

PROFESSIONAL  
**TROUBLEMAKER**



*with* **LUVVIE AJAYI JONES**

## **Professional Troublemaker with Luvvie Ajayi Jones**

**Challenge Authority (with Donna Brazile) - Episode 19**

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Welcome to the Professional Troublemaker Podcast! This is the place where we help you cultivate the courage, authenticity and audacity you need to use your voice, take up space and live a life that is so bold, even your wildest dreams say #goals. I'm your host, Luvvie Ajayi Jones, New York Times bestselling author, sought after speaker and side-eye sorceress bringing you thought-provoking conversations with amazing people taken action, done scary things and rocked the boat to an audacious life. Like the late, great John Lewis said, these are the kind of people who are "Never, ever afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

Before we jump into today's interview, know that this podcast is named after my second New York Times bestselling book, Professional Troublemaker: The Fear-Fighter Manual, which is available now wherever you get your books!

With this book and with everything I do, and I'm on a mission to help a million people live audaciously. To do that, they must fight their fear.

Think of it! A million people who are out there, standing on the edge of something great and need that little push of encouragement. That push to be the domino. To say the hard thing. To have the hard conversation. A million people kicking their fear to the curb and step into the life they've been dreaming of. A million people asking for a raise. A million people starting a fierce job they're not sure they're ready for. A million people doing something so big that their wildest dreams say goals. My goodness.

And that is what writing this book has done for me, what it's already done for those who are reading it and gifting it to others. This book has empowered people to say yes to things they were previously saying no to. It's empowered people to have tough conversations they weren't going to have before. People have asked for raises and promotions and gotten them after reading this book and finding the courage to speak up. The domino effect of what has been happening when a few people have decided not to live in the realm of fear has been amazing - think of what could happen if a million people stopped letting fear be the first factor in their decision making?

An audacious mission like that can't happen without you, so let's get this book in the hands of people who need it. Buy a copy of Professional Troublemaker for yourself, or as a gift for your friend who needs a push. I know it will change your life like it's changed mine and I know it will change the lives of all these people who touch it, because domino effects are real. Order Professional Troublemaker

(hardcover or audiobook) now at [PROFESSIONALTROUBLEMAKERBOOK.com](http://PROFESSIONALTROUBLEMAKERBOOK.com) or wherever you buy books.

My guest today is Veteran political strategist Donna Brazile is the former interim Chair of the Democratic National Committee and became the first African American woman to serve as the manager of a major party presidential campaign when she ran the campaign of former vice president Al Gore. Donna is a best-selling author and speaks at colleges and universities across the country. She's been an adjunct professor at Georgetown and the Harvard Kennedy School and is currently the Gwendolyn S. and Colbert I. King Endowed Chair in Public Policy at Howard University.

During our conversation, we cover the importance of always asking why, how critical it is to lift others as we climb, and the cultures that shape us. I have been super geeked to share this conversation since she and I talked a couple of weeks ago. Let's get into it.

## Conversation with Donna Brazile

LUVVIE So Donna, I always start by asking people what they wanted to be when they were growing up.

DONNA Well, as a child, growing up in the segregated deep South, my first thought about my future was when I was sitting in a church, way in the back and I wanted to be a priest. When I got home from mass, I told my mother that I wanted to be a priest. And she said, "You can't be a priest. You're a girl." And I'm like, well, what's wrong with that? I mean, Jesus' mom was a girl. I was five years old, but I knew enough about the Lord to sort of have this exchange with my mother about my goal of being a priest. I just love the fact that the church had this decorum about it. Where you walk up, you get your blessings, you get your bread and your wine, the blood of Jesus, the body of Jesus, the body of Christ, and I wanted to be a priest.

After my mother told me that it was impossible, then I wanted to be a doctor, until I got to seventh grade, a few years [inaudible 00:04:31]. And by the way, I did not like biology class because every time we dissected something, I kept thinking, "Wait a minute, we're dissecting a frog, did we just have fried frog legs." And then we dissect the turtle. Am I'm like, "Didn't we have turtle soup." So that turned me off, biology turned me off from science, although I did very well in biology and chemistry, not so well in physics.

So I ended up thinking, again, this is sequential, by the time I was reaching my teenage years, I said, "You know what, I'm going to devote my life to public service." And I decided I wanted it to be a community organizer, grassroots organizer. And I stayed on that course, although I majored in psychology and industrial engineering, my focus was on community organizing and being involved in politics and public service. I got the calling very early in life and I decided to [inaudible 00:05:28] through it.

LUVVIE We have a few things in common. One, I also want it to be a doctor when I was five years old. And two, I majored in psychology and got my college degree in psychology.

DONNA There you go, that's a well-rounded experience too. I love psychology. I love mystery of it, but I also love the challenge of understanding, not just the human psyche, but the soul and how we're all connected. And so, while I didn't practice it, I still preach having, what I call a natural balance, that we all are in a state of grace, but we also have a natural balance within ourselves. But as you know, we get out of harmony and then all the discord happening, and discord lead to disease.

LUVVIE Exactly. So when you were early teens and you will like, "I'm going to be a public servant." What was the catalyst for that realization?

DONNA The assassination of Martin Luther King and the ongoing trauma that I think many of us experiences as young kids growing up in the South. When you're told as a child that you cannot drink on a certain water fountain, and you're told that when you get on a bus, that you have to go straight to the back. And when early on, you're taught that there are certain days that Black kids can go to [inaudible 00:06:49] Park or certain days that Black kids were allowed at Audubon park.

I mean, you grew up with this sense of, "Wait a minute, why can't I enjoy the things that other people enjoy." And I think by the time I was 11 years old, when they began the integration campaign, and we were bused from our community across town to a community that didn't want to accept this. And they threw eggs, and they threw tomatoes and of course, threw rocks at us.

