Socio-Historical Assessment of Geneva’s Food Access
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Background
The USDA defines a food desert as lacking access to both affordable and healthy food options, like fresh fruit and vegetables. Geneva, NY, experiences issues of food insecurity and food deserts, specifically in the impoverished areas of the city. Having been familiar with Geneva’s food issues, we were curious as to how Geneva became a food desert.

Methods
We extracted data regarding downtown Geneva from both US Census Tracts and the Dickman Directory of all businesses in the county. We located the Dickman Directories from Ontario County for 5 different years (1980, 1990, 2001, 2010, 2017). We recorded all food sources in downtown Geneva, located on 5 different streets in proximity to downtown. We grouped all food resources into three unique categories: grocery store, specialty store, and convenience stores. We operationalized grocery store as a large store that primarily sells food, specialty store as an upscale boutique store specializing in a specific food, and finally, convenience stores as small stores offering limited groceries. For the current year, we found all food sources throughout all of Geneva, both town and city. Finally we mapped these current food sources on a map of collected US Census data of the racial makeup of Geneva.

Discussion
Based on the literature and census-directory comparisons, there are specific implications about the characteristics of Geneva’s food security in the downtown area that link race and unemployment to food options. The departure of white people from urban centers, known as “white flight”, created rapid social and economic disparities. Across the United States, financially insecure and non-white communities frequently have a higher density of unhealthy food options and less access to grocery stores than white and affluent communities. In Geneva, access to healthy food is becoming more dire as grocery stores disappear and convenience stores flood into the city.

The decline of white people in Geneva’s downtown is correlated with the decline in grocery and specialty stores and an increase in convenience stores. Other research has shown that “white flight” has the effect of dramatically pulling resources and investment out of a community. Non-white populations do not have the same agency to invest in more expensive projects like grocery and specialty stores due to racism in real estate and banks. Consequently, we see a rise in convenience stores as white people leave and non-white populations move in. For non-white residents, convenience stores make more economical sense since they do not require as much investment and can be run by anyone, while specialty stores require more investment and are run by established businesses.

Either way, Geneva’s financial insecure and non-white populations suffer from the disparity of food access while white and affluent communities have easier access to supermarkets. The placement of the current grocery stores is closer to areas populated by white residents and are not easily accessible without a car. The consequences are devastating, as they perpetuate health issues, racism, poverty, and inequality. The history and current layout of food options in Geneva should be alarming for residents and those dedicated to making Geneva a more equitable city.