



Our Hen House

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Interview with stic.man and Afya Ibomu

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **STIC.MAN AND AFYA IBOMU** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 200.*

JASMIN: Thankfully our guests today are thinking way outside the box with music, and they're bringing lots of animal rights messages and veganism to their amazing platform. And we're talking about Dead Prez, and specifically stic.man and his lovely partner in life, Afya Ibomu. And they are truly paving the way for new vegans and animal rights ambassadors to embrace the message, and they're doing it in a unique and refreshing style.

MARIANN: Yeah, I'm totally impressed by them, their knowledge, of particularly the health benefits of veganism and the impact it's had on their own lives, and also broadening that to the social influences of the horrors of the standard American diet on people, and then conveying that musically. It's just a great package.

JASMIN: Dead Prez.

Dead Prez is a hip hop duo composed of stic.man and M1, formed in 1996 in New York City. They are known for their confrontational style combined with socialist lyrics focused on both militant social justice and Pan-Africanism. The duo maintains an ethical stance against corporate control over the media, especially hip hop record labels. Stic.man is an American rapper, activist, and author. His wife, Afya Ibomu, is a holistic nutritionist, author, and the CEO of [nattral.com](#), and has been a vegetarian since 1990. Her third book, *The Vegan Soulfood Guide to the Galaxy*, was nominated for an African-American Literary Award for Cookbook of the Year. Afya is certified in Holistic Health and holds a bachelor's degree in Nutrition. She is also the author of *Get Your Crochet On* pattern book series that have sold over 20,000 copies. Afya is a celebrity nutritionist and crochet designer, and she works with hip hop artists such as Erykah Badu, Common, Talib Kweli, and of course Dead Prez. Afya and Stic currently live in Atlanta with their 12-year-old son, Etwela.

Welcome to Our Hen House!

STIC: Salute, salute!

AFYA: Hey, peace! This is Afya of [nattral.com](#). Great to be here.

JASMIN: It's so great to have you guys. We're thrilled to have you on Episode 200 here. Stic, how long have you been vegan, and what first motivated you?

STIC: Oh man. I was a vegan for about 10 years or so, and my wife, Afya, motivated me. I came down with a condition in my leg in my early 20s from drinking and smoking and eating meat and hot dogs and all that, and it was called gout.

MARIANN: Wow.

STIC: And my wife told me that she had been a vegetarian, and that plant foods can heal you, and so she said, "let's not get no prescriptions filled or whatever; let's go vegan." And we did. I cured the gout naturally, and then I became, like, you know, joined a kung fu class, and we got into a whole lot more great things as far as our healthy lifestyle. But it was actually the gout and Afya's motivation that helped me become plant-based.

MARIANN: Wow, that is a great story. It's really inspiring how many illnesses can be cured just by a healthy diet. Afya, how did you get started?

AFYA: Well, I've been a vegetarian 23 years and a vegan for 17. And I used to be really sick as a kid, like, asthma, allergies, irritable bowel syndrome, chronic dehydration, just so many things, and just on like eight different medications a day. I took allergy shots every single week, and just getting tired of that, seeing that none of these things were really helping me. And then my mom found an allergy specialist that said it might be the food that I was eating, and that was the first time I really related food to health, and I became a vegetarian. I wasn't a very healthy vegetarian; I was just 15 when that happened. But when we moved to New York, when he got gout, we met this sister named Queen Afua, and I was like, "we're vegans now," and just we started the whole natural, holistic, herbs, cleansing diet and lifestyle.

MARIANN: So, Stic, your entire career has shown that you clearly view the world as being in need of some serious structural change. Your work is very political. Would you say that veganism and food politics are a crucial part of revolutionary change, and can you explain how?

STIC: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's where it begins and ends, in terms of how we take care of ourselves, how we take care of each other, and how we sustain our energy, our health. All these things create a consciousness and develop our being, because we can change leaders, we can change one -ism to a different -ism, and we can go back and forth with that, but once you have that revolution of realization about health and your fitness and your diet, and organic food, how that affects the soil, the planet, how it affects the body, how it treats illness, how it does all these things, you start seeing it as central. And you know there's a lot of politics, there's a lot of different sides to a lot of things, but the one universal thing we have on this planet in common is our health. So, I think if we're talking about revolutionary change that's gonna reach the political level, then people have to be educated and inspired to know that they are worth having freedom, that they are worth the best of life, that they are worth... and it's possible, and you don't need all the money in the world, and you don't need to control and dominate all the resources. So, it's a step by step process, but I think the lasting sustainable change is the one that comes from that inner inspiration to take care of yourself and your community.

