

# PodcastS3\_Anjali\_Enjeti

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## SPEAKERS

Omkari Williams, Anjali Enjeti



Omkari Williams 00:21

Hello, and welcome to Stepping Into Truth, the podcast where we have conversations on race, gender and social justice. I'm your host Omkari Williams, and I'm so happy that you're here with me today. One of the things I say often, because it is so true for me, is that I love these conversations because they are intellectually stimulating, but also because they always move me into action. And that is really what I intend them to do for you as well. I want them to inspire you to go out and do something, no matter how small to make a difference in this world. And today's conversation is no different. I do want to mention that this conversation was recorded before the 2020 Presidential election. But with the Georgia runoff elections coming up all this is especially relevant not only to GA but to how we do elections going forward.



Omkari Williams 01:09

Today I'm speaking with Anjali Enjeti. Anjali Enjeti is a former attorney, journalist and activist who writes about voting rights, immigration and politics. Her work has appeared in mediums Zora Magazine, Al Jazeera, The Washington Post, The Nation and elsewhere. Her debut novel is forthcoming from Hub City Press and her essay collection will be forthcoming from the University of Georgia press. She teaches creative writing in the MFA program of Reinhardt University, and lives outside of Atlanta with her family. It is my great pleasure to welcome Anjali to the podcast. Anjali welcome.



Anjali Enjeti 01:48

Thank you so much Omkari. I've been looking forward to this for quite some time and I'm so thrilled that we finally nailed down a time to talk.



Omkari Williams 01:57

I know, I mean, it's been months in the making and honestly See the world has totally changed from the time that we set this up to now.



Anjali Enjeti 02:04

It sure has, goodness,



Omkari Williams 02:06

I mean, my goodness. So I was trying to figure out where to start, because there's so much going on. And what I decided to do is this. So, Georgia, unfortunately, has been in the news quite a lot in these past couple of months and not in good ways. And I thought we should start with some of the reasons that Georgia is the news hotspot that it is because I know that that is something that's very important to you. And let me just say that until about a year ago, I lived in Georgia. So this is a subject...



Anjali Enjeti 02:39

Fantastic.



Omkari Williams 02:40

Yeah, I lived in Savannah. And so I was paying attention because I still have friends there. And the first thing that happened was the murder of Ahmaud Arbery by self appointed law enforcement. And then there was the murder of Rayshard Brooks by police officers. I have to admit, I have not watched the video of either of those events. I literally could not bring myself to do it. But I've read the accounts. And it is as heartbreaking each time as it was the last time. And I'm wondering now in Georgia, in this deep red southern state, well, it's actually not as deep right as it used to be, but we'll get to that later. I am wondering how you think this string of high profile murders of unarmed Black men is going to shift the dynamic in Georgia and in the United States?



Anjali Enjeti 03:38

You know, that's a very good question. So I think, as you would know having lived here, especially lived here fairly recently, Georgia is a state of a lot of contradictions, I think. I mean, we are one of the birthplaces of the civil rights movement. I mean, we have a house here that belonged to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And we are also a state that is only 60% white 40% minority, which is surprising to a lot of people, and one in 10 of us are immigrants. So what we have here is a large proportion of people who are, you know, and who have been actively resisting white supremacy and these horrific killings and of course, our state has had more killings than this, right? I mean,



Omkari Williams 04:35

Yes



Anjali Enjeti 04:35

unfortunately, what happens is that it's the killings on the videos that go viral, that cause these protests and this outrage and get enough attention on them, so that District Attorney offices pay attention enough to charge officers or charge these white vigilantes and police departments then feel pressured to terminate officers. But of course they happen. You know, case in point, I live in a suburb called Johns Creek, which is about 40 minutes northeast of Atlanta. And we had a killing here two years ago. The woman's name was Shukri Ali Said she was a Black Muslim woman, Somali American. She was gunned down under very, very suspicious circumstances.



