoods using intersectional solutions. The hands-on approach of vendors and staff who work there fosters interpersonal connections, community building, increased access to medical care, and a personalized and educational shopping experience.

The market's nutrition educators could simply lecture customers on the benefits of eating green vegetables, similar to the style of a large lecture at a university. These educators are different because they forge strong relationships with customers. Every weekend, they have demonstrations on how to cook certain recipes with ingredients available at the market. They actively explain the nutritional benefits of each ingredient, encourage input from the customers on what they think would taste best in each recipe, and hand out a sample and the recipe to everyone. The next week, they check in with customers who were there the previous week to ask how they cooked the recipe. Very often, staff reported that many customers modified recipes, and were eager to come back and share their new recipes with the staff and other customers. This sort of community, according to the nutritional educators, is what makes this farmers market thrive.

The vendors who sell produce at the market also choose to take this collaborative, community centered approach. Instead of just showing up to sell produce, Isles, a larger nonprofit organization behind one of the market's smaller vendors, works within the community to address the inequalities faced by its citizens. From educational initiatives to specialized high school programs to removing lead from homes, they fill in many gaps the local government is unable to address due to the depressed tax base they work with, similar to the way Braddock, PA was abandoned by governmental agencies that allowed for structural atrocities to occur. Isles' presence at the farmers market is a major asset as it allows them to create more relationships within the community and spread the word about their services to help more people. They also bring a mobile recreation truck several times throughout the market's season to encourage community bonding and physical activity. Their multi-disciplinary approach is reminiscent of Paul Farmer and how he addressed many aspects of the structural violence that existed in Haiti through his work.

The SNAP/WIC benefits program is also a major contributor to the market's success. Despite technical restrictions about how the benefits are to be used, they developed a system which allows the benefits to be applied with all vendors (despite restrictions linked to farm acreage). This is crucial, because studies show that the institution of these benefits is crucial to attracting and retaining customers. They also make the market a viable place for lower income individuals to shop for their produce, and do so in a way which does not make it feel like a handout; everyone - those who receive benefits and those who do not - are treated as equal paying customers, preventing lower income attendees who rely on SNAP/ WIC benefits from feeling "other"ed.

It is interesting to consider this community through the lens of philosopher Ian Hacking. Hacking is interested in classifications of people, in how they affect the people classified, and in how the effects on the

people, in turn, change the classifications. Essentially, Hacking wanted “to know how this idea ‘making up people’ affects our very idea of what it is to be an individual” (161). In creating this sense of community engagement between the staff of the market and the customers, the farmers market staff classifies the customers as their equals. As such, the effect on the customers is that they feel welcomed and valued at the market. The educators and vendors of the Greenwood Ave Farmers Market strive to classify their customers as equals where they can build strong and friendly relationships. In their experience, they find that this classification is what keeps customers coming back. Judging from the experience of the staff at the Greenwood Avenue farmers’ market, it seems like Hacking was correct in arguing that the way in which those in power classify people has a tangible impact on the classified people and their behavior towards those in power, in this case, the staff of this farmers’ market.

One issue that the nutritional educators ran into was a language barrier. The market is located in an area with many Spanish-speaking residents, yet the market does not employ any multilingual staff. This barrier prevents some of these customers from benefiting from the robust nutritional, health, and community programs offered by the market, similarly to how language barriers played a role in the story of Lia Lee in *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. According to Hacking, this language barrier classifies this population as an ‘other’ and deters them from attending the market and receiving its benefits. In the documentary *Partners in Health: Saving Lives in Rural Haiti*, we learn that Paul Farmer’s fluency in French helps him interact better with residents to understand them and their situations more than what would be communicated through a translator or interpreter. It also solidifies a trusting relationship between Farmer and his patients. In the article “The Good Doctor” by Tracy Kidder, we learn that since no language barrier exists between Farmer and his patients, he is able to be a much more effective caregiver due to his ability to communicate with patients and gain their trust. In the situation with the Greenwood Avenue Farmers’ Market, it’s evident that the hiring of Spanish speaking staff, as well as the translation of more handouts such as recipe cards, would increase the market’s customer base signaling to the Spanish speaking community the market cares about them and is inviting them to become a part of the conversation, all while removing the stereotype of Spanish speakers as “others.”

