

Arnetia Fogg Dupree

Mon, 3/30 12:04PM 36:06

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

folks, people, feels, candidates, electing, community, important, build, conversation, point, political, question, strategies, work, black women, running, world, electoral, country, opportunity

SPEAKERS

Omkari Williams, Arnetia Fogg Dupree



Omkari Williams 00:00

Hello and welcome to Stepping Into Truth. I'm your host Omkari Williams and, especially in this stressful pandemic time, I am grateful that you are spending time with me. This is the podcast where we have conversations about Race, Gender, and Social Justice. These conversations are always important but in this particular time they seem especially significant as we grapple with places where our systems have broken down. My guest today is on the front lines of addressing the systemic inequities in her work to get Black women elected to political office. Arnetia Fogg Dupree is the Electoral Justice Program Manager at Three Point Strategies. She visions, coordinates, and drives their candidate work in partnership with its Founder, Jessica Byrd. Arnetia's work focuses on electing Black women across the country, by building and strategizing with their teams through election day. Changing policy is still one of the most powerful ways to address systemic injustice and representation matters. The work that Arnetia and Three Point Strategies do is a critical piece of electing people to office who will bring policy change and more equitable representation to our political offices.



Omkari Williams 00:00

I'm so happy to have our Arnetia on the podcast with me today. Welcome Arnetia.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 00:00

Thank you so much. Thank you for having me.



Omkari Williams 00:08

Okay, so when I was lying in bed this morning, and I have to say that this is the first day since we went into a stay at home order during this pandemic shut down. I'm in Illinois. This is the first day that I actually had a hard time getting out of bed. This is sort of the day I guess, where it really landed on me just the weight of this. So this conversations probably going to be a little different than the conversation we would have had a month ago. Because the world is so different. And it's impacting not only us as individuals, but how we all work. So I'm going to ask you to just roll with me here.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 00:52

Okay. Okay, cool.



Omkari Williams 00:53

But to give people context, I'd like you to talk about the work that you do normally on, a day to day basis when the situation isn't what it is. And tell people about Three Point Strategies and how that came to be.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 01:11

Absolutely. So Three Point Strategies. We are a political firm dedicated to serving Black people and electing Black women. Our firm came about in 2015 following the killing of Michael Brown. Our brave and fearless leader Jessica Byrd founded Three Point Strategies to really address the question that she had around whether there was a middle point where electoral politics and transformative social justice met. And so, I think that that's a really important focal point around why we started because it influences so much of the work that we do, how we engage with community and really what keeps us motivated and keeps us keeps us going. So my position at Three Point Strategies is to manage our candidate program. And so every day I'm on the phone with Black women who are running for office. I am strategizing and building coalition with their campaign staff. I'm working with our partners and our wonderfully brilliant team at Three Point to figure out the best ways to plan and build out races throughout election cycles. And so some of that involves capacity building. So that means that I will embed myself on a campaign and serve as a person who will fulfill fundraising or communications needs

where it's fit. And that also means that we will go to different cities and we will train folks one of the biggest projects that we work on with the collective is Black Campaign School. That is where we meet so many brilliant you know, Black folks running for office Black folks seeking to become operatives. It's a lot of how we build community in this space. And it really is a great, great opportunity for folks to learn more about politics and how to truly build an operation from the ground up.



Omkari Williams 03:17

That's amazing. I yeah, I love what you're saying here, because it feels like, Oh, yeah, you know, this is something that is so very important. We need to have representation of Black people in our government from all levels from the very, very, very local, all the way to federal levels. And so it's really interesting to me what you're doing. And the immediate question I have now is, how have you all adapted in this time of social distancing and people not traveling and people not going out and knocking on doors and so on?



