

AspenIdeasToGo_FoodSecurity

📅 Wed, 2/17 10:10AM ⌚ 52:46

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

food, people, communities, hunger, fred, eating, food insecurity, vegan, canvass, color, health, question, access, important, relates, hungry, stress, mother, allstate, obesity

SPEAKERS

Tricia Johnson, Fred Opie, Tamearra Dyson, support message, Nadine Gracia

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- S** support message 00:00

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 - T** Tricia Johnson 00:34

This is Aspen Ideas to go from the Aspen Institute. I'm Tricia Johnson. Millions of Americans are hungry thanks to an economy weakened by the coronavirus pandemic, there's likely more hunger in the US today than at any point since 1998 reports the Washington Post and hungers hitting Hispanic and black households harder than white ones. Hunger doesn't just affect the body, it impacts the mind. Food historian Fred Opie says fighting hunger is important, especially for kids.
 - F** Fred Opie 01:04

You can't expect great behavior of kids. You can't expect educational achievement if people are going to school hungry.

T

Tricia Johnson 01:13

Today food justice, how hunger and health intersect with structural racism in America. Aspen Ideas to go brings your compelling conversations from the Aspen Institute. today's conversation is from the institute's food and society program. In the 1960s, the Black Panther Party created a free breakfast program for kids 10s of 1000s of schoolchildren took part some of whom had never eaten breakfast before. Grades went up behavior improved, and the program led to the national free breakfast and lunch programs of today. When there's no food in the kitchen, people of all ages can experience chronic stress. Millions of Americans are facing hunger and it's especially prevalent in communities of color. Fred Opie, who wrote the book, "Southern Food and Southern Rights: Feeding the Revolution," speaks with Tamearra Dyson, she's the executive chef and owner of Souley Vegan and has her own story of growing up hungry. Their conversation is moderated by Dr. J. Nadine Gracia, CEO at Trust for America's Health. Here's Gracia.

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Nadine Gracia 02:20

Let's get right into this conversation, one that is truly timely and critically important. And I think one where it's helpful to lay a bit of a foundation and context and Fred, I'll start with you, in helping to make that connection when we when we talk about food justice. And here we're talking specifically about hunger and health, and the devastating impacts of structural racism. How do we make that connection between structural racism, food and hunger?

F

Fred Opie 02:50

It is interesting to think about one of the most offensive things that someone could do to you. One would be if you reach out your hand, and they don't shake your hand, that's offensive. Another one is denying you a seat at the table, whether it be at the breakfast table lunch table, the dinner table. So if you think about the most iconic protests during the Civil Rights Movement, it was a sitting at lunch counters. Why was it so important for white supremacists to deny access to people of color, Jews, Catholics to a lunch counter, because breaking bread is so important to our culture and our society. So I think it says something about how you feel about an individual or group self worth when you deny them access to food, or the ability to sit down and eat together. You also think about some of the historic punishments in human societies, whether it be from the Roman Empire on up that one of the most, one of the most often used punishment is to die somebody's bread and water. So there's something about eating, drinking and denial of that, that has to do with what we think about a person or group self worth.

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Nadine Gracia 04:15

Absolutely, thank you for that, that perspective. And, you know, in sharing that kind of a story, we recognize the power of storytelling and really understanding these types of structural inequities that have been long standing and be tomorrow you come with a personal story, a personal journey, that I think is is really compelling to put a face to to what we're describing, and we'd love to hear a little bit about your personal story and how that then brought you into the food industry and into the restaurant industry itself.

T

Tamearra Dyson 04:49

Yeah, I think that um, well, first of all, I come from a very food insecure background. You know, my mother, a single mother of three I the youngest of three And, you know, there were times that we, my mother shared with me only recently because I only remember, you know, times being hungry or not having anything in the kitchen, that at times we went on the third day without actually eating anything. Um, so you know, kind of With that being said, I went into the food industry, maybe subconsciously securing food for my family, because that's one thing that I can always provide is food, food to the Community Food for my family. So I mean, it's, it's, it's helped to shape and structure actually, the individual that I am today, I used it, I myself used it as a tool to kind of become more powerful, so to speak, in that in that area of being able to provide similar to my grandfather, who was able to provide his family the necessary, you know, the needs through hard work. So I applied that.