Anjali Enjeti 05:29

She was in the middle of a mental health episode and was approached by four officers and there were two ambulances nearby and somehow, they could not find a way to safely get her to a hospital, but instead decided to gun her down. So there's no video of that. Right. So we have the video of Ahmaud Arbery, we have the video of Rayshard Brooks, but we don't have a video of that. So there are certainly more Black people in Georgia who have been killed by either police officers or white vigilantes. We just don't have the videos.



Anjali Enjeti 06:03

But I think what's happening now and what has been happening in Georgia is that our rapidly changing demographics have allowed us to push harder, you know, policies and

procedures and bills that make the state a dangerous place for all minorities, but particularly Black Americans to live in. We have more voices. For example, there is a hate crime bill that is going through the Georgia State Senate right now, that up until yesterday had an amendment which made law enforcement a protected class in the same way that Black people or Jewish people or members of the LGBTQIA community would be protected under a hate crimes bill.



Anjali Enjeti 06:52

That amendment just got removed, but it's being added to a different bill. What you find out is that there is a lot of resistance to this in this state because of our demographics because these demographics tend to be, you know, minority groups that are likely Democratic voters. And so we have the pushback for these harmful policies and laws that we've never had before. And I think this has sowed the seeds since Trump's election for more Georgians to get involved in organizing.



Anjali Enjeti 07:30

For more Georgians to really understand how crucial the right to vote is. To push back against our rampant and widespread voter suppression, which happens in every single form you could possibly imagine. From people being wrongly turned away from polls, from having lines wrapping around buildings, for people to vote even early election or early voting days, not just Election Day. For the state to purchase 100 million dollars worth of new voting equipment that it knows is problematic and hackable and can't be audited properly. So we have built, I think, as part of the legacy of the civil rights movement, you know, and active of resistance. And people are raising their voices, as they have always been, but also like they've never before recently. So it's fertile ground here for this current social justice moment that we're in.



Omkari Williams 08:37

One of the things that I find so interesting, because I am originally from New York, so moving to the South was quite a shock in many ways. But Savannah is this little tiny island of blue in a sea of red and it had some of the most, and still has some of the most, committed activists I've ever encountered anywhere. And they are doing the hard work. And you brought up something that really just made such an impact on me when I was still living there, which was the election in 2018 for governor, and that Brian Kemp, as Secretary of State for Georgia at the time, purged half a million people from the Georgia voting rolls. And then closed polling places and all of this while he was on the ballot, to

become Governor in the race against Stacey Abrams.



Omkari Williams 09:38

And then now, as you reference, they have this brand new, extremely costly voting system that just crashed and burned on primary day. I mean, the pictures on the news were not unexpected and yet still horrifying. And I'm wondering what is going to happen in Georgia to prepare for the general election. And we know that Brian Kemp is an ally of President Trump's. So it is not in his interest to make voting easier for anyone. But there is tremendous attention now and tremendous pushback. So I'm curious how you see this coming up, election playing out.



Anjali Enjeti 10:19

You know, Omkari I think that is the million dollar question that you've asked, how are we going to find ways to drive voter turnout, despite the layers upon layers upon layers of obstacles that have been laid before us? I don't know if you saw this when I was tweeting this Omkari. But, for example, it took me six weeks to get my absentee ballot in the mail for the June 9 primary this year. And in order for me to receive it, I had to send several emails to Fulton County. And then finally I got it. And I didn't initially have the right email for Fulton County, I had a different Fulton County email that was the one that was listed on the absentee ballot application itself. And in order to know which email address I should use, I had to email people that were involved with Fair fFght the voting rights organization here that was started by Stacey Abrams in 2018, and the Democratic Party of Georgia's Voter Protection group.



Anjali Enjeti 11:31

Now I have friends with these organizations. So that was easy for me to figure out how to do but the number of steps that I had to take to actually receive my absentee ballot is disturbing on so many levels, because here I am somebody who is in the know, who knows who to reach out to for help if I have difficulty in any part of my voting process. So the question I come away with this. If this is so hard for someone like me to do, what is it like for people, for example, who don't know who to contact, exactly? Who perhaps do not speak English as their first language? Who perhaps do not have the ability to then jump in the car and get to their precincts to vote on election day if their ballot never comes?



