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Liberal vs Radical

General Questions:

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

In order to really examine what that means in terms of dismantling racism the food system has to be fair and just and at this point its definitely not fair and just.

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

I could not even imagine what the world would look like without an imbalance of power and privilege because I think as human beings we are prone to have an edge. For example,

either positive or negative. If the edge is positive, it's because people want to help one another and so there is a tendency that humans want to help one another that may sway the balance into the positive. And then on the negative, there may be people who need power, and so if you look at the world, there's always going to be some sort of imbalance of power where someone always needs an edge either on the positive side, whereby there's always the need to help someone or negative side need to control someone. I think that's the innate property of being a human being so there is always going to be some sort of imbalance. I think if we don't have that imbalance, it doesn't bring forth the element of challenge I think that is important balanced, could be stagnant and that could be detrimental.

Theme: Liberal vs Radical Activism

Description: Liberal activism is defined as working within an institution to change it from the inside out, such as running for Congress so you can influence food safety laws. Radical activists generally create change by rejecting broken institutions and starting new ones, such as starting food co-operatives rather than trying to get a large grocery chain to carry locally-grown foods. Though seemingly oppositional, these tactics coexist within organizations and movements.

1. In your work, do you usually utilize liberal or radical activist tactics? How does your work combine the two?

I think there's room for both. So look at the liberal activist tactics, really trying to promote a lot, especially communities and people to go into politics and deal with politicians so they (politicians) know what is going on at the grassroots level so that once they get into power, then how do you then work with that nuance of now you're dealing with political people, and so then I put on my radical activism hat because I challenge the political system in saying number one as a people, we put you in power because you work for us. And as a result, there has to be some accountability and transparency so in essence the liberal activism, political part are the people that we put in office and in turn have to make them accountable for their actions and the radical part of me is the grassroots person that is challenging that activism and that power. What people don't realize is if you take people you vote for them, you put them in office and then you expect them to lead you or dictate and that's not true. We have to have the mindset that we put people in power because of the power of our vote they are there to do our work. We must make them accountable. We must demand transparency. Instead of looking at both differently we should be looking at them together on both ends.

In my work, and that's why I'm not a politician because I feel that I have free will and free reign to say what I have to say. Sometimes when you are in the political arena you are beholden to a party or a group of people for favors - there's a lot of lobbying going around and so sometimes they really can't affect change because they are beholden to other groups.

Whereas being the radical activist that I am, I can then step back because I'm not beholden to anybody except myself and my community and I can make those people more accountable in the work that they do for us. Also to remind people the power of the vote. Voting is so important because things are done laws are passed by a political process. What politicians do, is they look at voting numbers so if a particular neighborhood wants things and they don't have enough votes then it goes to people who are more affluent and have the voting power. People should be mindful of the power of the vote. Voting is power.

2. How do you both support and critique activists who take a different approach than yours to dismantling racism within the food system?

I think I support groups that are openly practicing what they preach because at this point food has become a privilege its not a right its a privilege I'm very mindful at this point in time, what groups are there either one, chasing the money for grants or two, doing the talk but not walking the walk so I am very critical of those groups. Those groups who feel that they have the answers for other people's problems or communities without living there or knowing the community members they figure they have all the answers thinking they can go in and affect change, so I am very critical of those types of groups who say their mission statement or values is to affect change in low income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color, but when you look at the board of directors or employees they don't coincide with they claim they are supposed to do in other words their boards and personnel do not reflect people of color. I have a problems with outside people going after the money on the backs of the poor and disenfranchised. As an individual and an individual in a group we are trying to tackle that problem by exposing people who try to make a profit or get grants on the backs of the disenfranchised or the poor people. Really expose those groups that are not doing the work that they are supposed to be doing. In fact are just camouflaging by doing a lot of rhetoric and talk.

3. What are some individuals or organizations that you consider good models for racial and food justice movements? Please explain why.

After years and years of being in the food movement, after really harping and exposing injustice around food, racism that exists, the inequalities that are happening around our food system, as a person of color that lives in a low-income neighborhood, finally able to join forces with this new organization we call ourselves BUGS, Black Urban Growers. Last fall we were really the first to talk about the effects of the food system, economics, in the black community. Really examine what black agriculture means and Black Urban Growers, which came out of the Black Farmers and Urban Gardeners Conference, really exposed the inequities of our food system, of our economic system, of our cultural system and gave it perspective from the black community. So the organization was black, the participants were predominantly black, and the issues that were addressed were predominantly black and so for the first time you were in and audience of over 500 people who were really focusing totally on the black experience. For too long I think, and not saying that intentions were not well intended, for the first time you have a group of black people controlling a conference controlling a forum that was run by, put together by, people of color. Address directly the concerns that people of color have And I'm

saying that because for so long, we have been placed in situations where we felt somewhat uncomfortable about peeling down the experience of racism of hurt, of oppression, when we are around other ethnic groups. So here was a safe place whereby we felt comfortable about stripping down and really baring our wounds and talking about oppression, racism, and inequity. What was really great about that conference was the fact that there were so many young people. People were telling me, well you know its not something we should be talking about, it's really not as bad as people think, or we are moving in the right direction. I think it really brought home the need for us to continue to have that conversation, to continue to have the issues being led by people of color. In order for us to have solutions, in order for us to understand what is happening, we need to be in the conversation and we need to be part of the solution.

So what you're going to see as we move forward is a new dynamics on how things are going to be done especially here in New York City. For once and for all people of color will have a say in what exactly is going on their neighborhoods and have a hand on solution as we go forward so its no longer going to be outside organizations coming in, trying to fix it for us. We have to fix it for ourselves and so as we move on you're going to see a whole new dynamics of people of color stepping up in the forefront and saying If you really want to help us, give us resources give us tools in the end, we are the ones fixing our problems that have to be the ones figuring out the solutions, we are the ones that have to move ahead when it comes to the work in our communities.

Anything Else?

I think this is so important that you are capturing the voices of people that you know when we talk about racism or we talk about oppression our voices need to be heard not for other people talking for us but the people who are being directly affected have their voices heard. I applaud the work you are doing I applaud the people who may finally have a voice and say exactly what they have been feeling. Thank you for allowing me to do that.