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Nadine Gracia 06:02

Excellent. And you did quite a pivot, right, a quite a shift from where you originally planning your career to go to then moving into into food. And I would love for you to touch upon that and how you brought that experience now into the work that you're doing with regards to the work in in the food industry itself?

T

Tamearra Dyson 06:23

Yeah, definitely. So I was in the medical field prior to launching solely vegan, one prerequisite away from nursing school, work in the specialty department at Marin General Hospital of endoscopy, um, and one wooden kind of imagine that one would complement the other one industry would complement the other, but I learned extreme efficiencies. And I definitely kind of apply that to my business. And that's allowed me to not only sustain but thrive. And then even after, you know, COVID hit, you know, in the business was hit so hard financially, I think that I was able to structure my thoughts on, you know,

kind of how to rise above my situation, so to speak. But those experiences at Marin General Hospital working around phenomenal women, powerful women, very confident women, this all helped to shape and mold me to kind of the persistent individual that I am, right now in business,

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Nadine Gracia 07:24

You know, you both touched upon one, this essence of whether it's the deprivation or having that that essence of the insecurity of not having food and, and would would like to have us talk a little bit more about making that connection of, you know, how hunger and poverty, the both short and long term consequences of that, you know, if we start, for example, with with looking at children, and the impact of hunger, and health, how it leads to chronic stress for children, and that carries forth into adolescence and into into adulthood. You know, Fred, could you talk more about that kind of connection and elaborate on hunger and poverty, and the impact of that as it relates to then stress for children, and adolescence and beyond? And how that then becomes a cycle, if you will. And we see this, this exacerbate not only exacerbation, but a continuation of the inequities in health and well being.

F

Fred Opie 08:30

Well, let me just briefly say that when you do the kind of work I do, and I'm looking at sources of people of African descent, long before they arrived in the Americas in 1619. So, you know, I'll go back and I look at things in Africa. But I'll also spend quite a bit of time just because of research projects I'm working on, or series in a blog, looking at slave narratives, and one of the most common commentaries in the slave narratives is to be an enslaved person was to experience hunger, it was just a reality of this constantly thinking about what was your next meal. And people don't necessarily realize that it's an economic system. And so owners gave their enslaved people just enough to survive, and they're on their own to do the rest. So there's the constant ingenuity that you see enslaved people involved in creating food to provide for themselves and also scenario said, you see parents giving food to their children, and going without the children to survive. So that's this one thing I wanted to comment on. The other thing I would Fast Forward many decades later, to the work of the Black Panther Party, and so many of us think about the Black Panther Party as a bunch of violent vigilantes that were in the area. Tomorrow's filming in Oakland, but keeping Mind that one of the most important programs they did was start a free breakfast program. And this is around 1965 1968. And they would organize the businesses and communities to donate food. And then they would find a local church to offer space, and then provide these meals, because a lot of these kids in these poor neighborhoods, black, brown, white kids, they were going to school hungry.

And it just, it just affects what you can do in terms of learning. So that was one of the first initiatives of the Black Panther Party. And they talk about just that experience for kids throughout the rest of their life, that giving that somebody gave to them, and they gave back and that the kids grades were going up dramatically, their behavior in school was improving dramatically, because they were going in there with a hot meal.

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Nadine Gracia 10:55

I think that's a really important example of the importance of fighting hunger, that you can't expect great behavior of kids, you can't expect educational achievement, if people are going to school hungry. So and we see that manifesting today, right with regards to when we think about the impact of hunger and and and how it's leading then to both not only consequences for children, but you know, further into adolescence and into adulthood, you touched upon it, Fred with regards to, you know, not being able to learn and when you're when you're constantly thinking about where your next meal is going to come from and feeling hungry, and that we actually also see these connections to the nutrient nutritional deficiencies, right, and the chronic stress that comes from hunger. And then that prolonged stress, for example, can then lead to having this prolonged release of stress hormones themselves that can then increase inflammation, increased risk of chronic health conditions, like diabetes and heart disease. And so we see this and it can be cyclical, with regard intergenerational right now with regards to the consequences, and I am sure that the work that you have done was really studied that with regards to seeing this have take place intergenerationally with regards to that food insecurity and poverty.