Anjali Enjeti 12:26

I had a number of voters not understand that if they didn't receive their absentee ballot in the mail that they could still actually turn up to their precinct on election day and vote, because it's not clear. And this is deliberate. Right? It's not that this is, "Oh, well, we forgot to tell people this". This is intentional. It's premeditated, it's deliberate. And while all of this problems with voters not receiving their absentee ballots in the mail was going on, I got an email from the Secretary of State's office talking to me about a voter fraud task force.

A

Anjali Enjeti 13:00

So this is the priority of the state government in Georgia, is rooting out these fictional fairy voters who are voting twice or trying to stuff a ballot box or something. It doesn't exist. Study after study has shown that there is virtually no voting fraud, especially in Georgia. So this is where their efforts are. So to answer your question in a roundabout way, we have to constantly be talking to Georgia voters about the election and about what they need to do.

A

Anjali Enjeti 13:38

For example, the Secretary of State Office sent out absentee ballot applications to registered voters for the June 9 primary. They have decided that they are not going to do this for our August runoff and for the November general election. Now how many people know will know this a lot of voters we're probably gonna sit down and wait to receive their absentee ballot application in the mail just like we did in June. Well, now they have to go to the Secretary of State website log in and apply for their absentee ballot. So this is something that we have got to be screaming at the top of our lungs, especially since last week, Georgia had the highest rate of growth in COVID cases since the beginning of the pandemic. So we have got to really get the word out about how people can get their absentee ballot, especially if things are only going to get worse this year.

A

Anjali Enjeti 14:39

So we have got to make elections and voting, a daily conversation and all of our communities because our state is not going to help us do this, which means we all need to become voting rights activists in these months leading up into November. We have no other choice. I mean, every text we send to people, every WhatsApp chat, every Facebook chat, every Twitter conversation should be. How are you voting? Do you know how to get your absentee ballot? Do you know where your polling places are? If you're choosing to vote in person, do you know who to call? If you have trouble voting? Do you know you can stay in line after the polls closed as long as you get in line before it closes? So we've got to be talking about this to everybody we know. I mean, something else that is frustrating is

that because COVID started in March here, a lot of groups had to pretty much stop registering voters in person, right? I mean this right, either way. I mean, I'm with an organization and we had planned attending cultural events and registering voters we had planned on going into the high schools and registering voters Well, everything is shut down. So that avenue closed off and in Georgia, you can register to vote completely online, you don't have to leave your own home. But a lot of Georgia potential voters don't know that. So we've got to get the word out.



Omkari Williams 16:10

This is not only going to be a problem in Georgia, although it's bad in Georgia and Georgia is actually one of the states, I mean, I never found it as difficult to vote as I found it to vote in Georgia. But you know, across the country, people are going to have to figure out how they're going to vote. I don't mean which candidate they're going to vote for, although I have clear preferences, but how are they going to actually get their vote sent in or get to your polling place as you referenced, and this is going to be a real problem. And I think that one of the things we need to consider is that because of this pandemic, that they're slow walking, a lot of the protocols that would make voting easier because higher turnout, advantages Democratic candidates traditionally.



Omkari Williams 17:04

So one way to keep the voter turnout low is to make it a choice between voting or your health. And this is something that we're going to have to combat in every single state. But it's particularly hard in states where you have Republican governors or secretaries of state who are just doing the bidding of the GOP who wants to keep it much harder for people to vote across across the country. I mean, it's just it's tremendously disheartening that we're still having this conversation in 2020. But here we are. And I agree, we're going to have to just keep hammering away at this that people have to vote it's essential that you make a plan and that you know what your options are. So thank you for bringing that up. It's It's so important.



Anjali Enjeti 17:53

You know, Omkari you you touched on something else in the wee hours of the morning this morning. I read parts of a new study, I believe it was published by Harvard, that shows the tremendous rates at which Black people Latin x people, and indigenous people are getting COVID. And coincidentally, these groups that are getting COVID at three and four times the rates of white people are likely Democratic voters. So we have this whole other

issue with respect to COVID. And that the people who are getting sick and who are getting sicker, or people from these minority groups that are likely Democratic voters now, that's another barrier that of course nobody probably could have anticipated before March, but it does emphasize the fact that we are going to have to make voting this year and consider it like a part time job.