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 03:59

Yeah, so it is a bit of a transition. I will say that for a lot of the political shifts in the shifts around culture that we see, they really do for a large amount of young people already start and exist digitally and on AI. And so there is an existing community there, which really does, you know, provide a soft, you know, sort of foundation for folks to build on. I think what's going to become really important in the next couple of months are for organizations and candidates and organizers to really tap into spaces where we are valuing creative folks. Where we are valuing folks who create art and who build digitally and where we are not just tapping them for their brilliance and leaving, but that we are really providing actual compensation and safe places for them to build out. Things that are really going to sit and land well, with our folks and be sustainable, right? So because so many of our folks are going to be, you know, more online than they are out in the world and knocking doors, we're really going to have to create sustainable things online that are going to keep folks attention. And so I think really tapping into the creative, the creative side of the political space, and really just paying our digital folks what they're worth, what their brilliance is worth, and having more accurate and intentional conversations about the best ways to get folks attention and keeping it.



Omkari Williams 05:42

That's really interesting that you say that for me because a lot of the work that I did before I sort of moved into this and I still do, to a lesser extent, was around creativity

training and creativity coaching and getting people to bring their specific creativity into all aspects of their lives, because that's really nourishing. So that you're using that as a way of helping people who are running for office, connect with people who are there, their potential constituents feels so rich, because it feels like you're bringing more of who your candidates are as people into the process. They're not just now running for office. It's like you get to see a whole nother side of them, a whole experience of them that you might not otherwise have. And it seems like an amazing opportunity in a way to to expand how we engage with people in public office or potentially in public office.

A

Arnetia Fogg Dupree 06:51

Absolutely, absolutely. And one of the things that we believe in so much at Three Point is we are always encouraging... two things actually. We always run our candidates as the front runner, no matter what. And the second is that we always encourage our candidates to be their most authentic selves. And so we I think that this is, like you said, a really unique opportunity for folks to experience, you know, political candidates and electoral folks in a really unique way. And I think it's an addition to that, it's an opportunity for us to appreciate the real labor that goes into the creative space in the digital space. That really, like I said before, truly shifts culture. I mean, that is just something that is so undeniable. Movements are really, you know, strong movements are really made digitally and online these days. And so I think that really tapping those folks and just again, uplifting them and allowing them and elevating them and allowing them to create things that really will bring out the kinds of numbers that we're going to need in November.



Omkari Williams 07:54

I think it's really interesting that you also are so clear about paying people, especially right now for the creative work that they're doing. Because a lot of the conversation you know, right now people are completely and justifiably freaked out about money. You know, how am I going to pay my bills? How am I going to keep food on the table, and people often undervalue the creative realm. And those people are doing amazing work. And I really appreciate that you are saying, "No, these are people we have to be paying, and we have to be paying them what they're worth". And I think that's really important, because I think that on the other side of this, we have an opportunity, if we use it now, to rethink how we engage with one another in the society, across political campaigns across creative endeavors across just interpersonal contact, and I'm curious how you feel about that.

A

Arnetia Fogg Dupree 09:01

Well, I think that the ways in which we have sort of designed political conversations in past, I think that regardless of even if you're in person and not in person, we haven't quite gotten to the place where the messengers are truly landing with the folks that they are trying to organize and build with. I think that using language that is accessible, no matter if it's in person, or online is something that feels like it's so important to me, particularly in the time that we're in. Information and access to information and good information feels, to me in this moment, feels kind of hard. There are a lot of theories that come about during, you know, really intense times like these. And I think that just using very clear, accessible language, whether it's online, whether it's through a mail program, whether it's through just a one off conversation with folks in your community or in your family is going to be so important to actually landing with folks and in using language and in stories that are really going to sit well with our people that actually talk about what are the things that needs to happen in order for us to get to freedom and liberation. Sometimes I think that in the political space, we can really get so caught up in our own ways of talking about, about things that it really can sound more like a talking point or a soundbite than the actual truth. And so I just think that we have to be just that much more clear with with this space that we're in right now. Because we're not getting that person to person contact that we just have to be so much more precise about the language that we're using. And so just be real just to be really honest, folks, and not get super caught up in the way that we're used to talking about things.



