



Volunteers at a local food bank. (Photo by Chief Petty Officer Leanna Shipp, Naval Station Norfolk Public Affairs Office.)

Food and Hunger

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Mitchell County, Iowa, is flyover country for most Americans, but almost eleven thousand people call it home. The area is quintessential rural Midwest, a flat landscape of corn and soybean fields as far as the eye can see. Yet, even here, in a landscape of massive food surpluses, hunger abounds (McMillian 2014). Meet the Dreiers. Christina is a stay-at-home mom for her two children, both under the age of four. Her husband, Jim, works as a pesticide sprayer on local farms for fourteen dollars an hour. Both labor very hard to put food on the table for their family but they are often forced to choose between buying groceries or paying their bills because Jim's income is not enough to cover expenses. This economic squeeze pushes the Dreiers to rely on local food pantries and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), more commonly known as food stamps, to feed themselves. However, the local food pantries often have empty shelves and their monthly SNAP allotment has been cut by a Republican-dominated Congress and does not go very far. In the end, the Dreiers often bounce one bill against the other; what other option do they have? In Christina's words, "We have to eat, you know . . . We can't starve" (McMillian 2014).

Hunger is not just a domestic problem though; it is also a global issue. Welcome to El Carmen Tequexquitla, a rural farming community in the Mexican state of Tlaxcala, nearly two thousand miles south of the Dreier family (Althaus 2013). At close to eight thousand feet above sea level, the beauty of the sweeping vistas in the Mexican highlands offers a stark contrast to the omnipresent and chronic poverty of its residents, many of whom live in thatched-roof or tin-roof homes with dirt floors and no running water. As in numerous rural farming communities across the globe, hunger is pervasive here because of the lack of well-paying manufacturing jobs, minimal state supports for smallholder agriculture, and weak social programs to combat poverty. This poverty is why Juana Alvarez is standing in line at a grocery store with numerous other women, largely indigenous, to receive food aid to prevent her family from starving. A single mother of three whose husband abandoned her, she tries to put food on the table but can only find part-time work as a maid, so she stands in line waiting to receive rice, beans, corn flour, and cooking oil, because in her own words, "Without it I wouldn't be able to feed my children. This is all that we have" (Althaus 2103).

Despite the great geographical distance between Christina and Juana and the fact that they are of different races and nationalities, both women struggle to feed their children because of the absence of well-paid work and weak social safety nets. In this aspect, they are not alone but just two of hundreds of millions of people, principally women and children, who face hunger every day around the world. This occurs even though enough food is produced to feed everyone on the planet, so why are people going hungry? In the United States one dominant explanation is that the hungry, who are generally also poor, are lazy. Such a belief reflects the dominant logic of individualism, which attributes social outcomes principally to the actions of individuals and moralizes their success or failure as a result of the work ethic, or lack thereof, in this case. Through this lens, one's food choices are seen solely as the province of the individual. Yet, if one looks at the statistics, the majority of people who are hungry, struggling with food insecurity, and recipients of food assistance programs are either too young or too old to work, medically unable to work, or working (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015; Gray and Kochlar 2015). Such a juxtaposition between facts and beliefs begs for an alternative way of understanding and explaining hunger.

This lesson offers such a way through shifting from an individualistic mode of thinking toward a structural and relational analysis that locates the actions of people within their social and physical environments. As C. Wright Mills (1959) emphasized in his book, *The Sociological Imagination*, people's personal problems are often not personal troubles, but public issues rooted in the structure of society. People struggling with hunger may blame themselves, and others often do, but they generally are in situations that are shaped and molded by much broader social forces and institutions that they have little control over. Through utilizing the sociological imagination, this lesson will focus on both explicit hunger (i.e., lack of access to sufficient food) and implicit hunger (i.e., a lack of access to healthy food), domestically and globally, and link these conditions to the social processes producing poverty and the social structures shaping the production and distribution of food. In particular, the lesson will emphasize how the political economy of work (the vast number of low-wage jobs), the political economy of food (the privileging of corporate, industrial, and capitalist food actors), and the political economy of welfare (the limited social safety net) intersect in several important ways to create hunger as a normal outcome of how society is organized. At the same time, strategies for reducing the existence of hunger, both domestically and globally, will be discussed.