Anjali Enjeti 18:54

Now this is impossible for people to do who work multiple jobs just to pay their bills. may have disabilities and be among immunocompromised so they have more limited options and and for voting for them voting might not be as accessible for people who are have limited English proficiency. So we have to completely reimagine how to get people to the polls this year, because COVID affects not only so many people, but it, it affects so many likely Democratic voters. And this is just something that is it's just incredibly concerning for me.



Omkari Williams 19:33

It is and something that I've been saying from the get go is, and this was before we even had a presumptive nominee. It's like, whoever whoever it might be you have to look at this as if that person is down by 20 points. I don't care what poll shows Joe Biden up on Trump. I don't care. That is not what's going to do it. Hillary got 3 million more votes and still lost the election. So we have to look at all of the things that are sort of working against us and just put our heads down and say, Okay, this is the path we're going down. And we're going to work really hard because this is not sustainable. The damage being done to our society is not sustainable. And actually, that leads me into something else I want to talk to you about. So we're having this conversation a few days after Trump spoke to a very small rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma.



Omkari Williams 20:34

Not that I'm petty or anything.



Anjali Enjeti 20:37

Please, pettiness is the way of life right now. It's how I survive.





Omkari Williams 20:41

Right!



Omkari Williams 20:42

So in Oklahoma, first off, yeah, they the campaign had decided that they were going to go there on Juneteenth, which, you know, practically made my head explode, but it created such a backlash that they were forced to move the date, one measly day but still they moved it. So then the event occurs and Trump goes on this extended rant that cannot be called anything other than racist. And it really feels to me like we're at this place where the battle between anti racism and unabashed, unafraid, bigotry is being played out right in front of us. And I live in Illinois. Now I live in Chicago. So I'm in a little bit of a bubble. But I'm curious as to what you're seeing as this plays out in Georgia. And as you watch it on television, as I do play out across the country. What are your hopes and fears as this battle just keeps raging?



Anjali Enjeti 21:39

You know, it's interesting, because I think we sort of went through a few different phases here in Georgia after Trump was elected, you know, the months leading up to his campaign, right, he was saying these horribly racist and xenophobic and ablest things as well. But we were in a sort of denial for a while that he would be elected. And then afterwards, I think there was a shock that he actually won for a lot of people. And I think initially, what a lot of Georgians felt, at least the people in my circles was that maybe the best tactic was to just ignore him to block him out right to, to not watch his interviews to, you know, ignore the press briefings to, you know, let's just do the work we need to do to elect the candidates we need to elect. But let's not so much pay attention to this rhetoric. Let's keep our heads down and keep doing the good work, which might have made some sense, but then Charlottesville happened, right.



Anjali Enjeti 22:53

So once we started seeing the translation of racist, extremely racist, white supremacist rhetoric, translate into violence translate into an uptick of hate crimes all across the country. I think people started realizing that just keeping your head down and doing the work might not be enough that we actually needed to get loud about our anti racism and loud about, you know, show up to these white supremacist protests challenge these people more directly online.



Anjali Enjeti 23:38

And I think what happened was was people that had been relatively quiet about their politics finally started getting louder now. It's a shame and very, very unfortunate that it had to take so much violence, against Black people in particular, for people to activate and get really loud and really angry. But I think that's what's happening. happened is that we've now seen, we've now had three and a half years of violent dictator at the helm of the country, who is now largely responsible for the over 120,000 deaths from COVID, in addition to the rise in hate crimes, and the fear of being, you know, harm that so many minority groups are experiencing, and I think that's what we see. Right?