Omkari Williams 10:52

Yeah, that seems really truth to me when you say that I think to myself, you know, if I could sit down with someone and just hear their story, how much information what I get from them. And I think that in a way, what you're talking about, and correct me if I'm wrong, is creating an opportunity for that kind of richer, deeper conversation because we're not so much in the hustle and bustle, because where are you going to hustle to? Your dining room? There is nowhere to go. So you know that that forces us into a different rhythm. And I think it's a rhythm that has a lot of potential for connection, and community. And really understanding what matters to people, even things that they may not necessarily recognize matter to them. But when you get into a really meaningful conversation, they all of a sudden bring up this thing or that thing. And they realize, Oh, you know what, this is important to me, but in the hustle I hadn't actually paid attention to that. And now that I'm slowing down here it is. So that sounds to me like such a great model to continue on the other side of this whenever that winds up being.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 12:13

Yeah. And I think you're so right. I think one of the one of the things that I actually didn't that I wish I would emphasize in the last portion, this is that listening is so important. And you touched on it, right. So, listening to folks, I just think that listening to what folks care about, listening to what keeps them up at night, listening to what feels concerning to them. It helps us as operatives, just to be better to go out in the world and find those candidates who meet those exact needs. And not in a way that's pandering, not in a way that's transactional, but in a way that feels like, you know, there are people who exist who want to seek political office, who want to create policies that will help you sleep better at night. They want to create policies that will relieve that, you know, that particular stressor in your life. And so I think that listening to folks and taking the things that they say seriously, and going back into your work and figuring out ways to weave that into your everyday job is so important. And so I think you're exactly right. Yeah.



Omkari Williams 13:18

Thank you. And something you just said, also made me realize that it's not only the things that people say, but sometimes it's the things they don't say, yeah. And you'll be sitting in conversation with someone and all of a sudden, you'll have this really strong sense of the unsaid thing. And in the slower time online, you can go back and say, you know, I heard you say this. And I was wondering about this thing that you didn't say, Is this a concern for you? Is this a problem? And that we actually have an opportunity to build deeper relationships. From the listening and the hearing what said but also the listening for what might not be said, the fear someone might be afraid to express because they feel like if I say this, the sky is going to fall, you know, like, yes. And that, to me, is ultimately what what I would want from my elected officials is their ability to hear both the things that are said and the things that are unsaid because people are afraid to speak them out.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 14:30

Yes, yes, absolutely. And I think to even in, in how there's a part of the political space where it's just really important to be super tuned in with people and understanding that, you know, there are even some times when you'll talk to folks and some of the things that aren't mentioned, really, you know, aren't mentioned because they can't even dream of it happening. Right. And yes, yeah. And so there, there hasn't ever been an example of a leader that would actually care about some of the things that are these deep sitting fears with our folks. And so I think that too really comes out a lot when I'm when I'm talking to folks, and I'm like, there's no like, there is actually a possibility for leadership that is not transactional for folks who truly want to create policies that make your life better. Right. It is something that we don't see on a large scale at all in our political system. And so a lot

of times it just doesn't feel like a possibility for folks and that is a very sad truth. I think in our in our current time.



Omkari Williams 15:35

I wish I didn't have to agree with you, but I have to.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 15:39

Yeah, yeah.



Omkari Williams 15:41

It makes me wonder, though, you know, I, I try and look for the opportunities in this time because otherwise, honestly, it's just too depressing.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 15:51

Yes.



Omkari Williams 15:51

And I do think that one of the opportunities in this time is to decide to do things really differently on the other side, you know, to not go back to life as normal, because life is normal, wasn't working for a whole bunch of people anyway. And that this is an opportunity to say, how do we as a community, how do we as a country, how do we, as a world, shift normal to become a more inclusive model. And it feels like a lot of the work that you and your colleagues at Three Point Strategies are doing is to sort of build out a more inclusive model. And I would love you to talk about that aspect of what you're doing.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 16:39

