CHAPTER 1

The New Paradigm for Environmental Consciousness

It was the warmth and kindliness of old black ladies that first opened my eyes to the dangerous distance between people of color and the environment.

I was working as a project manager for the Trust for Public Land (TPL), first in New Jersey and then in Atlanta, GA. It was the late 1990s and early 2000s, and my job was to go into certain communities and negotiate land acquisition deals with homeowners in an effort to create more public green space. TPL would then transfer the ownership of the land to local municipalities and governments to create parks and trails, etc. Back in the '90s (before Google Maps!), I would consult physical maps to find the lands that would need to be acquired. I would then go out to various neighborhoods to secure the properties from the homeowners. In other words, I often had to use persuasive tactics to get people to sell their land for the public good. Sometimes it was just a slice of their land, which wouldn't require them to move; other times it was the entire parcel. Of course, I was offering money, but my mandate was to try to get the property as cheaply as possible — the bargain sale.

As we all know, land is one of the Earth's least replenishable commodities. We're not getting any more of it. Everybody's always fighting to get that last piece — usually a battle between public green space developers and commercial building developers. I experienced this dichotomy working for the State of New Jersey Department of Agriculture, specifically the State Agriculture Development Committee. New Jersey

was way ahead of its time: In the late '90s, I went to work every day in a state-owned electric car, then visited farmland across south Jersey, negotiating transferred development rights (TDRs) for farmers who were experiencing financial hardship. Most of these farmers were on the brink of selling their precious land to developers in exchange for cash. Therefore, giving them cash in exchange for their development rights on portions of the land was a win-win situation. I had a sense of urgency about the work because I knew if I didn't get there first, the land could be lost to yet another rapacious builder devouring land for profit.

But early on, I realized I had a problem. I was about 30 years old working at TPL, but I probably looked like I was barely in my 20s. In many of the neighborhoods where we were seeking land, the homeowners were primarily African American. This was especially apparent when I moved to Atlanta in 2005 and was working to acquire the land that would become the popular Beltline, the 22-mile abandoned railroad that rings the city. This was also the case while working for the PATH Foundation to negotiate easements for multi-use trails. Many of these neighborhoods were majority black, where I'd knock on the door time and again and find myself facing an older black woman who looked like my grandmother. The second they saw my face, they had immediate trust; I probably reminded them of a daughter or niece. After I got inside, I'd see that smile of familiarity, of comfort, of trust, spread across their face.

In my mind we were supposed to be engaged in a hard-nosed, bare-knuckles negotiation. The kind of negotiating I was trained to do in law school. But there I was sitting across from my grandmother. Law school didn't train me for that. I would explain what was going on, why we were interested in their land, and at first I'd get a lot of quizzical stares. "Wait, you want to do what, baby?" They had no clue what I was talking about, nor any idea that they were sitting on land that could potentially be valuable.

They'd tell me, "Oh baby, whatever you think I need to do, you go ahead and do that." I'd be thinking, Noooooo! I need to negotiate against you!

After all, my job was to get the land for under the market value, ideally for bargain-basement prices. That's certainly what the nonprofit organization, the Trust for Public Land, was looking for, what they've been trying to do since their founding in 1972, two years after I was born. But these older black women were so instinctively trusting of me, almost immediately warm and affectionate toward me, that they were not providing me with the adversary I felt like I needed — for their own protection. If they just gave me what I wanted, had I stepped across some kind of ethical line? That was my constant worry. It created a weird dynamic that I was very uncomfortable with. I'd sometimes even ask them if there was somebody else in their lives who could speak on their behalf, like a daughter or nephew somewhere who handled their affairs. If they told me there was, I'd call up that person and hope to negotiate with them. Maybe I'd get a tougher adversary — one that could get them what the land was actually worth.

But throughout the entire encounter, I would realize they had absolutely no idea what was going on, what kind of value they had on their hands. Most of them didn't follow the news reports or the talk in the business world about what was in store for their neighborhood. The savvier ones would figure out that their land was in the middle of something big that was pending, and they'd provide more difficult negotiations. And then there were the speculators and the developers, who would often be trying to get the land before we did. If they could acquire it first, we'd have to buy the land from them. For our purposes, that was the worst-case scenario. It got to the point where organizations like TPL that acquired land decided to stop publishing their proposed land use plans because it got too difficult to complete projects without having to spend far beyond their budgets for acquisition.

