



What Ferguson Means for the Food Justice Movement

Introduction by **Beatriz Beckford**

So it starts with a question.

What does Ferguson mean for the Food Justice Movement? This is a question I have grappled with personally and in community with some of the most brilliant black organizers and activists I know from across the country for the past year. We cannot hide or avoid it, we cannot ignore the connections and or place Ferguson and Food Justice in separate stories in different books on different shelves in different houses.

Asking what Ferguson means for Food Justice has forced me to confront my personal hesitation to juxtapose the connection between the death of black people at the hands of the police and state, and the death of black people at the hands of the corporate food system intentionally reinforced by the state. This deep reflection has not been without pain or struggle, it has not been without deep learning and transformation, and has pushed me to name both as extreme acts of violence against black bodies. It is important that I and other Food Justice activists personally and politically affirm what black nationalists, black radical feminists, queer activists, black farmers, abolitionists, community health advocates and members from communities across the country, including my own, have framed as state violence that restricts the self-determination of black people, and name explicitly all the ways that violence shows up in their communities as anti-black racism.

The intricacy of America's systems of oppression have always used land and food as weapons of choice. I say this not to take away any urgency from the extreme state violence black communities face at the hands of the state via a militarized police, but to make some important connections between the extreme and the everyday manifestations of violence against black people.

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I hope to lift up the silent, often unnamed killers of black bodies that are related to food, land and the lack thereof. This type of violence touches us all, our friends, family members and children. Black and brown children are now expected to live shorter lives than their parents because of diet related illness including diabetes and obesity. And it is important to understand that this is not about individual behaviors, this is about a system that is built to provide the illusion of choice. It is about a system of food apartheid in black and brown communities across the country like the Bronx NY, Jackson MS, and Baltimore MD where politically-sanctioned redlining restricts access to healthy food. It is about the food justice movement's inability to name anti-black racism as the root of systemic food and land oppression, and further the food justice movement's lack of a mass based strategy grounded in organizing and direct action.

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Tactics that are necessary to advance any major shift in power. Specifically, grassroots power that goes beyond voting with your fork to ultimately unravel a corporate food system that operates at the whim of markets and the elite at the expense of the planet and by exploiting poor and working class black and brown bodies. Consider Pigford vs. Glickman – a class action lawsuit in which years of racial discrimination and targeted disenfranchisement of black farmers by the USDA was cited. Black farmers and producers were intentionally denied loans and access to benefits through various USDA programs resulting in the loss of significant black-owned land and wealth – 300,000 acres in North Carolina alone resulting >>>

As Director of the Grassroots Action Network (GAN), **Beatriz** collaborates with grassroots partners and allies to organize for the food justice movement. She works to provide coalition building support to partners across the country and to develop strategic partnerships within GAN's Movement Communities of Practice, a national and regional program that centers intersectional movement building, and transformative organizing as the foundation of institution building, coalition building, allyship and accompaniment, storytelling and campaign development strategies. Beatriz works with GAN partners to lift up the leadership of historically marginalized communities and to build power and capacity for grassroots groups to organize effectively and develop strategies rooted in the collective wisdom of grassroots communities. Prior to joining WhyHunger Beatriz worked as the Director of Organizing and Policy Initiatives of the Brooklyn Food Coalition serving as chief architect of the coalition's organizing efforts. She has served on the boards of the NYC Food Systems Network, the NYC Food and Fitness Partnership, and Eco Station NYC. Beatriz is a founding member of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement Food Justice Committee, the Alliance for Food and Racial Equity, and is an active member of Black Urban Growers (BUGs). In addition to her role at WhyHunger, Beatriz continues to organize with groups active in the movements for social justice across the country.



My Personal Reflection on the 1 Year Anniversary of the Killing of Michael Brown.

What I know is; a year ago Michael Brown, a black teenager from Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri was gunned down by the Ferguson Police Department, specifically Officer Darren Wilson. Michael was unarmed, and still Officer Wilson saw it necessary to fire 12 rounds into the body of this young black man. The officers left his body in the street uncovered for over four hours. His community gathered at the scene, and ultimately stayed to protest. News outlets would play judge and jury ultimately criminalizing the Ferguson protestors in the same way the bullets Darren Wilson fired would indict, convict and seal the fate of Michael Brown. A jury would fail to indict Officer Wilson, and he would go free.

They always go free.

What I believe is that there is something terribly wrong in America. I believe that which we name as wrong has always been the norm, and that norm is the intentional state violence that uses black bodies and the consumption of those bodies as currency. The norm is rooted in a culture of anti-blackness that exists beyond the myth of multiculturalism, is deeper than what is touted as the black white paradigm, and exists in what many name as black and other or non-black. I believe that in order to maintain white supremacy there must be a sub class. A slave class. I believe that black people, or more so black bodies have been that sub/slave class in America, and maintenance of white supremacy is predicated on the extreme, and everyday violence against black bodies. I believe that black people have resisted this violence for hundreds of years and continue to do so now.

This struggle has had many casualties, and there will be more. This fight has been going on since the creation of the America and we must be strategic and sustained if we are to win. Organizing mass based social movements that can engage in direct action and institution building rooted in self-determination is key to that resistance. Without pushing on all these levers, we cannot build the power we need to transform this world. So we must see it as our duty, we must resist state violence and anti-blackness in all its forms. We must resist privatization of our natural resources and we must Free the Land.

in 1.2 billion dollars in assets from 1981 to 1996, according to Gary Grant, the president of the Black Farmers and Agriculturalist Association. The settlement for the most part awarded \$50,000 to black farmers, mainly those who managed to navigate a highly problematic claims process. Many black farmers died before a settlement was ever reached and the generations of discrimination and anti-blackness that farmers endured at the hands of the state via the USDA has created severe economic consequences and emotional traumas that have never been undone.

These issues are deeply interconnected and always have been.

As food justice activists and organizers we have to make the connection between food justice and a whole host of issues that food, land, and the exploitation of black bodies intersects with in highly sophisticated and systematic ways each and every day. We must be unapologetic in charging the current food system in its engagement in modern day lynching that mirrors jim crow policies, and posturing that marginalizes black communities from any semblance of food sovereignty, self-determination, and land.

We must be unafraid.

We must be unafraid to name what we see, to ask each other how and what justice looks like and how do we get there? How do we build/ create the societies we want to live in? Societies that are not built on the extreme and everyday violence against black bodies. What does the abolishment of anti-blackness in this world look like?

I don't have the answer to those questions, although they are on my mind every day. I do know that grassroots groups and communities across the country are asking those questions,

creating the interconnectivity we need to imagine and build new societies, and whose work creates glimmers of the adjacent possible. This is true in Detroit, Chicago, Oakland, Jackson and in your community too.

This Food Justice Voices series is an experiment. It is a bold attempt to name the way in which state violence is inclusive of food, land and black bodies. It is a collective interrogation of the issues from the perspectives of black organizers doing this work across the country, and is rooted in the innovation happening in black communities to resist state violence in all its forms while creating the societies we dream of.

My hope is that this continues to be a conversation, not just between the amazing people whose perspectives and work will provide a starting place for how we answer the question of what Ferguson means for food justice, but for all of us to grapple with the questions of our time. The reality for me is that Ferguson is about state violence and black bodies, yes, and it is also about a community's response to that violence, their demands for community control and the ability to be self-determining. That in and of itself is powerful beyond measure, and provides an opportunity for us all.

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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.

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