JASMIN: That's really well said. Now, Stic, can you talk about the influence of corporate food, especially fast food chains, like KFC and McDonald's?

STIC: Oh man. We call McDonalds Crack Donalds.

MARIANN: Hah, yeah.

STIC: And Burger King is Murder King.

JASMIN: Mm-hm.

STIC: And then you got Taco Hell, and the list goes on. These are what have been coined recently as things that you find in food deserts. And it's called a food desert, which is basically inner city communities, and places that don't have access to live produce and fresh vegetables and things like that and fruits. But on every corner, there's either a bodega or some fast food restaurant with a whole bunch of chemically preserved macronutrients, right? And a whole bunch of animal protein, and all of these things that the meat industry and the fast food industry have paid and whatever else they've done, the McMafia basically, to lobby government to -- even down to the food pyramid that we grew up learning in school, and how they promoted all the need for animal protein and dairy and all this amount of milk, and all this stuff that they pumped in our heads, and then the commercials on Saturday that we got pumped into, you need your milk for your cereal, and just all this stuff. This is a world wide, like I said, McMafia, of control, of addiction through chemicals in food, and of cheap food that wreaks havoc on the body.

And the American health crisis is a perfect evidence and perfect example. The wealthiest country, we're number one in heart disease, number one in cancer, number one in all of these food-related illnesses. So, it's definitely a war for our health. And the approach is not a pull-out guns and getting harmed and cause other people harm. The approach is to radicalize our diets, radicalize our choices, radicalize our awareness, so that we basically hit them where it hurts most, in the pocket. If we don't buy it, if we don't support it, if we use alternatives and we have local co-ops and local herbs and gardens and farms, and we generate alternatives, we can neutralize those things in a positive way.

MARIANN: We're so with you, and it is just so empowering to think this is one issue that's so important individually and globally, that we can really take control of. Another issue that I think either of you might address is that -- another issue on the global level is that many would argue that by feeding all of our grain to animals so that we can eat the animals, we're using up food that could feed the hungry all over the world. Is this one of your motivators for encouraging people to go vegan?

AFYA: Definitely because not only is the grain being grown to feed animals, it's causing an issue with the environment in general, and our health in general, because one, they're using a lot of genetically modified foods that feed the grains that they feed the animals, and then people who eat the animals are having issues with that. And then also, we're having the allergy issues that is here in the United States that's worse than anywhere in the world is due to the fact of the genetically modified foods that are here from corn, soy protein. So, that is definitely something that we do focus on and help to raise awareness to is genetically modified foods as well.

MARIANN: Yeah, there are so many political issues around food.

JASMIN: Afya, tell us about *The Vegan Soulfood Guide to the Galaxy*, which is the best title for a book ever, by the way. It's a cookbook, but it's more than that, right?

AFYA: Yeah, it's a cookbook and guide. So, being a vegetarian for 23 years and a vegan for 17, I've gotten a million questions. So, my goal for this book was to answer pretty much all the questions that I've ever gotten about how to be a healthy vegan. How can I make this a part of my lifestyle, as well as how can I have good, soulful recipes that taste good and that are easy to make? So, the book is called *The Vegan Soulfood Guide to the Galaxy*. It comes with a DVD called *Pimp My Tofu*, so that teaches you how to make -- I show you how to make tofu three different ways there. I talk about nutrients. A lot of times vegans can take everything out of their diet; they don't add things back in. They can become deficient and then say, "you know what? Veganism didn't work for me," so I really go into the nutrient part and how to be healthy. What's going on in the meat and dairy industry, why you want to choose to be vegan, as well as where to shop, what to buy when you go to the grocery store, how do you even know what to buy from seaweed to whole grains, natural sweeteners, and then where can you shop anywhere, where can you eat anywhere in the world as a vegan? A lot of times you feel like, "you know what? I'm vegan. I can't eat out anymore, I can't enjoy myself, I can't go out with my family." But I'll show you where you can eat out from Caribbean, Mexican, Indian, Italian, Ethiopian, all different restaurants and what kind of foods to order when you get there.

STIC: Yeah.

AFYA: And there's recipes, like candied yams, collard greens, cornbread, sweet potato pie, potato salad, all the things we love, but no white rice, white flour, or white sugar. So, it's really a comprehensive guide as well as a cookbook.

