

BSC _ Season 1 _ Ashley Munson _ Final

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SPEAKERS

Dr. Thomas, Dr. Fowles, Ashley Munson

- D** Dr. Fowles 00:00
Zora Neale Hurston said those that don't got it can't show it. Those that got it can't hide it.
- D** Dr. Thomas 00:06
Show that you got it with the merch we have in the Black Social Capital store. We've got statement tees, totes, and even a journal. I like to rock my scholar practitioner tee with a blazer. Visit our store at staymotivatedandrisetogether.com/shop Black, Black Social Capital. Today's guest is Ashley Munson. Ashley is a lobbyist and community activist who has overcome challenges in delivering progressive legislative change and policy change. She serves as a strategist for governmental entities and within the public affairs field. And she is known for initiatives that win legislative support, positive media recognition and favorable public awareness. And she is able to achieve all of this despite conflicting agendas. And we're excited to hear all about that. So welcome, Ashley.
- A** Ashley Munson 01:14
Thank you, Dr. Jaqui . It's great to be here.
- D** Dr. Fowles 01:17

I'm really excited to have you here today. We're gonna hop right into our Community Capital segment. And as everyone knows, this is a discussion of a Black professional's journey, best practices, professional lessons learned. And right off the top. The first question I have is, what is a lobbyist? And how do you become one?

A

Ashley Munson 01:40

Such that's a great question back today. Oh, thank you. Well, Dr. Jaqui, and Dr. Theo. Thank you guys for having me. It's great to be here and to share my journey. lobbyists. Right, so I get that question all the time. For some folks. It's a cuss word for others. livelihood. Right, a lobbyist is an advocate for a certain field for a certain field. And where you get paid to do that for a living.

D

Dr. Fowles 02:05

And I when I think of lobbyists, I'm thinking about, you know, folks that are going to, to various centers of the city, you know, in terms of legislation, and they're doing the, the the work that goes that that goes not unnoticed by the common person, but but they understand the inner workings of how the system works. And they can they're the ones that make things happen.

A

Ashley Munson 02:32

Yeah, you're not wrong in that at all. I think, you know, lobbyists are known to be behind the scenes, I think because media has Theriault tides, lobbyists as these big oil company folks, right, take these under the table deals, it has kind of had a negative connotation, but overall, a lobbyist has to advocate sure you have good and bad ones just like with any other field, but and the lobbyist I try to be as to advocate for Black and Brown issues that affect people that look like me. So I've had the chance to advocate for environmental justice, for education, and now for food insecurity in Chicago and throughout Cook County. So I think you know, media has kind of ripped to shreds, what a lobbyist can be. The positive things that we can do. And it's centered around relationship building is centered around knowing the players in the in the communities and in state legislature in the state legislature. And throughout the state.

D

Dr. Fowles 03:27

What started your interest in in community advocacy? How did you come to even my roles? And now what sparked those interests and kind of walk us through those some of those lines?