F

Fred Opie 12:21

Yes, just just Two other quick points I want to make on what you just said, is number one is that this is a reality. And if you have kids, and you look at your kids just behavior, what happens when the kids get hungry, you know, sometimes you'll think your kid is just going off the hook, but what's going on with the kid. And sometimes it's as simple, they are hungry. So there's there's a certain level of stress that we all experience when we're hungry. And we don't necessarily associate it with hunger until we get something to eat. And then as my mother would say, we come back to our right mind. That's that's one point. I think the other part that we see during COVID is the number of children who would take their first meal at school, and now they're doing remote learning, and then that they don't have access to that. So a lot of communities are scrambling with, you know how to do effective remote learning. Well, if the kids aren't getting fed, and then I think the last point is that most people are not aware that it was the Black Panther parties free breakfast program. That motivated if not shamed the federal government into starting that program. In public schools around the country, it was the Panthers first the

government, second.

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Nadine Gracia 13:31

You're specifically referring to the National School Breakfast programs and lunch programs, right, which form a critical part of what we consider to be our safety net, right with regard to to to for reversal food security, you know, both of you have have touched upon the covid 19 pandemic. And we have all set and we're all seeing that the pandemic. It did not create the inequities that we're seeing, but it has exposed them. And it is exacerbating those inequities. And certainly we have seen that as it relates to the impact on low income communities and certainly in communities of color with regards to rates of cases and hospitalizations and deaths, that communities of color disproportionately being impacted. But that also exists in all of the other dimensions as well of what contributes to our health, which is inclusive of food and hunger. And there's even recent data that came out of the Census Bureau that showed that Hispanic adults in particular have high higher prevalence of stress, because of concerns about not having enough food. Can you talk to me about you know, with this pandemic, what can we do now, with regards to not only addressing the immediate needs for food security and addressing hunger, but taking the the pandemic itself and really looking in the long term at how we address these long standing in equities as it relates to food insecurity and hunger?

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Tamearra Dyson 15:04

Information. Um, I think that, you know, with the pandemic, it's, it's a lot, you know, difficult structurally speaking to, to go out there and provide food. And like, Fred touched on the Black Panthers food program, I think something like that along with, with with information, I think that, you know, we lack information, therefore, we lack access to the solutions on kind of how to rise above our situations, and then even get get out of them. I think that when you're dealing with food insecurity, then you have your, your thought process is low, everything is low, your self esteem is low. And so then you think that you're undeserving, I think that offering, you know, just information to these communities, so that people understand that you're actually you don't have to be a victim of your circumstance, so to speak, there are ways to get out, there are ways to, you know, kind of teach them how to fish, so to speak, as opposed to just, you know, feeding them right now, even though obviously, that's important, I'd love to see programs, I mean, I'm a chef, I have a restaurant in Oakland, I'd love to see kind of the chef's form some sort of, you know, organized food distribution, even if it's just like, once once a month, or, you know, if we come together kind of as a collective, then it's, it bears on kind of a lighter weight on each individual's shoulder. But honestly, I feed people physically, but I really, really love to just share information. So I talk a lot to kind of the youth, um, you know, given my

background is something that I had to rely on my thought process, in order to get me out along the way, there were books that I read, you know, that I had to kind of go out and seek, and then found, but it's just about kind of knowing that there is a solution out there, um, you know, to actually pursue it. And a lot of the youth, especially if they're dealing with food insecurity, they have no idea that they can overcome their situation. So I think information is so very important.

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Fred Opie 17:24

I think that there's a great deal of value in remembering what people did before us. And as an historian, that's a lot of what I do with my work is I look at what's going on now. And I think, what lessons can we get from history, and I think there are a couple of them, I'm going to give you some from different cultures in our societies. One is from, from Turkey, that there's an expression that we use here in a country called on the hook being on the hook for something. And that is when you would go into a bakery, in Turkey to buy a bread and the bread would be a molded into a circle, you had the option of buying your bread, and then buying another piece of bread, that would be for people in need. And in the bakery, there would be a hook inside the bakery. And you would take that extra bread that you bought in the baker would put it on the hook. So somebody without food was coming by, they could come in, they wouldn't even have to ask anybody. Do you have anything for me, they can just look at the hook. So I think at the individual level, at the collective level, at the corporation level, what are the things we can do to be on the hook? That's one that's one solution, then there's certainly the examples that we see during FDR his new deal. And some of the programs they did there, I was just looking at images today. And actually, the image behind me is one from relief done during the Great Depression, which is look at existing infrastructures within communities. Find out what people need, and then get them those that you know, whatever that food staple is. But one of the problems that we see during the Great Depression, and I think similarly now is we have the food, it is a supply chain problem that we have the food is not getting to the people. So we have an issue in our country, and not just our country, but other countries as well. But our country, we just we waste a tremendous amount of food, we throw out a tremendous amount of food, we plow under as farmers a certain amount of food. We got to come up with ways to identify. And I think the other example I would pull from the Great Depression is once the United States moved into a world war two, we saw places like Ford, the GM plants, they would convert the plants and we see similarly right now what with corporations and business leaders stepping up to the plate to the Biden administration. We know that That you're having a problem getting these vaccines out, let us use our supply chain that we that we got. And it's working really well and implement it, I think, if corporations could think of a way of using their supply chains that are set up, have a way of getting folks who have plenty of food to the folks who don't have a lot of