THE STATE OF HUNGER TODAY

Has someone in your life experienced hunger? It could be you, a friend, a neighbor, an aunt or uncle. Did they have to skip meals because they could not afford to buy food? Did they depend on SNAP, food pantries, or soup kitchens to ward off hunger? Were they often worried about where their next

meal was going to come from? If not, then count yourself and the people you know as privileged. If so, have you given any thought to how that person's chances of experiencing hunger may have been connected to larger social groups, institutions, and structures? When it comes to hunger, your class matters, your race matters, your gender matters, your age matters, and your geographic location matters.

When people say someone is hungry, they generally mean that person does not have enough food to support the physiological needs of the body, that the person is malnourished. This malnourishment can come in two forms: individuals can be deficient in macronutrients (protein, fat, and carbohydrates) or in micronutrients (vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants), and both are important (see Lesson 4). While people use the word hunger to describe lack of access to food, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), non-governmental agencies, and antihunger activists often employ the language of **food insecurity** to conceptualize hunger and malnutrition, with food security being defined as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life" (USDA 2016; see Table 13.1). I will use the terms hunger and food insecurity interchangeably.

Based on the USDA's definition, 42.2 million Americans lived in food-insecure households in 2015, and close to one-third of this number, about 13.1 million, were children (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015). In all, about 13 percent of US households are food insecure and the majority of them struggle with low food security. However, 6.3 million households, about 5 percent of all households, experience very low food security. Hunger does not affect everyone equally though; race plays a large role in shaping an individual's odds of being one of these 42.2 million Americans. Black and Latino/a households are more than twice as likely to be food insecure as white non-Latino/a households. As a result, more than one in four black children and nearly one in four Latino/a children live in food-insecure households compared to one in seven white non-Latino/a children. (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015). Gender also plays a role in one's odds of experiencing hunger, with female-headed households

Table 13.1 US Department of Agriculture's Definitions of Food Security and Food Insecurity

Food security	Food insecurity
High food security: no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations	Low food security: reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet; little or no indication of reduced food intake
Marginal food security: one or two reported indications—typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house; little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake	Very low food security: reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake

Note: USDA 2016.

being more than twice as likely to be food insecure compared to other US households, 30.3 versus 13 percent (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015). Such findings reveal the intersectionality of race, class, and gender when it comes to hunger because the higher odds for black, Latino/a, and female-headed households, compared to white, male-headed, and dual-parent households, are a direct outcome of the disproportionate concentration of people of color and women at the bottom of the US class structure.

THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF GEOGRAPHY, RACE, AND CLASS: PLACE MATTERS

I asked you to think about whether someone in your life has experienced hunger and how this might be connected to that individual's class, race, or gender. Now I want you to think about your food environment growing up, how it might have been shaped by these social group characteristics, and how these social factors subsequently shaped your food choices. Was your community full of grocery stores and farm-to-table restaurants or corner stores and fast-food restaurants? Was it easy or difficult to get to and from the grocery store? Were the primary food choices fresh local produce or processed foods?

While you probably did not have much of a say as to where you grew up, odds are high that it played a large role in shaping your food choices. For instance, twelve states have higher household food insecurity rates than the US average of around 13 percent, with the top five being Mississippi, 20.8 percent; Arkansas, 19.2 percent; Louisiana, 18.4 percent; Alabama, 17.6 percent; and Kentucky, 17.6 percent (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015). On the other hand, if you grew up in North Dakota, Minnesota, and New Hampshire you would have had a much lower chance of experiencing food insecurity because their rates are 8, 10.4, and 10.5 percent, respectively (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015). These statistics underscore that explicit and implicit hunger are not equally distributed geographically across the country; they often map over persistent poverty areas and, with respect to the aforementioned states, the South. For instance, high-food-insecurity counties are more likely to be rural, and the South contains 90 percent of all high-food-insecurity counties, such as Jefferson County, Mississippi, which has a food insecurity rate of 37.5 percent (Feeding America 2015).