A

Ashley Munson 03:41

I think my journey has not been linear, right? I think when people see my resume, they're like, Oh, my God, it's amazing. But like, it's been a lot of trial and error. And so I guess I'll start with from Chicago, born and raised on the South Side. Since a young age, I always knew two things. One is that I am not church, traditional anything where I grew up in the church. But I also knew that I would be a misfit in a positive way, right? Like I questioned things. I tried to figure out why things are the way they are. And that's not sometimes accepted in the Black community when you're told to do something or told to be a certain way. The second thing I knew is that I wanted to make a difference, right? I wanted to represent people that look like me. And I took those two things and navigated in my life to where I am now. And so I went to Purdue University in West Lafayette, where I majored in political science and Global Studies. I can say when I got to Purdue, I wanted to be in management, because my aunt and my mother were both in the finance field. And so that's what I was kind of told to do. And I was told to kind of go to a PWI because that's what the real world looks like, which is a whole different conversation when we talk about that's a whole different thing, right? But that's what I was told and So that's what I followed. And so when I got to Purdue, I realized a lot about why I was doing what I was doing and why I chose this journey. And so my sophomore year summer I studied abroad in London, and the study abroad program was based in business management, but they use Parliament as a, I guess, a foundation for the class to kind of mix business and politics and to understand how politics kind of runs everything. Well, I mean, across the world, but specifically in London. And so after that, I was mesmerized by politics. And I had already been the child to sit in front of the news and MSNBC to just watch. That was a hobby for me, right? Like I feel doing now. Like I watch CNN and sit there just to obtain and be a sponge of information, and see different sides of it. But that's a tangent back to the story. So came back from London changed my major. From there, I started doing producing government and being on these appeals boards in college, all the good stuff. And then after, I didn't know what I wanted to do, I knew I wanted to be a public official in the beginning. I mean, at the end of my journey, however, I didn't know how to get there. And so I just started applying to jobs in DC. I had the option to teach English abroad and to be in the other option was to be a campaign manager for the Indiana House Democratic Caucus, I chose the latter. And it was the best worst decision of my life. I know, one day, I'll run a campaign for myself. And then all things will have to change. Like I'll have to canvass and do all the things. But moving to a predominantly white neighborhood, where I was responsible for creating a coalition to support my candidate, where it was racism, where I didn't know people, where I was away from family, and that being my first quote unquote, real job after college was a challenge. And so I learned a lot of things by being thrown in the pool and being forced to swim. It was a good experience, because I learned how to work with unions. I mean, overall, learn how to work with people, right, the different things that matter to different cultures. So that was my first experience there.

And so from that, we didn't win the campaign because trying to turn Indiana blue. Yeah, just don't know. I think Obama did. Don't know how, but here we are. And so I moved back to Chicago, where I worked for After School Matters, which is a Chicago based after school program that provides programs and arts and music for kids after school to keep them out of trouble and to help them in their professional careers. Applied for a job for the speaker in the house. Loved and hated that hated that got the job there. And that's when I started to understand how systems work in Illinois, right. We read, like this is how the budget passed. But in real life, textbooks have nothing on what happens in real life. And so that was my real dose of like, Oh, so that constituent letter that I got from my state representative was not from them. It was from a staffer. That's great. My dreams are crushed. And so just a lot of like, I wouldn't even say rude awakening, I was just awakening things that kind of ignited my fire to be a representative for my community. And so make this a little bit shorter. I went from there to working for the Illinois Environmental Council, where I was a policy coordinator. And then I think Dr. Theo asked me, How did I get into lobbying? Here we are. So I had built relationships with people on staff. It was only two Black staffers, on staff at the time. And this was the Illinois Speaker of the House staff, I was on the communication staff. And I told my director, I was interested in renewable energy. He then connected me to the executive director over the Illinois Environmental Council. And I was hired immediately. And she said, Hey, you have relationships with Black people? Do you want to lobby and I had no clue what that meant. I met lobbyists because they interacted with us because we were staff. But overall, I just knew it meant talking to people. And so from there, I was able to cultivate and build relationships upon the ones I already had. And so the legislators that I had build some type of rapport with while I was on staff, I was able to ask them for assistance. I was able to get bills passed trial and error of course learning what not to say how to say things how to kill a bill how to push a bill forward. But from there is where my my lobbyist career started. And so now I'm four or five years into the game learned a lot. Worked with a lot of people on both sides of the aisle, Republicans, Democrats in the middle alike, and now my life's mantra is to advocate for Black and brown people no matter what I'm doing. So whether that's lobbying, whether that's being a public official, whether that's activism, my life's work, goal is to make sure that our people are okay.