And I kept saying, we can bring eggs and tomatoes, they're too expensive, my mother will not allow us to do that. And of course we could've brought rocks, but we were outnumbered. And besides we were not in our neighborhoods. So I got a sense of justice and equality at an early age. And I knew what I wanted to fight for. Eventually, I went to the principal office because I was a troublemaker as a child, in a sense that my mouth got me in trouble. My mouth got me in trouble because I constantly questioned the why, why are we being attacked? Why are we told in the morning that we had to stand out in the sun or the rain while the white kids, they could stand underneath the roof.

And so I constantly questioned, and finally Mr. Ramsey came to me, he was the vice principal. He said, "I'm going to take you to see Mr. Russell, the principal. And I talked to Mr. Russell, at that time, I didn't even know what a leader was, but I began to take on those responsibilities early on in my life that I would be the one that opened my mouth and challenged authority.

LUVVIE Wow. How old were you when MLK was killed?

DONNA I was eight years old and I'll never forget that Thursday, April 4th. It was a rainy day, we got home from school and our grandmother told us, they didn't tell us at school, my grandmother told us when we got home, my parents came home later and they confirmed that he was dead. My grandmother told us that Dr. King was shot. And of course, like most Southern families, I think most families across the country. We had pictures of Dr. King. Of course, I read about Dr. King ever week and the in Jet Magazine or the Louisiana Weekly, and of course, once a month you got your Ebony.

And I knew what that became was doing, I also knew the people in the neighborhood who were associated with the SCLC, the NAACP, and other organizations. So as a kid, my grandmother that night reminded us that we had to pray, and I objected to praying for the person who shot Dr. King. I said, "I'm not doing that." She said, "But Jesus told us, and Dr. King believed that we should love our enemies." And so I'll never forget that as long as I live.

LUVVIE So eight year old, you was like, "I'm not with that."

DONNA No, of course not because I didn't understand it. I mean, why should I pray for someone who just murdered Dr. King. Dr. King was a man of peace. He preached non-violence. He wanted to bring about change that would allow all of us to go to the park, or get on a bus without going into the back. I understood as a child that Dr. King was marching for justice and equality. And although I was too young to March with Dr. King, I believe what he was doing was real and I supported it.

LUVVIE I love that little Donna was the Donna we have now.

DONNA I guess I haven't grown up. My inner child is still here. No, but I understood justice and equality. And I also had parents and grandparents, especially my grandmother Francis, my grandmother Francis was born soon after the civil war and she was born in Mississippi. And so, she was my first role model, because I would come home from school, and I would say to grandma, "Grandma, what is this? Grandma, who said that? And grandma, did you know Abraham Lincoln?"

And of course she could say, "No, I didn't know Abraham Lincoln, but I knew of Frederick Douglass. And so she would introduce these names. And of course, as a child, your curiosity got the best of you. And you wanted to figure out who was Harriet Tubman. I mean, my grandmother, her name was Francis Harriet. And I'm like, "Why did they name you Francis? Why didn't name you Harriet?" Just like I'd say, why'd they name me Donna, why didn't they name me Lease Louise. And so, she would tell me all these stories and I just wanted to be like my grandmother. I wanted to be strong, I wanted to be tough, and I also want it to be independent.

LUVVIE I love that. I have a grandmother whose fingerprints are all over me right now. You are speaking my language right now, Donna. And I think there's a gift in keeping your inner child. I think what usually happens is our inner child gets traumatized out of us, and then we grew up to be people looking for them still. So there's that joy and that beauty in the fact that you kept her, because she is who allowed you to become Donna Brazile that we know today. That troublemaker from the past is the troublemaker we have now. So where did you go to college?

DONNA I went to LSU. Coming out of high school, again, we were still in that period of integration and I had several offers, but the one offer that stood out was LSU because in addition to a partial scholarship for athletics, a partial scholarship that came out of the Lion's Club, full academics. I just thought that the money worked. I graduated in four years with less than \$1,500 in debt. So I took the money, I went to LSU and I loved it. The other reason why I wanted to go to LSU is that I wanted a challenge. My mother went to Southern, my daddy went to Gramley, my oldest sister, she was at Xavier, and my other sister was going to UNL, I didn't want to follow in my sister's footsteps, I was number three. I wanted to chart a new course.

And of course, I'm still the same way. I took a survey of my family. I say, okay. I mean, I wanted to know who went to Tulane, who went to Xavier, who went to LSU, who went to Gramley. I went through all of the schools and no one had, in my family, ever attended a predominantly white college like LSU. And of course, again, being the trouble maker, I wanted to go and stir things up and say, I'm going to go to LSU.

LUVVIE So tell me what you did on that campus. What trouble did you make on the campus of LSU?

DONNA Oh my God. In my freshman year I became the dorm president, it was majority white girls. It was a segregated by gender. And when Elvis died, I decided to throw a party, of course, I threw parties. I'm from the New Orleans, I was throwing parties left and right. I became dorm president. And then later, I got involved with the student government association, then every week, I went to Free Speech Alley and I called for a free South Africa, make Martin Luther King's birthday a national holiday. I was so progressive. I wanted to change the world, I even called for saving Black colleges and universities. And I [inaudible 00:14:06] for the Daily Reveille, which was the campus newspaper, and so I love stirring up trouble.

I would go on the big oak tree, where people go and make free speeches. And I went there every Friday to call out the Klu Klux Klan, racism and white supremacy, but I went there because I believe that as a woman, as a Black woman, I want it to show, not just my campus community, but the entire Baton Rouge community that we were about change, and we wanted to be strong advocates.

Later, the mayor of Baton Rouge, because I was a strong advocate for fair and affordable housing, fair housing, affordable housing, he put me on the Fair Housing Commission in Baton Rouge, and I was 19 years old. I don't know where it comes from, but I had an activist streak at a young age. I tried to stay out of trouble. My mom said, "Please don't get arrested." I didn't get arrested but I think I went right up against that line. And knowing the law as much as I understood it, I was very smart, very strategic, but I was an organizer.