MARIANN: That sounds amazing. And one of the things we love about both of you is that Our Hen House is all about inspiring people to use their talents and skills to change the world for animals, and both of you are doing so much with your personal talents. And we've always been deeply inspired by how Dead Prez is focused on big issues such as healthy living and food justice and global poverty and the environment. But the two songs in particular, the Dead Prez song, "Be Healthy," and your song, "Food Fight," directly address food issues in such an empowering way. Stic, do you find there's a lot of resistance to thinking of food as a political issue?

STIC: No, I don't. I get asked that question a lot. Like, I feel so empowered, I'm so motivated, I'm inspired. Everywhere I go I see people giving me like, "oh man, I stopped smoking, I did this, I haven't eaten no chicken, I'm running now." Like, all I see is people changing their lives, and that's what I focus on, because so often we can fixate on problems instead of fixing them. So, I try to have a solution-based mindset 'cause I know I can't do everything. I know the world has been the way it's been a long time, but I know that if we focus our energy, we can be helpful, right? So, that's what I see.

When I see people with -- my mother, for example, was diabetic and on insulin. And they were talking about, it's gonna get worse and worse and she has to do that for the rest of her life. And by us introducing her to a vegan, plant-based lifestyle, by us introducing her to hot yoga on Saturday mornings and acupuncture, in a matter of some weeks, a couple months, she's been, for about two or three years now, not on insulin, happy, healthy, singing, painting, acting, everything. And just small shifts. We didn't need big pharmaceuticals and none of that. But they were gonna have her addicted to that lifestyle, and we saw that change in our own lives just by love and some awareness and some discipline. So, man, I'm what they call Jehovah fitness. Yeah, I don't feel intimidated or frustrated at all.

JASMIN: I want to hang out with your mom. She sounds like a cool lady. Stic, in “Food Fight,” you make a pretty clear comparison between junk food and drugs. How do they fit together for you?

STIC: Very -- literally, junk food and drugs fit together because junk food is basically sugar. And sugar is one of the most addictive drugs. Or I should say, processed, white, refined sugar because the body runs off sugar, we convert everything to sugar. So, this is what the game is, is keep you coming back, so they put all kinds of different chemicals in food that stimulate us to crave it again. And the drug game is not just crack and mollies, which is bad enough, but the more deadly is the unseen drug game from the hormones in the meats and you name it. So, part of the education that we do with RBG Fit Club is to change the, shift the perspective on what we've been taught, and to shift that so that we can realize, “oh, okay, when I say I'm drug-free, what am I saying?”

AFYA: And just like drugs have an effect on your liver and on your kidneys and over time can cause liver and kidney failure, so can soda, so can artificial sweeteners and colors and flavors. All of those things can lead to so many different health issues from attention deficit disorder, diabetes, so they do have a very similar effect as pharmaceutical drugs, and other types of drugs as well on the body.

MARIANN: You know, Afya, food traditions are really, really important to people, and you alluded to this before in talking about some of your recipes. And you know, a lot of traditional soul food recipes are very meat-heavy, and people cling to those traditions. How do you encourage folks to hold onto the tradition while moving in a healthy direction?

AFYA: Well, we just came back from a festival, the Yoga Jubilee Peace Festival in Ohio. And I did a whole segment and cooking class on Healthy Holladays Vegan Style. We made barbecue tofu, coconut collard greens, and maple-baked candied yams. So, at the end of the day it's about food that tastes good and that people are familiar with. There were two young black men there; they were in high school, and they loved the food. I asked them, “what do you guys eat for soul food?” They were like, “Fried chicken, ribs,” and then I made the meal, and they were like, “This is so good.” I think at the end of the day, it's about making food that's good, that people are familiar with, and that they can say, you know what? This is something that I could eat on a regular basis. It's all about flavor and things that people are used to.

STIC: And also, a lot of people are concerned, will they lose weight? Especially men. They say, “well, where am I getting my protein?” and all these kinds of things. So, we, my wife and I, and my trainer, Scott Shetler, we are currently writing a book now about -- and I'm the guinea pig, as an all plant-based diet, and I'm putting on 20 pounds of muscle. And we're journaling it and we're gonna share that. But people who are -- you know, I'm a slim frame naturally, so people who are hard gainers. Not only are we doing it plant-based, but it's all whole foods, no powders, no supplements, not even vitamins. And on top of that, I'm also a runner, a marathon distance, long-distance runner, and I'm not stopping that. So, my metabolism is like Kilimanjaro high, right? And it's all plant-based, and we're on this journey, 20 pounds of muscles, and then we're gonna share that in a new book that we're putting together. So, we're just staying proactive with results-driven information.

