



The Olivewood Book Club
Meeting Outline - "Farming While Black" by Leah Penniman
August 13, 2020 @ 5:30 PM

Guidelines: This is a space of learning and growing. The following are guidelines we are offering to this group to use for positive, vulnerable, and growth-oriented conversations.

- Be mindful, everyone's experience is their own
- Respect the values and experiences of others
- Be careful to avoid cultural appropriation (eg. taking on the cultural beliefs/actions of other communities as your own - more on this in Chapter 3)
- Acknowledge the difference between intent and impact - words matter
- Use compassion if/when correcting others
- This is a confidential space, keep individual experiences within the group, and take learnings out to the community
- Step up, move back - share your experiences, thoughts, etc. and then move back to allow others to do so, as well
- If you start to feel defensive, hurt, etc. take a moment to breathe before responding
- We are all learning and growing, let's do our best to keep our egos out of the conversation and to be compassionate about our own and others' journeys

*Note: We suggest reading from cover to cover, as there is a lot to be gained from each section, AND we acknowledge that the book contains some more technical parts specific to farm management, etc. Feel free to skip over the sections that focus on farm specifics. Our discussion will focus on broader topics found within the book.

Book Club Discussion

- **Starting questions:**
 - What are you feeling grateful for at this moment?
 - What is the status of the action step you put forward at the last book club meeting (if you were present)? What have you done and/or discovered?
- **Discussion questions/topics:**
 - How are the wealth gap, gentrification, and capitalism related? What are some solutions to these discussed in the book and how might we encourage these solutions in our own community?
 - Why is it important to teach youth about farming and connecting to the earth, with a focus on sustainability principles and indigenous knowledge?
 - What are some ideas, principles, ways of life, etc. that have become normalized but are actually a structure of white supremacy?
- **Action:** What can you do to continue your action item & personal transformation?
- **Closing:** "Black Gold" by Naima Penniman



Questions for Self-Reflection

Chapter 9: Raising Animals

- Why does Penniman discuss raising animals? How is this connected to sustainability?
 - Using heritage breeds that require less resources - Creole Pig & Haiti
 - Virginia General Assembly (1692) makes it illegal for slaves to own livestock except chickens
- How has the American diet changed traditional ways of animal agriculture?
 - “Intensive, industrial livestock production is an environmental justice disaster, adversely impacting communities of color.”
 - How can we do our part to “participate in the cultural cuisine of our people with joy and also keep love of the planet and the sanctity of life at the center of our consciousness?”

Chapter 10: Plant Medicine

- “Self-care and healing and attention to the body and the spiritual dimension - all of this is now part of radical social justice struggles” - Angela Davis
- What is the difference between plants as medicine and pharmaceuticals?
 - Isolation of phytochemicals and their single-use chemical entities vs. synergy of phytochemicals collectively surpassing individual constituents
 - Over 80% of African population rely on traditional medicine as primary health therapy
- How and why was the history of herbalists erased?
 - Of Africa’s 45,000 plant species of potential medicinal value, 5,000 are in active use, patented and privatized by Western pharmaceutical companies
 - By mid-18th century, capital offense in Virginia and South Carolina for enslaved to teach, learn, or work with herbal medicine
- How is this history connected to the chronic disease epidemic our country is facing?
 - Consider the “you are what you eat” adage and movement away from behavior-related interventions that are replaced by pharmaceuticals
- Are there any medications/supplements you take that could be replaced with a natural remedy from your garden?

Chapter 11: Urban Farming

- How has The Great Migration and historic “redlining” lead to concepts like gentrification and how are they similar?
 - Emergence of community gardens leading to gentrification and “urban frontiers”
- Why was the Cuban government’s role after the 1989 food crisis pivotal to the sustainable agricultural system that resides in the country today?
 - Which policies were implemented/valued that empowered farmers?



Chapter 12: Cooking and Preserving

- What leads the author to write ‘Too often we are told that healthy cooking and food preservation is a ‘white people thing’ when in fact, the unhealthy aspects of our cuisine resulted from the deprivations instituted under slavery’?
 - What other institutional barriers have led to people not having access to healthy food and traditional cooking?
- How have government funded programs that invest in subsidised and processed food making people sick (prisons, schools, corner stores), specifically in low income neighborhoods?
 - Black people are 10x more likely to die of poor diets than from all forms of physical violence combined.
 - What do programs like WIC and SNAP provide?
- Why is learning from Elders vs looking up information important?
 - Intergenerational transfer of knowledge
- What is the Traditional African Heritage diet for better health and nutrition (African Heritage Diet Pyramid)?
 - People who survived the Middle Passage tried to continue their traditional diet but under enslavement and colonization their diet shifted and brought health problems
 - There are commonalities in traditional diets from American South to Carribean, South America to West Africa - “we base our meals on leafy greens, vegetables and tubers enlivened with ample herbs, spices and sauces.”
- What is the value of sharing recipes, preservation skills, and tips on how to meal plan and prep?
 - Radical Black chefs decolonizing food, teaching about traditional foods and carrying on traditional foods and preparation
 - Included is a shopping guide for a budget and what foods are “high-calorie-per-penny’
- What does “when you’ve got 400 quarts of greens and gumbo soup canned for the winter, nobody can push you around or tell you what to say or do” - Fannie Lou Hamer mean?
 - The author writes ‘We are beholden to people who feed us and would much prefer to be beholden to ourselves and one another rather than the industrial food system’
 - Food Sovereignty in storing, making, keeping, teaching, tradition, etc