And you know what, I love campus, and I still have the document today. I wrote an open letter to Black students, because of the progress we made in those four years, we formed the Black United Student Assembly, we started celebrating Black History Month on campus. And in fact, Reverend Ralph Abernathy came to visit us and many others. We started so many campus organizations that would empower Black students, but also empower the growing Hispanic students, the openly gay students. We wanted to be a community that brought about change on campus. We also advocated for more Black faculty. So when I graduated from college, four years to the day I arrived on campus, the chancellor looked at me and he said, "I'm so glad you're leaving." I said, "Well, thank you. I'm glad I'm leaving too."

And I've received my first honorary doctor from LSU. I mean, they understood that I was a fighter on behalf of the student body, but I was also very principled, and taking on the faculty and administrator. And now LSU will also receive my papers and all of my other accomplishments because I'm very familiar with the college and my nephew will be graduating this spring, he's pre-med. And I have a cousin who will be gone this fall. So once you open up doors, you know what happens, people follow you and people [inaudible 00:17:00]. And my other philosophy is that once you've reached top, you bring the elevator back down. I do believe what Mary McLeod Bethune taught us some years ago that we lift as we climb.

LUVVIE Absolutely. So you basically came on this campus, end up turning things upside down for the good. I know you face all types of battles. How were you, as a young Black teenager, on this mostly white campus, what fed you and gave you the courage in the bad moments?

DONNA A sense of history. I had a keen sense of the history, not just of my state, but the history of my people. And I wanted to, not only protect that history, but I also to showcase that history. And so, because of a combination of being mentally engaged in the community, I was engaged in the community of Baton Rouge. I was also engaged with my community back home New Orleans metropolitan area. I grew up in Kenner.

I was engaged, basically I knew all of the people that were organizing and trying to bring about change to my beloved state of Louisiana. And that's what kept me going. I was involved in the 1976 presidential campaign with Jimmy Carter. I was a state youth coordinator before I was even 18, I was doing voter registration campaigns, and so I was very active. And because of that, people constantly called upon me to help them organize and to help bring about student involvement in various campaigns. And so by the time I graduated, not only I have a job in corporate America, which I told my mom I would take after I finished my internship on Capitol Hill, also Mrs. King, I had met her through Ralph Abernathy, and she invited me to be part of the effort to make Martin Luther King's birthday a holiday.

And because I was good at organizing campuses, I was very active in the United States Student Association. And I was active in the National Third World Student Coalition. And so, naturally, I had contacts across the country and my job was to mobilize students to sign petitions. And when we came up with more than seven million we pushed forward to get the legislation through Congress.

And before I was 24, I had organized the 20th anniversary of Dr. King, he's historic March on Washington, and then I got involved in the Jackson campaign. So I just kept moving-

LUVVIE You kept moving.

DONNA ... I just kept setting higher and higher goals. And likewise, when I turned 40, I set a goal and I wrote in my first book, *Cooking with Grease: Stirring the Pots in American Politics*, that I said before the end of this decade, before the end of this century, or the next century, we will have a Black president. And we've had a Black president, now we have a Black female vice president, but I'm still working. I'm still looking for the next higher order of things that we must do to make this a more perfect union.

LUVVIE So my question for you is, around that time, when you were young, before you were 25, you're working on all these massive national campaigns, you have all these connections, you've already done a lot for such a young person, what was the toughest part about all of it?

DONNA Being young? I mean I understood racial discrimination. I understood gender discrimination, but being young, people used to say, "Well, she's too young." And I'm like, "Excuse me, Dr. King was 26 when he organized the Montgomery buscott, Jesus was in his 20s. I just started putting it down like, "Wait a minute. Why should I wait until I'm 40 or 50 when I can do it right now? And besides I have no debt, I have no children, I have no family, so let me do it now while I'm still

able and capable of doing this." And I wanted to change the world. I didn't want to wait until I was 50. I had time on my hands, and I was smart enough, and I was committed enough.

Now look, I mean, do I regret not spending several holidays with my family during that time? Absolutely. And when I look back now and recognize that the only reason why I was able to see my mom before she passed away was because I got fired on a job, and I had to go home. And thank God I did because, had I not been fired, and maybe that was the only way I could get my attention, but I got a chance to see my mom before she passed away, that was in the 1988 cycle.

But the good news is that I had goals, measurable goals that I set as a child. I said, by the age of 40, I will manage a presidential campaign, and I say by 50, I will be a college professor, well, I started that in my 30s. So I had measurable goals that I set for myself as a young person. And all I kept doing was I kept looking at those goals and I kept going for the prize. And I knew my North Star and that was, I wanted to serve.

LUVVIE Donna, you are an icon, a legend in this game. You have done so much, you've been a part of every presidential campaign since what year, 1976?

DONNA '76, and I have the scars to prove it.

LUVVIE Let's talk about it. So your first campaign was Jimmy Carter, what was your role?

DONNA Youth coordinator? And then in 1980, I was a student coordinator. I constantly moved. And by the time I got to Jesse Jackson campaign in '84, I was part of the field team, deputy political director, political director, field coordinator, floor manager at the convention. So I kept moving and moving, and then by 1988, I became a deputy campaign manager. And then of course my goal was before I turned 40, and it happened right on time. In September of 1999, I was 39 years old. Al Gore asked me to be his campaign manager. So that was my goal. The reason why I wanted to work on presidential campaigns, I had studied Barbara Jordan, I had studied so many people. And I kept thinking that, "I got learn this process. How can I put a Black person or a woman in the White House if I don't know the process?"