food, setting up barter systems, between states, between counties and between communities, identifying people in need, and coming up with a supply chain that could get there part of the last example, is very local level. And I want to give a shout out to the trader Joe Corporation, I for many years, volunteered with their program called share. And what they would do is they would pull product off of the shelves, as it was about to go bad. And as many of you know, the labels on products have very little to do if the product is actually it's still edible. So what they would pull products off off the shelf. And then they would get people at the store like me volunteers to come. And we would pick up the food particular weekend, Saturday and Sunday. And I would deliver it to soup kitchens, I would deliver it to people who are in transition, all kinds of facilities where people needed this type of food. Salvation Army is one of the clients why we bring things to it's a tremendous program. And I know a lot of folks are doing this in the food industry. But if you are somebody who's a leader in HR person in your company, are you letting your employees know that there's a need, whether it's Trader Joe's or another company, for people to go pick up product and deliver it to folks, is there somebody who is a supply chain genius within your organization that you can help create a way for that food to get to the right people.

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support message 21:59

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Nadine Gracia 23:26

Something that both of you highlighted was was sectors and the importance that it's it's it's not just one sector that has to be involved in this issue, right, that this is gonna This is going to really take a multi sectoral approach. And the other is that it's at the systems that there's the individual, but it's it but it's also at the system's level, right that these inequities have been perpetuated over generations and and some of the work that we do, certainly interest for America's Health is looking at these conditions, right, the conditions

in which people are born, where they live, where they work, where kids play, as we as we turn them in public health, the social determinants of health that are these social and economic conditions. And Fred, you just touched upon a place that I was hoping we would go, which is the opportunity that we now have, certainly within the context of the current and new administration presidential administration is what do we need to see with regards to systems level change? Right, that that changes the narrative that it's solely an individual's responsibility with regards to accessing food and addressing issues of hunger, but understanding that, that these are long standing structural and systemic issues that actually have to be transformed. Are there are there things that you are looking forward to see with regards to how the administration will address the issues of hunger and nutrition?

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Fred Opie 24:50

One of the reasons why the Biden administration I would even see, say, the Trump administration that, you know, republics might have lost the President's election. They got a lot of people elected to Congress and Senate. And they did. They got a lot of votes out for Trump. Same thing with the Biden ministration. And one of the things I know I have a course called food and politics, I look at the role of food in politics and retail politics. And one of the ways that you get your candidate elected is you canvass neighborhoods, you go door to door and you knock and find out, are you registered to vote? Are you have you voted yet? Can we get you out of the polls? What if we took that same canvassing strategy to find out who is dealing with food inequities? And make sure Are you okay with seniors in your name? Are you okay? Do you need anything? Do you have anything in surplus that you would like to donate that can imperishable that we could pass on to somebody else, the canvassing strategy can be used more than just winning campaigns.

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Nadine Gracia 25:45

You have some thoughts there with regards to what you would like to see: some of the trends, the transformation and changes in systems that can really help to address some of these structural inequities.

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Tamearra Dyson 26:01

Yeah, I think that what Fred said was lovely, I think just kind of holding everybody accountable. Um, I like kind of the thought process behind being on the hook, I think that, you know, we just need to check in, we need to check in and make sure you know, our neighbors are okay, that our community is okay. And kind of how to logistically structure that is a conversation that needs to be held, but I think everyone all of us should be held

accountable.

