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# FOODSERVICE NEWS

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## BLACK LIVELIHOODS MATTER



From left, All Square restaurant manager, Seejae Johnson, and fellows Terrein Gill and Randall Smith appreciate the programs and camaraderie of All Square, a craft grilled cheese spot and nonprofit social enterprise. Photos by Michael J. Spear

The restaurant industry employs more than 11 million workers, yet study after study finds that people of color face racial disparities in kitchens across America, from hiring practices to having the opportunity for promotions. Now combine that with a pandemic and high unemployment rates which disproportionately affect women and people of color.

By Callie Evergreen

**T**O THE ALREADY SIMMERING POT of racial inequity and a pandemic costing restaurant workers their jobs and social net, George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, died on May 25

after former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for around eight minutes while Floyd was handcuffed face down in the street. And in the midst of a pandemic, people took to the streets to demand justice for

George Floyd and to finally deal with our country's systemic racism in a lasting way.

Located just two miles from 38th and Chicago where George Floyd was killed is All Square, a craft grilled cheese restaurant that is also a nonprofit social enterprise and professional development institute that invests in the lives of formerly incarcerated individuals. A 12-month fellowship program provides development in customizable industry-specific profession plans such as law and entrepreneurship.

Randall Smith, a fellow since August 2019, said he stands behind what All Square stands for and how it tangibly fights against injustices. "We've been swept under the rug like we don't matter. Everything that's going on, and everything that (white people) benefit from this has to be exposed in order for change to happen," Smith said. "It has to be put in white people's faces because it's their problem, it's a police problem and their culture. It's not on us to change, because we're not doing the hurt...The only way we can come back is to fight every person who is racist behind the scenes and other Caucasians accepting of that behavior."

Terrein Gill, another fellow since August 2019, echoed Smith's sentiments about All Square's mission. "This restaurant is definitely more diverse with gender and race. It's eye-opening when you come in and see the different people working here that work together and have fun," Gill said. "It's cohesive. We smile, joke, know customers by name—it's an awesome experience to be a part of."

Each month, the All Square crew creates a new sandwich with a tie-in to civil rights. In June, their creation celebrating Juneteenth—the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of slavery ending in the U.S., when Union soldiers landed in Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865, and told enslaved peoples they were free, two-and-a-half years after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

The Juneteenth sandwich, priced at \$11, features Texas toast with a choice of chicken or pork, cheddar, housemade BBQ sauce and tangy housemade pickles.

"Imagine having people come in and order (the Juneteenth sandwich), paying homage to all the slaves," Gill said.

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Restaurant manager, SeeJae Johnson, right, works with his crew at All Square. Each month the crew creates a new sandwich with a tie to civil rights. Photo by Michael J. Spear

SeeJae Johnson, a Black chef and restaurant manager, joined All Square in February and found out that their culinary director happened to be his former teacher at culinary school in 2005. Johnson felt like it was meant to be.

“I’ve been in the restaurant business almost 20 years, and I have to say, I’ve been held back from things because I’m Black and because I had a record,” Johnson said. “I’ve been fighting through it ever since, personally with people in my life and work life with not being able to be promoted or to get a chance.”

In response to what other chefs and restaurants can do to engage employees and consumers in these conversations about racial inequalities,

Johnson suggests following All Square’s lead by adding menu items named after civil rights events to educate customers, or creating a 1 percent tax that goes to the Black Lives Matter movement.

“Just to be able to give people a way who don’t know how to show how they feel, a way to express it in a small way—it might not be the best way, but it’s a start, and a start is better than no start,” Johnson said. “As a father of biracial children, I want to make sure you know we don’t hate white people. We’re not trying to lump everyone together—we know the ones who are bad. But those bad apples keep popping up, and for some reason they’re not getting knocked down by other white people so we have to knock them down, which always looks bad.”

Smith added that All Square fellows have created a podcast called Squared Up to speak truth and power against racism, as well as celebrate the voices, talents and stories of those impacted by the justice system, along with those committed to reforming it.

“It’s happened to me so many times, where white people call the police on me, they pull me over and say I had a gun when I don’t,” Smith said. “I don’t think people really understand the dynamics and the things we have to go through, just coming outside...it behooves me how people can navigate in life and be oblivious if it doesn’t bother them personally.”

#### House of Gristle

Jametta Raspberry is an award-

winning Black chef who wanted to disrupt the status quo of Minnesota restaurants, which often lack equitable hiring and promotional opportunities for women and people of color. So, in January 2019 she founded House of Gristle, a pop-up catering company.

“It’s a new business model and an anti-restaurant concept,” Raspberry said. “Because of the disparities and segregation I experienced while working in restaurants, I decided to start Gristle as a clean slate in an effort to build real wealth for women and people of color chefs.”