Now I knew the names of every president of the United States. At that time it was 38 of them. I knew all of their names, but what I didn't know with the game itself. And I learned it. And once I learned it, I wanted to master it. And I'm still the same way, if I'm learning now how to do chalk paint, but for me, it's not just a simple task of learning something new. I like to master it. I like to understand it, I like to understand the concept of it. And now I'm learning how to put cream, in fact, my computer is on one of the platforms that are built. COVID has had a lot of meaning for a lot of people. For me, it's brought me back to what I can do with my hands and what I can do by using my mind to paint. I first started off going back to Paint By Numbers because when we were-

LUVVIE Oh, I love Paint By Numbers.

DONNA Yeah, my mom used to go out and get us Paint By Numbers. There were nine of us. And so, she had to constantly bring stuff home for us to sort of stay together. And she would bring us Paint By Numbers. And I would sit there for days on end and paint by number, horses, barns, birds. I

got to the point where not only did I paint them by the number, I could draw them. And so that I learned how to draw based on using the concept of the Paint By Numbers.

Like I said, I've been home a lot, and I'm learning a lot of things. I'm trying to learn now, I'm doing woodwork. When you go to one of these hardware stores and you see these planks on the ground, because after they deliver the goods, they throw those planks away. I took it and I hung it up in my garage and now I'm using it as a place to hang all my gardening tools. So I'm learning because I want to constantly grow. And in addition to reading books and writing columns and doing all of the other stuff I do on TV and radio, I like to be creative.

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Imagine being in an online space where people's foolishness doesn't make you want to fight the air. That might sound impossible with your current choices for social media, but I was sick of wading through nonsense to find like-minded people, so I created my own online community. And if you are the kind of person who is striving to be a professional troublemaker and fight fear, we need you to join us in that community, because you need people to cheer you on.

LuvvNation is my online community and app that is a safe space in a dumpster fire world. It's the place for the most thoughtful, funny, most chill deficient people on these interwebs. We're a community that comes together to make each other better with curated conversations, opportunities to connect, and challenges to help us transform and do better in every area of our lives. So, I want you to come in there, join us. Become a citizen of LuvvNation. So go to [luvvnacion.com](http://luvvnacion.com), that's [luvvnacion.com](http://luvvnacion.com) L-U-V-V-N-A-T-I-O-N. Download the app in the App Store or on Android, it's on iOS and Android and come on through! All right. Back to the podcast.

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|--------|---|
| LUVVIE | So Donna, you, you do all of that while also still continuously getting in trouble, you stay getting in trouble.  |
| DONNA  | I've tried as I've gotten older, one of my best friends, Minyon Moore, who you know very well. Minyon is probably one of the only people, because she and I have known each other for almost 40 years. Minyon is what I call-   |
| LUVVIE | She's so chill.   |
| DONNA  | She's chill. When I know I'm ready to take somebody's head off or go into a full battle mode, I call Minyon to see if I should ease up a little bit. When we were young and Minyon would leave or she said, "Donna, I'm and get lunch, what do you want?" I said, "Whatever you get, get it from me." She said, "I don't want you cuss anybody out." "Okay. I want to cuss nobody out. I'll wait for you to come back." Before she got back in the office, she said, "Who did you cuss up?" "Well, I cuss out this guy, Rick," "Why?" "Because I told him I wanted some money for a Black radio, and he said, no. |

Minyon, in fact, when I joined the Dukakis campaign, I joined it a couple of months ahead of Minyon because Jesse Jackson's campaign was really going with a full head of steam. I took the liberty of boycotting the Dukakis campaign. I was deputy political director, but I was at liberty of boycotting the campaign. And Minyon said, "Why are you blowing cotton the campaign? you're on salary?" I said, "Minyon, I requested \$10,000 for the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Weekend so that we can mobilize people and try to gain some support, and they refused to give me my money." I said, "Oh no." I said, "Michael Dukakis cannot win the Black vote without going through the Congressional Black Caucus. So yes, we're going to go down to the DC, and we're going to lobby the Black caucus, because we need their support." Well, when they told me they were not going to give me that money. I said, "Okay, well, good. Since you've wrapped up the Black vote, and you know how to win the Black vote, I'll just go home. Call me, when the election's over with." Sure enough, I boycotted my own campaign.

LUVVIE How'd that go?

DONNA I stayed home until they gave me my money. [inaudible 00:28:16] she said, "Are you coming back?" I said, "No, hell no, you don't treat Black people that way. You don't treat anybody that way. If you want to treat Black people that way, fine. If you're going to insult me because I requested the money, fine, I will stay home."

And I stayed home until, I got a call from Michael Dukakis, and he said, "I need you to come back to work." I said, "Governor as you well know..." He said, "No, I agree with you. We're going to invest in the Black Caucus Week, and [inaudible 00:28:47] get the money. It had to go all the way up to Michael Dukakis, all the way up. And when I got back in an office, I looked at people, but that's how we started the Colored Girls. Because when we learned that the 'campaign manager' the general election, you go from having, say a 100 staff to having a 1000 overnight. And so, we acquired more office space. But they decided to segregate "the senior staff" from everyone else. Meaning that one entire floor would be all white people, and this was 1988. And so, that happened, we knew at five o'clock, they go on to get a cocktail or two. So Minyon and I went up to the ninth floor, we found an open office with no name on the door. And we went in there and we turn everything around, made it like desks. And then we closed the door and put up a sign, the Colored Girls. [inaudible 00:29:45] moved.

LUVVIE We shall not be moved.

DONNA Janice Mathis, we were some bad sisters, Wanda Williams, and you know Susan Rice, what we used to call Susan, her cutoffs and her flip-flops, Susan Rice. I mean were some bad sisters. But it was Minyon and I who went up there and I'm like, "Yeah." Getting in trouble is not so bad. I mean, look, I know my limitations, but you got to d envelope every now and then. And I don't [inaudible 00:30:19]. I'll just tell you another one that that happened recently, well, it's several, but I'll give you the first one. I was on the mayor's task force, the coronavirus task force. And everybody was like, "Yeah, this is the virus this..." I'm like, "What about poor people? What about people who ride the bus? What about people who live in public housing projects? What about people who live in homeless shelters?" They may have insurance, but they don't have a doctor. And how are we going to test them?"

