

Declaration of Dependence: Duron Chavis

What do you do if the grocery stores close? This question was posed to me by an African American farmer more than 15 years ago. It haunted me then and haunts me now. Food security, i.e. the ability to feed oneself, family and community has been my Sisyphus boulder since.

The system of white supremacy has created clear disparities among who has power and who does not. A result of that intentionally-created disparity results in a dependency by communities of color on white people for everything from housing to healthcare to utilities to food. Each time people of African ancestry have developed systems that attempted to usurp that dependence, white people have used violence to reinstitute that dependence. From Rosewood to Tulsa to Jackson Ward, we see example after example of black people building resiliency in spite of adversity, yet the system of white supremacy negating those efforts through assassination, destruction, and racist policies that reinforce a false hierarchy of human value, with white people on the top and black people on the bottom. The system remains unchecked in our relationship to food.

In the early 1900s, African Americans owned more 200,000 acres of land. Today we own less than 14,000 acres. This reduction is a result of racist policies, racial terror, and theft. Land justice is the reconciliation of white people taking the land and putting it back into the hands of the people. The colonization of the Americas, particularly Virginia, serves as the foundation for exploitation of both the earth and of its indigenous people. This subjugation of nature and human served as the basis of independence of white settlers from Europe, but at horrific costs. We live on today; shackled to a legacy of injustice, and to right this historical wrong means to destabilize the power dynamics imposed by white supremacy.

What does it mean for black people to be independent? I am reminded of the question asked of me by that farmer. Black people, living in communities scarred by redlining, marred by discrimination and racist urban renewal policies, are challenged to develop systems of resilience that call for the end of white supremacy and domination. The linkages of ecological degradation and human exploitation are clear and demarcated by the scars left on the built environment, through climate change, and through the disparities that exist across all sectors of human behavior. The future of humanity is dependent upon whether white people determine that this arc of history, built by their ancestors and perpetuated in the present, is the path on which they wish to continue.