D

Dr. Fowles 10:02

I'm here for it. I think, you know, as you were talking, I'm sitting here, taking a little bit of notes, right. But I'm also I can, like, a lot of this process of advocacy is something that gets lost in the sauce. Right? Like, you know, if I'm a person in my community and, and, and my issue, you know, sometimes I don't see a clear path to either tell someone or tell officials, and then get that response back to me. There's all these people in the middle. So I think one of the things I'm interested in is, is like their perspective on like, this momentum that

seems to be building around, you know, upcoming generations being a generation of change, and having all these different community movements, right, you know, whether that's movements like the Black Lives Matter movement, or other movements that are advocating for change, like how to some of these movements, integrate, not integrate, but exchange ideas, or build into what you're doing, you know, as a lobbyist, or someone that's working within the within the space?

A

Ashley Munson 11:17

Yeah, I think that's a great question. I'll answer it with the story. And then I'll give you an explanation. So I think, disclaimer, my nine to five is lobbying, right? That's the technical term, but out off the clock, my job is to make sure our folks are okay, on a different level, right. So being in the community being at food pantry, talking to people that, you know, politician, traditional politicians or folks want to talk to, but just trying to get on the ground sense of how people are feeling and what's the need. And we all know because of COVID, the need is greater and many aspects, right? So folks being laid off has increased food insecurity and so forth. And we can go on, like all the issues that affect us. So that's one thing. Last summer for Juneteenth, I, maybe 12 days. I'll give it 14 days. 14 days before Juneteenth last year, I had the idea it was it was in the midst of the rioting and everything going on. And I actually got into a Twitter argument with someone, which is a whole different story. But

D

Dr. Fowles 12:19

One of Dr. Jaqui's favorite things to do.

A

Ashley Munson 12:21

Is it?

D

Dr. Thomas 12:22

Yeah, I love it. I love arguing on the social media.

A

Ashley Munson 12:27

I need to get some tips for you. But so in college, that was my thing, because I was a little bit less mature. However, now. It was it was a different type of argument, because I'm sure Dr. Jaqui can attest to this. It was more like engaging in thoughts and hearing people's opinions versus I was just petty in college. Right. And so this argument was around rioting.

And you know, you had the argument that is the white man stuffing way that argument then you have the argument, well, why are we destroying our own communities. So I sent some tweets out, got a lot of responses. And before I decided to really engage, I took a step back, I took like a day or two off of social media. And I started to doing- I start to do research on writing and marches and what role they play.

D

Dr. Thomas 13:11

You had to come back with the facts.

A

Ashley Munson 13:12

Exactly, that's exactly what I did. After I got you know, let some rounds off my clip, the Twitter sphere, I posted to say it would be dope to have a March, you know, a million man march in Chicago, something like that. And so long story short or shorter. I ended up leading a march of over 5000 people and Chicago during Juneteenth. It was amazing. We can talk about it too. But I think for me the most captivating thing was I am I call myself an underdog, right? And I say that to say I'm not traditionally what a lobbyist will look like I have tattoos. I am not I know how to use verbiage. And I know how to critique my words in a way that can articulate what I want to say. But sometimes I speak my mind. And I say this because it ties in to the movement we're in now. We're in a place where you don't have to look a certain way be a certain person to get things done. We have clubhouse that has connected people that might have never met, right? You have people that are engaging on Twitter and talking with elected officials. So this is a climate where change can happen and change can happen not traditionally. And I think this movement when we talk about the things that transpired over the past few weeks. And you know, we have a new president and a new Congress that is blue. We have the potential to make change and to fix things that have never been fixed before. We have the opportunity to address issues that seem to go under the rug before right. But one thing we've learned from COVID is that people were at home seeing the world in a way they never seen before. Right? We Black folks knew this. We knew racism was a thing we knew Trump was a thing we knew all these things were happening. But now Black people have the attention of a global on a global scale, where people are at home in London, because they're working from home, seeing what's going on in Chicago or seeing what's going on with different cities and regards to people of color. So I think this, we have the opportunity for this decade, including fixing what was done in the past administration, but we have the opportunity to make change happen. And that's on a local, state and federal, even if we look at Georgia, like Georgia, is I need people to understand how historic it was right? I think one of the lessons that can be drawn from from that scenario is like, you know, was it that Black people? Was it that Black people do not vote? Or was it that the Black vote was