People can't afford to take a test. Back then, you remember the test was like a \$100, \$160 just to take the test. I said, " Oh, hell no. We need to provide free testing and free tracing, and we

need to go where people are. You've got to provide them with the PPE stuff, the personal protective equipment." Bus drivers didn't have it. And I'll forget, I walked my dog all the way over to 16th Street, and I looked at the bus drivers. If you looked at where the bus stop, what I call the beginning of the line, if you ever caught a bus where the line starts and you know where the line ends before it turns back around and go again.

And I said, there's a direct connection between where the COVID was spreading and where the hotspots. And I said, you can look at the D bus line, you can look at the S bus line. And yeah, I knew I was upsetting people. Some days you don't want to do that, but everybody is so comfortable, and so assured of themselves and I'm like, "Well, what about the poor people?" Hell no, I will never forget it.

So when I got my vaccination, I went to the public housing project. I said, "I'll be an influencer. I will go [inaudible 00:31:59] because I want them to see me. I want them to know I have no problems getting this vaccination and on my second vaccine, I got a letter saying, well, you can go to Sibley Hospital, that's way across town in Ward Three. I said, "No. I'm going back to the public housing place. They know me."

LUVVIE

Yes. That's important, and that's one of the reasons why I deeply admire you, is over these decades, you have constantly put yourself on the line for the greater good. You're constantly pushing the envelope because you're not forgetting the people who everybody else is forgetting. And that's why you are the Donna Brazile, you've been doing the work and your passion for the people is so clear.

And I love the fact that you just brought the Colored Girls. I definitely want to talk more about that. I of course have read your book For Colored Girls, which everybody needs to go pick up, bitch y'all four created, but let's talk more about the Colored Girls. So just so y'all know, the Colored Girls is this incredible group, you want to talk about squad goals, squad goals is Donna and all these brilliant Black women who ride for each other, politically in public and privately. So Donna, tell us more about the Colored Girls. You just told us how the color guard started with Minyon putting a sign on the door outside of an office y'all found, dig deeper into who the Colored Girls are and what that friendship means.

DONNA

Even today, when I got up this morning, I think I spent each day talking to Minyon, or Leah, and Yolanda as well. But let me tell you the difference. Minyon, as we said, she can even you out. Leah can pray for you in ways and lift you up. When my dad was sick and I knew that this was the moment. And I could have called the Catholic priest. I had a priest in there on the day before, but I called Leah because I knew she could reach God. I knew she had a direct line. Pentecostal, yes, but I knew she could reach God. And my dad was so open to Leah's prayers. Yolanda is someone that, if it's game on, she is strategic. She thinks message, marketing. She puts three dimension chess to shame.

And so Minyon, with have strategic mind, Leah, with her tactical ways of making things happen, she's so practical and down the earth. And it's important that we have a preacher on this because I'm like a cussing sailor, drinking, low down, knock them down kind of girl. And I ain't going to change. I'm not going to change. I really hope that God forgives me for anybody I cussed out. I know that days I'm like, "Oh God, I'm so sorry. I just told that person what I thought of them, but I did it in a nice way." And Yolanda's just gut buckets fun to be with. And

so, here we are all in our 20s, come in from different life. I met Yolanda when I was gone door-to-door on Capitol Hill, looking for supporters for the holiday.

I was one of those kids that went into your room and said, "Hi, I'm Donna Brazile. I'm working on a bill to make Martin Luther King's a birthday, I they understand you from the state of Maryland while we've got Marvin State, Buoy State, and I would list all of the..." And Yolanda was working for Barbara Makowski and she said, "I know who you are." and she's going to back the bill. And I checked it off. And then Yolanda said, "Give me the list." And I gave it a list, she said, "I'll help you." That's how I got to meet Yolanda. And of course, Minyon and I with the Jackson campaign. And when I was 20 years old, there was this huge gathering of Black nationalist, Black activists in Brooklyn. And [Keiko Masu 00:36:03], whatever his name was.

Anyway, it was a bunch of brothers Curtis, Cree, a bunch of brothers. And he had a station wagon," Would you go to Brooklyn with us. We're go on the Black United Front." I'm like "Black United front, all together, blackwards never." I got in the car with them. And that's how I got to meet Leah's daddy and meet Leah.

So we all come from different parts of the country, Brooklyn, Rochester, Chicago, New Orleans, but we had a single mission, once we got in the room, oh my God. First of all, we were all raised by strong Black family. We all come from strong Black families. Secondly, we had a sense of history. And we became deeply involved in a DNC. At one point, we were all on the same committee and we would just sit there, almost lined up. And if you were with us, you were on the same side and if you were against us you sat across from us and it was about how we were going to beat you down.

And when I think about where we are today, the DNC, I think about the women who dare to make a difference who got us there in the first place, I think about Fannie Lou Hamer I think about Shirley Chisholm. I think about even Jesse Jackson, Ron Walters, Mayor Francis Barrett, Eleanor Holmes Norton, who created rules. Yolanda was on the Fairness Commission. And when we expanded the States to include Nevada and South Carolina, we were all part of that. And yes, we changed the rules to allow Black representation to matter. When we got Blacks in the list, we took Hispanics with us, Asian Pacific Islanders with us, we made sure that young people, I mean, we took everybody with us. We never walked in a room and changed anything without taking everybody with us, and that's why we're the Colored Girls, because you know what, we are not afraid. This time last year, as you will recall, when Joe Biden said that he was going to put a woman on the ticket, we got on that phone with Melanie Campbell, and Ross Brock, and Star Jones, and The Colored Girls, and Marcia Fudge, because Marcia was with us-

LUVVIE Marcia Fudge.

