

— conversations on —  
**FOOD JUSTICE**

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

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**SUMMARY TO ACTION REPORT**  
**SESSION #3**

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**SESSION DESCRIPTION**

On February 9<sup>th</sup>, Share Our Strength, in collaboration with Food & Society at the Aspen Institute, aired the third session of **Conversations on Food Justice**, a series examining the roots and evolution of the food justice movement and how it intersects with race and class, as well as health, educational and environmental inequities. “Hunger and Health: The Devastating Impact of Structural Racism” featured speakers, Chef Tamearra Dyson, Dr. Frederick Douglass Opie and was moderated by Dr. J Nadine Gracia. The panel delved into the broad connections between health and structural racism, and the inequities of our health and food systems that compound negative health outcomes. Poor access to healthcare and bias in clinical settings, and other social determinants of health- all converge to negatively impact the health of children and families of color.

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**FEATURED PANELISTS**

**Chef Tamearra Dyson**

Executive Chef and Owner of Souley Vegan LLC



Having worked for Marin General Hospital for almost ten years, earning an outstanding reputation in work ethic and expertise in the specialty unit of Endoscopy, Tamearra Dyson’s peers thought she was insane to leave her security as a single mother having no savings. A true testament to "The Leap of Faith" Dyson left everything behind striving for her goal which was to launch a vegan food business where she prepares and sells vegan cuisine in a way that the world had not yet seen. In 2009 Dyson opened a brick and mortar now infamously known as Souley Vegan. Twelve years later, Dyson has built Souley Vegan to a nationally known brand with 6 locations.



**Dr. Frederick Douglass Opie**

Professor at Babson College

Fred Opie is an innovative educator, speaker, author, and host of the Fred Opie Show. He is also a Babson College Professor of History and Foodways. His most recent book is *Southern Food and Civil Rights: Feeding the Revolution*. Fred is also the Host/Producer of the Online Teaching Survival Guide: A 7-Part Audio Series. Fred's work examines history through the lens of food and he use history to positively impact the future. Fred's secret sauce his sharing the stupid tax he has paid so others can learn from his failures.

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**Dr. J Nadine Gracia, MD, MSCE**

Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Trust for America’s Health



Dr. J Nadine Gracia has extensive leadership and management experience in federal government, the nonprofit sector, professional associations, and academia. Previously, Dr. Gracia served in the Obama Administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Minority Health and Director of the Office of Minority Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). She also served as Chief Medical Officer in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, where her portfolio included adolescent health, emergency preparedness, environmental health and climate change, global health, and the White House Council on Women and Girls.

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### SUMMARY AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

*“The pandemic did not create the inequities we’ve seen, but it has exposed them and exacerbated them.” – Dr. J Nadine Gracia*

Due to inequities driven by structural racism, communities of color are disproportionately impacted by higher rates of disease and mortality. A journal from the American Heart Association defines structural racism as “the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics- historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal- that routinely advantage white people while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color.”<sup>1</sup> Those that experience structural racism are more likely to face hunger and stress, subsequently leading to increased rates of obesity and chronic diseases. A 2015 report from the Department of Health and Human Services found that Black males and females had a lower average life expectancy than their white counterparts, higher infant mortality and pre-term birth rates, and higher obesity and hypertension rates<sup>2</sup>.

In the early 1900s, Civil Rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the first to note that health inequalities of Blacks are impacted by social conditions. The social determinants of health impact various social and physical environments, directly contributing to racial health disparities. The intersection between the social determinants of health and structural racism is apparent in several interrelated sectors. One example is how exclusionary policies such as redlining have made homeownership difficult. This leads to less investment in neighborhoods, affecting food access, schools, transportation, roads, outdoor space, employment, etc.<sup>3</sup> Several studies have found that redlining has a direct correlation in affecting health and wellbeing, causing pre-term birth, cancer, tuberculosis, maternal depression, and other mental health issues<sup>3</sup>.