JASMIN: That is so exciting. Stic, people often say that veganism is elitist and expensive. You recently shared a must-read article, really, in the Huffington Post called “Seven Ways

to Eat Good on a Hood Budget.” Can you give us a glimpse into how people can be vegan and healthy on a budget?

STIC: Right on! Well, working with my wife all these years, I've learned a lot from her savviness in shopping and gardening and just everything related to health, and life period, really. So, that article was just some of the things that I've learned and we've figured out. For example, produce is the healthiest thing in the grocery store, and also the cheapest, pound for pound. A cup of blueberries or whatever, compared to a pack of M&Ms, you know what I'm saying? The health and the cost, you're gonna save. But also, so, produce, getting produce instead of packaged goods is a way to save money. Another way is to cook in bulk, cook for the week, right? So, you don't have to eat out a lot or et cetera, and it'll save you time. Freezing your foods allows things not to spoil and get wasted, and you can pop them back in. And my wife has this awesome campaign called Drink Water that she can tell you more about some things she's been able to do in Africa with bringing water. But that was number seven on the list is drink more water, 'cause we spend a whole lot of money buying all these sodas and sugary drinks and 5-Hour Energy, and all these expensive things. But water is the most powerful life force that we have, so just drinking more water keeps us more full and it gives us the kind of energy that our body really is looking for, so...

MARIANN: That's all really great advice. Like, I think it's amazing how people tend to forget that there are a lot of foods that are actually vegan, like produce, the most basic foods we are. They just tend to think of the specialty foods, but so many of the healthiest foods that we eat all the time are vegan.

STIC: Yeah.

MARIANN: And Afya, I would love to hear about your water project, and we also want to hear about your website, Natral.com. Can you tell people what they can find there?

AFYA: Sure. My site, Natral.com, is just a culmination of our life, living naturally, so there is recipes, there's health tips, I have videos, cooking demonstrations, ways to heal yourself naturally, so it's a whole gamut of things. Plus, we have products for sale as well. And one of our programs and campaigns is Drink Water. So, we wanted to promote the health benefits of drinking water, as well as -- part of the proceeds, if you buy any of our shirts or water bottles of our Drink Water campaign, part of the proceeds goes to getting clean water in Africa. And we're working with a village in Namatete, Malawi, and one of our campaigns has helped to get a water pump in a village in an orphanage there, as well as food and helped to build, helped some of the buildings get repaired. And that is really just the beginning of the program. Over time, we're gonna try to get rainwater collectors, as well as help them to get a garden, because a lot of times they are malnourished. So, the pump is good for right now to help them get water, but over time we want to make sure that they're having the food and nutrition and water that they need on a regular basis. So, that is something we're very proud of 'cause we just got that. Maybe about two months ago, we put the water pump in.

MARIANN: I love that project, and I love how it brings it all -- you know, food is such a completely local issue. It's a personal issue and yet it's a global issue, and that really brings that home.

JASMIN: It really does. What can you do, what can people do to help keep their kids healthy, with all of the food temptations out there and with so many of the other kids around them eating animals and eating junk food?

AFYA: I think it starts at home. Our son was raised vegan, and you, as a parent, have to be an example. If I'm buying candy, that's what my son is gonna want to eat. So, at the end of the day, you really just can't bring in a lot of junk food into your house. It starts by cooking. Even if you eat out, in my book I talk about many different restaurants that you can go to and foods that you can get that are healthier for you. And then kids, honestly kids want simple foods. A lot of times kids don't want a lot of their food mixed together, they don't want it touching. They don't want all different sauces. They want real, simple, whole foods. And I think if we start there, they would like that. And then you can have things, like you can make your own cookies, you can make your own granola bars. That's what I do for my son. A lot of times, when he goes to a party or whatever, I just have to make food for him, and I'll ask them ahead of time, like, "what are you guys gonna have?" And then I'll have him something similar to that. But then when they get older, all you can do is really have a great foundation for them, and it's gonna be up to them at a certain point for them to make healthy choices. But it starts at home.

STIC: And if all else fails, learn jiu-jitsu, pin them down, and pour the green juice down their throat.

JASMIN: Noted!

AFYA: But our son is so like used to a plate. Like, we eat a green vegetable with every single meal, and if there's not a green vegetable on a plate, he's asking like, "Where's the greens? I can't believe we don't have greens today!" So, it starts at home. It definitely starts at home.