suppressed? Sure. It's a little bit of both. But let's talk about how Stacey Abrams and her team of fabulous Black woman got on the ground and got people to vote. Right. So that is a telltale sign and many of the things that have happened, that we can be the change we want to see cliché and all like this is the opportunity for people that have not been hurt before people that have been overlooked people that have been counted out as being underdogs, or what have you. We have the world stage now. And it's time that we use it.

D

Dr. Thomas 16:14

I'm really just sitting here just loving everything you said, right? Just especially the last part, like I be the change like I'm it's cliché, but it's, it's, it's sticking around, because it's real. Right. And Stacey Abrams, and her team, right? And she always says that it's not just me, right? I didn't do this on my own. But they just- they did that. They really did that. And I wonder how many organizers are so encouraged right now, because they've been you know, they've been fighting in these states that have been red for a long time just trying to just really get a fair vote out. And oh, I'm excited about the future.

D

Dr. Fowles 16:58

So you mentioned, you know, getting books out on Juneteeth, and and that's over 5000 people, right? So what was the next step? If you take those 5000 people, and you want to push them towards an opportunity and idea? Because I, from my perspective, it always takes a long time for a you know, somebody's issue to end up as a resolution, somewhere down the line. So can you talk about like the process it takes, and the amount of time that you need to go back into a community to, to reinforce an idea or to make things happen?

A

Ashley Munson 17:40

I think it takes time. But I also think is I think we have to be creative. We have to meet people where they are right. So everybody doesn't want to run for office. Everybody doesn't care about politics. That's great. That's dandy. But where can we meet people where they are right? So like, health is an issue that affects everybody, and whether it affects you at 29? It's gonna affect you at 62. Right? So it's the issue that you can kind of cater to the demographic that you're talking to. And so I say that to say we need to learn how to meet people where they are by making issues more palatable, so they can comprehend it. Right. One of the things that I do on my social media, I've taken a long break, just because last year was a year. But I use my platform to break down political issues and make them make sense for your everyday person. And I think when we talk about mobilizing and coalition building, I think that's one thing that we can do. That's practical, right? So we talked about starting block by block, but literally, that's what we

have to do right there. There are resources out there and people that are already out there doing the work, I just think we need to connect the dots. It's no reason-- and overlapping and doing the work right. We need to learn how to come together overall, right? I mean, it's trial and error for sure. But if we learn how to come together with basic things and learn how to mobilize people, and meet them where they are like basic needs, it's like you need to eat let's find a way to get a food pantry in your district or you need healthcare. Let me help you sign up for healthcare and introduce you to somebody in your community that can assist you with something like job training, right? It's just connecting the dots. And I think, you know, everyone wants to change the world, but we don't want to start with us, nor do we want to start with our community. And I think that's where it starts.

D

Dr. Fowles 19:25

Speaking of that, you know, I can't I can't let this interview go any farther without, you know, speaking directly to Chi city. So So I know that you're working with food pantries throughout Chicago. Tell us a little bit a little bit about no food insecurity in Chicago. Tell us some of the challenges you might have seen and and where you see the city going. Do you think it's a example for other cities, other major cities I know in Los Angeles, we have a big problem with homelessness as well as food insecurity and, and food deserts, things like that. So what are some some things that you're seeing across cities? And how can Chicago be example for those those cities?