Yeah. And so what by electing, by working to elect Black women, we really are going against what our political system was designed for. We are simultaneously working against racism and sexism, when we are trying to elect Black women, and oftentimes that does intersect with class. Right? And access to resources, and access to large amounts of funds. I will say that what keeps me, and I think it's safe to say what keeps our team, grounded in our work is that Black people are truly just so resilient. And so when we look

at the fact that we have built such community that we are folks who provide for our communities and our families, when the government should and won't. When we look at how we care for and uplift organizations in our neighborhoods, kids and youth organizations. And the way we truly just build a village, around our neighborhoods, those are things that we do because like I said, we are resilient. But those are also things that come out of the systemic barriers that we face. And I think that in a lot of our elections, we do see folks asking this question of electability. Is it possible for our candidates to win? And I think it really does go back to our point of folks, not really being able to see a world that they've never been told is possible. And it makes it difficult. But once we once we talk to our folks that have those very real conversations about the fact that the majority of times our candidates is the best person in office, then community becomes community has our back right community is right there with us fighting the good fight. A lot of the times the biggest challenges really are the ones that are systematic, the ones that the reasons why we are not able to get some, you know, a lot of support early on. The, a lot of the barriers that we face are the reasons why so many of our women do not have access to the same source of resources that folks who are deemed electable or folks who are deemed front runners have access to. And so, to answer your question, it is every single day, it is a privilege and an honor to work to elect Black women. But it comes with this real need to be precise, and to be a master at elections because it really is fighting, you're fighting against the grain every single day. And you're fighting to create an electoral space for people that it was never intended to give space or voice to. And so that's a long winded way of saying that electing Black women requires a real mastery. And I think that every single day that I show up to work, I am at the front of the class, just figuring out the best ways to get our folks elected.



Omkari Williams 20:10

I don't think that was long winded at all. I think that's a beautiful answer and a really true answer because no, that space of the political realm was definitely not made for people who look like you and me. It was not made for us. And to sort of move into that space with intentionality and determination, not just for ourselves, but for the little Black girls coming behind us. Who then can say yeah, you know what, I can do this too. And my voice is needed here. Because every community needs representation, because we have we, yes, we have our universal experiences, but we also have have our very specific experiences that are the experiences of an ethnic group or a racial group or a religious group. And all of those voices need to be part of the conversation. So I bow down because you're doing God's work as far as I'm concerned. I mean, it's really important. And, you know, especially right now, because one of the things that tends to happen when we get into circumstances where people are afraid, and people are very justifiably afraid right now, is we tend to retreat to old patterns and places that felt safe in the past. And here we are,

but we're in a different world. And the things that were safe in the past are actually maybe not so safe now. But it's not always that easy to recognize that when you're in the middle of it, so I think that to just continue to do that work of saying we need to bring these voices into the conversation, no matter what really matters, that feels very important to me.

A

Arnetia Fogg Dupree 22:14

Yes, yes, thank you for that. And I think what what comes up a lot, what motivates me at the same time it can feel so, you know, gut wrenching is the reality that you know, sometimes our candidates do fall short. Right? And what motivates me is that our candidates are oftentimes the most prepared, principled, brilliant folks in the race. What feels so gut wrenching is that sometimes in the political system that we have, that isn't enough to get them across the finish line. And it is something like I said that that keeps me going but also keeps me up at night. And I just I think that to go back to Jessica's point of even starting Three Points around a question, I think that that this just feels like such an open ended question for me that I just will continue to work towards every day until I have my answer.



Omkari Williams 23:18

And would you say what that question is exactly.

A

Arnetia Fogg Dupree 23:22

When we will get to a place where we acknowledge that Black women have contributed principles and values to the political space that are based in humanity, that are based in people having freedom and being liberated, and that those are the kinds of values that we want to see at the top of every ticket across the country. And that Black women are the ones representing those values, and they're the ones who should be elected.



Omkari Williams 23:54

There you go. That is, that's really powerful. And what a really wonderful question to contemplate and to act from and to inspire other people from. And so you all have been around since 2015. So that's five years now. Although I can't even believe that was 5 years ago. It's just going so crazy fast.

A

Arnetia Fogg Dupree 24:26

Yes.



Omkari Williams 24:27

Have you had candidates who have not won a race who come back and run again? Has that happened for you guys?



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 24:36

So not in the not in the short time that we have existed. I will say that we that we have had definitely had candidates who have fallen short that we are still in communications with today to figure out what's next with them.