The food industry is another sector that has a deep history of racism. From the early to mid- 1900s, different food products were marketed toward white and minority populations. Today, food companies disproportionately target communities of color through the marketing of unhealthy foods. In 2017, eighty-six percent of junk food advertising spending was targeted towards Black communities and eighty-two percent of spending on Spanish-language television<sup>4</sup>. A report conducted by the Rudd Center, the Council on Black Health and Salud America found, “By 2017 Black children saw eighty-six percent more food ads than white kids . . . Overall, only three percent of ad dollars were spent on healthy food advertisements but Black targeted ads saw one percent of that spending and Spanish-language TV saw little to none.”<sup>4</sup> Heavy promotion of these food products is linked to obesity and other co-morbidities, directly contributing to poor health outcomes of Black and Hispanic communities.

Dr. J Nadine Gracia contributed the perspective that the COVID-19 pandemic did not create the inequities we are seeing, but exposed and exacerbated them. Panelists agreed that communities need to come together to take care of each other. Dr. Opie proposed using the efficient canvassing system to offer help to the community, and Chef Dyson added, “We need to check in to make sure our neighbors are okay.” As a society, we need to continue to identify areas that perpetuate structural racism and hold governments, organizations, and other social structures

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<sup>1</sup> Churchwell, K., Elkind, M. S., Benjamin, R. M., Carson, A. P., Chang, E. K., Lawrence, W., . . . Williams, O. (2020). Call to Action: Structural Racism as a Fundamental Driver of Health Disparities: A Presidential Advisory From the American Heart Association. *Circulation*, 142(24). doi:10.1161/cir.0000000000000936

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Health Statistics (US). Health, United States, 2015: With Special Feature on Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities. Hyattsville (MD): National Center for Health Statistics (US); 2016 May. Report No.: 2016-1232. PMID: 27308685.

<sup>3</sup> Bailey, Z. D., Feldman, J. M., & Bassett, M. T. (2020). How Structural Racism Works — Racist Policies as a Root Cause of U.S. Racial Health Inequities. *New England Journal of Medicine*. doi:10.1056/nejmms2025396

<sup>4</sup> Ravitz, J. (2019, January 15). Black and Hispanic youth are targeted with junk food ads, research shows. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/15/health/junk-food-ads-black-hispanic-youth/index.html>

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accountable for dismantling disparities. Change needs to come not just from the individual but also from the institutions directly influencing the sectors where people live, work, and play.

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### RESOURCES

Article: [How Structural Racism Works- Racist Policies as a Root Cause of US Racial Health Inequities](#)



*Elected officials, corporate leaders, and academics alike use the slogan “Black Lives Matter,” which has also been widely adopted by members of the public, who by the millions protested the extrajudicial killing of George Floyd. With this change comes growing recognition that racism has a structural basis and is embedded in long-standing social policy. This framing is captured by the term “structural racism.”*

Blog Post: [Sugar](#)



*Collection of blog posts written by Dr. Frederick Opie covering the origins of various sugary products with complementary recipes.*

Book: [Sweetness and Power](#)



*A fascinating persuasive history of how sugar has shaped the world, from European colonies to our modern diets*

Book: [Franchise- The Golden Arches in Black America](#)



*From civil rights to Ferguson, Franchise reveals the untold history of how fast food became one of the greatest generators of black wealth in America.*

Book: [Heavy- An American Memoir](#)



*In this powerful and provocative memoir, genre-bending essayist and novelist Kiese Laymon explores what the weight of a lifetime of secrets, lies, and deception does to a black body, a black family, and a nation teetering on the brink of moral collapse.*

Book: [Race for Profit- How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership](#)



*Poverty, food insecurity, and poor nutrition have detrimental impacts on the health and well-being of children in the short and long terms. One critical strategy to address these issues is connecting vulnerable children and their families to Child Nutrition Programs*

Picture: [Red Cross Relief- Mound Bayou, Mississippi](#)



*The Distribution of Red Cross food relief during the Great Depression at a local black owned and operated local store in Jim Crow era Mound Bayou, Mississippi, 1931, Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

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### CALL TO ACTION LIST

*“We lack information, therefore we lack solutions.” - Chef Tamearra Dyson*

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:

- Reflect on the historical conditions that have led to disparities in food access in your community. Consider how you might bring those disparities to light.
- Spread information and connect people with food resources. Start a garden, distribute food, or organize food distribution from local chefs/ restaurants.

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- Hold elected officials at every level 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. Reach out to us at [foodjustice@strength.org](mailto:foodjustice@strength.org) learn more about the initiative and upcoming sessions at <https://www.shareourstrength.org/program/food-justice-series>

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**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/>