JASMIN: That's great. Yeah, and the other kids always wind up wanting the special thing that you made for yours. I mean, that's what I see with my friends who have vegan kids. It's always like, "ooh, what does he have?" I'm like that, I want what the kids have. That's inappropriate. I shouldn't be stealing food from kids anymore.

AFYA: Oh, that's true! That's true. If you make it like cute and in a nice little box or whatever, that makes kids even more interested instead of just like, you know, I just got a sandwich on some white bread. You make something like interesting, it looks fun and cute, people and kids will like that.

JASMIN: Yeah. I guess my final question for both of you is -- not to put you on the spot, but allow me to put you on the spot. What did you have for breakfast this morning?

STIC: Let's see, I was up first, right? So, first thing I had was 16 ounces of water. And the reason I know this so meticulously is because we're writing this book and I'm journaling everything I eat. So, I had 16 ounces of water and then I had a green juice, which was mostly spinach with a pear and some hemp seeds, basically a lemon. And then I went and I did a seven-mile run, which was an interesting run this morning because I got bit by a dog while I was running.

JASMIN: Oh, no!

MARIANN: God.

STIC: But that's another story. And then--

JASMIN: Wait, hang on, was the dog okay?

STIC: Yeah, he's okay. Yeah.

JASMIN: Sorry. I know, are you okay?

STIC: You know, I'm made out of Atlantean steel, so I hope his teeth is all right. But yeah, we kept running. It was real quick. He just kind of decided, let me leap at you, and I tried to protect myself with an elbow, and he caught my elbow.

JASMIN: Yikes.

STIC: And we kept it moving. But it was all good, but after that I had a Moringa Green shake. And Moringa is packed with all kind of minerals and vitamins and protein and good stuff, and so I had that. And then I got some fresh kale and some barbecue tofu.

JASMIN: Yum, wow. I'm coming over for breakfast tomorrow, just so you know. Afya, what did you have?

AFYA: I had -- every morning, I usually have a cup of tea. I have peppermint tea with agave and almond milk. And then I had some leftover spaghetti that had spinach in it with some gluten-free brown rice noodles.

JASMIN: That sounds great. I just want to say on a personal note, I've been vegan for 10 years and I actually started out as a junk-food vegan, and when I switched over to become a whole-foods-based vegan, I lost about 100 pounds. And I also took up running, and so it's really inspiring for me to hear about all this, and you're giving me all kinds of ideas of things to incorporate into my morning routine, but not the dog bite. Maybe a dog cuddle or something like that, or I'll make out with my dog, but no biting.

STIC: Yeah, man, and I'm working on -- I did an album, I don't know if your audience may be familiar, but I did an album called The Workout, which is new hip hop music, no cursing, no profanity, all dedicated to health and fitness and wellness. And each track is kind of like featuring a different discipline or a different part of the lifestyle. So on the Workout 1, there's "Runners High" for long-distance runners, there's "Yoga Mat" for the yoga students, weight-lifting training, martial arts-inspired tracks, vegetarianism, sobriety, people who are letting the weed and the alcohol and all these other things go. Just a holistic panoramic view of wellness is what I did with the first one. And I'm currently working on Workout 2 for early 2014.

JASMIN: Wonderful.

STIC: So, if anyone is interested, rbgfitclub.com is our site for all things we're doing with the movement and the music, so I just wanted to share that.

JASMIN: No, that's great. I mean, there are a lot of corporate influences encouraging people to eat bad food. But this is an issue that people can take into our own hands, and I suppose that was the message you were trying to get across in "Be Healthy"?

STIC: Yeah. This is like, you know people always say this is something-something on steroids?

JASMIN: Mm-hm.

STIC: Well, since I don't promote steroids, I won't say it's on steroids. But I will say the Workout album is like "Be Healthy" on wheatgrass.

MARIANN: That's great.

STIC: You know what I mean? It's a whole album of that, but high intensity and you can actually put it in while you're training. So...

JASMIN: Well, this is so cool. I'm so excited and inspired, and hungry, suddenly. So, I just want to thank both of you so much for all that you do. You really are changing the world and you're taking something that is, as Mariann said, such a personal issue, and making it so global, and also empowering people to get involved in this kind of change making in our own lives. So, it thrills me to know about everything you're doing, and I really am so grateful to both of you for joining us for our very special 200th episode, so thank you.

AFYA: Thanks for having us.

STIC: Yeah, y'all stay being plant-based bosses and what y'all doing.

JASMIN: Awesome. Thank you.