



Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teenager, was shot and killed on Aug. 9, 2014 by Darren Wilson, a white police officer, in Ferguson, Mo., a suburb of St. Louis. What does what happened in Ferguson and the subsequent response that followed have to do with the food justice movement?

[Risk Ratios](#) reveals that Black people were killed at 10 to 40 times the rate of whites or other minorities at the hands of the police. [Research also forecasts that Black and Brown children are now expected to live shorter lives than their parents, due to diet-related disease.](#) This special series of WhyHunger's Food Justice Voices is a bold attempt to explore the way in which police violence and institutionalized anti-black racism is deeply interconnected to food, land and Black bodies. What is the connection between the death of Black people at the hands of the state (police shootings) and the death of Black people at the hands of the corporate food system (diet-related disease/land displacement/redlining)?

To lift up critical voices of grassroots leaders, WhyHunger's Beatriz Beckford facilitated a national call with dynamic organizers and activists across the country to discuss the connection between the oppression that Black communities face at the hands of the state via police violence and at the hands of an unjust

food system. Based on this initial dialogue, *What Ferguson Means for the Food Justice Movement* series was born. Through this series, we'll release a powerful collection of articles featuring the grassroots voices of Black leaders working within movement building and food justice to create real social change. These are their voices and their solutions, rooted in their lived experiences.

The *What Ferguson Means for the Food Justice Movement* series is a collective interrogation of these issues from the perspective of Black activists around the country organizing around food justice. The series is rooted in the innovation happening in Black communities to resist state violence in all its forms while building our way into the society we have always dreamed of.

We hope you join us for this important conversation and contribute your thoughts. Read the [series introduction](#) by Beatriz Beckford to get started and follow the conversation with [#FoodJusticeVoices](#).

What Ferguson Means for the Food Justice Movement Issue 3

A Conversation with Food Justice Activist **Amanda Walker**

with Introduction by **Montague Simmons** from The Organization for Black Struggle

Introduction

by **Montague Simmons**

The Organization for Black Struggle

Racism leaves us at the bottom of this fight. Meaning, it's not a fight that exclusively hits the Black community. We just tend to get the worst edge of it. Economic inequality hits us most acutely, and restricts access on a number of fronts, food included. We need to think outside the market based solution and really start thinking about food sovereignty, cooperation and a real shift of mindset...in terms of what it

means to be sovereign in our own communities. There is a vast amount of wealth of land and property that's not only dilapidated but underutilized. I think the question that's got to be emerging in this next phase, 20-30 years, is going to insist that we begin to culturally redevelop those existing resources so that we can claim a different kind of community control that is not situated within businesses as much as it is situated within our own collectives, cooperatives and communities that produce what we consume — what we'll need to survive. ▶▶

Amanda Walker is a farmer, activist and community organizer. Working with HOSCO (Holistic Organic Sustainable Cooperative), Amanda facilitates community engagement in the Co-Op City Eco-Village training program recruitment, and community building. Amanda works developing the Fresh Farmers mentorship program creates pathways for leadership development, skill, and relationship building for community members. Amanda is a native of St. Louis and knows the importance of the food justice movement as well as how it connects with Ferguson!



These systems of class, and specifically a ruling class that is waging war on poor and working class folks, use racism, and they use patriarchy – they use these things to wedge us against each other. This is an opportunity for us to really begin educating and talking to folks about what it means to really shift out of this system, and to start envisioning what something new could look like.

The Civil Rights Movement allowed folks to really envision a world that could be possible beyond the racism that was faced each and every day. I think we need to claim this space, this time in the movement for Black lives and do that same thing. **We need to be clear that it's not just about police, this is about the way we live and the way the system is actually assaulting us in an ongoing fashion.**

[The Organization for Black Struggle](#) (OBS) was founded in 1980 by activists, students, union organizers and other community members in order to fill a vacuum left by the assaults on the Black Power Movement. OBS works to build a movement that fights for political empowerment, economic justice and the cultural dignity of the African-American community, especially the Black working class.

BB: How do we define food justice with a racial justice lens?

AW: If we are going to examine food justice through a racial justice lens then we first need to address the history of agriculture and the rise and fall and re-creation of the plantation complex. People of color have always produced food – this is nothing new. The problem is when you insert a system designed to exploit the people's labor and not provide equity. Equity means having a say in what goes on in the boardrooms. It means a say in the decisions made when it comes to major contracts being awarded to our children's schools. When the majority of food workers are people of color, the profits are a direct result of their labor. In an equitable system the workers should share in those profits. This can be done a number of ways. We chose to use a cooperative business model. This is one of the forms of disruptive capitalism that will force a paradigm shift. Food is one industry that is currently being challenged by new models that will challenge the older models of centralized ownership and privatized wealth. It's important to understand that food justice is at the core of community economics empowerment and development. The more we think about cooperative systems the more successful we will be by becoming a producer. Without food all life would cease to exist.

