

— conversations on —

FOOD JUSTICE

A series hosted by
Share Our Strength and Food & Society at the Aspen Institute

SUMMARY TO ACTION REPORT SESSION #1

SESSION DESCRIPTION

Launched on October 29th, **Conversations on Food Justice**, is a new initiative and collaboration between Share Our Strength and Food & Society at The Aspen Institute. The series is designed to examine the roots and evolution of the food movement and how it intersects with race and class, as well as health, educational, and environmental inequities. Together, we hope to elevate voices that educate, inspire and challenge ourselves and others to go beyond charitable responses and address the root causes of why so many Americans experience hunger. If we don't aim our efforts toward food justice, then anti-hunger work – though essential – will merely be a band-aid not a solution. And we know this is a solvable problem.

“Food shouldn't be a privilege; we should have the right to food by being born and living on the planet and it isn't so” –
Ericka Huggins

Learn more about the initiative and upcoming sessions at <https://bit.ly/3eGANa1>

This first session explored the origins of the food justice movement, and how it intersects with fostering racial equality. The USDA piloted a school breakfast program in 1966, **but it was the Black Panthers who brought the model of free breakfast to national attention** in 1969. Since expanding school breakfast is a key piece of No Kid Hungry's work, the **series kicked off on Thursday, October 29th at 2pm EST** with “The Radical Origins of Free Breakfast and the Food Justice Movement.”

FEATURED PANELISTS

Ms. Devita Davison

Executive Director, FoodLab Detroit



Devita Davison is an activist and executive director of FoodLab Detroit, an organization created to provide guidance and support to independently-owned food businesses who are exploring business models that create a more equitable and sustainable environment for employees, producers, and people in the community. A native of one of the Blackest cities in America, with deep roots in activism and food sovereignty, Davison has the benefit of a long perspective on food movements and economies. Davison's overall goal is to create a food economy that acknowledges the importance of food justice, community health, and local ownership.

Ms. Ericka Huggins

Human rights activist, poet, educator, Black Panther leader and former political prisoner

For the past 30 years, Ericka has lectured throughout the United States and internationally. Huggins extraordinary life experiences have enabled her to speak personally and eloquently on issues relating to the physical and emotional well-being of women, children and youth, whole being education, over incarceration, and the role of the spiritual practice in sustaining activism and promoting change.



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Dr. Norbert L. W. Wilson

Professor of Food, Economics, and Community at Duke Divinity School at Duke University



Norbert Wilson's research touches on several food issues, including access, choice, and food waste. Wilson explores equity in food access and food safety, and quality issues in international trade and domestic food systems. Prior to joining Duke Divinity, Norbert was a professor of food policy at Tufts University's Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy and a professor of agricultural economics at Auburn University. Norbert is an ordained vocational deacon in the Episcopal Church USA.

SUMMARY AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

"Feeding each other and taking care of each other isn't anything new. We can't free ourselves until we feed ourselves" - Devita Davison

The Food Justice Movement is a grassroots initiative emerging from communities in response to food insecurity and economic pressures that prevent access to healthy, nutritious and culturally appropriate food. Food justice recognizes the food system as "a racial project and problematizes the influence of race and class on food production, distribution and consumption of food."¹

In 1962 the Board of Supervisors in Mississippi voted to cut funding for the Federal Surplus Commodities in what came to be known as the Greenwood Food Blockade. According to panelist Devita Davison, this program was vital to sharecroppers and farmers as it provided a source of essentials such as meal, flour, and powdered milk to 90% of Blacks during winter months. The blockade was instigated as part of a wider effort to disenfranchise Blacks in the South and prevent them from political participation. The connection between food justice and political participation was underlined as Blacks sought to feed themselves through mutual aid and solidarity.

The food justice movement took a significant step forward in 1969 when the Black Panther Party launched the Free Breakfast for Children Program at a church in Oakland, California. The program was launched in direct response to the hunger and poverty in the area that made it difficult for children to attend school. The success of the program was related to the dedication of unpaid party members who worked with parents and local businesses to ensure children had nutritious foods to carry them through lunch. Local businesses donated food, and allies across the country launched their own breakfast programs. By the end of the year, the breakfast program quickly spread to cities across the United States. The Free Breakfast for Children Program garnered national attention, leading Congress to increase funding for the National School Lunch Program and expand the breakfast program to all public schools. In, addition, out of the 64 community programs the Black Panthers launched – food was a part of every one of them.