Anjali Enjeti 24:30

They, I think these protests are our protest, not only after the death of George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks, and so many other Black Americans, but also, I think it's just been a tipping point for people, especially in the south who sometimes like to keep their politics quieter and closer to their heart to take it to the streets. I mean, I live in the suburbs, and I'm always someone who has had to drive into Atlanta to go to protests and rallies. And almost I think I've attended every rally I've attended in protest has happened out here in the suburbs. They're happening in rural Georgia. They're happening in Savannah, as you say, where they're extremely well organized. In Columbus, Georgia, which is also very blue. They're happening in Macon, Georgia. So we have a lot of parts of the state, not just the Atlanta metro area, where people are getting very loud about not just their politics, but about their values, about their morals and are really prepared to get more aggressive about ensuring that marginalized people are not harmed. And so it's unfortunate that so many people had to be hurt for it to get this way. But it has also just been a thing of beauty to see how seriously people are taking, organizing and expressing their voice, especially people who have not done it before now.



Omkari Williams 26:01

I could not agree more. And it's been one of the most encouraging things to see is when you see people in rural parts of Georgia or in small cities, standing up and speaking out, and it's not just Black people, people of color, it's across the spectrum. And the way you describe it as people standing up for their values, I think is spot on. I think that's precisely what it is. And it's really heartening to see people just say, okay, you know, what, I am not going to just sit silently by because I realize now that being silent, is unintentionally being complicit. And if I don't use my voice, that people are going to make assumptions that are not necessarily true, and they're going to make decisions based on those assumptions. And I'm done with that. That's not how I'm going to be anymore. And that really gives me

hope because something dramatic has to shift and has to shift soon because I feel like we're at this tipping point in the country, we could go one of two ways. And one way is a bad way. And one way is a way that's good, but still going to require a lot of work. But if we go too far down on the bad side, I don't see how we get back to anything that resembles the country we believe we've had we want to have. So I think it's really important that we see these protests and people getting into action and sustaining action over a longer haul, which is always the hard work of it. It's how do you sustain?



Anjali Enjeti 27:40

Absolutely. And and I think to Omkari, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.



Omkari Williams 27:44

No it's fine. Go ahead.



Anjali Enjeti 27:45

You keep illuminating things for me. When you talk, I'm like, "Oh, yes". And then. So one of one of the things you said just made me think of something and I just I have this theory, and I don't know if there's any truth to it. But I've sort of been seeing this really interesting thing happen with these Black Lives Matter protests. I'm finding that people on social media who identify as moderates, and who may also even identify as Republicans throwing them themselves behind the Black Lives Matter movement. And what's happening is it's making them think twice about what it is that makes them quote, moderate or Republican.



Anjali Enjeti 28:31

It's making them wonder a little bit about the disconnect there. About how you can actually see that something horrific happened to George Floyd, but still continue to be moderate on an array of political issues, or even conservative of them on them. The same is true with a lot of these evangelical churches that are now for the first time white evangelical churches, obviously, that are now for the first time posting information about Black Lives Matter. It makes you wonder whether this vigorous and beautiful Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 is actually what's causing people to reflect on views that they used to not really consider, made them complicit and made them hypocrites and made them put Black lives in danger to begin with. So I'm hoping that there is a an awakening happening for that group of people as well. But it's not just people who otherwise identify

as liberal or progressive getting more active. But maybe these protests are causing people who don't identify as progressives to reconsider why they hold the views that they hold.



Omkari Williams 29:52

I think that's an excellent point. And I hadn't really thought about it in that way. But I don't think there's another way to really explain the protests that we're seeing in places where we've never seen protests before. And I think that one of the things that certainly happened in this time is that people have had the stark reality laid out for them. You can't watch someone, literally smother the life out of someone else and think that everything is fine. You can't watch that and think it's fine.



Omkari Williams 30:27

And so people are now in a position where they're being forced to look at what's happening and say, either I think I'm a moral person, and I object to this because this is heinous. Or I just have to pretend and stick my head back in the sand. I think that increasingly people are saying, I'm not willing to do that. This is a matter of principle for me. If I am going to say that I'm a good person, if I'm going to say that I'm a Christian in a meaningful way, if I'm going to say any of these things, then I have to stand up for this basic principle that Black Lives Matter and that that does not mean other lives don't matter. It means that Black lives have not mattered in this country for the 400 plus years since slavery.