Eventually I decided the dynamic for me in these land acquisition negotiations was too much; I left that job. But on my way out, I realized that I was in a unique position to do something about the information deficit I was observing. I needed to find a way to educate the people in these African American communities about the importance of preserving land and about their inadequate access to public

parks, particularly for their children. Thankfully, PATH Foundation gave me the opportunity to work as a consultant as I began to think about how I could do something about this glaring problem.

I was tired of the dissonance I would feel when I'd walk into meetings concerning the environment or farmland preservation and be the only black person in the room. All eyes would turn toward me and linger. I knew what everyone was thinking: What are *you* doing here? Eventually I started asking myself the same question: What *am* I doing here? I distinctly remember being in meetings and having out-of-body experiences, looking at myself, wondering: Is there a purpose for you being in this room with all of these white folks? They clearly don't want you here.

However, I knew that unless we started early in teaching young people of color about the importance of being stewards of the Earth, it would be too late by the time they became adults and the imbalances I witnessed would continue. I looked around and saw that no one was teaching this to black and Latino kids — not to mention Native American children. We all have to live on this planet, and we all care about preserving it, so why was it seen as an issue just for wealthy white people? And then I cast my mind back to law school, and how incensed I was as a Fellow at the Center for Governmental Responsibility, learning about environmental justice issues, such as how wastewater treatment plants, sewage plants, and landfills were disproportionately located in communities of color across the US. The environment was incredibly relevant to black people in so many ways.

That's how the Greening Youth Foundation (GYF) was born, through my revelation that my people were the victims of a massive information gap. The environment wasn't just a white issue, and it was about more than saving polar bears or melting ice caps. There were a multitude of environmental issues right here in front of us — and if we were going to make change, we had to stop operating in these segregated silos and bring everyone into the conversation.

It started on Earth Day 2008, at Brookwood Elementary, the elementary school my sons, Miles and Cole, were attending in Gwinnett County, Georgia, a suburb about 40 minutes east of Atlanta. It's

astounding to me when I think back over the past decade to recall that my now-global, multimillion-dollar nonprofit started at a class with a couple of dozen five-year-olds. The after-school environmental club, which my father dubbed EcoForce (cool, right?), consisted of a bunch of energetic, mostly white schoolchildren who quickly bought into the idea that protecting and preserving their environment was in their hands. They were willing and eager "stewards." They scoured the school to make sure teachers and classes were recycling all relevant materials, such as paper. They immediately went home and got their parents and families on board. The support we got from the school community was quick and incredibly encouraging. Moms and dads wanted to know what they could do to help the EcoForce club in whatever way they could. They told me their kids banned them from using plastic bags at the supermarket; the little ones would chastise them when they failed to bring reusable bags.

During one of our routine walks, I asked my neighbor, Ruth Kitchen, a lovely and talented white woman who also happened to be a

Ruth Kitchen and Angelou Ezeilo with first GYF environmental education class. Credit: Greening Youth Foundation archives

teacher, to help me create a K–6 curriculum that schools could utilize to teach children about the importance of them becoming stewards of the Earth. We incorporated music, art, games — our focus was to make it accessible to children by making it fun. When we went into elementary schools in Gwinnett, we were so thrilled to see the curriculum working. The kids were naturally drawn to the message and the call to action. I knew I was on to something.

At this time, we asked my husband, James, who had a thriving law practice in Newark, New Jersey, to help us establish the best legal structure for this new birth we now called Greening Youth Foundation. We also asked a neighborhood friend, Mike Fynn, an engineer, to join our volunteer team. At the time, Mike was appropriately deemed our Technical Director as he would go into schools where the EcoForce clubs were conducting recycling audits. He would break each school into quadrants — participating students would be responsible for promoting recycling in their specific quadrant — and see how effective the club was in reducing waste. James, being the master negotiator, led our negotiations with a recycling company that would come to the school and retrieve the recyclable materials, weigh them, and report back to the school and the students how much trash was diverted from the landfills through their efforts. We would deliver a report card to each school, which excited the young people to no end. They were hypermotivated to get a good grade on the report card — a concept they knew all too well.

We ran into an obstacle that illustrated just how difficult it would be to truly bring about a change in thinking. The school district had already negotiated contracts with waste removal companies — so even though we were trying to help them save money, they saw little benefit from our efforts. "Eh, we already negotiated the rate with them," was their response.