A

Ashley Munson 20:14

Sure. So I work for the Greater Chicago Food Depository. I'm the Senior Manager of advocacy. And we serve Cook County, we have other food depositories that serve the rest of the state, but Cook County-- Chicago is a part of Cook County. So we serve Chicago and Greater Chicago. But when we talk about food security, I think one of the things that is frightening, is realizing that one, the last time I checked, the it was 90 between 93 and 96% of households and Cook County goes to food pantries. And so this is not just the folks you see on the streets, right? These are the people that are deciding should I pay this energy bill? Or can I go to the grocery store, right, so like, it's those people that are making these, you know, livelihood decisions. And so for that to be 92 to 96% of people going to food pantry, it's the problem. There's a systemic problem with racism. But there's also a problem where we're not meeting people's daily needs, like let's not talk about, you know, we can talk about clothing and things like that. But food and healthcare are two of the basic needs, that everyone should be allocated. And so it's alarming that we have a pandemic that is only increasing the the food need of folks that are hungry, that are without jobs. And we all we always know that when there is a pandemic that increases the likelihood of people with not people not having jobs, people not having money. So we

talked about SNAP, we talked about WIC all these programs are programs that were created to assist families in need. Right. And so I think Chicago is a good template for, you know, the coalition building, I think we need help and learning where we can better partner with local, state, and federal partners. But I also think there needs to be more of an advocacy on a local and state level. Like we always only talk about presidential elections. Why are we talking about the city City Council and the senators and the state rep? Right. And so when we talk about where money is allocated in your district, why is there food deserts, right, because we're not holding folks accountable. And I mean, the rabbit hole can continue. But I think to your question, I think we are doing a good job for what we have, we get a lot of federal dollars, we get state money, we work with our local officials to make sure that we're partnering, but there is not enough. And I could only imagine the landscape for other cities and other states. But I think Chicago still needs a lot of work. In both criminal justice reform and both food and security and both healthcare. And I think we have to start on a local and state level to get those needs met.

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Dr. Thomas 22:51

So I have a question about that. Because this is something I've been wondering about, and I you know, I dabble and try to do stuff, but I don't know if I'm doing it right. But I be out there trying. About holding your elected officials accountable. Because I completely agree it is not just the people in those big federal jobs. It's the is that I guess the city government that makes the decision on how much money goes to schools and libraries and the police and all of that, right. Like, I'm pretty sure that the level that that those budgets get made right?

A

Ashley Munson 23:25

It's a mixture of the state and local. Yep.

D

Dr. Thomas 23:27

Okay. So when we start talking about state and local, like, what is the best way to hold your elected officials accountable? Right, like, if you call them and you get that voicemail? What do you say? And then who listens to that? Do they actually get that? Or should I write them a letter? What? Should I email them? How do we hold them accountable?

A

Ashley Munson 23:52

That is a great question. And I promise you, I think I've been asked that question maybe four times in the past month.



Dr. Thomas 24:01

Good



Ashley Munson 24:02

Right? And it's getting me to a point where I need to go back to the drawing board because as person that is in this field, right is nothing for me to pick up and call an elected official. And I'm not boasting, I'm just saying just because of my career, right? And so you get your everyday folks who are not interested in what you're interested in. They're like, Yo, I want to help but how do I? Traditionally, I would say, you know, pick an area you're interested in, find the key players do it that way. Whenever we're not in a traditional time. I think it's just meeting not meeting people where they are. But like, think about it. You have a congressional person, which is a US senator or us Congresswoman are men. That represents over like 50,000 people, right? I mean, they can get to 100,000 depending on the district, your aldermen city council level or Your state rep or state senator represent a little less than that. And sometimes for aldermen, a lot less than that, depending on where you are in the city, it could be more, it could be less whatever, what I'm trying to say is your your local and state officials are more accessible to you than your US senator would ever be. And for that reason, it is a little bit more easier to get people out of office, I have a friend who was a state rep that had a challenger in one of the previous elections, she was a teacher, she came out of nowhere and almost beat him. And so that's saying, one, you can hold people accountable by holding them to the promises they make. If you say you're going to allocate school money to the school that is in desperate need of books and school supplies, and you don't, I have every right as your constituents to hold you accountable, which means I might support your opponent. Or I may be at your office every day, because I have that time to hold you accountable. Right. So I think I think accountability varies, but I think it means everything from some of the things you say like making a call, if you call a state district office enough, they're gonna know who you are, they're gonna tell the senator or rep who you are, and they will return your call. I'm close friends will my senator and we have conversations with somebody about his constituents how they call and I try to strategize and see how I can help. Right. So I think that is how we touch people. That is how we hold people accountable. But again, I mean, social media has is a is a blessing and a curse. But hypothetically, if you have a legislator who is not listening to you, who doesn't care about the issue, you can connect with people that can broadcast the issue. Right. So I think there are creative ways to do it. But I think from a foundational level of how to do it is just taking the initiative, I think young folks who take the initiative to listen to the shade room or go to the shade rooms page to find out who divorced who. But when it comes to our state senator and what's going on locally, we don't we're not privy to what's going on, that's because of our interest. Right? Once we connect the dots that these things affect us whether whatever age you are, it will affect