Omkari Williams 24:51

Okay. Yeah, yep, that feels really good.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 24:54

Yes.



Omkari Williams 24:54

Because, truthfully, most first 10 candidates do not win their races.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 24:59

Yes.



Omkari Williams 25:00

So to know that they are still out there and thinking about how can I make a contribution what might be in the future for me, makes me feel really good because we have to be realistic. And if you're not going to win the first time, and you very well might not, then you'll come back, dude. Yeah, keep keep biting at that apple until you get it, you know? Yeah, it just feels really important that we not step away because we've lost. And since there's so little, generally, so little support for Black women running for office, I can imagine that not stepping away is a tremendous act of courage if you've lost a race.



Omkari Williams 25:46

So I'm so encouraged to hear you say that you're still in communication with some of those candidates, and they're looking at what's next. Yeah, yeah, that's great.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 25:46

Absolutely.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 25:59

Yeah. Just to name a few, I just want to shout out a few Tishaura Jones she fell short in her mayoral race. And she is she ran for mayor of St. Louis, and is still serving as treasurer in that city. And Yvette Simpson fell short in her run for mayor Cincinnati. And she is now CEO at Democracy for America. And then, of course, our beloved Stacey Abrams, who you fell short in Georgia who created Fair Fight and is just really fighting the good fight in Georgia right now? Trying to yeah, trying to get folks registered and just a host of other things. So some of our women because of our resilience, our women fall short and then go on to continue to build community and do amazing things for our folks. So I just wanted to give them some shout outs.



Omkari Williams 26:47

Thank you for that. I didn't know the first two that you referenced, but I was living in Georgia when Stacey was running and was out knocking doors for her and that was the most heartbreaking loss, because I'm pretty sure that election was stolen. But let's not go down that rabbit hole.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 27:09

We will need a whole nother second for



Omkari Williams 27:10

Oh, we'd need a whole nother month. But she is doing amazing work and I am actually really hopeful that she is on the ticket as a vice presidential candidate. I think she would be astoundingly good. And so I can hope for that.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 27:29

Absolutely.



Omkari Williams 27:29

That's my hope. So our time is starting to wind down and I want to be respectful of your time. But I have a couple more questions. So



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 27:40

Okay, no problem.



Omkari Williams 27:42

One of the things that I am really interested in is when you have an organization like Three Point Strategies, what kind of interaction do you have with just the general public? How do you all get your support? Do you have a particular presence in your town. How do you structure yourselves?



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 28:04

Yeah, that's a great question. So with Three Point we are a team of operatives and trainers and facilitators, and we all work remotely. So we are all in our separate corners of the country. And so a portion of the work that Three Point Strategies does is we actually are the electoral firm of the Movement for Black lives. And so we work with brilliant organizers and strategizers, who are on the ground locally. And so what we really do try to do is there's a project that we started called the Electoral Justice Project, and they formed a league called the Electoral Justice League, and it is a team of fellows. And so the brilliant organizers that work with the movement for Black lives have essentially created this community based fellowship, where we plant messengers and folks on the ground, who are really responsible for leading how we're talking, interacting, with with our folks all across the country. And so I think that us working remotely is, of course, a service of functionality because we're such a small squad, but it also really helps us to be really powerful and mighty in the different places that we are all across the country. And so during election times, right, we will have different campaigns that we that we run. One of them was, Wakanda the Vote, we will also do different town halls across the country where each organizer is really responsible for galvanizing a certain amount of folks in their area. And that that originally started out as a project called Black November. And so being all across the country, has just allowed us to expand and show up in really, really

strong ways.



Omkari Williams 29:51

I love that because sometimes I feel like you know, in this this digital world, sometimes I feel like our connections can be really shallow. You know, we get in the habit of liking something on Facebook or Instagram. And you know, we're just sort of, and we'll do that kind of mindlessly. But you all are taking the digital world and making it a really rich, deep place for community. And I think that's really great. Because, yeah, you're not all in the same place, but you're all fighting the same fight. And that's, that's the main connection. And that's the most important thing. And I really appreciate that you're working with those other organizations to do what you're doing.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 30:37

Yeah. And I think what makes it so much more productive is that we're all experts on our communities, right? And so we allow everyone to show up and use a strategy that makes the most sense for where they are. And then we meet back in the middle with what worked and what didn't work. And I think it really just allows folks to tap into the things that they know to be true about where they are in the world.