But we could see that the young people were feeling empowered, realizing that even elementary schoolchildren in a Georgia suburb could help save their planet. We even brought in celebrities to ratchet up the excitement level. Ovie Mughelli, who was an All-Pro fullback

for the Atlanta Falcons at the time, was a huge supporter of our efforts, making numerous trips to elementary schools to encourage their recycling efforts. Our big culminating event was the Earth Day Fun Festival. It included recycling parades that featured throngs of children dressed in adorable costumes they had created with recaptured recycled materials, environmentally focused vendors, old-school games, rides, and food. It was a hit. We had done it — children were being environmentally aware while having fun.

It was all good, all encouraging, giving our team of four and the volunteers (Christy Kearney stands out in particular) who were helping us all kinds of warm feelings about the work we were doing. But I soon realized that, to a large extent, I was working with the same population that had always been perceived as the environmental activists — well-to-do white folks. After all, the reason I had decided to throw myself into this project was because of what I had seen in the poorer Atlanta and New Jersey neighborhoods where the residents looked like me. I was grateful for the reception I had gotten in Gwinnett, but if I was really going to activate my mission and start changing the paradigm of who knows about and who cares about the environment, I knew I needed to go back to those Atlanta neighborhoods.

It wasn't very long after we started presenting our curriculum in Atlanta that we realized we had made a mistake in not taking a fresh look at the materials we had created. Ruth is as earnest and excited about this as they come, but as she stood in front of the classroom strumming an acoustic guitar and singing to a room full of black kids, they stared at her with a quizzical, bemused look on their faces. Some of them looked at me, as if to say *Really?* I felt a jolt of panic. This was not going to work for them. I was making the same miscalculation that schools had been making with black and brown kids for decades: not assessing whether the material had any cultural relevancy for them. By using a white woman playing an acoustic guitar and curriculum materials that didn't include illustrations of brown children, I was telling them that I didn't care enough about them and their culture to tailor materials to them. It was certainly what they were used to — but it

was not a recipe for success in getting black children to take the material seriously.

Ruth and I went back to my dining room table and redid the curriculum materials. We changed the name of our central character, a detective investigating environmental questions, from Dolly to Dina, one that was a bit more culturally ambiguous. Instead of the acoustic guitar, we played hip-hop, neo-soul, and R&B music and incorporated the latest dances. We were telling the kids that we saw them; they were important. Making those cultural changes was so critical — it made a huge difference in our ability to reach the kids.

Over the past three decades, the environmental community has been dealing with a schism that has created two warring camps: black vs. white; environmental justice vs. conservation; upper-middle-class vs. poor (which usually means black, brown, and Native American). Two separate silos, warily watching each other, judging each other. But if we're really going to make change, we must have both sides dealing with both issues, fighting together. We can no longer afford this polarization and tunnel vision. The climate crisis is something that affects everyone; it's not an issue just for rich white folks. After all, studies have shown that when things like coastal flooding happen, communities of color around the world are more negatively affected. When a nasty storm rumbles into their town, they often don't have the resources to evacuate. They don't have the transportation or the money to live in a hotel somewhere or stay with relatives in a big house away from the danger. We really need to be more holistic in our view and approach to these issues.

I hate when someone introducing me says GYF is tackling environmental justice issues. That's not all we do by a long shot, but too many people when they see brown faces are trained to automatically think it's an environmental justice organization. I think it's somewhat condescending for both sides to think white people only care about polar bears and black people only care about environmental justice. Isn't it all about justice? We also care about the state of the planet. And I know plenty of white people who care about environmental dangers

disproportionately burdening communities of color. You can look at the way votes break down on environmental questions and bond referenda at the ballot box to see that, when asked, black and brown communities will vote overwhelmingly in favor of protecting the planet and creating more green spaces. In some ways, the voting on election day is often the purest way to assess how communities of color feel about these issues because typically they are confronting those ballot questions for the first time and haven't encountered fliers from the Democratic and Republican parties telling them how to vote. No, it's just that voting lever and their conscience and priorities at work. I'm well-versed on the major environmental questions of the day, but sometimes even I have to read through the question several times to understand what it's asking. Without prepping from my political party of choice, I have to dig down and assess how I actually feel about the issue. It's too late to consult Google to see how the liberals or conservatives are telling me to vote. Only in recent years has the data been aggregated to show that people of color are huge supporters and protectors of the environment. I find that information to be extremely empowering. You can no longer tell me I only care about food, housing, and education because of my skin color. That's the message I have gotten for too many years: Oh, the state of the planet isn't your issue, let us worry about that. You keep fighting poverty and racism. Now we are announcing to the world, Yes, we *do* care about where the park will be located and the healthiness of our food.