you, I think we'll have better traction with getting people to hold folks accountable. So I think it's everything from calling to writing letters to being that obnoxious constituent that gets stuff done by going up to the office or, you know, calling people calling your friends or letting your friends know, issue issues, I just think we have to be accountable on all levels. So holding our people accountable, but also holding our elected accountable.

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Dr. Thomas 27:32

All right, I guess I'll keep calling.

A

Ashley Munson 27:35

And I mean, you and one thing is I think finding community groups that support where you stand, I think it's helpful to because there are a lot of organizations out here that are trying to do the work, they just lack the bodies to get stuff done. Right. So if I'm interested in, I don't know, health care, and there are two community groups in my neighborhood that I know that are working on that, partner with them, because most likely they either need funding or the bodies to get stuff done. And the more people you add to a coalition, instead of doing individually, you have more success that way,

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Dr. Fowles 28:08

You mentioned earlier that, you know, now's the time, we have an opportunity to really make things happen. Right. As someone who is looking at, you know, current politicians, and and folks like that their ages are up there, right? The only, or the only folks that that I know that are 70-80, you know, staying up past nine o'clock. I'm like how is this possible, right? So if I demographics are slowly changing, but my question is, how do you learn what that system is like, if I if I'm a if I'm a person that doesn't like, you know what my city council person is doing? And I'm like, Hey, I could do a better job, like, how do I learn how to do that? Like, where do I go? Where do I go to be a politician school?

A

Ashley Munson 29:05

Traditionally, this is how it would go, right? You would volunteer on a campaign, you will work your butt off on that campaign and you will kind of network that way. And then you would be called to be a legislative assistant, what have you, you will start to know more people, then you would have to wait in turn, wait your turn to run for office so that when you hear two people refer to the machine in Chicago, it's kind of that I mean, it's the Speaker of the House, of course. But it's more so of a system way of doing things. You have to wait your turn, you have to stand in line you have to serve you have to do this.