¹ Alkon AH, Agyeman J (2011). *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. [ISBN 9780262516327](https://doi.org/10.1017/9780262516327)

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RESOURCES

Book: [The Philadelphia Negro](#) by W. E. B. Du Bois



In 1897 the promising young sociologist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) was given a temporary post as Assistant in Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania in order to conduct a systematic investigation of social conditions in the seventh ward of Philadelphia. The product of those studies was the first great empirical book on the Negro in American

society.

Ted Talk: [How urban agriculture is transforming Detroit](#) by Devita Davison



In a spirited talk, fearless farmer Devita Davison explains how features of Detroit's decay actually make it an ideal spot for urban agriculture. Join Davison for a walk through neighborhoods in transformation as she shares stories of opportunity and hope.

Book: [Begin Again](#): James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own By Eddie S. Glaude Jr.



*Mixing biography—drawn partially from newly uncovered interviews—with history, memoir, and trenchant analysis of our current moment, *Begin Again* is Glaude's endeavor, following Baldwin, to bear witness to the difficult truth of race in America today. It is at once a searing exploration that lays bare the tangled web of race, trauma, and memory, and a powerful interrogation of what we all must ask of ourselves in order to call forth a new America.*

Article: [The Greenwood Food Blockade](#)



Throughout the Mississippi civil rights movement, the relationship between race, segregation, and the politics of food shaped the social, political, economic and nutritional realities of blacks, especially for those who participated in activism in the Mississippi Delta. With the decline of the cotton industry and limited access to nutritious foods as a backdrop, the era created fertile soil for proponents and opponents of civil rights.

Website: [People's Kitchen Collective](#)



Working at the intersection of arts and activism as a food-centered political education project. We create immersive experiences that honor the snared struggles of our people. We believe in radical hospitality as a strategy to address the urgent social issues of our time.

Article: [The Black Panthers: Revolutionaries, Free Breakfast Pioneers](#)



Born in their Oakland, California headquarters in 1968, it was one of the first organized school breakfast food programs in the country.

Paper: [Black Panther Party: 1966-1982](#)



From its beginnings as a local, community organization with a handful of members, it expanded into a national and international party. Despite its relatively short history, its modest membership, and its general eschewing of electoral politics, the Black Panther party was arguably the best known and most controversial of the black militant political organizations of the 1960s, with a legacy that continues to this day.

POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS



[World Trust Educational Services](#)

Since 1998, World Trust has worked to advance social justice and racial equity with a strategic focus in Education, Health, Media/Culture and Technology sectors.

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CALL TO ACTION LIST

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?”- Martin Luther King

People often ask, what is the next step? If there is a right way to take the step, or if there is a formula. There is not, but we can all do something. Individual actions suggested by the panelists include the following:

- Explore how you and your community recognize and empathize with those experiencing oppression, poverty and racism.
- Invest in young people, and in stores and restaurants that are owned by people of color.
- Hold elected officials accountable for supporting equal food access. To learn more about bills needing your support, and to take action with No Kid Hungry, visit <https://www.nokidhungry.org/what-we-do/advocacy>

We hope you will continue the conversations in your organizations and in your community! Please do not hesitate to let us know how you are keeping the conversations going or if you have thoughts or topics you would like to hear in the future.



Share Our Strength is ending hunger and poverty – in the United States and abroad. Through proven, effective campaigns like No Kid Hungry and Cooking Matters, we connect people who care to ideas that work.

<https://www.shareourstrength.org/>



Food & Society at the Aspen Institute brings together public health leaders, policymakers, researchers, farmers, chefs, food makers, and entrepreneurs to find practical solutions to food system challenges and inequities. The common goal is to help people of all income levels eat better and more healthful diets—and to enjoy them bite by bite.

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/food-and-society-program/>