N

Nadine Gracia 26:29

You know, something that we also are seeing, you know, is actually this this paradox between hunger and food insecurity, and obesity. And that that, you know, we are, we are dealing with an obesity epidemic, and yet at the same time, are also seeing this crisis of food insecurity and hunger. And and in a report we just released last year dealt with the issue of food insecurity in the context of the nation state of obesity. Fred, might you talk to us about explaining that, that understanding of how are we actually having a paradox of both hunger and obesity that is also disproportionately impacting communities of color and low income communities?

F

Fred Opie 27:12

I think it's I think it's two-fold. First of all, I think you have to go back to a term I heard one person say there's different ways of saying it, but but food apartheid, which is, you don't have grocery stores, in low income neighborhoods, I did my PhD at Syracuse University had family there. And I noticed when I went there as an undergrad, and then I came back for graduate school almost a decade later. And I was amazed at the number of grocery stores that closed up in low income areas. So what to people in those low income areas have in terms of accessing food, and particularly, not only are the groceries closed, but when you have budget cuts in a city, then you have bus routes close. And if you want to get to a decent grocery store, you got to go out to the suburbs, so they have a very limited access to food. And sometimes it's limited to bodegas that don't necessarily have the healthiest type of foods in those in those bodegas. So people are consuming things that are high in fat, high in sugar, highly processed, and you're stressed out because your economic situation. And I don't think it's any revolutionary information to say, when people are stressed out, they often cope by drinking, they often cope by eating. So there is a duality between not having access to grocery stores, farmers markets, or bus routes that can get you to a place where you can access better food, and then having that stuff that is inexpensive, right there at your beck and call at the local corner store.

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Nadine Gracia 28:54

Absolutely. And, and that really gets at, you know, the that issue of around the the, the inequitable conditions that we see right? And that can be traced back to understanding the history of redlining and how communities You know, there was racial residential segregation that there was disinvestment in communities of color. And with that disinvestment also came other limited resources. So to your point, Fred, with regards to

not having access to full service grocery stores, but also even the types of foods that are available in communities and whether they're healthy and nutritious and affordable. And, and the opportunities that communities have. And so then to being actually you utilizing and, and, and having a diet that is more of a high caloric, less nutrient diet can actually then when we see these issues of obesity in communities that then also increase the risk for these chronic conditions such as diabetes. In heart disease and other chronic conditions, and so it's how we also think about how we can address the types of infrastructure that's available in communities and really bring resources to communities, and that's equitable, to really ensure that they have an equitable opportunity to reach their full health and potential, you know, to merit you know, you talked about in particular with regards to food because there's sometimes can be that tension about food and culture and and that food is a, you know, such a key part of cultural identity. And in particular, when talking about not only hunger, but also in thinking about obesity, people say, Well, how do I maintain our cultural identity with regards to the types of foods that we eat? Could you share your perspective with regards to the power of food and, and respect for cultural identity and, and how that actually can really create the healthy and healthful lifestyles and living that communities really all deserve to have?

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Tamearra Dyson 31:04

Yeah, definitely. So my mother, again, single mother of three. And, you know, at time she worked, you know, she held two or three jobs. During those times, in particular, she accessed healthier foods for us, actually. So our snacks were, you know, yogurt and granola, apples and raisins, etc. Other times when she, you know, was not working this one particular time, she had gotten hurt or mugged or something and she went away, without, without working, we lived up the street from a hostess bakery. And that bakery would offer the little cakes and pies for maybe like pennies, or five cents, or something like that. So if you can imagine a mother of three with a couple bucks, we were eating hostess cakes, you know, and that would that would feed us over a few days. Other times when we weren't doing well, but we weren't doing that bad, then we would be able to access Top Ramen, Top Ramen, hot dogs, things like that. So all of these unhealthy foods. And actually, I myself, when we had, you know, separated from my mother, is when I actually started gaining weight as a child because of that depression. And again, she made the decision to separate because, you know, my father was doing a little bit better, she thought it was a good decision to leave us kids with him. And it turned out to be, you know, the wrong decision. So we moved from place to place. So again, a decision made based off of food insecurity, I went into a depression being without my mother. And so what I would do is I would sneak into the kitchen at night and get cake mitts, you know, and I started eating cake mix, you know, at night, and that's when I really kind of first started gaining weight. Prior to that I didn't, I didn't really think that we were active

enough. But definitely the stress component and then trying to keep culture, when you're just trying to feed your kids, it's almost just non-existent, you're going to do whatever you need to do to just get them fed so that they don't have to go to bed. You know, hungry, my mother, she loved us so much. So I can actually never remember feeling hungry. But I do remember being hungry, if that makes sense. Um, but I think it's just, you know, it's almost non-existent to say, okay, we're gonna keep a family, you know, culture, it's not sustainable when you're just trying to feed your kids. So whatever the store or the closest store is offering, then that's what you're gonna, you're gonna buy. And that's just, that's that's the way it was.