The next phase for GYF came when we realized that we could not only train youth of color to be stewards of the environment but also lead them into actual careers in the environment: engaging, important careers that could sustain them for the rest of their lives, in an area that had traditionally been shut off to people of color. This work has brought us some of our greatest successes as an organization; former GYF interns are serving as park rangers across the nation, or doing critical work in other sectors of the natural resource management field.

Frankly, it is through the environmental internships and careers that I have been able to get a lot of environmental justice folks interested in

the work that GYF does. If I say, Look at the enormous disparities in the racial breakdown of environmental careers, I'll immediately have their attention. They see that there are justice questions at play over here as well. When it comes to internships and careers, it's all a question of access. Once you give youth of color access to this world and show them what's possible, they jump at the chance. I understand that because it happened to me as well. As a student, I had no idea these were fields I could pursue. I went into law, the logical end result in my mind of the path laid before me throughout my schooling. It was part of the equation for a girl from a solid middle-class black family: a good education leading to a good job and a good career. Environmentalism was quite far from my post-secondary radar screen. I'm not even sure how my parents would have reacted if my 23-year-old self had pronounced that I was going to be an environmental attorney.

With our students, the words of the astronaut/teacher Sally Ride apply quite profoundly: "You gotta see it to be it." First you must have access to it for you to know it even exists. Once you see it but you don't see anybody who looks like you doing it, it likely won't resonate with you. When we get our interns working in national forests and national parks giving them exposure to careers in natural resource management, they quickly become models to the people visiting the parks. Last summer, through a program birthed in 2012 by my husband James and George McDonald — the Youth Program Director (now more aptly called a friend) at the National Park Service (NPS) — called HBCUI (Historically Black Colleges and Universities Internship program), we had 50 interns working in national parks where African Americans have left indelible contributions. Places like Tuskegee National Historic Site and Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park, and some of the country's most popular national parks, such as Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Canyon, and the Everglades. Millions of visitors, including many children, passed through those parks during the summer, each of them observing brown people working at the sites. That single encounter changed or formed each child's view of who could work in those places — the green and gray uniform of the NPS reflecting back a

Nicole McHenry, National Park Service; George McDonald, National Park Service; Angelou Ezeilo and James Ezeilo, Greening Youth Foundation, at HBCUI 2018 Career and Leadership Workshop in Tuskegee, AL.
Credit: Eboni Preston

gleam in the eye of that child of color who, perhaps much to his parents' dismay, just happens to love working outdoors with plants and animals. A decade or two later, this encounter could result in that child donning the NPS uniform himself, pursuing a career working with endangered species, or maybe ecology or botany.

I have to address here an issue that I've discovered over the last couple of decades working in the environmental space. For many black people, especially older generations, the outdoors conjures a lot of historical negativity that they'd rather forget — merciless toil in endless fields under a brutal sun; night riders wielding shotguns and menace; rapes and lynchings possibly waiting at the next curve in the road. Even before our ancestors were brought here shackled in the holds of ships, in West Africa we traded stories of scary beings in the woods, keeping many people from venturing outside at night. Many of these myths and stories are still told in Africa and in the Caribbean. This unrest

and fear sits in our bones like a congenital disease, to be foisted onto the next generation. Carolyn Finney, a professor at the University of Kentucky, persuasively probed this phenomenon in her 2014 book, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*. Finney claims that the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, and racial violence have shaped our cultural understanding of the outdoors and our view of who should and can have access to natural spaces.

We see this every year with each new group of interns, hear it in the voices of their parents when they're asking us questions about their children's safety in these far-flung parks surrounded by white people. We have their babies, and we're sending them to places they've never been before themselves. They call us and say, "Is my baby safe? Are they going to be okay?" In some of these parks, there's virtually no cell phone coverage, so they can't get hourly check-ins once their child is gone. We find ourselves doing a lot of counseling and consoling with the parents. In effect, we're rewriting that family's entire idea of the outdoors as a dangerous space, shifting the paradigm completely by saying it's okay to be in those places. As of 2018, we had sent more than 5,000 interns into national parks and forests across the country, and wonderfully, easily 85 percent of them reported having positive experiences. Many of them now even bring their families back and have picnics with their parents and their aunties and their grandparents. They send us pictures all the time. Their decision to become interns through GYF has a mushrooming effect on everyone in their lives, rippling outward and touching black folks across the land.

