

My interest in food systems and social justice catalyzed my involvement in JCTP. It is the reason I am now Editor of this wonderful journal. I felt compelled, working in sustainable agriculture and food systems work, to explore the complexity of the food system from a social justice lens and to highlight the “fact that our food system is racist, classist, and sexist” (Winne, 2008, p. 190). I have found in my work that these facts are not necessarily obvious to many working in food systems or those who purport themselves to be part of an Alternative Food Movement. While food systems and agriculture are increasingly part of a broader public discourse, we still have a long way to go in thinking about and creating a more socially just food system. A couple of recent high profile events have made this particularly clear to me.

First, in their May 2014 special issue on the “new food revolution,” National Geographic failed to engage any questions related to social justice. While they note five significant steps for achieving the goal of feeding the projected 9 billion people on the planet by 2050— freeze the agricultural footprint, grow more on existing farms, use resources more efficiently, shift diets (e.g. less meat), and reduce food waste— the issue does not offer a single mention of poverty, the need to empower people to alleviate poverty, and the need for greater food sovereignty. Indeed, it appears that questions critical to advancing social justice were absent from their strategy to ‘feed the world.’

Second, the 20th birthday of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) celebrated in January of this year reminded me how much more we still need to bring to light about our food system and inherent social and environmental justice issues. The anniversary of NAFTA provides greater evidence of a corporate food regime “organized around a politically constructed division of agricultural labor between Northern staple grains traded for Southern high-value products” (McMichael, 2009, p. 32). Indeed, since the passage of NAFTA we have seen the disenfranchisement of peasant agriculture in Mexico, greater immigration and conflict over labor and human rights here in the U.S., and net importation of staple foods in Mexico. For example, Mexico is now a net importer of their cultural and nutritional food staple, maize (corn), while corn production continues to expand in the United States with human, ecological and political ramifications (Bello, 2008).

Thankfully, I believe, as does our Editorial Board, that the work presented in this Issue of JCTP highlights critical and often unexplored social justice ideas as they relate to our food system. The issue begins with an interview that I conducted with Dr. Cornelia Flora, Distinguished Sociology Professor Emeritus at Iowa State University, about the ways in which she came to the work of social justice within the realm of sustainable agriculture and sociology. This piece is followed by a review of Alison Hope Akon and Julian Agyeman’s book *Cultivating Food Justice* by Hanna Rosman. The next manuscript, Carol Thompson’s *Valuing Smallholder Food Production- A Call for New Theories*, explores how valuing indigenous knowledge can help us unpack the neoliberal approach to food production.

The special issue then shifts to three articles on the Alternative Food Movement (AFM), a critical piece of food system social justice work. In *The Celebrity of Salatin: Can a Famous Lunatic Farmer Change the Food System?* Ryanne Pilgeram and Russell Meeuf explore the neoliberal messaging inherent in the mythos surrounding a cherished leader of the AFM. In *Civil*

Subversion: Making “Quiet Revolution” with the Rhode Island Food Policy Council, Melina M. Packer explores the ways in which the emergent Food Policy Council framework can miss important social justice questions inherent in local foods work while still being an important space to create more democratic and participatory food systems engagement. The last article on AFM is Christine C. Caruso’s *Searching for Food (Justice): Understanding Access in an Under-served Food Environment in New York City*, which unpacks the notion of food deserts by using a food justice framework and explores the concept of a “food apartheid.”

The final few pieces in the special issue illustrate the role of institutions in shaping conversations around sustainable agriculture. Carter et al. explore curriculum development in *Students Creating Curriculum Change: Sustainable Agriculture and Social Justice*. While Joann Lo’s piece, *Social Justice for Food Workers in a Foodie World*, offers a practitioner’s perspective from her work directing the Food Chain Workers Alliance.

At JCTP we are building knowledge across multiple disciplines and institutions to address “the absence from public discussions of the acknowledgement that our food system is part of a political economy that systematically produces inequality...” (Guthman, 2011, p. 186). We might not, as Guthman points out, change the world through one meal at a time or in one JCTP Special Issue on Food Systems and Social Justice; however, our rich group of authors and their thoughtful manuscripts have deeply contributed to the acknowledgment of the fact that our current food system(s) are largely designed to reinforce and perpetuate inequality. This acknowledgement takes us one step closer to transforming the current food system into something that is more just.

References

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