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Nadine Gracia 33:47

It's right. So it you know, it's how do we make the healthy choice, the available choice, the accessible choice, right? And in, in your case, as you said, you know, that it was whatever was there that you that you had available to you? And certainly compounded with that is that is that the stress that that you had just even as a child and imagining those types of conditions? How do we then really work to transform and create the conditions in which everyone really has the opportunity to be able to access you know, what are healthy and affordable and affordable foods, nutritious foods, if you will, you know, we also can look to the role of industry in the sense of the business industry, where we've seen, for example, that even when you look at the targeting and marketing of commercials, and for foods and I see Fred, you shaking your head that that, you know, there's there's been surveys and studies that have shown that with regards to some of the less healthy foods that that actually is disproportionately marketed to children of color as opposed to healthy foods and So it's, um, you know, a role can be for example as as, as is for lawmakers and Congress and others to actually disincentivize and not provide those types of tax loopholes for businesses to be able to to actually market those types of foods to children and adolescents. Are there other you know, sectors in ways in which you see for example, even in the corporate and business sectors to be in got engaged and involved in this spreads, you pointed to some some examples that have entities you've worked with.

F

Fred Opie 35:34

One of the best books on that topic is Casey, laymen's heavy, it's a terrific book on that and his battle throughout his life growing up in, in poverty in Jackson, Mississippi, in that kind of, you know, that that pendulum of going back and forth with with eating as it relates to his mental health, and economic situation. And then there is a new book out just on what you're talking about Mickey D's by one of my colleagues at Georgetown University, her name is Marsha chatlin. Her book is called franchise the Golden Arches in black America, by ww Norton. And it's on that actual topic, how Mickey D's has targeted

towards low income urban African American communities, in their pricing, and in the location of their stores. So they're this is this is documented history that we're talking about. This is not something where we're just some left wingers pulling things out of our hat talking about these topics. It's real stuff. Now, I need you to repeat your question, because as I was thinking about those books, I forgot.

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Tamearra Dyson 36:44

What, as you touched upon it, which was indeed the issue that, you know, within the corporate sector, business sector, all sectors have a role to play, but in particular, that we've seen that marketing of these unhealthy foods and drinks, sugary drinks, etc, disproportionately marketed to, to children of color, and so other strategies that we can have to be able to address those other types of systemic issues where the, the exposure to these unhealthy foods even starts as early as childhood as well.

F

Fred Opie 37:22

You know, we have to be vigilant as parents, as educators, tomorrow talked about this, it's, we have to feed people. But more importantly, I think we have to educate people. You know, I am constantly talking about this, through the work of Michael Pollan. He's got this great part in one of his books, where he talks about, like seven types of food. And one of the things is, you know, how do you know it's real food? If it don't look like real food is not real foods you got just like these seven things. I'll see if I can find it before we get off and share it in the chat. But a lot of us, we really have gotten so far away from real food. And we're consuming things because it's fast and easy, or it makes us feel full for the moment. But in the long run, what are we doing, you know, and wealthy wise people make decisions, not on tomorrow, not all next year, it's five to 10 years. And if we took that same paradigm for eating, and thought about what this thing I'm about to drink, or put in my body, what's the five to 10 year investment I'm making? Or deficit I'm making by this decision? It is that critical that we teach people how to be what I would call food literate.

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Nadine Gracia 38:41

Thank you for that, Fred. Let's let's move now into some audience q&a. We've got we've got several questions coming in. And it's still continue on this on this theme with regards to specifically types of foods and that's where this one's for you. It says that food is soul food is deeply embedded in the fabric of black culture. Can you talk about how you've brought the vegan and Soul Food TV movements together to create the healthy options for people?