Raspberry started conceptualizing the idea for House of Gristle six years ago after graduating from Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Minneapolis. As a single mom of two little kids

## We have some work to do

In order to determine which states have the most racial equality in terms of employment and wealth, WalletHub, a financial services company, compared the 50 states and the District of Columbia across eight key metrics. Data compares the difference between white and Black Americans in areas such as annual income, unemployment rate and homeownership rate. Minnesota’s ranking was 48th, and Wisconsin was 50th. Here is how we ranked in each of the categories:

- 49th – Median Annual Income
- 44th – Labor-Force Participation Rate
- 43rd – Unemployment Rate
- 48th – Homeownership Rate
- 48th – Poverty Rate
- 38th – Homeless Rate
- 33rd – Share of Executives

Along with this new awareness that came with the protests around the killing of George Floyd, corporations started looking at how their brand icons may have not

kept up with the changing times.

- The Land O’ Lakes Native American maiden was quietly removed from its butter packaging in mid-April;
- At the age of 131, Aunt Jemima is finally old-school enough to retire from Quaker Oats line up;
- The makers of Uncle Ben’s Rice released a statement that they also would “evolve” their logo of a Black man in light of recent events and to put an end to “racial bias and injustices;”
- The last remaining Sambo restaurant in Santa Barbara also pledged to change its name. Although the breakfast chain claimed Sambo was a combination of the owners names, the theme of the restaurant was based on the children’s book, Little Black Sambo.
- Cream of Wheat is also revisiting its logo of a Black chef on its packaging.
- And the Washington Redskins football team finally succumbed to pressure to change its name and logo. But at press time a new moniker had not been reported. [FSN](#)

—Nancy Weingartner Monroe





**Jametta Raspberry**

working at a restaurant, it took her 10 years to get a raise above \$10 an hour.

"I am super articulate and educated, and I'm a fast and quick learner and reliable, so something was wrong after a decade," Raspberry said. "Why am I not getting promoted? Why was I never nurtured to maybe be an executive chef one day? ...There was no path to build that I saw, or even any available path for me to take."

Raspberry felt the only way to survive and to earn a livable wage was to create her own restaurant model—an anti-hierarchical, lateral-based system. Having worked in the foodservice industry for 16 years as a cook and a chef, Raspberry now works with six volunteers at her start-up, which was impacted severely when COVID-19 hit because there were no events to cater. Then came the killing of George Floyd.

"This has been going on in my life the whole time, so it didn't snatch me out of my space. I anticipated and expected this to happen," Raspberry said. "I've been protesting since Trayvon Martin because my son was currently in college, and he almost reminded me of Trayvon. They looked alike. I became active that day and have been speaking out on racial injustices on the street and in the corporate world and in restaurants for many years." (Trayvon Martin was a Black 17-year-old with a bag of Skittles who was fatally shot by a neighborhood watch captain.)

Raspberry started an effort of cooking free meals to give out to community members in need. First the free lunches went to protesters, then to people cleaning up, then to volunteers who stayed up all night to help protect homes and businesses, and then to people experiencing homelessness and seeking refuge from the fires. Now, Raspberry is focusing on helping underserved youth for the rest of the summer.

"We know the kids don't have the ability to make decisions. They just get up and go," Raspberry said. "I think that resonated with me. I know regardless of what we're doing, we'll definitely have some sort of positive impact on this specific demographic."

So what can restaurants and consumers do?

"I implore people to start spending your money better and more responsibly with these restaurants. Find out if they are all inclusive and



**Rick Didora**

operating on integrity," Raspberry said. "It's not about good food anymore, you can get that anywhere. It's about supporting a responsible business, being a responsible consumer, and dismantling these things that keep certain people oppressed. We all have a duty."

**'Hearing this story more and more'**

Rick Didora, a chef who helped open St. Genevieve in South Minneapolis, has been working at Dangerous Man Brewing Company in Minneapolis for four years now. Didora immediately noticed the segregation in kitchens when he moved to Minnesota from Canada. At one restaurant he worked at, Didora was told by the executive chef that the Black chef he recommended for a promotion to sous-chef didn't want the position. It was just this summer that Didora learned that wasn't true.

"I started hearing this story more

and more," Didora said. "We have a responsibility as white chefs to not only be better, but to be actively doing the hard work in our kitchens, holding each other accountable, doing our research and being aware of our implicit biases and the system for white chefs that grooms us."

Didora is currently working on a small, boutique hotel restaurant with a lateral model, similar to Raspberry's. He has also started designing a graphic highlighting racial disparity in the restaurant industry and what actions businesses can take if they want to create anti-racist environments. The graphic features data from Restaurant Opportunities Center United, which revealed staggering disparities in the service industry in their report, "The Great Service Divide." For example, white workers hold 81 percent of front-of-house management roles and 78 percent of all front-of-house positions. Meanwhile, workers of color hold only 22 percent of front-of-house roles. Workers of color also face 56 percent lower pay than white workers with the same qualifications.

"I think the biggest part of our responsibility is to recognize our privilege and where that puts us on a trajectory to ownership and celebrity chef status," Didora said. "The second really important thing is anti-racist training and hiring policies, and actually being vigilant about creating a kitchen that's very diverse, not just having a token Black guy or token woman." **FSN**

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