Anjali Enjeti 31:15

And it's also such a reckoning, I think right now for the prison abolitionist movement, I mean, the fact that we are actually having really meaningful conversations about what it actually means to defund the police. I mean, this was like considered fringe even just like a year ago. This has been work. I mean, the contemporary movement began with Angela Davis in 1970s. So it's been around for a while, but these are conversations that even people who consider themselves progressive were so offended by this notion of reducing the police force seemed out of left field, right.



Omkari Williams 31:58

Absolutely.



Anjali Enjeti 31:59

The Daily Show has a panel on people who, who are talking about what it means to defund the police and why it's a valid avenue for us to pursue as a nation is remarkable. I never used to bring up this stuff on like Facebook because I was just, you know, you just you just get an avalanche of people criticizing you for the language you use. And that's oh these are good people and which misses the point, right? It's not about individuals being good or bad. It's about a system that systemically imprisons and kills Black people and has since as you mentioned slavery, so yeah.



Omkari Williams 32:40

I mean, Angela Davis, this week said something about just being grateful that she is still alive to see that this work that she's been doing for her entire adult life is finally bearing some fruit. That always reminds me, you know that we get to a tipping point. And people often think about activism. And they think about, well, I've been doing X, Y, or Z, and it doesn't seem to be paying any dividends. And I always like to remind people that you don't necessarily get to see the result of your action. And that sometimes it takes the time it takes, and that that is not a reason to stop. You can't just be waiting to see a result. Because it's sort of like when you're a kid and you're waiting for that tooth to fall out. And it's seems like it's never going to happen. And then the next thing, you know, there's this big gap in your face. So you know,



Anjali Enjeti 33:37

You're so right. And you know, the analogy that I use Omkari when I'm talking to friends who are new to activism, and who feel really frustrated when things don't work out, is I say, pretend that you have 1000 darts, and you're trying to throw them at a dartboard. If one of those darts lands on the dartboard anywhere at all that's a win and that's how you have to look at it is that you have to try so many different things for the chance that one thing might might work, right?



Omkari Williams 34:09

Yeah,



Anjali Enjeti 34:09

That's, that's the best any of us can do. You know, there was a lot of talk this week right about the Tik Tokkers and how they secured tickets to Trump's Tulsa rally and might have

contributed to the fact that it was an empty stadium. And then there was a weird backlash that was, Oh, well, they didn't do it. And here's why. The point is not whether they were successful in doing it. The point is, is that a lot of our youth organized, they saw a potential opportunity to for this extremely racist, white supremacist rally led by our extremely white supremacist dictator, and decided to actively try to stop it. That's all that matters. Whether or not we have the stats that prove that they actually did this and were successful doesn't matter. The fact is the good news comes from the organizing effort and the community built around that organizing effort. And then the rest, you just have to let go of and just hope it works right? Or it may not work, but you can't control that always. But what you can control is the organizing effort that you put forward.



Omkari Williams 35:20

And one thing about the whole effort that these teenagers, largely teenagers, did that made me so happy is that they're teenagers. So they are building their activists skills, and they are building their activist community, and they are interested and committed and dedicated. And I was just not that person when I was a teenager. So I am in awe of who they are and what they're doing. And whether it totally worked or didn't work is really, as you say irrelevant. And what they absolutely did, regardless of whether they kept the numbers down and I don't think that's the case. But what they absolutely did was mess up their data banks. And that is so valuable because that's how they any campaign reaches out in the 21st century to its voters is through the database and if you can mess that up, good.



Anjali Enjeti 36:17

And that is possible generation to pursue that avenue because these Gen X Gen Z ers or I've heard them called Zoomers, I'm not sure what they prefer. They are experts on all these social media tools.



Omkari Williams 36:32

Oh boy!



Anjali Enjeti 36:32

We are not right?



Omkari Williams 36:34

Yes.



Anjali Enjeti 36:34

You know, I've been on Instagram for a while I still didn't really get how to use it, especially for purposes of activism until I began following these high schoolers and college students and seeing how they use it for activism and



Omkari Williams 36:38

Absolutely!