If you lived in a community full of quality grocery stores and could afford to shop there, count yourself privileged. But if you grew up in a community with little to no access to grocery stores, you grew up in what is called a **food desert**. Food deserts are low-income areas with limited access to fresh vegetables and fruits because grocery stores or supermarkets are out of reach (more than one mile in an urban area and more than ten miles in rural areas). According to the USDA, 29.7 million people in 2010, 9.7 percent of the US population, lived in food deserts and the majority of these people were located in urban areas and were disproportionately black and

Latino/a (Ver Ploeg et al. 2012). While the food desert concept is in vogue today, it only partially reflects the food environment of many low-income communities, which has led to the creation of a new term that spatializes implicit hunger, a food swamp. While the food desert concept reflects a lack of absolute access to a grocery store, the term **food swamp** refers to the lack of relative access to a grocery store, with a food swamp defined as an “area in which large relative amounts of energy-dense snack foods inundate healthy food options” (Rose et al. 2009). These urban communities are often stocked full of bodegas, liquor stores, and fast-food restaurants that provide cheap foods low in vitamins and minerals yet high in fats, sugars, and salts. Additionally, if a grocery store is to be found in these communities, the produce sold may be of low quality; it is often damaged, spoiled, or past the sell-by date. Once you combine the limited access to fresh produce with easy access to cheap processed foods, constant junk food advertising, and limited incomes, what emerges is a path of least resistance toward the overconsumption of foods that should be eaten in moderation. Consequently, these communities suffer from the **hunger–obesity paradox**, having higher than average rates of chronic malnutrition as well as chronic diet-related diseases, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure (see Lessons 3 and 14).

Overall, a large body of research has found that race and class play a significant role in shaping geographical disparities in food access (Treuhaft and Karpyn 2010; Walker et al. 2010). Affluent and predominantly white communities tend to have higher rates of grocery stores and lower rates of fast-food restaurants while low-income communities of color tend to have the opposite, higher rates of fast-food restaurants and lower rates of grocery stores. The logic of individualism would explain these findings by saying that affluent communities know how to eat healthy and low-income communities have a preference for unhealthy foods. However, food environments emerge not from the aggregation of individual food choices but rather from structural and historical processes that are created out of the economic and political practices of public and private institutions. In this case, the federal government and private banking industry have played a prominent role in the creation of food deserts and food swamps. Since the 1930s these two actors have disinvested from and outright demolished low-income black and Latino/a communities while shifting federal and private investment dollars via mortgage, transportation, and infrastructure development to affluent white communities in the suburbs. This process has taken many names, redlining, urban renewal, benign neglect, and planned shrinkage, to name a few, but the outcomes have generally been negative for black and Latino/a communities. This shift in funding facilitated white flight and coincided with growing opposition to the civil rights movement and efforts to racially integrate education, housing, and employment. As investment shifted to suburban communities, so did disposable income, and grocery stores followed. Grocery retailing is a very competitive industry with low profit margins and an economic model that relies on volume sales. In this environment, stores left cities for the suburbs

to take advantage of cheaper land, lower tax rates, price premiums on upscale products, and the larger volume sales that can come from having a bigger store. The outcome was food access barriers for low-income urban communities. Given this history of racial inequity, people in the food justice movement may utilize the term **food apartheid**, rather than food desert or food swamp, to underscore that food inequities are the outcomes of racialized social processes that privilege whiteness and are not naturally occurring phenomena or rooted in the individual choices of residents (see Lessons 19 and 20).

