

September 11, 2019

Transcription

Happy Birthday, Democracy Summer!

Alyssa Rodriguez: Welcome to Built By Us, a podcast created by Democracy North Carolina, a nonpartisan nonprofit organization dedicated to building a political system that works for all. My name is Alyssa Rodriguez. I'm your host and in this episode I sat down with Aja Bullock, Democracy Summer intern to reflect on the program this summer and to talk about some of their experiences. Aja is a second year intern with the Democracy Summer program and I really enjoyed learning more about it and some of their favorite moments. Here's my conversation with Aja. I hope you all enjoy it as much as I did.

Aja Bullock: Hello, I am Aja Bullock. I'm from Fayetteville, North Carolina right now I go to school at Chapel Hill and I'm studying communication studies. When I'm at school, I am involved in UNC Black Congress, which is a black queer centered organization committed to black liberation. I'm also a part of the Bridge, which is a journalism type creative outlet online magazine for women of color and I usually write political and social commentary. Those are my two favorite things that I do while im on campus and now during this summer I'm interning with Democracy North Carolina as a second year organizing intern.

Alyssa Rodriguez: Aja, so you mentioned this is your second summer with Democracy NC as an organizing intern. How did you get involved with this organization and how's your journey been up to this point so far?

Aja Bullock: Yeah, so last summer was like the end of my first year of college and the first year of my college, like I said, I go to UNC Chapel Hill. So it was marked by Silent Sam protests on like my first day of classes in college. It was marked by Charlottesville just a few days before that Silent Sam was relevant to what happened in Charlottesville because the Charlottesville protests were about a confederate monument and it ended in a death and it was like a really bad thing. But then Chapel Hill was a very similar campus, had confederate monument as well. The nickname is Silent Sam and for years student organizers, community members have been mobilizing to get rid of silent Sam because of the racist history that it represents of the university and how that racist

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history keeps living on at the university and how not taking that statute down was just an example of that and the statue was old down by concerned community members and students this past fall and the UNC system was trying to take away a lot of programs that were at UNC for diversity and inclusion and those kinds of things. They were defunding the Center for Civil Rights at the UNC law school and all of this was happening while I was in my first year of college and it was really confusing and I was like, why am I at this school? It really sucks. It's doing all these bad things. But the good thing about it was that I saw a lot of people doing organizing work on campus. I mentioned before that I'm part of Black Congress. Now, one of the political education chairs. But like during my first year, like that organization like really sparked my interest in doing community organizing because I saw that they were like on campus getting things done, getting the attention of the chancellor and getting faculty and staff on their side. And it was really inspirational. But I was too scared to approach them and ask to be a member because I was like, I don't know the first thing about organizing. So I was like, I'll just find some summer internship that will help me learn about organizing. And so I googled it and democracy North Carolina was the first thing that popped up. So I applied and yeah, since then I've been like, it was a really great summer last year. So when there was an opportunity arose to apply again this summer to keep doing the work, I was really excited about it. And that's why I'm here again this summer

Alyssa Rodriguez: And we're so happy you're back this summer too. I've actually been meeting a lot of alum from the Democracy Summer program. And one thing I always notice is that everyone is always so excited to talk about their experiences. What are some things that you think you'll take with you into the future from democracy summer?

Aja Bullock: So last summer was really important to me. Like I said, I was really interested in what it like community organizing could do. But after spending my time with Democracy North Carolina last year, I like learned a lot about what it means to be an organizer. So I learned how to build base with community members and advocates and volunteers who will like help you do the important work. I learned the importance of lobbying elected officials and the like actual impact that can have. I learned about phonebanking fundraising, all of the really important things to make sure that an organization like Dem NC can like keep doing important work. And so when I went into my second year of college after having this internship, I was ready to, you know, take on bigger roles on campus. I applied for the Board of Black Congress and I'm now doing that work. I spent my last spring during a fellowship with Ignite NC, which is a statewide organization that is committed to liberation of, of black and brown queer people and does a lot of really amazing work. So I did higher education organizing and worked with fellows that were doing just gender justice organizing. And if I wouldn't of had the

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experience with them summer last year, I wouldn't have been like confident enough to go and do those things. But those have been really great experiences. And so that's what I've taken with me since last summer. But this summer has been different. I've been doing more like mentorship stuff with the first year interns. So from that I've learned how to help support and lead a team, reached their goals even after I leave on campus.

