

Essay Topic:

We are requesting that folks who would like to contribute their voice write a brief paragraph (500 words) describing your background and perspective on Race and the Food System. We are looking for diverse voices, not professional writers, so please do not be discouraged to apply if you are not comfortable as a writer.

Irucka Embry's Response

Irucka Embry holds a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering with Minors in Environmental Engineering and Spanish. He is presently pursuing a Masters of Engineering with a Concentration in Environmental Engineering. Irucka is registered as an Engineer in Training (EIT) in the State of Tennessee. He is the Principal of EcoC²S, which is a Nashville, Tennessee-based small business that offers diverse services ranging from organic edible gardening to tutoring to Free/Libre and Open Source Software (FLOSS) implementation to promoting healthy living through the Read the Labels Campaign.

I believe that there are some fundamental questions that we need to discuss in our individual families and as a greater community of color to help us better comprehend how various historical forces and present ideologies impact our understanding of our own health and the food that we eat (or don't eat). The following questions are only some of the ideas that we must ponder:

In our community, is there a negative stigma attached with eating healthy? If so, why? How does the history of enslavement in the United States and the Caribbean impact our likes and dislikes for certain foods? What is the history of "soul food"?

In our community, do some people believe that healthy food tastes bad? Why? How can we change this perception?

In our community, is there a disconnection between people of color, in general, and the food that we eat? i.e., Do we know where our food comes from? Can we identify various fruits and vegetables as vegetation (plants, trees, etc.)?

In our community, is there a negative association with men who garden rather than landscape? i.e. Due to some homophobia in our community, is there a negative assumption that a man that says that he gardens rather than landscapes is a homosexual man (more feminine than masculine qualities)?

Why would some people in our communities rather pay money to see a doctor frequently than to prevent possible illness by eating fresh fruits and vegetables on a daily basis?

Why do some grocery store chains limit the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables (and other healthy food options) in their stores in areas that are usually populated with people of color and people with lower incomes (lower middle class and/or poverty class)?

Why don't more houses of worship in our communities promote "Gardens of Eatin'" whereby there are areas set aside for community gardens to feed the congregation and anyone else in the neighborhood and within the greater community?

Do any of our national media personalities encourage their listeners and/or viewers to start their own gardens? If not, then why not?

Do any of our HBCUs reach out to communities of color with programs designed to help educate people about sustainable agricultural methods and healthy cooking?

I would like to thank you for your time and consideration.

Irucka Embry, EIT
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