COMBATING HUNGER IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Have you ever volunteered at a soup kitchen, food pantry, or food bank? Have you ever donated a can of food or a box of dried food to a food drive during the holidays? Maybe you even helped glean produce on a farm for donation to a local food bank? Odds are you have. Millions of people donate food, time, and money every year to organizations that are part of this **emergency food network** (EFN) that works to put food in empty bellies every day. Think about your act of charity. Did it make you feel good that something was being done to provide food to those going hungry? Or maybe the experience pushed you to question whether such food donations could end hunger. If you had such conflicted thoughts, then you are not alone. A tension exists in the US between addressing hunger through short-term, charity-oriented stop gaps (food banks, soup kitchens, volunteer-run meal programs) or long-term, rights-oriented structural solutions (higher wages, full employment, better income redistribution programs, state-funded food assistance programs). This tension is reflective of differing framings of what causes and what can reduce hunger in the United States.

Almost nonexistent in the 1970s, today the EFN consists of over forty-six thousand agencies and close to sixty thousand food assistance programs that rely on the free labor of volunteers and large-scale donations in kind and money from wealthy individuals, philanthropic foundations, and corporations to stave off hunger. And the need is great. Every year the EFN feeds over 46.5 million people, about one in seven people in the United States. Janet Poppendieck (1998) investigated the EFN and their ability to combat long-term hunger in her book, *Sweet Charity?: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, and her findings were not rosy. She found that the growth of the EFN is in direct relationship to the federal cutbacks on food entitlement programs and the ascendancy of conservative claims that charity and volunteer efforts can replace government programs and demand-side policies in the fight against hunger. Moreover, Poppendieck found that the EFN serves as a “moral safety valve” that makes people feel good about doing their small part, but the EFN is not intended to, nor can it, address the broader forces producing hunger.

While the EFN is an example of a short-term, charity-oriented model to address hunger, SNAP is an example of long-term, rights-oriented solution. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is a governmental

response to hunger that frames it not as a personal failing but as a structural outcome of how a capitalist economy unequally distributes access to work and therefore income. It is a food assistance program that provides cash assistance to families to help them put food on the table, as we saw with the Dreier family at the beginning of the lesson. However, in recent decades, conservatives and the Republican Party have sought to enforce cuts to SNAP, if not outright eliminate the program, under the claim that it creates a culture of dependency that skirts work ethic. This claim does not match up with the body of scholarship on the food assistance program, however. In Fiscal Year 2014, the federal government allotted \$74 billion for the program, which covered about 46.5 million people living in nearly 22.7 million US households (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2015; Gray and Kochlar 2015). This represents about 14 percent of the US population and means that more than one in seven US residents obtains food stamps, with the average SNAP participant receiving about \$126 per month, or \$1.40 per meal. Of this population, nearly two-thirds were children (44 percent), elderly (10 percent), or disabled nonelderly adults (10 percent). Additionally, nearly 43 percent of all SNAP participants lived in a household with work-related earnings. These numbers underscore that SNAP participants are those who are unable to work, those marginalized from work, and those who are the working poor. Moreover, SNAP is a countercyclical program rather than a dependency-creating program (Tiehen et al. 2012). When the economy is going strong and growing, people are able to find jobs and leave SNAP. When the economy contracts and businesses stop hiring and start firing, SNAP participation expands. These economic fluctuations of growth and contraction are the primary reason why SNAP roles grew during the Great Recession and have declined as the economy has slowly improved. Research on SNAP has also found that it decreases poverty, in depth and severity, among both households and children (Joliffe 2003; Tiehen et al. 2012). Therefore, SNAP is effective at combating hunger by allowing people to buy food when they otherwise could not afford it.

HUNGER: AN OUTCOME OF POLICY

Let us think about the numbers on hunger again. Thirteen percent of US households are food insecure. One in seven people uses the EFN. One in seven uses SNAP. If we look at other developed countries, principally in Europe, we see that the United States stands apart with a very high rate of food insecurity. While in many European countries one in fifteen people face food insecurity, in the United States the rate is more than one in eight, almost double that of its European counterparts (Taylor and Loopstra 2016). To understand the prevalence and perseverance of hunger in the United States, particularly when compared to Europe, we must understand its structural roots, which is an outcome of the lack of labor market policies that push for high wages and full employment, as well as the absence of wage support

policies emblematic of a robust welfare state where people's basic needs are met regardless of their capacity to work.

