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# OPINION

## Children of Color in the United States

### Obstacles on the pathway to opportunity

BY THE REV. ELIZABETH LEUNG

"Every parent wants good schools, safe communities and access to the services their children need ... [but] African-American, Latino, American Indian and subgroups of Asian and Pacific Islander kids face some of the biggest obstacles on the pathway to opportunity" ... according to a 2014 "Race for Results" report on the state of children of color released in April by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

By 2018, children of color will be the majority, but they, their



families and communities are disproportionately lacking in resources on their pathway to opportunity. By 2030, these children will become the majority of the workforce; and by 2050, they will be the majority of the population. Our future requires that we help all children and not let children of color be consigned to the sidelines.

The "Race for Results" report scores children's progress -- across racial groups, among ethnic groups and by geographic locations -- in meeting critical milestones for their long-term success. Indicators include babies born at normal birth weight, fourth graders who scored at or above proficient levels in reading, children who live in low-

poverty areas (poverty <20%), high school students graduating on time, etc.

African-American children are in a national crisis according to the "Race for Results" index score. They particularly fare poorly in Michigan, Wisconsin, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Arkansas, and in South Carolina where they are least likely overall to become middle-class.

American Indian children face some of the steepest barriers to success, like African American children, especially in the upper Midwest, Southwest and mountain states. In South Dakota, they fare worst of any groups in any state. White children in the northeastern states of New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Connecticut hold the top three scores for white children on the index. While in the South, especially the ex-

treme poor regions of West Virginia (Appalachia) and Mississippi (the Delta), white children score the lowest two.

Children from immigrant families face greater obstacles than children in U.S. born families because of the household not being fluent in English, parents' lack of a high school degree, and legal status that can keep them from accessing public programs.

Latino children from more than 40 states scored in the lower half of the index. Families from Mexico, the Caribbean and Central America face bigger barriers in attaining economic security than those from Cuba, Spain or South America. Asian and Pacific Islander children of Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese descent are the least likely to score high on economic security compared to

Japanese, Asian Indian and Filipino children.

Fair-minded persons who believe in equitable opportunity recognize that the above are examples of the continuing impact of structural racism. Though great progress has been made to roll back overt racist laws and customs, the cultural norms and bias in our foundational institutions that limit opportunity for children of color are legitimized over time through seemingly "colorblind" customs, practices and policies.

This report helps us to see "a clear picture of yesterday's history, today's reality and tomorrow's hope for the nation's future."

Elizabeth Leung is Minister for Racial Justice for the United Church of Christ's Justice and Witness Ministries.

## I'm a Vegetarian. Well, Mostly Vegetarian

### An honest conversation about our food

BY JILL RICHARDSON

As a vegetarian, I have to walk a fine line.

Really, I'm not judging you. But I often find it necessary to establish myself as "not a threat" to meat eaters. I also occasionally bump up against militant vegans.

Consider this collision I had the other day with a devout vegangelical. While at a potluck among an omnivorous group that included a woman who raises and slaughters chickens and turkeys for meat, I tried to politely excuse myself for not partaking in most of the food.

"I'm vegetarian," I said. "Well, mostly vegetarian."

Then I tried to crack a bad joke. "I'm vegetarian except for when I eat bacon."

Big mistake. Vegangelicals have no sense of humor.

"Then you're not a vegetarian," the vegan said, annoyed. "Bacon is not a vegetable." I



could tell from her tone that she was eager for a good fight — a fight I did not want to have.

The truth is that an awful lot of thought goes into my diet, as it does for much of my lifestyle. I

care about the world around me and I care about my health. I don't want to buy products that were produced via human or animal suffering, and I don't want

to consume or use anything that will harm my health or the planet.

There are, of course, limits to this way of life because nobody in modern society can be absolutely perfect. I'm sure there are clothes in my closet that were made in sweatshops. I can't afford solar panels and I drive a car. While my Prius gets good mileage, like most cars it requires occasional trips to the pump.

But I try. Hard.

And I try to be a mindful consumer in a way that is manageable and affordable, not crazy-making. I make one change at a time and gradually adjust my lifestyle.

I gave up meat in 2005, and even went vegan for a year.

Then I became friends with farmers and ranchers who raise animals for food on sustainable, organic farms. Last summer, I even spent a week on a farm, caring for pigs, chickens, cows, and lambs that were all heading for someone's plate. It tempered my view of eating animal products.

These animals lived a good life. They grazed on grass, had plenty of room to roam around, and they were cared for by humans who loved them.

To a vegan, that's still not good enough. To me, that's pretty damn good. I ate meat from that farm while I was there. Then I went back to abstaining after I left.

But complicated explanations can't be communicated quickly. And emotions can run high at mealtime. Meat eaters wonder if I think they are murderers while vegans get ticked because I fall short of their standards.

Even when meat isn't the issue, something else can become a touchstone.

Why won't I eat processed food? Why do I prefer to eat organic? And, do my choices imply that others around me are

trashing the environment, torturing animals, or poisoning themselves and their kids every time they sit down to enjoy a meal? Here are my answers: no, no, and no.

I usually diffuse tensions by laughing at myself, excusing my strange diet by saying, "I'm weird." Becoming a Californian helps. Everyone knows all Californians are weird.

I wish strident vegetarians and vegans would chill out too. This tension erects a barrier to discussion, learning, and changing. Would you want to

learn anything from a vegetarian you think is judging you for eating a hamburger? And maybe a vegan can learn something from a rancher who raises animals for meat.

Everyone should become more open to honest conversations about our food without judging one another or becoming defensive about being judged.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*.

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