DONNA Secretary Fudge, she was with us. We say, "We want to push for a Black woman." We did it. I mean, did we ruffle some feathers? I'm sure we did because we call for a Black woman on a ticket. And we said, "Yes and we will fight for it. And we will promote her. And we will promote the ticket." And once that occurred on August 11th, there was no turning back, there was no turning back.

LUVVIE I want everybody to pick up For Colored Girls book because I think, and I told you all this, I feel that book is behind the scenes of history's biggest moments, our last half-century's biggest

moments. The Colored Girls have been a part of the fabric of the political system of the last 50 years in the United States, which is significant because people don't realize it. A lot of people don't realize the power of you and the Colored Girls. The fact that y'all sit with every presidential candidate, they have to go through you. I want you to talk about that piece.

DONNA They call us, they want to have dinner. And we have two rules. One, it's off the record and two, they must pay.

LUVVIE Yes, why would you pay? They have the honor of your company, yes.

DONNA Yeah, and we sit down with all of them and we've been doing this now, oh my God, going back all the way to 2004. We sit with every candidate and true to form, it was Hillary Clinton who told me, Minyon that we needed to meet this young State Senator out of Illinois, who was running for the United States Senate because we had to help him. And everybody come to us when they want to run for the Senate or whatever because we'll make a way out of nowhere. And at that time we were like, maybe we can raise 2 million, maybe 3 million. We had no idea what we were doing and look where we ended up, okay.

LUVVIE And who was the guy? Who was this young fellow?

DONNA Barack Obama, he came to our office at 1001, G street. It was around four in the afternoon, and he sat there around the conference table with us, explaining what he wanted to do. And we said, you know what, we're going to help you. That same year, right before the Democratic Convention, we called Alexis Herman and Bill Lynch. Alexis Herman, former Secretary of Labor, Bill Lynch, who worked with The Honorable David Dinkins and worked with Nelson Mandela. And we said they were working for John Kerry. And we were like, "We have a potential keynote speaker." And they say, "Who?" We say, "Barack Obama." They say, "Who?" We said, "Barack Obama." That's history.

LUVVIE That's history.

DONNA That's who we are. Ain't afraid, we will take it to the max. And just recently, we went up to New York on February 16th to bury our dear friend and sister Cicely Tyson. And sitting in that church, Abyssinian Church, and thinking back to that moment, two years ago, we were all down in Florida at an Odyssey Conference and Cecily said she wanted to go and walk on the beach. Well, we had another friend with us. Her name was Marcella. And she said, "Walk, honey, we going to rent a boat and we're going out and just see all of the little islands down in the little quays." And we rented a boat, a bunch of Black women. And you went to the supermarket and got our food and liquor, of course, I had to have myself a drink, it was hot outside somebody's got to have something to drink. But Cecily was with us and being at the funeral that day, I'm like she trusted us. She looked at us and she said, "You all some crazy women." And we're like, "No, you want to walk on the beach, let's go walk on all of them." And we just went out into the ocean. We found all these little islands and it was the most beautiful moment to spend with her. She just wanted to walk on the beach.

LUVVIE And y'all turned it out because y'all are the bougie, rich aunties, everybody needs.

DONNA

Well, we're the ones that will put out nickels together and figure out that we have a quarter, put quarters together and figure out we have a dollar, put our dollars together and figure out we can rent a boat. And we had two white men, shepherd us across the most small islands. But we had the time of our life. We got back and we were sitting on a beach that night and guess who joined us on the beach that night? Because we still had liquor to drink and we still had food to eat, Mary Wilson, [inaudible 00:43:09] then we showed up and then they closed the beach at nine o'clock. Then we had to go into the bar and we showed up and we closed it down. Next morning we're getting all the car and driver was taking us back to the airport. And we're like, "What happened last night?"

But that's who we are, we are sisters. And I'll never forget in 2005 when Rosa Parks passed away. And again, it was one of those phone chains. And I don't know who called this one, who called that one? Because sometimes I can't remember who made the first call, but you know what, within 24 hours, we're like, she's not going, [inaudible 00:43:54], we're going to give her a diva homecoming.

So we needed a plane to get her from Birmingham to DC, DC to Detroit, and Condoleezza Rice. We wanted to make sure that she could lie at the Capitol. Because she's not a state official, she's never been elected to office. We took care of that. And so by the time we got to the church for one of many ceremonies, we had a car, as if she was a president, they shut down the entire Beltway coming into the District. People lined the streets, we had everything done. We gave her a presidential-style funeral. We were calling all of our sisters. So George W. Bush and Laura Bush came what a presidential wreath. So when we got to the AME church, we got the presidential wreath and it was beautiful. Girl, we put that presidential wreath on the airplane, to take her to Detroit. And we learned it's never supposed to leave DC because it's a presidential wreath, the president of United States, we said we didn't know, it was for Rosa Parks. So he can get another one-

LUVVIE

So wait, y'all end up taking it to Detroit.

DONNA

Hell, yeah, we had to call Condoleezza Rice, I say, " Condi, I'm so sorry, I don't know how that happened. We didn't know. Nobody was saying return to sender." The president of United States, we're like, "That's why it's going to Detroit, her final resting place right?"

LUVVIE

Oh my God.

DONNA

Can you imagine? And we had the honor guards, and we had the color guards and we had the policemen care. We gave our sister, we said we're going to give her the best homecoming. We want to set an example of how you leave after you have done your work, after you have served your people, after you have heeded the call. And we get sister Rosa Parks, a presidential-style funeral. And I'll never forget that as long as I live, because Minyon had a piece of it, Leah had the preaching part, of course, Yolanda and I are the organizer, who sit here, who sit there. She was doing the press, but I was facilitating how the grassroots, the real people would get involved. And it matters, it matters so much that we're still together. We're still close friends. We're going to take some time off this spring, now that we've all been vaccinated-

LUVVIE

Y'all deserve it.