Compared to other wealthy nations, the United States has the highest proportion of workers in low-wage jobs, defined as those where employees earn less than two-thirds of the median wage (OECD 2014). For example, in 2014, 1.3 million people earned the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 and over 25 million workers earned less than \$11.50 per hour, which left many of them in or near poverty (Oxfam America 2014). If you earn \$7.25 an hour and work forty hours a week all year round with no time off, your take-home pay before taxes is \$15,080. If you earned \$11.50 an hour under the same conditions your income would be \$23,920. These jobs are emblematic of the growing ranks of the working poor in the United States, where having a job does not keep you out of poverty or provide you and your family with a decent quality of life. This has not always been the case for minimum wage jobs or near minimum wage jobs, however (Desilver 2017). In 1968 the real value of the minimum wage stood at 99 percent of the poverty level for a family of two adults and two children. Since then, the real value of the minimum wage has declined significantly and hovered around 60 percent of the poverty level.

Therefore, it is difficult to address the roots of hunger in the United States today without focusing on the inability of minimum wage employment and near minimum wage employment to feed a person, let alone a family. This is most apparent for food chain workers, where the irony of hunger is profound. Those who grow, process, prepare, and serve the food we eat have higher rates of marginal food security, low food security, and very low food security than the general population (FCWA 2012, 2014). Overall, 30 percent of the twenty million food chain workers in the United States are food insecure, double the rate of food insecurity in the US workforce (FCWA 2012, 2014). In fact, farmworkers have rates of food insecurity over three times greater than that of the general US population because they are excluded from the basic labor protections and worker rights that many Americans take for granted, such as collective bargaining rights, the right to join a union, and overtime pay (FCWA 2012) (see Lesson 11). The low pay of food chain workers also pushes them to utilize food stamps at one and a half to two times the rate of the rest of the US workforce (FCWA 2012). The restaurant industry in particular, which has over ten million workers, alone accounts for almost half of workers earning at or below the federal minimum wage (USBOL 2017). As a result, 16.7 percent of restaurant workers live below the poverty line compared to 6.3 percent for workers outside the restaurant industry (Shierhloz 2014). This is a direct outcome not only of a poverty-level minimum wage, but also of the fact that millions of restaurant workers do not even legally qualify for the regular nontipped minimum wage because they are servers who receive the tipped minimum wage (Jamieson 2012). The federal tipped minimum wage came into existence in 1966 to ensure that servers were not living solely off tips and was pegged at 50 percent of the federal nontipped minimum wage. However, since 1966 the nontipped minimum wage has not kept up with inflation and in 2010 was worth only

29 percent of the nontipped minimum wage. Tipped minimum wage workers receive less than the nontipped minimum wage in forty-three states and in seventeen states they are only paid the federal minimum tipped wage of \$2.13 per hour. All these employment and wage policies matter because these jobs are disproportionately held by women and people of color and the extensive gender and racial segregation in food industries confines both groups to the bottom of the labor market in low-paying positions, thereby increasing their, and their children's, chances of facing hunger (FCWA 2012; Liu and Apollon 2011).

Looking at the restaurant industry, we can tell that hunger and poverty are outcomes of specific political and economic policies. They are choices we collectively make about how society is to be organized and who is to bear the burden of these choices. While the US has chosen a low-wage model, other countries, such as Denmark, have chosen a high-wage model. The base wage for fast-food workers in Denmark is twenty dollars an hour, about two and half times what fast-food workers earn in the United States (Alderman and Greenhouse 2014). This high wage exists because there are strong unions, durable collective bargaining arrangements, and a culture of cooperation between unions and companies. In addition to the higher hourly wage, workers receive five weeks of paid vacation, a pension, and paid parental leave, benefits that their US counterparts do not receive. Between this wage structure, employment-related benefits, and the strong social supports of the Danish welfare state, working in the food industry does not create a poverty-level existence; in fact, it provides a decent quality of life. Moreover, such policies are integral to Denmark having a food insecurity rate of only 4.9 percent (Taylor and Loopstra 2016).

