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December-January Report

Frost's Secret Ministry.

Winter. Boston's short wintry days shine muted light over a city much more familiar to me now than three months ago. The solemnity of the cold weather and the long daily spells of darkness encourage reflection. A time for taking stock of what is and making plans for what will be.

In my last letter I wrote that The Food Project follows the seasons. I do not mean to suggest that the organization is hibernating. The organization's offices are lively places full of impressive people tackling myriad complex tasks. TFP is currently preparing for spring and summer, when their agricultural and youth programs go into high gear. Piles of applications are reviewed, interviews are scheduled, and seed orders are placed. Preparations are being made for an exciting growing season. However, most of this important organizational work does not lend itself to my own documentary vision. Still, there is much to report.

Although it is cold outside, TFP's Dudley Greenhouse is warm enough to produce a variety of hardy crops. Collards, salad mix, pea shoots, and other vegetables are being produced right now, and tended by staff, youth interns, and community members. In the community bay of the greenhouse refugee groups are gardening in small plots. On Fridays, organizations like Refugee & Immigrant Assistance Center (RIAC) and the Boston Center for Refugee Health and Human Rights (BCRHHR) have partnered with TFP and are bringing in people recently relocated from Uganda and Vietnam, among other places. I am currently in the process of making connections with some of these individuals. I have recently started photographing some of their visits.

I've also nearly completed a portrait series with the entire staff of TFP. At the moment I have completed twenty-one sittings, and expect the last few to be completed in the couple of weeks. I go into the homes of staff members and make portraits in their kitchens. This project is useful for me in helping to strengthen relationships with some of the staff that I do not get a chance to interact with on a regular basis. Many of these people have spent their entire lives here and know this place much better than I ever might. I am relying on them, in a way, to help point out issues and show me what they think is important. In that respect these portraits are opportunities for me to connect with folks through photography and learn and collaborate with them in a number of ways. Also, this project updates and complements TFP's photo archive by supplying current photographs of staff members in a more formal way than most of the images they had before. To this end, the organization's documentary and outreach caches are expanding.

In addition to the portrait series, I am also embarking on a black and white film project that documents several neighborhoods in Boston through the lens of food—what I am calling the “foodscape.” I am in the planning stages for this project and have just begun shooting. I am not yet sure what the final form of this will be, but am certain that it will somehow be incorporated into a kind of capstone project for my fellowship.

Aside from my work at The Food Project, I am also engaging with the community in various other ways. To my great pleasure, I was invited by the photographer Bill Burke to sit in on his class *Evidence* at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts. It meets on Tuesday afternoons, and although we are only three meetings in I feel that I have already learned a lot. This important seminar will no doubt inform the work that I produce for the rest of this fellowship and beyond. Also, in February I will be teaching a class entitled *Documenting American Communities: Space and Place* at a gallery in Jamaica Plain. You may read more about it here: <http://www.eliotsschool.org/classes/documenting-american-communities-space-place> .

The cold weather brings opportunities: to plan and prepare, to reinvigorate. Coleridge writes, wishes, that “all seasons shall be sweet.” This winter has been, and the spring promises to be as well. The remainder of my time seems pregnant with possibility and I am excited to see how it all unfolds.