I understand the apprehension of the parents. It comes from not knowing, from their unfamiliarity with these outdoor places and spaces. With two children of my own, I know it's a parent's job to be leery of the unknown even when your child is moving blissfully ahead without a care — sometimes you're leery *because* your child is blissfully uncaring. After the internship is over, many parents are not entirely comfortable with their child announcing that they want to pursue an environmental career, thinking: Is that good and stable enough?

Can you make enough money doing that? That's why the exposure and education are crucial for everybody in the community. We need to send out the word that careers in natural resource management can be added to the list of good stable jobs.

It has been interesting for us to see that these federal land management agencies need us perhaps even more than we need them. For too long, they were focused on one demographic: middle-class white males. But now those long-time white male rangers are retiring and the agencies are having a difficult time finding enough candidates to fill their positions. The National Park Service, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and other federal land management agencies are discovering all of this hidden talent among young people they never before considered. Through GYF, they have tapped into a new wellspring. The agencies are thrilled to find out that these young people are fantastic workers. We know because after a summer with GYF interns they call us back and eagerly ask for more. For instance, we partnered with organizations in the West that fight forest fires because we were interested in showing them that African American males are ideal for hiring. Many of the guys (in some cases, ladies) from some of the toughest neighborhoods in the country were perfect workers for the task at hand: ambitious, athletic, and fearless.

Of late, we have set our sights on another lily-white corner of the environmental world: the outdoor retailer industry. These companies have long been connected to federal land management agencies because they provide gear that outdoor enthusiasts and workers need when toiling outside in all kinds of conditions. If you look around at the workforce of these companies, you see the same homogeneity that plagued the federal agencies. Their demographics were a perfect mirror of each other, except one was private and one was public. The retailers are driven by an added incentive that doesn't enter into the federal agency picture: the profit motive. They are eager to sell their wares to large and growing demographics that they hadn't yet connected with, namely communities of color. But it seems they hadn't realized that if they wanted to sell to these communities, perhaps it might be helpful to

employ some of their members. At least that's me giving them the benefit of the doubt. It seems they hadn't yet made this connection, though it's always possible that they just weren't interested in hiring members of these communities. I have to admit I am still stunned by how overwhelmingly white these companies are at this rather late date, closing in on 2020. We have been in discussions with their representatives about creating internships to include young people of color. Progress has been slow but steady. Admittedly it is not easy, but we all must try a little harder — after all, it has taken decades to create the scenario we have today. Some companies that are new to the scene, like Wylder Goods, inherently get it. Other more established ones, like the North Face, are starting to make more of the connection. These companies understand the economic and social benefits of diversity and inclusivity.

It's fascinating because if you polled the executives from this industry, a vast majority of them would probably consider themselves to be politically liberal and aware. To use a popular term, they might consider themselves *woke*. But somehow they forgot to apply that liberalism to their workforce. I get it — kinda. It's comfortable to be surrounded by people who look like you, who think like you, who like the same food, the same music. It's easy. It's more work to include people who may have different preferences for food, music, and vacation destinations.

I had an extremely unsettling experience when I attended a retreat for the Trust for Public Land out in Sonoma County, California. One early morning, a colleague and I decided to take a walk. In an attempt to get some exercise, we were briskly walking down the street from our hotel, enjoying the lovely surroundings, deep in conversation about our personal lives and our families. Out of nowhere, a white woman drove by in a Ford Element SUV (orange; I will never forget that color) and shouted, "Go home!" I was stunned. Napa Valley's beauty instantly turned ugly and sinister. When I got back to the retreat and reported what had happened, my co-workers were somewhat surprised. But I needed to get out of there. I called my husband immediately because the plan was for him to meet me in Napa Valley for a mini-vacation. However, I wanted no part of the place, so I packed my bags and within

a couple of hours was headed to the airport to fly back to Atlanta. I later told my colleagues that they need to think very hard about the kinds of places we go for our retreats in the future — and of course this area in Sonoma County should be snatched off the list immediately. Their response? Blah, blah, blah. A lot of lip service. But the point is that they now needed to start considering such issues so that someone like me could be as comfortable as they were.