The founders of the market emphasized the importance of engaging with and listening to the community. While they initially received support from much of the local community, their conversations with the senior center across the street resulted in some pushback with the seniors making it “clear that they wanted a place that they could play games so they could get out of the towers.” In response, the founders adapted their vision of the market to appeal to these senior community members, organizing weekly bingo games and access to health services and engaging with these members of the community. This is reminiscent of Dr. Dwight Conquergood from *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* who, in contrast to his predecessors, engaged with the customs of the Hmong in order to create “a productive and mutually invigorating dialog, with neither side dominating or winning out.” The founders emphasized that the types of problems being addressed by the market were community issues that could only be solved through a communal effort. This engagement with

the community also reminded us greatly of the efforts of Paul Farmer in Haiti and the effects of losing the community hospital in Latoya Ruby Frazier's *The Notion of Family*. Farmer's approach in Haiti stood out as unique due to the way he intimately worked to improve all aspects of life for the community he was serving. His attention to the need for adequate housing, food, and livelihood in addition to medical care and its relationship with local beliefs is what allowed him to so successfully treat and improve the communities he worked in. Through his clinic, he provided much more than just medicine; he addressed all aspects needed for community wellness. In contrast, Frazier documents the destruction of the community center that existed in the hospital in Braddock, PA. The hospital contained community spaces for food, recreation, and medical services. The destruction of the hospital took with it all of those things - things identified by the Greenwood Ave market as crucial for creating community wellness.

The need for the Henry J. Austin Health Center (mobile clinic) at the Greenwood Ave Farmers' Market is created by the politics of science and healthcare that intersect with capitalism, racism, and classism. The conditions of healthcare in areas like Trenton, include the lack of access to care due to the inability to afford healthcare and lower quality of care patients within certain demographics receive. This is a national issue, one related to medical experimentation we learned about this semester. The Tuskegee Experiment was conducted on black men from a "poor county in one of the poorest states in the country" where people "couldn't afford healthcare." It was said to be an "unparalleled scientific opportunity" for syphilis but had no specific protocol. There is also no explicit protocol for the US government to maintain its healthcare disparities and their drastic, sometimes fatal, impacts on individuals and their surrounding communities. However, the healthcare system that continues to exist leaves many people untreated or with limited access to often low quality and discriminatory care. The people in this nationwide 'experiment' are those who cannot afford healthcare and are part of minority populations. The mobile clinic combats these inequalities by bringing free and equitable care to those who would not normally be able to afford or access it.

The Greenwood Ave Market helps break and address the cycle of inequality produced by the structural violence that exists in Trenton. Through employing local vendors and workers, it helps support local business and combat the local food desert. Its mobile clinic and partnership with Rutgers University helps it address community healthcare needs. The relationships fostered between vendors, educators, and customers helps create a community and provide nutritional and opportunities for scholastic education for its customers. Though only a farmers market, Greenwood Ave provides all ingredients needed to foster community wellness in Trenton and serves as a great model for other communities struggling with similar issues.

Works Cited

- DiAnni, Denise. *The Deadly Deception*. Princeton, NJ :*Films for the Humanities & Sciences*, 1993.
- Fadiman, Anne. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998. Print.
- Farmer, Paul. 2003. "On Suffering and Structural Violence." *Pathologies of Power*. Berkeley: UC Press, pp. 29-50.
- Frazier, Latoya Ruby. *The Notion of Family*. New York: Aperture, 2016.
- Hacking, Ian. 1999. "Making Up People." *The Science Studies Reader* edited by Mario Biagioli. New York: Routledge, pp. 161-171.
- Kidder, Tracy. 2000. "The Good Doctor." *The New Yorker*, July 10, 2000, pp. 40-57.