Anjali Enjeti 36:47

And then have it clicking, right? I mean for Instagram and Snapchat in ways that are so inventive and really catch your eye and get you to start paying attention. And I'm learning from them. It's been great.



Omkari Williams 37:04

I'm pretty sure they're born with a chip in them. You know, we just didn't get that chip. So we are disadvantaged from the hop, but they're amazing. And I'm so glad that they are doing the work they're doing because this is what we need in this world. And it's beautiful to witness. Now, our time is coming to an end. And I want to get into two more things before we go so far. One thing that I really wanted to talk to you about because I thought it was so important was you're a professor you teach at UC school, and you talk about how our classic literature in the United States is really missing the boat when it comes to being not just anti racist, but just even being representative in meaningful ways and you specifically reference *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Huckleberry Finn*. And I would love for you to talk about how these books exemplify problems that you perceive in literature.



Anjali Enjeti 38:12

You know, it's interesting because I think there's a process of learning that happens with these books as we grow up. And then I think we have to spend the rest of our lives unlearning these books, which is not the same thing as saying, don't ever read them. It's

just saying you must read them in the context of what they meant then and what they meant now, where people of color particularly Black people, were never agents in their own stories in these white authored books about racism in particular, right. They were not empowered individuals. They were not fully fleshed out characters. They were simply devices that were used for white characters imagination for their emotional journeys for their psychological journeys for their intellectual journeys. I believe Matthew is the sociologist that coined the term magical Negro when I heard it adapted to be called magical native for other ethnic groups.

A

Anjali Enjeti 39:21

But we have this literature that is still so heavily based in the so called classics, which are basically just colonized literature, where white Americans are always the predominant storytellers. And it's their lives which are, which are the focus and the center of what is deemed good literature. Right. And, and this still continues, I mean, I have a recent high school graduate and I have another child in high school and then a middle schooler. I mean, these books are still being taught.

A

Anjali Enjeti 39:54

Maybe people are still learning about racism from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but I think what they're learning is that racism is in the past, that white people can be good and be anti racist. They can learn all they need to know about anti racism from reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and not doing anything else. But what happens is, is you then don't see the Black characters as real people. And if you're not seeing Black characters as real people in literature, you probably aren't seeing them as real people in real life, and understanding the ways that you continue to have power to oppress Black people. So that's the problem. And I think we need to have a reckoning and reinvention of what we consider classic literature, because I keep having conversations with people who teach about what the value of classic literature is, and I'm finding that not a whole lot of people, even white people think that there's a whole lot of value in classic literature and in telling these types of stories, because what they do is they don't really expand your view of humanity, they limit it.

A

Anjali Enjeti 41:03

You have to have so many racist things happen to you as a character of color in order for white people to understand racism, like really you have to read these horrific things. It reminds me of the videos that we see of Black Americans being murdered that go viral. Like, do we really have to have non Black people watch these videos to understand the



humanity that Black people have? Same goes for To Kill a Mockingbird, like did these really horrible things have to happen? Did we really have to have this white savior, Atticus Finch to fix these problems and in order for us to realize that Tom Robinson is a human person and had a right to this life and to be free? I mean, I it's it's a it's a very toxic Catch. 22 I think, and I don't think we're actually learning anything that we can apply to life from these books other than to think of ourselves as the good white people or the good non Black people who wouldn't do such horrible things.



Omkari Williams 42:05

That's really interesting. I'm, I appreciate your saying that because I do think it's tricky. And I think people need to read these books, if they want to, with that perspective with that understanding, because they are beautiful literature, they just may not be the meaning that people necessarily have always taken from them. You can appreciate the literature and still see the flaws in it.



Anjali Enjeti 42:33

Absolutely.



Omkari Williams 42:34

So I want to end by asking you, what are three simple actions that you would like to see people do in the next few months in particular in the social justice realm, something that will move the needle. You know, just three simple basic things.