Alyssa Rodriguez: So it sounds like you do a lot of work as a first year intern and as a second year intern, but specifically as a second year it sounds like you do a lot of work in mentorship with the first year interns. Have you had any experiences with any of this year's interns that have stood out to you?

Aja Bullock: Yeah, so it's been really great knowing that I have a team that you know, feels like they can come to me if they need advice or just seeing them grow, seeing them be able to, like at first they were asking me questions. They were like, how do we do this? How do we do that? And then they kind of just went into the field, took some advice I gave them, that their organizer gave them, and they've just really been able to do some amazing things, reaching out to a lot of really cool people in the communities that they're working, planning their own events, and really doing important work that's going to help sustain the organization throughout the entire year.

Alyssa Rodriguez: Even as I have been in this program as a comms intern, I've gotten to know all of the interns and I'm just so happy that I got to meet all of them. They're all doing such great things right now and I know they're going to do such great things in the future and I can just really see how this transforms students and young people in general throughout their journey in this program.

Aja Bullock: Yeah. And from some of the interns in the Winston Salem region, this was their first time really ever organizing and at first they were really scared, like I said, asking questions and everything, but they've been leading forums lately, meeting with the city council in Winston Salem, not even just in Winston-Salem, going to Greensboro and surrounding areas and really like growing into this in a way that they were pretty nervous about in the beginning.

Alyssa Rodriguez: So I definitely see the impact that this has on everybody on a personal basis and individually. But how do you think this program affects Democracy North Carolina as an organization?

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Aja Bullock: Working closer with the regional managing organizers, I've heard from them how like the Democracy Summer program is their favorite part of the entire year. And I can see that from the way like I know last year it was like always asking the organizers if we could try something new. It's sometimes organizers get, they're used to doing something but us as young people, we come in and bring in new ideas and maybe we tried something out on our campus that works. So we want to see if it will work with Dem NC too. So that's like one of the really, and it's also like the excitement of seeing like young people out here. We hear that a lot whenever we go into the fields and we're meeting with elected officials and we're lobbying and we're like in the community it's like people are always excited to see young people involved. And so I think that's something that Democracy Summer really gives to demonstrate.

Alyssa Rodriguez: Aja, I think Democracy Summer has been so grateful to have you as an intern within this program as both the first year and the second year, helping the new first years. I think young people being involved in programs like this in general is so important and there's so many talented young people across the state that just need to take that step or don't know how to take that step or don't know where they can gain the skills to make these changes in their community. And I think Democracy Summer is a great program to start. So if you think you or anyone you know would be interested in this program, you can apply at demnc.co/summer. That's demnc.co/summer

Aja Bullock: Yeah. Like I said, this is a great program so I think anyone who is really interested should definitely apply.

Alyssa Rodriguez: Well Aja, thank you so much for being here. Are there any final words you want to leave listeners with about Democracy Summer?

Aja Bullock: Yeah, I just want to say that this is a really important program, not just to Democracy North Carolina, but to the entire state. We have a large impact and even though it might seem scary cause there's a lot of work that we do across the state, this program is really accessible to all people in their organizing career. Like I said, last summer was my first time ever doing organizing and I've been lucky enough to be back again this summer continuing my work and outside of democracy, North Carolina, I've really grown as an organizer and I think that's something that a lot of people can say about their experience with Dem Summer. So definitely something that you should do.

Alyssa Rodriguez: Well, I hope you apply to Democracy Summer and join us in creating in North Carolina. That's Built By Us

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Aja Bullock: And thank you for listening to this podcast made Of, By, and For the People. Bye!

Alyssa Rodriguez: Bye!

Alyssa Rodriguez: Connect with us on social media, you can find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @DemocracyNC, or you can visit our website at democracync.org