T

Tamearra Dyson 39:11

Yeah, definitely. So you know, I grew up my grandfather was from Louisiana. My mother, I'd like to kind of call her the cook of the family. So she would prepare his dishes just so the sausage bacon grits, potatoes, great old Southern meal, but I myself, I'm at the age of 17, turning vegan. And this was just a decision that I made at the time, all of a sudden, you know, meat, just eating meat off of a bone didn't sit well with me. So I made the decision to go vegan when I was about 17. And then really got in the kitchen and started learning to cook when I was 18. My grandfather is the greatest man that I've ever known in my life. So I think that he was the the major influence on me in terms of that Louisiana culture. And so it was only natural for me to Kind of gravitate towards that cuisine, but being a vegan, I had to kind of create my own version of it, so to speak. Um, and, you know, learning again, and then talking with the community, and then gratefully inspiring people to understand that they don't necessarily need meat to flavor their food. In fact, spices and herbs do it a lot better. And so just kind of creating that organically and then understanding later that, hey, this is something that I want to show the world.

N

Nadine Gracia 40:36

Fred, I think this question is for you that that it says the commodification of sugar is deeply rooted in slavery, it is also killing people of color faster. Tell us about the history of sugar in the United States and the outsized impact it has on communities of color.

F

Fred Opie 40:55

Excellent question. By the way, I'm sure tumhare is aware of our colleague, Brian Terry, who also does vegan soul out in the same area. So there are quite a few people. And in my current project, my writing project is on a woman named Dr. Albania Fulton, who was the nutritionist for Dick Gregory, Muhammad Ali, Bill Walton, like all these people, she was turning them on to the importance of eating well, the vegetarian diet, all these elements. So in terms of sugar, you know, I always, particularly if I'm talking to a predominately African American audience, whether I'm, I'm in a church or community event. You know, one of the things I stress is, if you understood the history of sugar, and its relationship to the enslavement of people of African descent, and the Atlantic slave trade, you probably would never consume processed white sugar again, you just you would not mess with it. The history is so insidious. And then you look at it. And you look at the maladies that have been wreaking havoc on African American communities, diabetes in particular, you know, it's it is crazy. If you look at your family history, how many of us suffer from diabetes, which is directly related to the African slave trade, which first started with the creation of slave plantations off the island of Africa in a place called South till May. So that's the first place where we see slave plantations. And people see just how much money it makes. So it

takes off through Brazil first and throughout the Caribbean. But we would not be on in the Americas of people of African descent, if it wasn't for the profits made from sugar. And then to know what doctors are saying for us like that. So let me just go off on a related tangent, is we just see Tom Brady at age 40, something winning the Super Bowl. I don't I don't even know you guys probably know if he went MVP, I don't even know. But if you were to look closely at Tom Brady's diet, he consumes no processed sugar whatsoever. Now, if you look at LeBron James, you're going to see the same thing. These these are, these are highly productive, excellent x athletes. And then nutritionists have said to them, if you want to excel past your peers, here's some things you could do. I'm a former athlete, and I remember doing the same thing. I wasn't getting playing time. So I said, I got to change any and everything I did. One of the first things I did was give up soft drinks and processed sugar. So there's a relationship that historically, it's almost to me, I see it like voting. knowing what I know, as an historian. I don't care if it's a local school or election school board election, I have to vote because I know, no one want to know about the history of sugar. I can't consume it like that. I just can't do it.

N

Nadine Gracia 44:07

We're gonna try to get to a few more audience q&a. So I've got one here that says, Can you talk more about how organizations can address food insecurity in a culturally responsive way? How do we make sure we're offering culturally responsive options to people?

T

Tamearra Dyson 44:27

Yeah, I think that it's kind of just, you know, kind of going back to what we said initially is just taking responsibility for our community. As individuals logistically, um, you know, thinking of a resolution on how to get food to the food insecure, and tons of myself I what I started the community is accessible and In comparison to a lot of other establishments, I keep I try to keep my, the prices low so that it is accessible. Use for you know, fresh ingredients and best ingredients I feel partially responsible for a lot of my guests help, because a lot of them eat with us two to three to maybe even four times a week. So I pay close attention, I don't cut any corners. And I think that we should just all hold each other responsible. You know, I don't what does that look like, you know? Because, you know, everybody's independent, and everybody has their own way of doing things. But, you know, what does that look like to hold all of us responsible for, you know, for our brothers and sisters and what we serve them or in any way I serve food, but but how are we all serving each other to make sure that we're all okay,

N

Nadine Gracia 45:55

Fred, we've got a question that came from someone who said that this was when you spoke about the civil rights movement, and you're making the connection to the civil rights movement, how food can be used to include or exclude people? What more can we as consumers of food do to participate in addressing food insecurity?

