



Veganism of Color

* A Starter Guide *

For People Of Color By Vegans Of Color



You already know white-centered mainstream veganism is, well, not currently aware of our struggles or compatible with our goals as people of color.

We agree...



Yet, while human and nonhuman oppression are not the same, they are justified through the same supremacist ideology that keeps both marginalized groups otherized and oppressed. Nonhumans are otherized, which means they are marginalized through a tactic whereby “others” are of “less” value compared to the “superior” way to be: human.

The same tactic is used under systemic white supremacy in which people of color are “others” and of “less” value compared to the “superior” way to be: white. The interconnections of our oppressions come to light when we acknowledge the similarities in the justifications of our oppressions and when we recognize that nonhuman-animals are used to otherize us, people of color. In essence, our oppressions are upheld by systemic supremacy. Thus, we must recognize that without nonhuman animal liberation, we will not find our own.



Why Veganism of Color?

People of color don't have to follow the "master playbook" (D. Moore 2017) of supremacy that is systematically used against us. Veganism has never been more accessible, and as people of color, we also need to be aware of our own hand in oppression and supremacy. Speciesism is fueled by human supremacy, which draws a line between humans and nonhumans assuming that nonhumans are less than when they are simply beings with their own communities, languages, and abilities incomparable to humans. Veganism of color acknowledges that it's not an "us" versus "them". Black vegan authors Aph and Syl Ko (Aphro-ism 2017) delineated the fact that the classification system of human vs. animal is an idea founded on white male rationale. What if we finally oppose the idea that human and animals are opposite and begin to recognize the interrelatedness of oppression and the idea that humans are animals and that animals are also individuals on their own instead of a lump sum group that we see collectively as "them"? Then we will finally begin to break the cycle of oppression that is kept in place through a system still supported by white supremacy.

It is imperative that we embrace a social justice approach that is consistent in its anti-oppression stance on behalf of both humans and non-humans.

Mainstream, white-centered veganism does not define our commitment to ethics that are inclusive of all. Veganism is a lifestyle and a tool that we can use to fight against the oppression of nonhumans from humans. Veganism of color acknowledges speciesism and attempts to work against it in the same way that we work to counter our own oppression and the oppression of other marginalized human communities.

Oppression is oppression regardless of species. Nonhumans deserve justice and to live free from abuse and exploitation. Nonhumans have the right to their freedom and to live life on their own terms. They have a right to their own bodies and their young. They are not "less than" any more than we are to our own oppressors.

While nonhumans are the reason behind veganism, the benefits of a vegan lifestyle and a plant-based diet also help fight our own oppression through several ways:

Environment

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics included in their most recent report (2016) that, “Plant-based diets are more environmentally sustainable than diets rich in animal products because they use fewer natural resources and are associated with much less environmental damage.”

The United Nations has already proclaimed (since 2010) that humans must adopt plant-based diets in order to fight world hunger, poverty, and the worst impacts of climate change. The report explained that, “Impacts from agriculture are expected to increase substantially due to population growth increasing consumption of animal products. Unlike fossil fuels, it is difficult to look for alternatives: people have to eat. A substantial reduction of impacts would only be possible with a substantial worldwide diet change, away from animal products.”



The Food and Agriculture Organization outlined the disastrous environmental impacts in their report titled “Livestock’s Long Shadow.” Animal agriculture and the fishing industry are responsible for grave ecological damage, pollution, land degradation, and many more impacts to our environment. The UN’s report lead scientist, Professor Edgar Hertwich explained that, “Animal products cause more damage than [producing] construction minerals such as sand or cement, plastics or metals Biomass and crops for animals are as damaging as [burning] fossil fuels.”



Our law-makers are lagging in leading the way against climate change and the destruction of our planet, which is the only one we have. Therefore, it is up to us to do as much as we can in our daily lives to preserve the planet for future generations, as well as ensure that we protect the most vulnerable communities of color from environmental devastation. People of color abroad depend on those of us with more privilege and ability to act.

