

**Ai H Interview**  
**April 20, 2011**  
**Youth-led Activism/Youth of Color-Led Activism**

**General questions:**

**1. What does it mean to you and your community to dismantle racism through the food system?**

I think I'll probably begin by saying, like most people, I don't belong to just one community. I belong to many communities. I'm a woman of color, I'm a food activist, I'm involved in the youth movement, I also physically am part of my neighborhood and community there, which is in Queens, which is lower income, largely immigrant population from South and Central America. So I would say those are the many communities I belong to. And one thing I would say is probably for all those roles, I would say the most important thing in dismantling racism is to make sure that all these multiple voices are represented: that women are represented, that women of color are represented, that youth are represented, that immigrants are represented in these conversations about the food system. And once there's a better representation of who's involved in the food system, I think that's one way to actually make sure everybody's viewpoint is considered, and, more importantly, what the impact, and some of the injustices are that some people in different groups are facing in the food system. So to me, I think, having better and more equal and fair representation of multiple voices is important.

**2. What would the world look like without an imbalance of power and privilege?**

I think it would probably be the opposite of what it looks like currently. I think, when I see that we're sort of in a self-destruct mode. And I'm talking in terms of currently, the impact of our food system on the earth itself, on our health, on the economy, on various communities of the world and I think it's necessary, in order to shift to a more supportive and generative mode, we have to sort of shift this – redistribute the power and look at who has privilege and really move it from being concentrated in the hands of very few people to a wider population. And I think that's kind of what I see. So, more equal distribution of power, a food system that supports our health, that supports the environment and helps feed generations to come, and also is empowering to communities.

**Theme: Youth-led Activism/Youth of Color-Led Activism**

**Description:** The voices of young people, particularly young people of color, are not often heard within social justice movements, in spite of the fact that they have unique perspectives and ideas, influence over their peers, and energy. Youth all over the world voice their opinions on policies that directly affect their lives in creative and impactful ways.

**1. Why is it important for youth, especially youth of color, to be involved in the food movement?**

I think the biggest reason is that the youth are the ones who have the most at stake just because they're the generations that are going to have to live with the consequences the longest and live with the impact of what previous generations have done. And, in terms of their involvement, rather than being passive recipients of what's happening, I think it's really important that they be active and actually take control and actually be involved in either fixing or dismantling the system that is having a negative impact on them right now. So I think youth, again, have the most at stake, but they also have the most

potential to bring about change right now. So that's why it's important.

## **2. What are youth's priorities for the movement?**

I would definitely hesitate to generalize and say there's only one priority, but I'd say some of the things that I think have come up among youth is this general need for more information, more access to correct information. I think there's been a lot of talk about the role of media in influencing youth and pushing this culture of unhealthy foods on them. So I think looking at getting correct, more public awareness-raising is one thing. Peer education is another, I would say, getting others involved in their age group. Especially one of the things I know from some of the youth I have worked with, in terms of getting their peers on board, some of the resistance they're facing is everything from apathy to not knowing how to get involved, to just straight up not understanding their own roles and sources of power that are available to them. So I think that's some of it. And another part of it too, I know for a lot of youth, employment is a big issue too and building livelihoods that fit in with their values and also will lead to help them become leaders in the community, or basically, benefiting their communities as well. That's a huge priority.

## **3. How are youth today taking action against racism and food insecurity?**

Well, some of the things I've seen, I would say if I had to categorize them, the areas I've seen are service, the next would be peer education and peer leadership, and the third would be advocacy. So, in terms of service, I see a lot of the youth that I've worked with do everything from working at emergency food shelters, like volunteering at soup kitchens, to working in their schools, trying to get healthier food in their cafeterias, to just doing more long-term, like gardening, getting involved in community gardens. In terms of peer-education, we've also had some of our students work with giving presentations to different community organizations or classrooms. Or even, some of our high school students have done presentations at elementary schools or middle schools on nutrition or how to read labels, or how to grow your own herbs. So that's peer-education. And the third would be advocacy. And that could be everything from understanding their roles as citizens and consumers and going to DC to lobby on the issues. So these are the ways they can get involved. And it's a powerful way to get involved because they can understand what their rights are and also how the system works and how they can bring about change, legally and influence policy.