GLOBAL HUNGER: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF FOOD AND DEVELOPMENT

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), there are around 795 million people globally, one in nine of whom suffer from chronic undernourishment (FAO 2015). This population is generally the poorest of the poor, principally women and children, who tend to live in rural areas of developing countries and are often marginally employed in agriculture. Akin to their US counterparts, a major factor creating this problem is marginalization from high-wage jobs and the lack of a social safety net, issues compounded by inequitable trade policies that make it nearly impossible for small farmers to remain agricultural producers.

Meet Griselda Mendoza, twenty-three, who was born and raised in Santa Ana Zegache, a small rural community in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca (Burnett 2016; Darlington and Gillespie 2017). Located at 5,587 feet, the town lies in a beautiful mountain valley, is full of hand-built adobe houses and unobtrusive dirt-lined streets, and is fairly well known for its restored seventeenth-century painted church. The community of three thousand also

has a large indigenous Zapotec population with a history that traces back thousands of years in the area. Griselda's father, Benancio, was a corn farmer and comes from a long line of corn farmers, like many of their neighbors, who cultivate indigenous maize in hues of yellow, white, and burgundy on small plots of land. They primarily grew corn to feed their family but would sell whatever surplus they had for income. It was not a wealthy life, but people got by. This all changed with the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Cheap corn from the United States flooded over the border at prices that Mexican farmers could not compete with. Many gave up farming and migrated north to the US to look for work. This was the case for Benancio as well: "He went north looking for a job and I didn't see him again for 18 years," states Griselda (Darlington and Gillespie 2017). He ended up getting a job in a restaurant in Tennessee and sends money home to help the family. If you talk to families throughout Santa Ana Zegache you will hear similar stories; it is a town full of women, children, and the elderly. Most men have left either to find work in the big cities of Mexico or to traverse the scorching deserts of the Southwest to enter the United States as undocumented immigrants.

Griselda and her family are just a few of the millions who have been adversely affected by NAFTA. Signed in 1994, the agreement created a trade zone between Canada, the United States, and Mexico and sought to reduce barriers to trade and investment between the respective countries through the reduction or elimination of tariffs on exports. The premise behind free trade agreements, like NAFTA, is that through opening domestic markets to foreign competition (market liberalization) and the removal of state subsidies to domestic producers (privatization), a more efficient market economy would be created that would subsequently fuel economic growth and thereby reduce poverty (McMichael 2007; see Lesson 8). However, such agreements had very negative outcomes for smallholder agriculture and the communities organized around smallholder agriculture since they eliminated programs and policies that were vital to enabling small-scale producers to compete against large-scale corporations, including state-backed pro-smallholder land reform, subsidized seeds, fertilizers, fuels, and machines, and state credit and insurance networks, buying groups, and marketing boards. Without these public subsidies and programs, large agriculture companies ignored peasants and smallholders in favor of selling inputs to and buying food from well-financed industrial farms geared toward cash crop exports. The result was that peasants and smallholders were unable to remain agricultural producers and feed locals, an outcome that has undermined long-term food security and exacerbated the root factors producing hunger in small rural farming communities throughout the country.

On top of these problems, free trade policies were selectively applied to developing countries (McMichael 2007). The European Union and the United States, the two actors that were drawing up the rules for the global trade in food, were allowed to continue their protectionist and heavily

subsidized agricultural policies while less powerful states in the global South had to eliminate theirs (see Lesson 9). This selective application of free trade policies incentivized and enabled the European Union and the United States to dump—sell below the cost of production—their agricultural surplus on the global South and outcompete Southern producers. Examples of dumping, beyond the case of corn in Mexico, include the destruction of Jamaica’s milk industry, Senegal’s poultry industry, and Ghana’s poultry industry by imports from the European Union and the United States.