DONNA And I also coordinated that because we all said, we want to be free of this virus. And we decided that we're going to take some time to go and start plotting the next 10 years. We got to start plotting the next five to 10 years so that we can continue to make progress in our country.

LUVVIE I feel honored that I can sit at the feet of the Colored Girls and learn from you all because how you move through this world, outside of even the professional, the fact that you do have this deep sisterhood, y'all talk every day, you have all types of chats and I'm watching y'all and just know that we are learning so much from how you are living your womanhood. Listen, we're going to do what we need to do to take care of ourselves, your unapologetic presence is necessary.

DONNA We text each other. We're constantly updating each other almost on an hourly basis of what's happening. And things we should know, and it is the best great bond in my life because I know everything right now, that's happening in this world because of The Colored Girl. Somebody is paying attention at something and we're all like, "Okay, okay, okay. I'll get to in a minute." I mean, I'm blessed to have five sisters by birth, but another four sisters because of the struggle that we've all been in and the struggle that we've committed ourselves to. And I had no way of knowing that, I would meet these dynamic women. And my family think of them as my sisters. So when Minyon called me yesterday. She said hi to Eleanor because she knows on Sunday, I go and check on Eleanor Holmes Norton my Congresswoman, I bring Eleanor flowers or I bring her favorite ribs. We share a love of ribs, and likewise, Minyon used to go and check on Cecily. So we all Reverend [inaudible 00:48:45]. We used to check on [inaudible 00:48:47]. Because that's who we are, we check on our people. We make sure that they're doing well. And if they need something from the grocery store, or they need us to go run an errand, or they need us to go pick up their medication, whatever they need. If they need a ride somewhere, we take them, we have to make sure that we lift as we climb.

LUVVIE Lift as we climb, and I had such a good time when I did you guys Chicago book tour?

DONNA That's right, thank you.

LUVVIE Donna, you was on that stage cutting up.

DONNA I can't help myself.

LUVVIE I wish it was recorded. It was so fun. And each of your personalities are so different. We would just be, Lord, they go Donna, she doesn't-

DONNA You notice that I get into the religious stuff and she gives me the side-eye. Minyon likes to sit next to me so she can just hit me. And I can't help myself, but I was always the kid in the classroom that spoke up. And although I consider myself very shy and an introvert, whenever I'm out in public, I don't know what happens. I can feel the energy in the room and it just helps elevate me to the point where I want to be a part of that room, that's one of the reasons why I'm a teacher.

I learned that years ago when I gave up everything to become chair of the Democratic Party for the second time, when I say I gave up everything, I got rid of all my clients because I didn't want any conflicts. I didn't want anybody's saying that I was trying to profit from being chair of The

Democratic Party, hello. And I said to my clients, at the time I had some good clients, including Verizon, and Microsoft, and others. And I say, "Hey, guess what? Sorry, I need to do this for my party and my country." And when it was all the way after the tumultuous 2016 election, and I gave up CNN, most people don't realize I had to give up CNN in July, I had to give up ABC. I couldn't have any conflicts whatsoever. And when it was all over, I looked at my life and it was an empty slate. And I'm like, "How do I rebuild my life? How do I reinvent myself?" And the first thing that came to mind was I'm going back to teaching because that's the only thing I missed. It was like, I didn't miss TV. I didn't miss my clients, although I took a real serious drop in pay, I didn't miss anything but teaching. I missed my students, I missed the ability to be in a room and to teach them the things that I've learned. There's an old African proverb, she who teaches must learn. And I learned so much from my students. So I'm at Howard University, this is my third year at Howard and this is my 19th year at Georgetown. Overall, I've been a teacher for practically half my life. I started in 1993 and I'm still at it, I love teaching.

LUVVIE So what are you doing? What does self-care in the midst of being this dope woman?

DONNA I walk a lot. I try to put in the 10,000 plus steps a day, I try to keep my body strong because that's key to overall growth and harmony, I garden a lot, I do a lot of prayer, some people call it meditation. I call it what I've been used to doing, which is prayer, because prayer's consciousness, and being conscious of the presence of God. I miss some of my routines like going and seeing an acupuncturist because I try to stay healthy.

I drink a lot of wine, which of course the doctor once said, "You got acid reflux." I said, "Yeah, I don't know why my stomach is burning like hell." He said, "We got to kill some of the acid." I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He said to me, he looked at my diary and he said, "Well, you got coffee, you got this." I said, "Look, I'm going to give up wine, but I can't give up coffee." So now I'm giving up coffee but I'm still drinking wine because I want to stay healthy. I want to stay vibrant, I want to stay [inaudible 00:53:14].

But self-care to me is about making sure that my emotional load doesn't take over my physical load. I try to keep myself in balance, keep myself in check so that I can help others grow in the same way that I have learned how to grow. But I take good care of myself and my health and my mental emotional is important because the world, as we know it today, the world is mean, there's a lot of negativity going around, there are a lot of people who are in pain and we see that with these mass shootings, there are a lot of people who have lost hope. And I try to encourage people to turn within, to find that joy that God has given them.

I think we're all born with joy and I try to keep my cup filled. And some days I have to fill it by listening to what I call my joyful music. I go to the old-time religious music because sometimes you listen to Mahalia, you feel like she knows God I mean you're like (singing). If only I could sing, God knows, I wish I could because I would make a record, and I don't know who buy but I will make a song. But you want Tramaine Hawkins, you want Shirley Caesar, you want James Cleveland, you want Kirk Franklin. Man, I heard that cussing he did with his son. How damn I thought I was a cusser. I can do profanity, lace profanity in multiple sentences without even putting an adverb in there because there's so many great profane words.

