

**“Ending Hunger in America: Local Innovations to Inform a National Strategy”**  
**Statement of Christopher Bradshaw, Executive Director, Dreaming Out Loud, Inc.,**  
**hosted by the Committee on Rules,**  
**United States House of Representatives**

**July 15th, 2021**

Good afternoon Chairman James P. McGovern (D-MA), members of the Rules Committee, and the American people. My name is Christopher Bradshaw, Executive Director of Dreaming Out Loud. We are a nonprofit, cooperative social enterprise located in Washington, DC. Our mission is to create economic opportunity within marginalized communities by creating a healthy, equitable food system. My organization operates farming and regional food hub operations that distribute more than 1,000 weekly shares of our Black Farm Community Supported Agriculture Program to communities across the District, facilitate wholesale sales of socially disadvantaged farmers products into institutional markets, and train marginalized food entrepreneurs. I am thankful for the opportunity to speak before y’all today, sharing the critical work that we are engaged in to bring about comprehensive racial and economic justice, using the food system as our vehicle as our lens and our vehicle.

Hunger. Six letters. A lot to unpack. We so often discuss hunger as a state of being where human beings lack access to food; rather, we need to pivot the talking points to the root causes. Hunger is a racial justice issue. Hunger is an economic justice issue. Hunger is violence. Hunger is not a natural state of being. Hunger is not the result of natural disasters. We must speak to the intentional construction of hunger, the building blocks of which comprise the greatest challenges to the fulfillment of human promise that our country and our world endure today, and seemingly since time immemorial in American history. To fail to name the culprits that work to continually erect new barriers and undergird violent and oppressive systems that perpetuate the circumstances that produce hunger, is to participate in aiding and abetting.

Let me say it again: Hunger is violence. Racialized violence, once upon a time, would have manifested itself as it did in Elaine, Arkansas, in the late hours of September 30, 1919 Black sharecroppers met to establish the Progressive Farmers and Household Union of America to fight for better pay and higher cotton prices. Upon word of these labor organizing efforts, a racist white mob (not unlike that of January 6th, 2021), formed to murder hundreds of sharecroppers. Not only were our folks mass-lynched, survivors were then put on trial and blamed for their own self-defense. Here we have the contours of the current state of “hunger”. Racialized violence. Suppression of labor and wages. Dispossession of land. The denial of the ability to create generational wealth, driving the racial wealth gap. All undergirded by public policy discrimination in housing, labor, agriculture, medicine, banking, the carceral state, denial of full rights to our LBTQI+ community members, and I could go on. And no reparations to level-set, to heal, to undergird life outcomes based on these direct, traceable causes of our people’s challenges. Hunger is systemic, it is structural, and it is tied to this history. Hunger is violence.

While we mark historical events, we must remember that we are constantly in the production of a new history; often one that unmistakably manifests itself in historical cycles of violence. Let me point to a July 12 article in USA Today, where in my home state of Tennessee, “Chief U.S. District Judge Thomas

Anderson issued a national injunction that bars the Biden administration from enacting the loan forgiveness plan approved by Congress in March as part of the American Rescue Plan Act — a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package.” An attempt to block even a modicum of remuneration for the centuries of historical damage to Black farmers and communities much like Elaine, AR. Unabashed racist actions threaten further Black farmer land loss, driving the inability to accumulate generational wealth and the racial wealth gap, impact communities ability to feed themselves; and in fact drive hunger.

Black folks have been the drivers of local food systems innovations from Booker T. Whatley, the inventor of the community supported agriculture program (the precursor to my organization’s Black Farm CSA) to Fannie Lou Hamer’s social innovation with her Freedom Farm Cooperative in the Mississippi Delta. Each of these ancestors brought new solutions that were met by the width and breadth of structural inequity, racialized violence, and systemic racism that worked to counter their every move. With these historical markers and current acts of white supremacist framing of key attempts to implement reparative and restorative justice solutions, a national strategy must acknowledge the harms and that Black Lives Matter; facilitate comprehensive financial, mental, and spiritual repair; undergird individuals, communities, and institutions with an economic and social floor; and guard against regressive and white supremacist irredentism currently attacking voting rights, use physical violence, and the violence of systems to perpetuate white supremacy for generations to come. Defeating hunger requires defeating white supremacy wherever it manifests: Culturally, politically, physically, and within systems. It requires a latticework of public policies, agencies, allies, and clear definitions of the problem are facing. This is a generational struggle...but we stand ready to feed the fight.