In short, the global hungry are those who have been most negatively affected by the push toward a world organized through free trade agreements that benefit well-capitalized large-scale farmers. The rural poor often have little to no access to quality farmland and little to no state supports for agriculture. While this is the reality for many today, it does not have to be their future. Research has found that investments and policies to support smallholder agriculture are quite effective at combating poverty and hunger, more so than investments in resource extraction or manufacturing, and that trade liberalization policies and privatization efforts without supports for smallholder agriculture exacerbate poverty and hunger (FAO 2015). Alongside these programs, a more robust welfare state with strong social protection programs, such as cash transfers, has been found to be a “highly-cost effective way to promote rural poverty reduction and improved food security and nutrition” (FAO 2015, 37). Based on these findings, there is the possibility of a future with less hunger and poverty, but only if there is an investment in smallholder agriculture and rural communities that empowers them to first feed themselves and, second, be competitive with larger agricultural producers.

Conclusion

Hunger is pervasive. The number of hungry may rise and fall with the stock market, but even in good times hunger remains. And while in the United States there is a strong tendency to see the hungry as moral failures, this lesson has taken a structural and historical approach to underscore how hunger is an outcome of how society is organized. In particular, hunger is the result of how the distribution of work and income intersects with the production and distribution of food. Those who are hungry are those who are marginalized from and within the labor market. They are people who either cannot work or cannot find well-paying jobs. Thus, the problem of hunger is not generally caused by the lack of a work ethic, but by the lack of well-paid work and the lack of access to income when one cannot work. While in the United States the relationship between food and hunger points to the current inadequacies of the minimum wage and food assistance programs, and therefore employment policies and the social safety net to mitigate poverty, globally we see that this relationship is a result of international trade policies that have benefited large-scale farmers and harmed the vast majority of smallholders. Such insights reaffirm the

need for the creation of economic and political policies that are inclusive and directly strengthen the livelihoods of the poor, because only then will the structural factors producing long-term hunger be addressed.

Discussion Questions

1. Should we be concerned with hunger in the United States? Why or why not?
2. How has your race, class, gender, or geographic location shaped your access to food and your experiences with hunger? What social structures, social institutions, and policies have affected your access to food and experiences with hunger?
3. Think about the tension between short-term and long-term solutions to hunger in the United States. Why do you think there has been a movement in the United States since the 1980s toward short-term voluntarist solutions to hunger rather than long-term governmental programs?
4. Using your sociological imagination, what type of social changes would you advocate for to address hunger?

Exercises

1. Volunteer at an EFN organization or antihunger organization and discuss the pros and cons of their ability to address short-term and long-term hunger. What success is the organization having in reducing hunger? What could the organization do better to address hunger? Why might the organization currently be unable to address long-term hunger? What would need to change to enable the organization to address the structural roots of hunger?
2. Participate in the SNAP challenge. In 2007, Congress members were issued a challenge. They were asked to attempt to live on a typical food stamp budget, that is, to only spend about one dollar per meal, or twenty-one dollars per week. This was called the Food Stamp Challenge and sought to bring the difficulty of avoiding hunger and eating healthy to privileged members of society through direct experience. Since then, hundreds of groups across the United States have participated in the SNAP challenge. Today, the challenge is to live off four dollars a day, or twenty-eight dollars for the week. See <http://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/take-action-snap-challenge-toolkit.pdf> for details.
3. Visit the USDA's Food Environment Atlas and obtain information on your community's food environment, such as access and proximity to grocery stores, restaurants, participation rates for SNAP, national school lunch and breakfast program, Women, Infants, and Children, household food insecurity, obesity and diabetes rates, and general demographic profiles. Then do some research on your community's history and how federal and private practices and policies have shaped this food environment. Compare your community with that of other students in your class and determine any associations between the history of the communities, the demographic profile of the communities, and their access to food.

Additional Materials

Readings

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Films

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- Karslake, Dan. 2014. *Every Three Seconds*. First Run Features.
- Unknown. n.d. *The Last Hunger Season*. Courter Films.

Websites

- Feeding Hunger, <http://www.feedingamerica.org/>
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>
- Food Research and Action Center, <http://frac.org/>
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