Worker's Rights

While vegans of color are aware that veganism alone is not cruelty-free in itself, adopting veganism also means acknowledging that animal agriculture also violates worker's rights. Embracing a vegan stance also works towards recognizing and standing up against the abuses that slaughterhouse workers, commonly people of color, are exposed to and/or forced into. PTSD and other psychological trauma, having to wear diapers due to extremely limited breaks, high rates of injury due to high stress and high-speed work conditions are but a few ways that workers are affected and abused. Animal slaughter is big business kept alive by consumers.

Decolonize

The overreliance on nonhuman animals and their introduction to our lands and diet was forced on many communities of color upon colonization. People of color have begun to embrace their people's traditional diets, which were low impact, heavily plant-based, and "of the land" – a far cry from the exploitative abusive factory farms that have become detrimental to nonhumans and humans world-wide. Thus, to embrace plant-based diets and veganism is to reject the colonialism that affects a large part of our existence. This is to decolonize – to realign ourselves with our lost traditions and cultures. To embrace decolonization is also to reject supremacy. Embracing a vegan lifestyle is to take the next step in order to fully reject human supremacy while aligning our values with the awareness that we must tread lighter for the health of our planet.



Health

Major organizations across the world have released statements in support of plant-based diets at all stages of life. Specifically, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (2016) released a report that stated, "...that appropriately planned vegetarian, including vegan, diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. These diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood and for athletes." The report assured us that, "Vegetarians and vegans are at reduced risk of certain health conditions, including ischemic heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, certain types of cancer, and obesity. Low intake of saturated fat and high intakes of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, soy products, nuts, and seeds (all rich in fiber and phytochemicals) are characteristics of vegetarian and vegan diets that produce lower total and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol levels and better serum glucose control. These factors contribute to reduction of chronic disease."

Therefore, plant-based diets are safe, typically healthier than standard diets, and may help reverse and prevent diet related illnesses.



How-to Vegan

Plant-Based Eating – A Quick Guide

Minerals & Vitamins

It's absolutely possible to get everything you need from a plant-based diet!

When making the switch to veganism, you just have to make sure to find replacements for sources of iron, calcium, zinc, B12, Vitamin D, and fatty acids.

Calcium

Milk products from cows are not the only sources of calcium. Many vegetables, including spinach, broccoli, and kale, are high in calcium. Foods such as legumes and calcium-set tofu are also good sources, and many plant milks are also fortified with calcium. Supplements are also an option.

Iron

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends, "...to focus on good sources of non-heme iron, such as iron-fortified breads and cereals, beans and lentils, raisins, and blackstrap molasses, along with good sources of vitamin C, like tomatoes and citrus fruits for optimal iron absorption, and cooking in cast iron pans."

B12

It is important to secure a source of vitamin B12 when switching to a vegan lifestyle. You can ensure that you are getting enough B12 from fortified foods, such as plant milks, or from supplements. Teens and adults only need very little – 2.4 mcg per day, for example. Do consult a registered dietician's advice and your medical professional to match your needs.



Vitamin D

It's important that all people, whether vegan or not, get enough vitamin D. You can get vitamin D from fortified foods, supplements, or good old daily sun exposure.

Protein

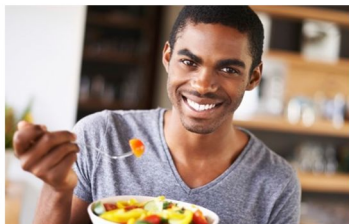
The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics confirmed that "Vegetarian diets that include a variety of plant products provide the same protein quality as diets that include meat. Protein consumed from a variety of plant foods supplies an adequate quantity of essential amino acids when caloric intake is met."

Therefore, variety is key when it comes to plant-based diets! Tofu, tempeh, beans, lentils, chickpeas, nuts, seeds, meat alternatives, as well as certain plants themselves are good sources of protein.



Fatty Acids

Make sure you also have a good source of fatty acids. Some plant foods to incorporate into your diet for fatty acids are flax seeds (ground), chia seeds (soaked), and canola oil (in cooking) to name a few.



The above is a short overview of the many nutrients that are available from plants. It is recommended that you consult with a registered dietician and/or your medical professional before making any big changes, especially if you are on special medications. You may also find it helpful to read more in detail information on plant-based vegan diets from vegan registered dietician, Ginny Messina from theveganrd.com and The Vegetarian Resource Group via vrg.org. The Facebook group "Ask a Vegan Dietician", run by Mark Rifkin, will also answer diet related questions free of charge.