Omkari Williams 31:01

That's great, because I think something that people often misunderstand, especially about the Black community in the United States is, people tend to think of the Black community as a monolith. And that we all think the same way. And we all have the same ideas. And that is absolutely untrue. So there are communities that are Black communities in this country that are quite conservative. And there are those that are quite progressive, and then there's everything in between, but it's not all the same. So what works in one community is not going to work in another community. So it's really important to know that and honor that difference.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 31:46

Definitely. Absolutely.



Omkari Williams 31:48

So let me ask you a question that may be a little challenging to answer in the pandemic

world. Okay. What are three things that people listening who are interested in helping you and Three Point Strategies achieve your overall goals. What are three things, three simple things that they could do that would make a difference for you all?

A

Arnetia Fogg Dupree 32:17

Yeah. So I would say the first thing that really just comes up for me is to care for someone today to do something that makes someone feel cared for and love. I think the digital space, like I've said so many times is, is so necessary for shifting culture and movement. And you'll see online that folks in the time that we're in right now that folks are really doing these small acts of love and acts of kindness, whether it's sharing toiletries, or if it's if you have a little extra donate into a cause donating to a family. Just do something show up for some someone today and make them feel really cared on and loved, I think that feels just really important for where we are in the world. And the second I would say is involvement. Again, that doesn't need to be limited to person to person interactions, join or start something. There are plenty of petitions and calls for different causes all over the internet. And so I would just implore folks to join something that feels like it is calling your name. Join something that feels really passionate to you. And if you can't find anything to join and start something of your own, whether it's calling a particular elected official in your area to close off businesses except essential businesses, right. Whether it is calling for an organization to use more of its resources to help a particular marginalized group in your community. You know, use your voice, get involved, and if you can't find anything that exists, start something of your own. And then the last thing I mentioned this before, being a source of good information is just really, really important. It's time. And so I say that in a way where there there are resources that are available to us, the FDA, the CDC, those guidelines do not fall on political lines, right? Those are truly guidelines that are helping us be our healthiest self during this time. And so being the source of true and accurate, good information is really, really important. And listen to what folks need answers for. That is something that I've started to take a lot more seriously with my, with my friends and my family, I've started to really tune in to big questions that they have about this time. And then I go into a corner, try to find the best, most accurate answers for that and and come back to them with real resources in a way that makes them feel empowered and makes them feel that all isn't lost. This is just the truth of what's happening. And so those are the things that are coming up for me right now.



Omkari Williams 35:02

Thank you. Those are great. Those are really great because they're doable. And they're things that will make not only the people we're doing them for feel better, but they'll make

us feel better. And that's not nothing. Yes, everyone's stressed out right now. And we need to take care of ourselves. And sometimes the best way to take care of ourselves is by taking care of someone else. Yeah. So thank you so much. I have loved this conversation. I would like to say that we should do this again, when we're on the other side of this so that we can focus a bit more on the work that Three Point Strategies is specifically doing as we get closer to the election. So I'm going to ask you if you'll come back in a few months.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 35:51

Absolutely. I would. I would truly love that. Yes, yes, I will.



Omkari Williams 35:55

That's great! Well, thank you so much, and I will talk to you in a few months.



Arnetia Fogg Dupree 36:02

All right, thank you again for having me. Have a good one.



Omkari Williams 36:04

Thank you. Thank you all for joining me for this conversation. You can find the suggestions that Arnetia laid out for us in the episode notes. Her first suggestion was that we do something that makes another feel loved and cared for. While doing that, please don't forget to take care of yourself. Remember, each of us has a role to play in addressing the challenges of our world. I want you to know that I am here for you in any way that I can be. If you need an ear please don't hesitate to reach out to me through my website. Thank you for joining me for this episode. I will be back with another episode very soon.