My mother used to go zoom. I'm like, where did she get that mouth from? But I try to take care of this soul, I'm a soul, we're all soul and spirit. And I want this soul, this beauty that God gave

me, this wonderful spirit, this child that still exists, I want to feed her, I want to nurture her, that's why she plays in the dirt. That's why she paints, that's why some nights I just cut up garlic and onions and peppers and I smell was celery, which I'm growing outside. And it just smells like the earth, just the child that is now walking across the park and I'm like that's a female tree, that's a male tree, that's an Oak tree, that's an Elm tree. A kid who constantly want to learn. That's a blue jay, that's a cardinal, that's a robin, that's a dove, or that's a hawk, a kid. Now, I'm not looking for snakes, now. I'm done with that. I did-

But I'm a kid who still want to learn and want to be part of this vibrancy called life. One last thing I do for self-care, I do not turn on the television until after dark, I just don't. I get any news on me from one of my little gadgets, but you know what, I didn't want to be glued to the television. I mean, throughout this past year, when I was grounded, I mean, that's what I call it, COVID grounded me. I used to live out of a suitcase. I had a two days suitcase, a three days suitcase, and a seven-day suitcase. And I'll never forget on March, 11th when I was leaving New York from Super Tuesday at Fox News. And I got back and there like, that's it. And one by one, by one, all of the speeches I had lined up for Women's History Month, boom.

And then I'm like, well, what do you do all day? What do you do at home? I mean, what do people do? And it's been really a remarkable experience for me. I mean, it's been tough, I'm tired of Zoom funerals, excuse me, Zoom Memorial services, but I've read, I've written a lot, I've rediscovered the joy of things that I'd forgotten. And I've caught up with my family. I know all 17 nieces and nephews. I now remember their birthdays. And by the way, the kids in the neighborhood, they call me auntie. And for the Superbowl, I made them what I call express chili. And I've always wanted to make cheese cornbread, a little jiffy cornbread makes it go a long way. And I made them cheese cornbread and now all the kids in the neighborhood they love me because they know Auntie Donna can make chili with cheese cornbread.

LUVVIE I'm going to need some of that.

DONNA I love children I think they're beautiful, I think they're wonderful. And I know at six o'clock they need to go home to their mom and her dad because that's the cutoff time. It's five o'clock somewhere, well, I can go to six, seven O'clock. Uh-uh, I'm about to get my glass of wine. The sun is setting at 7:30. I'm out in my garden. I'm looking at my daffodils, my tulips. I go out there and talk, I say, "When are you going to pop up? Come on. I want to see your face." And now they all smile at me. "Don't you love me."

I love that. I create this. I created my oasis. I created the space I'm living in, of course I spent too much money gardening, but it's my happiness. I have six different varieties of rose bushes. I have various shrubs that, in the spring time, I like the yellows, I like the peonies. I like all of this because it's about the vibrancy, and of course the color purple. I mean, it's out there. So I can sit on my porch and look at it and say, "Thank you, God, isn't this beautiful." It's who I am, it's life.

LUVVIE I love that, that is amazing. So my last question for you is what do you consider a professional troublemaker?

DONNA Someone who makes people uncomfortable initially, but then befriend them, become an ally, and ultimately teaches him or her to be their higher self. I mean, I think we're all called to challenge. I mean, there are friends in my life who have challenged me in ways, challenged me

in ways that at first I was very uncomfortable, like, "Oh, hell no, don't you get in my space. Don't you do that?" And then later you're like, "That was really good. I needed that." I'll never forget, in my earlier years of working in the nine-to-five context. Back in the day before you had all of these different gadgets, you really had to talk to people, and they often wanted to go to lunch with you. And you're like "No, no, no."

But a professional troublemaker is one who makes others uncomfortable initially, to get their attention. But ultimately, it's about pushing the envelope, helping to accelerate the pace of change, helping to stir the water so to speak. If we just allow the status quo to exist, we would never see change. We would never expand beyond the little boxes that we all grew up in. We grew up in these little tiny boxes, and what we don't understand is that culture dictates everything in our lives. And unless we're able to make people uncomfortable and break out of the cultures that we're in, we're going to all be boxed into this little small paradigm. And we cannot change the narrative. And if the narrative stays the same, then guess what, you're stuck. And that's not how human beings are. There's a reason why when you grow, you expand, and when you learn, you also expand, you expand your horizon.

I believe professional troublemakers are indispensable in the workforce. Because if someone is not willing to raise the right questions, or challenge some of the old assumptions, then we are all strategically locked in a box that we can never break out, that's why it took so long for women to be convinced that they deserve the power to vote. That's why it took so long for people don't understand that you cannot contain people by saying, "Here's the line, you stay on this side." You got to allow people to grow and to expand because we're humans and I think that comes natural to me.

LUVVIE That's it, that's the word right there. Donna, this has been amazing.

DONNA Luvvie, thank you for teaching us so much, not only in the space that you have mastered, but in the spaces that we must now occupy and grow. So thank you for encouraging me to expand my horizon and to learn more about social media. And also, you had been just a wonderful role model for many of us who want to grow and do things differently as we age, so thank you.

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A big part of being a professional troublemaker is being disruptor for the greater good. And Donna Brazile is definitely that and always has been. She's always been this person who spoke up for people who couldn't speak up for themselves in rooms where decisions are being made.

And I absolutely loved hearing about her squad. The Colored Girls are #SquadGoals. That type of friendship is powerful. It's always powerful to have other dope women to encourage you and lift you up, but to have these women that work alongside you, doing work that matters and literally helping to change the last half century. Make sure you pick up her book *For Colored Girls* and let it inspire you to not only make a difference in this world, but to do it in community with other dope people.

Be sure to follow Donna on social media. She's [@donnabrazile](#) on Twitter and [@donnalbrazile](#) on Instagram.

Much love to Chicago Recording Company, who I've been partnering with from the start of this podcast and they've been such a huge help putting my recordings from home together and making the sound on point.

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Until next time, have the courage to speak your truth and show up as yourself. Create good trouble.