Chapter 13: Youth on the Land

- Why is it important to include nature/land based learning for BIPOC youth who live in cities with little nature or green spaces available?
 - “It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men.” - Frederick Douglass
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- Brother Yusuf and the power of nature to heal
- Soul Fire's guiding principles for youth on the land strive to create a healthy and healing space for youth - trusting students with complex concepts, providing mentors and leaders of the same demographic, honoring dignity and uplifting each youth to raise their voice, thoughtfully critiquing systemic issues and institutions that oppress, and much more.
 - How are these guiding principles used to educate the youth on the land and disrupt the pathway in the school-to-prison pipeline?
 - Collaborating with institutions in the local community is an important way to create restorative justice initiatives to keep youth from having a record and getting trapped by the (in)justice system while providing a place to heal from trauma with respect to the youth.
- Why is the Food Justice Curriculum important and what value does this type of learning bring rather than only focusing on skills-based farm education?
 - Examples are given that can be adapted for younger youth or adults: activities include concepts for food justice, healthy food and diet, historical leaders in the movement, history of land loss for Black community, fun, cooperation, movement, observation, being in nature, etc.
- Why can creating a pledge be a powerful tool for change?
 - Soul Fire Farm Youth Food Justice Pledge inspired by "The Black Child's Pledge" from the Black Panther Party.
 - Using self talk and encouragement and a 'contract' to oneself to promote well being and loyalty for their actions, intentions and beliefs on the land and with the community.

Chapter 14: Healing From Trauma

- What is generational trauma and how has it/might it impact descendents of enslaved people and other oppressed people?
 - Eg. farming as triggering & re-traumatizing - slavery/plantation connection
- Why is it important to learn history? Did you learn the history Penniman lays out in your schooling?
- How are these historical systems, institutions, policies, and events related to today's inequities?
 - Slavery -> police brutality -> Black Codes -> Convict Leasing -> Sharecropping -> Terror Campaign -> Jim Crow Laws -> Theft of Black-Owned Land -> Heir Property Exploitation -> Discrimination against Black Farmers -> Redlining -> Exclusion from New Deal -> Urban Renewal
- What institutions and systems exist today that perpetuate inequity?
 - Mass Incarceration, wealth gap, income gap, food access gap, power gap, environmental gap



- How can internalized racism present itself and how does this impact individuals and communities?

Chapter 15: Movement Building

- What ways does Penniman outline for justice seeking?
 - Litigation, education, direct action, land defense, policy change, consumer organizing, mutual aid & survival programs
- Why was Pigford v. Glickman such a landmark case?
- Can we make connections between the movements discussed in this chapter and those of today - eg. Black Lives Matter?
 - NYC community gardens movement
 - Sojourner Truth, "40 acres and a mule"
 - Delano Grape Strike - United Farm Workers
 - Colored Farmers' National Alliance and Cooperative Union strike
- What are some ways we can support and participate in movement building?
 - Policy demands of Northeast Farmers of Color Network and Movement for Black Lives

Chapter 16: White People Uprooting Racism

- White supremacy: "historically based, institutionally perpetrated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent for the purpose of establishing, maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege."
- What types of reparations are being discussed and what are some ways that we as individuals or our community could participate in them?
 - Pillars: "Nothing about us, without us," "No strings attached," "The whole pie"
- What are some of the guiding principles and practices of participating in interracial alliances? Why is it important for white folks to follow these?
- How can organizations become more anti-racist? Consider ways that you and your work could enact some of the practices discussed in the book.
 - Decision making & power, budget & finances, accessibility, culture & commitment, programs, narrative, behavior
 - Challenging white supremacist patterns
 - Calling in vs. calling out: "One of the highest forms of love is accountability"
- Why is learning our own history important?
- What does cultural appropriation look like? Have we participated in cultural appropriation and if so, how do we prevent it in the future? How do we appreciate other cultures but not participate in appropriation?
- How has white supremacy impacted you?