Anjali Enjeti 42:54

Sure, so I think the first thing I would suggest is that you If you weren't eligible to vote, check routinely your voter registration to make sure that you are still eligible to vote because so many people get kicked off their voter poll registration rolls, we need to double check frequently that yes, we are still an active and current registered voter. And I recommend everyone doing this. Obviously states like Georgia, notorious for purging their rolls, but I recommend that everyone do this, check your voter registration. If you've moved, you need to change your voter registration, figure out how to do that. If you've moved you might need to change your driver's license address and your voter registration address to vote at your local precinct. So make sure that first that that is in order your voter registration, because we need you to vote.



Anjali Enjeti 43:54

Number two, I have always said and I maintain that local activism is the best kind of activism there is. And I truly believe it's the most effective activism. I think we get so wrapped up in Trump, right? It's hard not to get wrapped up in Trump, that we spend so much time focusing on big elections, so much time focusing on Oh, is Joe Biden going to beat Trump right? Or is the US Senate going to be flipped? But the truth of the matter is, is that if Joe Biden wins in November, for example, my state Georgia still has an abortion ban that could go in effect if it's ruled constitutional. So what does that do for me? As it turns out, residents, especially residents of red states will still have a host of issues that they are living with, even if Joe Biden wins. So we need to really practice our activism on the most local level possible. You know, start attending your city council meetings, for example, start following the bills going through your state legislative body, start figuring out who's on the school board, who's the superintendent, these actions are so, so important, and they don't bring the glamour that the bigger elections bring, but they're every bit as vital.



Anjali Enjeti 45:23

And third, I think we are still not having and when I say we, I mean non Black people are still not having the kinds of conversations we need to have in our communities about complicity, about the ways that we continue to oppress Black people, undocumented people, people with disabilities, people from the LGBTQIA communities, Muslim people, Jewish people. I think we are failing at looking at the people who we share meals with, who we you know, attend religious services with Well, of course, a lot of those are zoom now, you know, but the people we see every day, I don't feel that we are challenging them in the very open ways that we should be. We are still operating in spaces where we want to be comfortable, and we want to feel secure, and we want to be liked. And I would encourage people to understand who pays for this for this kind of everyday civility that we engage in? Who pays for it, it's not us, because we want to be comfortable, and we want to still be able to text our friends and go meet for a picnic in a park. But there are people who are really suffering, because we refuse to openly challenge people who we love. And I think these this needs to be part of our regular practice as activists is to actually look at the people in our inner circle and say, I can't stand for this anymore. I can't stand for your silence and your inaction and maybe you need to be less a part of my life because of it.



Omkari Williams 47:00

I love all three of those. Those are so very important. And I'm so glad that you brought each and every one of them up. I'm especially going to second the second one, which is

about local activism. And I think it's incredibly important in this time of COVID, where we are much more in our own communities than we might otherwise be. I mean, I'm not getting on a plane anytime soon. So yeah. But I think that, you know, the school board election where the decisions are made about what textbooks are actually going to be in the schools and the city council election where they decide, are they going to reduce the budget for your local police department and divert some of those funds into other areas. All of these are really, really important. So thank you so much for referencing each and every one of those ideas. I am going to make sure that I amplify those as much as I can. Well, this was amazing. I'm so glad we got to speak Anjali. I just loved this conversation. As we said at the beginning, it took a while to get here. But here we are.



Anjali Enjeti 48:17

Oh, thank you so much for having me. This was just dynamite. I get so much energy and adrenaline from talking with people who are really trying to make change like yourself. And it's inspiring to me too. I've learned so much from you and your own activism.



Omkari Williams 48:34

Thank you so much. Thank you. This has really truly been great. So hopefully, we will have a conversation six months from now where we're celebrating a new reality in this country on so many levels. So thank you once again, Anjali and be well and keep doing the good work.



Anjali Enjeti 48:55

Thank you. You too. You take care.



Omkari Williams 48:56

Thank you. And to all of you listening out there There's so much work to do. And we can do it even if we are still sort of stuck at home, taking care of our health and taking care of the health of other people in our community. So do what you can do. Pay attention to the suggestions that you heard today because they are absolutely critical ones to moving the needle and making sure that we are just making progress every single day in every way that we possibly can. I look forward to seeing all of you again on this channel really soon. And in the meantime, remember, everything you do matters. So make a decision. Take a step and keep moving forward.