And when I said earlier, it's kind of a different time. I mean, I don't think folks are waiting their turn anymore, right. So I think my advice to anyone that wants to run for office, I mean, you just have to dig in, right? You have to share volunteer campaigns. Because campaigns are numbers right? You have to know your your win number in order to get it path to victory. I think a lot of people overlook like, yeah, I can just run on like, no. Let's talk about the neighborhoods in that district. Let's talk about the demographics of the district district. Let's poll and see the issues of that district. And then we can form a campaign, right? I'm not just gonna come in a community to say, Hey, I can run for office, no, what are the top three things? What should I be focused on? What has the person that I'm trying to run against has not succeeded in? And I think that's one thing, one way to infiltrate, right? It's the person if we're leaving, if we're if we're in the neighborhood, that is lacking jobs, like maybe 50% 60% of people have job insecurity, right. That's something I'm going to poll and research about and rep state senator such and such has not done or has not committed to or has not did what he said he would do on before the election on Election Day, right. And so I think there's ways to infiltrate it, I think there are issues that we can specifically search, whether that's job insecurity, food insecurity, health care, there are issues that matters to people, I just think people need to be more strategic and understanding their community needs versus trying to be a savior. Just because you're Black and want to run for office doesn't mean you should. We all have a purpose, we all serve a purpose. And that may not mean you're going to be a lobbyist or legislator, maybe you're a donor, maybe you get in the healthcare field, or you get in corporate, and you get these dollars to fund the projects you want. Right? There are ways to make changes without having to be in office. And I would offer to that most people that aren't in office do the real change. Some people get in- some people get in office to make the real change. That is beautiful. That is great. But that's not everybody's calling, get the dollar, so you don't so you can fund your friend running for office, right? That's how a lot of people end up corrupt because they're begging for dollars, which is a different conversation. However, I think the basis is finding an issue that matters to you seeing where the people that represent you lie on that issue, and campaigning around that or having organizations call them out on their BS and being like, holding, we hold everybody accountable, except the people that we need to.



Dr. Thomas 32:06

Cuz I mean, we will hold a celebrity accountable in a second.



Ashley Munson 32:10

Okay, cancel culture and all

D

Dr. Thomas 32:12

We will like, you know, storm their little Twitter pages, their Instagram pages, and I mean, nothing to I mean, all a lot of these police departments have Instagram pages, you can just be like, hey, right. Yeah, that thing you did? I don't like that.

A

Ashley Munson 32:28

Yep. And getting people I mean, you know, so much covert racism, right. But I think the way we do it is together, right? We have so many untapped resources, there's no reason why one person shouldn't be doing anything. Sure. One person, one person can champion it, or leave the cause. But I mean, you gotta you gotta partner and push things forward. That is that we Black folks cannot afford any longer to be separated, you have other cultures that you know white folks can't afford to do things on their own sometimes, right? us as a people as a whole, we have to find better ways to work together. We have the ample amount of opportunity to try to make change, we need to use that and partner with Black and Brown people. Right. But, you know, we got we have a lot of work to do, and it needs to start now.

D

Dr. Thomas 33:17

I want to know about organizations, you've been a part of that have helped you either professionally, or just allows you to connect to or give back to the community. Right. So what are those? I know you got some community based orgs Are there other professional org social orgs, what orcs helped you become like Ashley, the lobbyist, so you know, helping us change the world.

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Ashley Munson 33:42

I would say the number one thing that has helped me is connecting with people that are in my field that have similar experiences. So after working with Speaker of the House, there was a group of us. I think the first group chat was like Blacks at the Capitol, just stereotypical. But um, we all have had jobs that ranged from lobbyists to advocate to liaison, legislative liaison to Governor staffer, right. And so the first thing I would say is connecting with people that are in your field and not being afraid to make those connections. And now, it's turned into several things. I have one of my friends who leads the organization for Black woman in Chicago, where we try to connect Black women with political jobs, right? We reach out, review resumes we, you know vouch for folks, that's one thing. That's her. That's her baby. That's her project. But that's one thing that has been beneficial to me, because now I'm at a phase wife and mentor women, right and give

them advice. I think on the other side of that, I stay on my legislators tail about cultivating some type of pipeline for Black people, right, I think, and when I was living in Springfield, there were You know, a handful of Black staffers there, but like there's no pipeline. Right? So we talked about having more staffers and we have over 50 Black reps, why aren't there over 30 Black staffers, right? And not just because they're Black they need to staff or no, because Black people are intelligent. And we need more Black people in these offices that represent their community. So I've been working, this is behind the scenes working with legislators to kind of create a pipeline of Hey, she would be good to ask the team, hey, she needs to work for you and your district. So a lot of the stuff that I do besides like the march for us activism, connecting with like the Chicago Urban League, and doing food service, or food pantries on the weekends, or connecting people mentorships, during school program like that stuff short, that resume, but for me behind the scenes, my job is to plug people where they need to be and to create a pipeline where Black people can be represented in all fields, not just politics,