I know this part of the story gets really complicated. See, TPL has a great mission of conserving land for the public. In fact, I am appreciative of TPL, because I found them after working for the government, which I knew was not the answer for me. The national NGO really gave me my wings and perspective, and I will always be thankful. However, working for them and other environmental NGOs also emphasized the incredible polarity that exists in the conservation world. Particularly, I got a certain understanding of the white liberal world. Whenever things would get racially uncomfortable at the workplace, it would often be written off as an exaggerated aberration: "Surely you misunderstood his/her intention …" or "Let's not lose sight of the issue at hand."

It was very frustrating navigating the workplace environment because I knew race was always something people did *not* want to discuss. But, how could we ever move beyond the discomfort if no one was willing to talk about it? My most hated phrase was "Angelou, I don't even see color — we all look the same." Really? In short, I knew I needed to leave this work world so that I could actually breathe. Most importantly, I wanted to make sure that no young brown person in the future with an interest in an environmental field had to exist in this schizophrenic workplace.

But I know I can't present an angry face to the world. I've spent too many years of my adult life observing the peril that angry black women encounter in professional spaces. Often we encounter the same peril whether we're angry or not. I can be literally melting inside from the angry heat I'm feeling, but I know I must keep it hidden. They don't want to see Angry Angelou. She won't help anybody. I know I have to present Smiling Angelou. She makes big moves. I can't say to them,

"You know what? It's 2017 and everyone in this room is white! You don't see a problem with that?" Even if I'm thinking that, it has to come out like this: "I understand that you looked up and realized you weren't being as intentional about diversity as you needed to be and about having other perspectives around the table. Okay, so let me help you be more representative of the world we all live in."

It reminds me of scenes from the television show *Black-ish* with Anthony Anderson and Tracee Ellis Ross. They do a great job of depicting the comfort that white characters have around each other at the advertising agency where Anthony's character works — and the unease they have talking about anything related to race. It might be comedy, but for many African Americans who work around white people, unfortunately those scenes are all too real. That's what drives many of us out of corporate America and turns us into entrepreneurs — exhaustion, frustration, resignation.

I was proud when a group of GYF interns learned very early that they didn't necessarily need corporate America. We had trained these young adults in our Urban Youth Corps to work in urban agriculture and landscape management, but when they finished the program, they couldn't get jobs. Although this demographic was receiving incredible training and certifications in various areas, not many sectors had actual jobs waiting for them. So, in many cases, these young adults didn't stop there; they created their own businesses. They said we have the skill set now, so why are we waiting to get hired? There are reams of data showing that entrepreneurship among African American women is flying off the charts. This feeling of us not being included or accepted is giving birth to wonderful new businesses.

We know that much of this is slow work, transforming one person, one company, one neighborhood at a time. For instance, I'm seeing the black community beginning to embrace the idea and necessity of healthy eating. When I was on a panel, I heard someone say, "Healthy people are happy people — and happy people want to make the world a better place." I got excited about that line. Black communities are beginning to insist that they have access to locally grown food. It's becoming chic

to have a plant-based diet. If they still eat beef, they are insisting that it be farm-raised and organic. Sometimes I have thrilling little moments when I know it's working, transforming lives. A decade ago, one of my family elders used to tease me about my vegetarian diet. At family functions, he'd look at my plate and say, "What you eatin', grass?" He'd walk off, laughing real hard at his little joke. At a recent family gathering, he said, "Angelou, I'm eating like you now." Well into his eighth decade, he had made the connection between his diet and his health. He's nearly a vegetarian now. I told him, "Now this is a moment."

Why would people of color conclude that they don't want to feel well? Now you see urban agriculture blossoming in our neighborhoods, black people going back to their roots, wanting to see their vegetables growing out of the ground. I joke that we've always been proponents of the "slow food" movement, long before it had a name. We did it out of necessity. Now we're returning to this lifestyle, recognizing that many issues plaguing our youth, such as obesity and diabetes, can be traced directly to fast food, to McDonald's Happy Meals and a KFC two-piece-and-a-biscuit.

If our next generation can become more aware of the importance of locally grown food on good soil with no pesticides, it will result in us all living longer, happier, healthier lives. That's a movement we can all get behind.