Not Just About Food!

While many nonvegans may automatically think that veganism is about food, it is important to recognize that animal exploitation occurs beyond food and veganism opposes all forms of animal exploitation. The main animal exploitation industries include:

Food (meat, including fish and invertebrates, eggs, dairy, honey, etc.)

Animal Testing (for medication, cosmetics, cleaners, etc.)

Clothing (leather, fur, wool, feathers, skins, etc.)

Entertainment (zoos, circuses, aquariums, seaquariums, dog and horse racing, horse riding, etc.)

Companion Animals (i.e. pets, breeders, adopt - don't shop!)

While veganism is practiced "as possible" since we do live in a nonvegan world, things like medication, formula, and vaccines are a gray area since no alternatives currently exist. As for the rest, alternatives exist and for many of us, are typically easily accessible when it comes to food, clothing, and buying products and cosmetics not tested on animals, for example. Entertainment can be replaced with animal-free acrobat circuses, state park and national park trips, visits to nature centers or wildlife hospitals that may have permanent residents you may be able to visit for workshops on making your community wildlife friendlier, farm animal sanctuaries, and many other options. As for companion animals, there are many dogs, cats, rabbits, and other species awaiting their forever homes in pounds and refuges across the world. Make a commitment to never buy animals while shelter pets continue to die.

As with any major change, a lifestyle change will take a few weeks to adjust to. There are countless support groups on social media by vegans of color for people of color. You just have to seek us out!



Accessibility & Interconnections

While there are root issues that prevent many communities of color from accessing healthy foods and a vegan lifestyle, for those with the privilege to do so, adopting a vegan lifestyle, on top of the work we are committed to doing across other social justice movements, is a step towards disbanding root issues that also affect us.

Many communities of color live in areas very much affected by animal agriculture or in areas like food deserts and swamps, where access to healthy food just isn't available at this point in time. The end result is that we find communities that suffer greatly from diet related conditions due to systematic oppression and of course, colonialism. And while veganism would not solve these issues directly, it does help address issues related to human oppression.



Even though veganism still entails a dependency on farm workers, plant-based diets reduce the demand and impact of worker abuses in oppressive institutions such as slaughterhouses, which heavily impact and rely on immigrant workers. Thus, rejecting animal agriculture is taking a stance against nonhuman exploitation and slaughterhouse worker exploitation. Along the same line, the majority of plant crops grown are used as feed for animals used for food. Thus, embracing a vegan lifestyle and plant-based diet means, less exploitation related to food agriculture and less destruction of land in places like the Brazilian Amazon, which is typically used as land for grazing animals such as cattle. This also impacts wildlife and Indigenous people displaced by the pressure imposed by “developed” countries for their massive demands for animal agriculture.

In other areas of the world, animal farms are typically in close proximity to low income communities. This means that these communities are affected by pollution due to animal waste. Laws also protect farmers over wildlife, which means top predators, needed to keep healthy habitats, are routinely killed on behalf of a farmer's livestock.

These are but a few examples of issues directly and indirectly linking humans and nonhuman oppression. Yes, we still have a way to go with regards to solving food justice issues and accessibility. However, relinquishing nonhuman animal foods and by-products means more resources for human communities considering we have enough resources to feed the entire human population. Unfortunately, most of those resources are currently being fed to livestock.



Veganism, in our work against oppression and towards our own liberation, is but one aspect towards consistent anti-oppression and liberation for all. Your journey can start here...

Recipes, Resources, & Further Reading

Check out www.veganismofcolor.com for an extensive list of organizations, blogs, books, projects, podcasts, and more to get you started on your journey and to read more about consistent anti-oppression. All by vegans of color FOR people of color.

About the Author

Julia Feliz Brueck, juliafeliz.com, is a decade-long vegan, published author and illustrator, as well as the founder of Sanctuary Publishers, sanctuarypublishers.com, a vegan publisher helping to raise the voices of nonhumans and other marginalized communities.



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**Vegans for Consistent
Anti-Oppression**

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