



My name is **Malik Yakini** and I've been a long time activist in the Black Liberation Movement - having been fortunate to be radicalized as a very young teenager. More recently in the last 15 years or so, I have participated in what we're now calling the "food justice movement" and I clearly see the way we participate and when I say "we" I'm referring to the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network - we clearly see that as being a component of the larger movement for freedom, justice and equality.

What Ferguson Means for the Food Justice Movement: Issue 1

By: **Malik Yakini**

Prompt 1: How do we define food justice with a racial justice lens?

Ok. So starting with just looking at the demographics of the United States, if we're talking about food justice we have to be talking about people of color. We have to be talking about people of African descent, people who are called Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians - who, as we progress more into this century, will be the majority in this country and people who are defined as white will be the minority. And as has already been said, the majority of work within the food system is done by people of color, both the planting and cultivating and harvesting of food and the processing of food in plants is done by people of color, and those most impacted by food insecurity are people of color. So we can't address the issue of food justice unless we look at it through a racial justice lens. It's impossible. The other aspect of it, I just wanna raise up is, in order to have a food justice movement which really addresses racial justice, the food justice movement has to be led by those who are most impacted by food insecurity and the other injustices within the food system.

Prompt 2: 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?

I think a lot of it rests around how we frame our work. And for me, either we can be revolutionary - which in my mind means that we're really working to replace the current system of capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy with systems that assure justice and equity - or we can be reformist, meaning that we're just trying to "make life better on the plantation" as one of my elders used to say. We're not trying to really have a fundamental shift in power, but we're trying to make life more comfortable. Which might look like having greater access to food in our community. Or it might look

like lifting up Black chefs or whatever. So I think, if in fact our work is revolutionary and we're committed to a fundamental shift in power, then that has to be part of our ongoing discourse. It has to be part of the conversation we have with people as we're doing community organizing. It has to be part of the conversation we're having within the larger movement. So that we're intentionally really radicalizing the movement and moving away from the kind of cosmetic reform that might be proposed by some of the more elitist aspects within the movement. So I think by framing it in a more revolutionary way, we tie it to all of these other issues - we tie it to institutional racism, we tie it to the question of power, and we tie it to the question of a *fundamental shift* in power so that our people are empowered. So that we can have sovereignty and define our own destiny. The reality is that no people have food sovereignty unless they have sovereignty. Food sovereignty is tied to control and access to land and the reality is that unless you have control of land, and the ability to govern yourself, that you're only gonna have nominal degrees of food sovereignty. So the question of food sovereignty is really tied to the larger question of sovereignty and freedom.

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Reactions

I want to lift up the comments that Tanya, and I believe Dara, made about how we have internalized oppression and how we act this out on ourselves and that we need to be conscious of how this plays out within ourselves as individuals and within our organizations. And so I'm constantly in the process of that and over the last several years have become much more aware of patriarchy - how I play into it and how it plays out in Black organizations. So I just agree that we have two levels of work to do: we have the work of resisting the system of oppression and working to empower



our community, but we also have the work of transformation - the work of transforming ourselves, our organizations, our communities - so that we're whole and healthy and we're not replicating the same systems of oppression or replicating the values that are embedded in the systems of oppression that we're seeking to change.

Prompt 3: Ferguson as representative of the extreme violence of the system through, extension of the state like police, education, food systems, what explicit connections can we make between food justice and police violence SYSTEMS/ STRUCTURAL?

Clearly the majority of people of African descent are in this country as a result of the so-called transatlantic slave trade. I say, "so called", because I don't want to reduce our ancestors who were enslaved to being viewed as commodities. The term "slave trade" does not acknowledge our humanity. I say the majority because I do want to acknowledge the African presence in America prior to the so-called "slave trade". But clearly the vast majority of us are here as a result of that and that system of enslaving our ancestors did not respect our humanity and so our very existence in this country has been characterized by lack of respect for our humanity. Police in this country are here to protect property, and they're primarily a tool of the ruling class and primarily a tool of white supremacy. So what we're seeing is really a continuation of a historical trend where extreme violence is inflicted upon black people by police who are agents of the state because the state and the systems that interact with and support the state don't respect our humanity. And so another manifestation of that violence and that lack of respect for our humanity is the violence that we see within the food system, which is a much

slower violence which kills us over a protracted period but nonetheless it is violence. And so it's really one in the same. They're different manifestations of the same root cause. We live in a system that was never designed to serve us, that has always inflicted violence upon us as a way of keeping us suppressed and as a way of keeping us from rebelling. So we're just seeing a continuation of the same thing. It manifests in different ways at various times but it's all an attempt to suppress our humanity.

"We Demand..." participants finish the sentence.

Ok, I wanna paraphrase Malcolm X first: We demand to be treated as human beings. We demand food security, food sovereignty and food justice be recognized as a human right. We demand equitable access to land and we demand a national food policy to make equity a priority.

"One of the ways that we need to move forward is by building institutions and building organizations that are able to mobilize people over a protracted time period to address the things that need to be addressed."

Long Term Vision/Strategy: 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?

I'll just say that we need longevity in this movement. At one point, in the past, in the 60s, we thought that revolution was an event and that it was something that perhaps happens very quickly. But we now know this is a protracted and an intergenerational process and one of the ways that we ensure that we're able to respond and build our own capacity on a long term basis is by building institutions and building organizations that are dedicated to and focused on the work. One of the ways that we need to move forward is by building institutions and building organizations that are able to mobilize people over a protracted time period to address the things that need to be addressed.

Final Remarks

I just wanna lift up the importance of national organizing. It's very important that we do the on the ground work where we are in our particular locales, but it's also critical that we link that work up nationally - so that we actually begin to build a national Black food sovereignty and food justice movement. That can also have some impact on the larger, mostly white food movement - although I don't think that should be our primary objective - but you know, having allies can be a good thing. But also, I wanna lift up that not only is food injustice a national problem but it's an international phenomenon. And it's connected to global capital and so we need to be finding ways to stand in solidarity in concrete ways with people around the world who are also struggling around issues of land and race and class and gender and patriarchy and affirming their own humanity as well because this is really ultimately a global struggle and as Malcolm advised, we need to internationalize our struggle and not only see it within the context of the United States.

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