BB: Considering the fact that our movements (food, labor, gender, etc.,) are segmented and often divorced of a racial justice analysis, how do we create movement interdependency that acknowledges racial biases and institutional racism as root cause for all these other issues?

Offering by
Tory Russell, HandsUpUnited

“What I see as key is really going back in time, and debunking or deconstructing the old ways of living. Putting our hands in the dirt, living off the land and living in community together.”
– Tory Russell

[HandsUpUnited](#) is a collective of politically engaged minds building towards the liberation of oppressed Black, Brown and poor people through education, art, civil disobedience, advocacy and agriculture.

AW: The best way to solve this is to create our own systems that operate in parallel to the current oppressive one. Another way we can do this is to demand inclusion and bring decisions back down to a local level that includes the voices of people in major policy decisions. Demand a social capital tax to provide capital funding to projects that provide entrepreneurship training and to stimulate communities through capital investment into entities that are more than 51% community owned and operated. We must also become more active in the local issues that determine our local policies.

BB: What explicit connections can we make between food justice and police violence?

AW: If we are to create an environment that values Black life we must first build up our capital and cannot ignore the role food plays in the economy. By building >>>

cooperative businesses that generate dollars we can recirculate dollars back into the community. **But the truth is that without good land and good food we cannot be truly free.** In communities of color where there are high poverty rates, the lack of opportunity for economic advancement provides a space for community ownership through food production to take root and grow into a network of co-member owners. This is a way to make sure dollars are put to use within the community.

BB: “On the national call with Black food activists around the country, which precipitated this series, I asked participants to finish the sentence “We demand...” How would you finish it?”

AW: We must demand and participate in what it takes to bring access to healthy fresh local produce in our communities and demand the capital be reinvested in the communities to increase economic and social equity and boost healthy food access. We demand the city identify opportunities for revitalized landscapes, including vacant lands and housing that could be used for orchards, grain production and other crops to supply local food businesses.

BB: How can we connect the organizing that has been happening – the innovation and future thinking in black communities – with the energy that has been generated through response and support of mass

actions around policing and police killings in black communities?

AW: Starting small by establishing a committee that focuses on creating action within the community and changing our course when the community expresses concern or input, working with the community to develop plans they believe will be the most beneficial and have the most positive impact. The idea is to create an environment in which local residents and community members can generate resources needed in order to become thriving, economically sustainable communities. The energy surrounding Ferguson can be channeled into organizing our communities and incubating business cooperatives like [HOSCO Farms](#), that are providing services and resources that have a direct influence in the community and provides benefits, like continuum of community service, fostering community economic empowerment, promoting community ownership and actively engaging in the community through outreach.

BB: Any final remarks or offerings?

AW: Currently, there are a handful of corporations that control where our food comes from. Food justice is an integral part in building our communities.

Historically, the amount of African Americans in farming has drastically dropped over the last 50-75 years. That shift has left our communities starving, in which we find ourselves in a position of being fed. We are entirely dependent on a system that has historically oppressed people of color to feed us.

BB: Thank you all for contributing to this important conversation. Some common threads that have come up through this dialogue for me have been rooted in interrogating capitalist food economies/systems that are dependent on the extraction of wealth and labor in service to a corporate food system designed to benefit a few at the expense of the masses. I appreciate the lifting up of alternative non-extractive economies including cooperatives and

community controlled food businesses. I also would like to emphasize not just the reclamation of land and food systems but the reclamation of ourselves and our histories; as Tory pegged it: “deconstructing and debunking myths” about Black people, food and land. In [previous issues](#) we affirmed that Black communities have a deep connection to the earth with land as a source of spiritual, economic, cultural and communal grounding. Our connection to, relationship with and access to land and our ability to have community control of our food system are essential to of our healing, power and ultimately our liberation.

HOSCO Farms

[HOSCO](#) is a sustainable food and sustainable community economic development cooperative founded in St. Louis. Designed to stimulate economic growth locally by training individuals to become cooperative business owners. Our focus is incubating and supporting food-based cooperative businesses and the supply chain industries that support them. Beginning with farming we try to provide a complete skillset that will allow individuals to work in several food system related fields. All while working towards ownership through a cooperative based membership styled structure. This allows members to take advantage of the collective resources and lower pricing for products or services produced by the cooperative. Our goal is to create sustainable communities beginning with the food system and community development through job training and education. Simply put, we are committed to food justice, making food more available and affordable to people, and empowering others to grow our local food economy while providing paths to entrepreneurship through cooperative creation. We believe self-sufficiency through cooperatives will rebuild communities and serve as a model for how businesses and communities can work together to create a brighter future.



WhyHunger is a leader in building the movement to end hunger and poverty by connecting people to nutritious, affordable food and by supporting grassroots solutions that inspire self-reliance and community empowerment. WhyHunger's programs support community-based organizations and social movements as they grow and develop, and bring new ideas and practices to creating a just food system that provides universal access to nutritious and affordable food.

Learn more at whyhunger.org