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Dr. Thomas 35:57

it does help when you just start to diversify, who's in the room that decisions are being made, there's so many times that I sit in a room that is you know, outside of myself is mostly just white people, right? You might get a, you know, you might get some other POC from time to time, but as in a lot of rooms where there's a lot of white people, where decisions are being made. And I'm I'm able to advocate for things. And sometimes I'm able to advocate for things and actually succeed. And part of that is due to what's going on politically, like all of the activism work that's happening, they're seeing it right, because it's so it's so prevalent, ubiquitous, ubiquitous right now,

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Dr. Fowles 36:45

I think, one of the things that I'm thinking as we wrap up, um, this is a two-fold question one, what what would you tell your, your younger, professional self, that you now know, you know, about your professional career? Right. And the other part is, you know, what are you looking forward to? We talked about the excitement of things coming up. But what are you looking forward to professionally, you know, as you as you continue to make moves,

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Ashley Munson 37:19

I think when I was younger, I was so worried about doing everything, right, I was so worried about people's perception of me. And and now knowing what I know now and where I am, by the grace of God, of course, but also, you know, being that creative, innovative Black

girl in the room in the room full of 50 white folks that, you know, are disqualifying you just because of your skin color or your age, right, I think it's to focus and to focus on the things that matter like my purpose more, I think I went through some time of struggling with my identity, like Who am I? Why am I the way I am right? And I don't want I never want to get fame and and all these things that come with visibility to ruin it, right? I think fame has a role in advocating for the issues and the purpose that you were created for. And so now I'm at a point where I am more focused than I've ever been. But I could have been this way years ago, if I would only take the time to sacrifice, um, not having fun and living life but sacrifice people's opinions and and public opinions on what people think I should have done, or people's perception of me. So I think I would have told myself just to focus on the things that matter, right, which is health, which is family, which is career instead of worrying about like, Is it gonna turn out right, will I be okay, it's it's more of focusing on moving forward than worrying about what's been. I think what I am most excited about is, like I've mentioned before, this is a point in my career where I am starting to mentor, where I'm starting to give back in a way that I haven't I think, to the first point I struggled with my identity, because I was like I always tell myself, there are people that do better than me, right? There are people out there that have Harvard degrees, and that's worked for the president themselves, right and disqualifying and kind of the role that I have, and I'm what I'm capable of. So I'm excited about the future and everything that I have planned on the ground and activism during this time. And the March this year, we're going to do another Juneteenth March, and hopefully is bigger and better. And also being in a career and a field where I can coalition build so that means connecting the Justice involved organizations to food security, I think we're so siloed like your healthcare, your criminal justice, your this, but we're like it affects all the same people. So finding ways to collaborate so we can all succeed. So I'm most excited about my role as senior manager of advocacy to bridge the gap

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Dr. Thomas 40:01

I'm just I'm excited to have met you and learn from you and heard all of this. I feel like if everybody just listened to you, We'd be good.

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Dr. Fowles 40:11

We gon wrap up this episode of the Black Social Capital podcast, we're gonna see everybody in two weeks, we're gonna hit you with another one. I want to thank Ashley for being our guest today, you've dropped so many nuggets on how we can continue to be effective in our, our political lives and our professional lives. And I'm sure someone's taking notes to make this thing happen for themselves. So we just again want to take this time to say thank you. And with that, we're out.



Ashley Munson 40:42

Thank you guys.



Dr. Fowles 40:45

We hope you enjoyed today's show. Remember, the way we build social capital is to build self and build others. We' you got some notes on your tablet, computer or even using a pen and paper. leave us a review. continue the conversation on social media at Black Social Capital, and share the show with someone you know. Until the next episode, stay motivated and rise together.



Dr. Thomas 41:09

This is Black Social Capital.