F

Fred Opie 46:16

You know, I go back to the ideal I just said about I think of my namesake, Frederick Douglass, and a young man came up to him when he was living in DC towards the end of his career. He said, Mr. Douglas, what can I do to help my people in Douglas paws and he said, agitate? agitate? agitate? And I would add to that, for the question you just said is organized, organized, organized, take it upon yourself, as a group with the Knights of Columbus, KFC, a local sports team, you coach must be a great community service. If you coach I coach, the CrossFit youth kids, take the league organization and decide that you are going to canvass the community, do a food campus organize, organize one as an organization, if you're if your company is in one particular city, and you got a kind of a large campus and footprint in that community, take it upon yourself, to organize a canvas, a food campus and find out who is in need of food, who has a surplus, particularly during the wintertime, I'd say to everybody, do what you can to start a garden, or to help somebody else, start a garden. And as you produce from that garden, find out people in need that you can help distribute that food throughout that community by coming up, you know, we got some smart people on this on this zoom event that come up with a way of creating a digital map of the community and do a monthly campus and where you find out where the food's needs, where the food needs are and where the food surplus is, and a way to distribute that.

N

Nadine Gracia 48:00

All right, we're coming on to our final question for both of you. And I'll also chime in and answer on this question as well, which is: What makes you hopeful?

T

Tamearra Dyson 48:12

For myself, what makes me hopeful? My experiences that I know that I can share with the youth makes me hopeful, um, you know, for the future of my community, I love to share. And I was just talking to someone about this book that I read more recently that touched on kind of growing and what success looks like. And to me, success is not, you know, necessarily winning the lotto, or having someone kind of completely fun, like my dream,

but it's about working hard and building something. And then in that process, a kind of building character that I can then go back and teach the youth, not only how I did it, you know, financially, but the core values that helped me to succeed. And that's something that I you know, I mentor young girls, and I'm very passionate about, again, information.

F

Fred Opie 49:18

I'd say as a as an educator, I am teaching two sections of a first year student course it's on justice and inequality. And I was thinking about at the end of class and teach it all online, by the way, which I've been doing for a long time. And I'm thinking about the three students who came to office hours at the end of the class. Last night, we talked for about 45 minutes. A one is from Massachusetts, everyone's from Atlanta. And the third one I cannot remember where she's from. She's originally from Ghana. But when I listen to these three students, they are millennials who have their act together. They are passionate about me Making a difference. And I see young folk like that all the time that they're like sponges, once they find somebody who is trying to make a difference, they want to listen, they want to add what they're thinking they can do. And they, they're just inquisitive, trying to find ways to put your stuff in action. So I have a lot of hope, just because of the examples I've seen out there.

N

Nadine Gracia 50:24

Thank you both. And I will quickly say what gives me hope is, what I see is the growing recognition and the growing sense of ownership that we all have a role to play in creating a more equitable and just society. And that is certainly as it relates to hunger and food insecurity. That's as it relates to access to health care and education and our criminal justice system and all of these, these various conditions that impact our health and well being as a nation. And my hope is that we will take what I started with the clarion call for action, and this moment to actually see the transformation and make the transformation happen across generations for a healthier and more equitable country.

T

Tricia Johnson 51:15

Fred Opie is an educator, author and host of the Fred Opie Show, Tamearra Dyson started Souley Vegan which has grown into a nationally known brand with six locations. Dr. J. Nadine Gracia served in the Obama administration, as Deputy Secretary for Minority Health and Director of the Office of Minority Health at the US Department of Health and Human Services. Make sure to subscribe to Aspen Ideas To Go wherever you listen to podcasts. Follow us on social media at Aspen Ideas. Listen on our website Aspen Ideas org and sign up for our newsletter. Today's show was produced by Marci Krivonen and me and

programmed by the Aspen Institute's Food and Society team. Our music is by Wonderly I'm Tricia Johnson. Thanks for joining me.



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